

URGENT ACTION

PRISONER OF CONSCIENCE FACES DEATH THREATS

Prisoner of conscience Mohammad Ali Taheri, who has spent over three years in solitary confinement in Section 2A of Evin Prison in Iran's capital, Tehran, has been threatened with death by interrogators. He is serving a five-year prison sentence on a charge of "insulting Islamic sanctities", in relation to his spiritual beliefs and practices.

Mohammad Ali Taheri, founder of a new spiritual group in Iran called *Erfan-e-Halgheh*, was arrested on 4 May 2011 by officials linked to Iran's Revolutionary Guards and held incommunicado for nine months in Section 2A of Evin Prison. Branch 26 of the Revolutionary Court in Tehran convicted him, on 30 October 2011, of "insulting Islamic sanctities" and sentenced him to five years' imprisonment, but found that his offence did not involve, as the prosecution had argued, *saab ul-nabi* (deliberately denigrating Prophet Mohammad) which would have carried the death penalty under the Islamic Penal Code. Amnesty International understands that the authorities have, nevertheless, continued to threaten him with death, apparently based on religious fatwas that order the killing of apostates.

Mohammad Ali Taheri has been serving his prison sentence entirely in solitary confinement and his repeated requests to be transferred to a cell shared with other inmates have been denied, leading him to undertake at least seven hunger strikes and attempt suicide four times. Except for a six-day period of leave in March 2013, his interaction with the outside world has been limited to brief bi-weekly visits from his wife in a "cabin" (behind a glass screen) and limited telephone calls, both of which have stopped since his wife was arrested on 2 July 2014 for a period of two weeks.

Please write immediately in Farsi, Arabic, English or your own language:

- Calling on the Iranian authorities to release Mohammad Ali Taheri immediately and unconditionally, as he is a prisoner of conscience, held solely for the peaceful exercise of his rights to freedom of religion or belief and freedom of expression;
- Calling on them to ensure that he is protected from all forms of torture and other ill-treatment, and that he is no longer held in solitary confinement;
- Urging them to allow him regular visits from his family and lawyer.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS BEFORE 7 OCTOBER 2014 TO:

Leader of the Islamic Republic
Ayatollah Sayed 'Ali Khamenei
The Office of the Supreme Leader
Islamic Republic Street- End of Shahid
KeshvarDoust Street,
Tehran, Islamic Republic of Iran
Twitter: @khamenei_ir
Email: info_leader@leader.ir
Salutation: Your Excellency

Head of the Judiciary
Ayatollah Sadegh Larijani
c/o Public Relations Office
Number 4, 2 Azizi Street intersection
Tehran, Islamic Republic of Iran
(Subject line: FAO)
Ayatollah Sadegh Larijani)
Salutation: Your Excellency

And copies to:

President of the Islamic Republic of Iran
Hassan Rouhani
The Presidency
Pasteur Street, Pasteur Square
Tehran, Islamic Republic of Iran
Email: media@rouhani.ir
Twitter: @HassanRouhani (English) and
@Rouhani_ir (Persian)

Also send copies to diplomatic representatives accredited to your country. Please insert local diplomatic addresses below:

Name Address 1 Address 2 Address 3 Fax Fax number Email Email address Salutation Salutation

Please check with your section office if sending appeals after the above date.

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ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Mohammad Ali Taheri described in a leaked letter from prison that during the months following his arrest on 4 May 2011, he was reportedly subjected to various forms of psychological torture, including threats to kill him and his family. In August 2011, Channel Two of the Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting aired his televised “confessions” in which he denounced his previous activities and teachings related to *Erfan-e Halgheh* as “illegal”, “religiously forbidden” and “a security threat”, and called on his followers to refrain from disseminating his audio and written materials.

Mohammad Ali Taheri was allowed six days’ leave from prison on 1 March 2013. Amnesty International understands that during this time, his communications and movements in and out of the house were strictly controlled, and his telephones and those of his wife, children and followers were tapped.

Mohammad Ali Taheri introduced the spiritual doctrine of *Erfan-e Halgheh*, also known in English as “Interuniversalism”, “Interuniversal Mysticism” and “Mysticism of the Ring”, after 13 years of receiving what he calls “spiritual inspirations” that empowered him to connect with a larger “Cosmic Consciousness” and develop transformative ways of relating and being in the world with others. He opened a cultural and educational institute, also called *Erfan-e Halgheh*, in Tehran in 2006 to develop and disseminate his newly found spiritual beliefs, and practice them with his followers, in “healing sessions” apparently focused on obtaining physical and mental wellbeing through alternative non-medicinal spiritual modalities. The three offices of the institute in Tehran were forcibly closed in August 2010, after Mohammad Ali Taheri was arrested on 18 April 2010 and detained for over two months.

On top of his five years’ imprisonment, Mohammad Ali Taheri has been sentenced to 74 lashes on a charge of “committing a religiously forbidden act”, for holding the hands of one of his female followers in the course of a “healing session”.

Article 513 of Iran’s Islamic Penal Code provides that “anyone who insults Islamic sanctities or any of the Great Prophets or [12] Shi’a Imams or the Holy Fatima shall be executed if the insult is considered *saab ul-nabi*; otherwise, they shall be sentenced to one to five years’ imprisonment.”

The Human Rights Committee, which monitors the implementation of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) by all states parties including Iran, has stated that the prohibition of torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment under international law “relates not only to acts that cause physical pain but also to acts that cause mental suffering” and has stated, specifically, that prolonged solitary confinement may amount to acts prohibited by Article 7 of the ICCPR (General Comment 20, paras. 5 and 6).

Name: Mohammad Ali Taheri
Gender m/f: m