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Iran: Amnesty International welcomes freedom and human rights award for Drs Kamiar and Arash Alaei

Amnesty International welcomes the award to Drs Kamiar and Arash Alaei, who are brothers, of the Jonathan Mann Award for Global Health and Human Rights. The organization launched a campaign for their freedom after their arrest in Iran in June 2008.

Dr Kamiar Alaei, and his brother, Dr Arash Alaei, who are both experts in the prevention and treatment of HIV and AIDS, were sentenced in January 2009 to three and six years' imprisonment respectively, for "cooperating with an enemy government" after months in pre-trial detention without access to a lawyer and an unfair trial in which secret evidence was produced which they were not allowed to see or challenge. Their arrest is believed to be related to their links with foreign academics and civil society organizations, including in the USA. Both doctors were highly respected AIDS specialists who had not been politically active. Amnesty International, along with a wide range of health and human rights organizations, regarded them as prisoners of conscience who should never have been imprisoned. and called for their unconditional release.

In May 2009, the UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention concluded that the detention of Drs Arash and Kamiar Alaei is "arbitrary, being in contravention of articles 9, 10, 25 and 26 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and articles 9, 14, 18, 19 and 22 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, to which the Islamic Republic of Iran is a State party." The Group also concluded that "the detention of the above-mentioned physicians is also contrary to articles 12 and 13 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and to Principles 11-1, 17-2 and 18-1 of the Body of Principles for the Protection of All Persons under Any Form of Detention or Imprisonment" and called on the Iranian authorities to immediately take the necessary steps to redress the situation.

Although Dr Kamiar Alaei is now free, with his sentence completed, Dr Arash Alaei remains in prison in Tehran and Amnesty International is urging that he be released immediately and unconditionally and allowed to return to his important work.

The Jonathan Mann prize recognizes the valuable work Kamiar Alaei and his brother Arash Alaei, have done to provide necessary care to people living with HIV in Iran, and both doctors should be free to put their knowledge to good use in the service of people living with HIV.

The continuing challenge of HIV as well as the persistent reports of prisoners in poor health in Iran being denied adequate medical care – in some cases contributing to their deaths, as in the case of Hoda Saber who died on 12 June 2011 after the prison authorities reportedly beat him and failed to provide adequate treatment following a hunger strike in protest at human rights violations - underline the need for doctors in Iran to be able to practise medicine rather than face imprisonment on spurious political charges.

Background

The Jonathan Mann Award for Global Health and Human Rights honours a key figure in the 20th century fight against global poverty, illness and social injustice. Dr Mann, who died in a plane crash in 1998, was the founding director of the World Health Organization's Special Program on AIDS (1986-1990) and a vocal advocate of both health and human rights.

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