

PUBLIC

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UA 271/08 Fear for safety / fear of torture or ill treatment / possible prisoners of conscience

IRAN

Maqsoud Ahdi (m)]
Mansour Aminian (m)]
Dariush Hatemi (m), 29]
Aydin Khaje'i (m), 23] student activists for the cultural rights of Iranian Azerbaijanis
Amir Mardani (m)]
Majid Makuyi (m)]
Sejjad Radmehr (m)]
Feraz Zahtab (m), 23]

The student activists named above were detained during a series of arrests which began in July 2008. According to the Vancouver-based Association for the Defence of Azerbaijani Political Prisoners (ADAPP), their families have been denied access to them, though some have had irregular contact by telephone. None have had access to legal representation of their choice and Amnesty International fears that they may be prisoners of conscience, arrested solely for the expression of their conscientiously held beliefs.

The student activists have increasingly called for greater cultural and linguistic rights. These include the right to education using the Azerbaijani Turkic language, which they believe is provided for under the Constitution, and the right to celebrate Azerbaijani culture and history.

Sejjad Radmehr, a graduate student of mechanical engineering in Tabriz University, along with his friends Feraz Zahtab and Aydin Khaje'i, both law students and members of the Islamic Student Association at the same university, were arrested on 17 July 2008 at the entrance to the university. It is not known where the three students were taken, though each of them has been allowed to make a few short telephone calls to family members. Following their arrest, security officials searched their homes and removed personal items.

Prior to their arrest, Sejjad Radmehr took part in a hunger strike on 11 May, to protest against Tabriz University's temporary suspension of some other students. As a result of this, he was banned and deprived of his student rights for one month, following a suspension handed down by the university officials. Feraz Zahtab and Aydin Khaje'i also took part in the protest against the bans levelled at students. All three men had previously been banned from the university for one term, following their participation in a demonstration in May 2006.

Dariush Hatemi, a close friend of Sejjad Radmehr, Feraz Zehtab and Aydin Khaje'i, was also arrested on 17 July. He had been carrying out his national service in the army. On 13 August student activist Amir Mardani was arrested at Tabriz University. He has been allowed to make two phone calls to his family, but has not been given direct access to them or to a legal representative. There are fears that he may be facing particularly harsh treatment as he is reported to have refused to "collaborate with security officers".

Mansour Aminian is a mechanical engineering student, while Maqsoud Ahdi studies geography. Both are also members of Tabriz University's Islamic Student Association. They were arrested on the morning of 20 August, Mansour Aminian at an office of the Ministry of Intelligence, to which he had been summoned, and Maqsoud Ahdi at home. The residences of both were searched following arrest. Whilst in detention they have been permitted two telephone calls to their families and have appeared before a judge who has extended their period of detention by two months, in contravention of Iranian law.

On 31 August, Majid Makuyi, a final-year shipping engineering student at Malek Ashtar University of Technology in Esfahan, was arrested at his father's home in Khoy, East Azerbaijan province. His personal effects were examined and seized. According to ADAPP sources, he may have been taken to a Ministry of Intelligence detention facility in Oroumiye. Majid Makuyi has been repeatedly summoned for questioning by the Ministry of Intelligence in both Oroumiye and Khoy over the last two months. He has now been transferred to Tabriz.

Elahe Radmehr, a student at Oroumiye University and sister of Sejjad Radmehr, has been threatened by security officials. Unidentified university officials also told her that she would be banned from the university if she gave any information about her brother's detention. Other family members of the student activists have been threatened by the Ministry of Intelligence. Sejjad Radmehr's mother was threatened after she went to Tabriz University to ask about the legal status of her son on 23 August. In an interview with radio Farda, Feraz Zehtab's mother said: "They don't give us a correct answer. I asked prison employees, they said they don't know anything. I asked the Ministry of Intelligence too, but they didn't give me any answer. I don't know where my son is being held and I heard his voice only one time."

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Iranian Azerbaijanis, who are mainly Shi'a Muslims, are recognized as the largest minority in Iran and are generally believed to constitute between 25-30 per cent of the population. They are located mainly in the north and north-west of Iran. Although generally well integrated into society, in recent years they have increasingly called for greater cultural and linguistic rights, such as the right to education through the medium of the Azerbaijani Turkic language, which they believe is provided for under the Constitution, and to celebrate Azerbaijani culture and history at cultural events.

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send appeals to arrive as quickly as possible, in Persian, French, English or your own language:

- urging the authorities to ensure that the eight Azerbaijani rights activists named above are not facing torture or other ill-treatment;
- urging the authorities to allow the eight individuals immediate and regular access to their family and a lawyer of their choice, and to any medical treatment they may require;
- noting that if they are held solely on account of their expression of their right to freedom of expression and assembly, then they are prisoners of conscience, and should be released immediately and unconditionally.

APPEALS TO:

Head of the Judiciary

Ayatollah Mahmoud Hashemi Shahroudi

Howzeh Riyasat-e Qoveh Qazaiyeh / Office of the Head of the Judiciary

Pasteur St., Vali Asr Ave., south of Serah-e Jomhouri, Tehran 1316814737, Islamic Republic of Iran

Email: info@dadgostary-tehran.ir (In subject line write: **FAO Ayatollah Shahroudi**)

Salutation: **Your Excellency**

COPIES TO:

Director, Human Rights Headquarters of Iran

His Excellency Mohammad Javad Larijani

Howzeh Riyasat-e Qoveh Qazaiyeh (Office of the Head of the Judiciary)

Pasteur St, Vali Asr Ave., south of Serah-e Jomhouri, Tehran 1316814737, Islamic Republic of Iran

Fax: **+98 21 3390 4986 (please keep trying)**

Email: int_aff@judiciary.ir (In the subject line: **FAO Mohammad Javad Larijani**)

Salutation: **Your Excellency**

and to diplomatic representatives of Iran accredited to your country.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY. Check with the International Secretariat, or your section office, if sending appeals after 4 November 2008.