

PUBLIC

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Further Information on UA 309/06 (MDE 13/124/2006, 17 November 2006) – Incommunicado detention/fear of torture

IRAN **Asgar Akbarzadeh (name corrected) (m), student, aged about 21**

Iranian Azerbaijani student Asgar Akbarzadeh was reportedly released on 21 December on bail of 70 million Rials (over US\$7,500) by Branch 14 of the Revolutionary Court in Ardebil. The charges against him are believed to include “propaganda against the system”, which relates to his copying, compiling and distributing leaflets about a demonstration that had been planned for 23 September, the first day of the Iranian academic year, demanding education be delivered in Azerbaijani Turkic. He is also awaiting the verdict in a trial on a separate matter.

Asgar Akbarzadeh, a chemistry student at the Payam-e Noor University of Ardebil, was reportedly detained on 15 October, while outside the university premises, by men in plain clothes believed to be officials from the Ministry of Intelligence (*Etela'at*). The next day, the Head of Branch 14 of the Revolutionary Court of Ardebil reportedly charged him with “propaganda against the system” and set his bail at 70 million Rials. As his family did not have a guarantor for the bail, Asgar Akbarzadeh was taken to Ardebil prison. However, on 1 November, unknown to his family, he was transferred to a Ministry of Intelligence detention facility, where he is believed to have been tortured. This included being severely beaten while blindfolded and handcuffed to a chair. He went on hunger strike, and after five days was returned to Ardebil prison, in late November, where his family was allowed to visit him.

Before this, Asgar Akbarzadeh's family had reportedly made strenuous efforts to find where he was. However, Ministry of Intelligence officials threatened to arrest them, and pressured them not to say anything about his situation to human rights activists. The family's telephone was reportedly cut off.

Asgar Akbarzadeh had previously been arrested on 24 May 2006, during a period of widespread demonstrations in Iranian Azerbaijani areas. He was released about 12 days later. Before he was arrested, officials from the Ministry of Intelligence twice came to the family home looking for him. On 27 May, the day of the demonstration in Ardebil (when Asgar Akbarzadeh was already in custody), officials from the Ministry of Intelligence cut the family's phone line and searched the premises, but left without taking anything. On 25 and 26 May Asgar Akbarzadeh had appeared before the Revolutionary Court in Ardebil, apparently accused of “acting against state security”. The next day he was transferred to Ardebil prison. On 8 June 2006, Asgar Akbarzadeh was released on bail of 50 million Iranian Rials (about US \$5,600). On 11 January he appeared before Branch 105 of the Revolutionary Court in Ardebil, where he was reportedly charged with the further offence of “participating in disturbances”. No verdict is known to have been issued yet.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

In May 2006, massive demonstrations took place in towns and cities in north-western Iran, where the majority of the population is Iranian Azerbaijani, in protest at a cartoon published on 12 May by the state-owned daily newspaper *Iran* which many Iranian Azerbaijanis found offensive. Hundreds were arrested during and after the demonstrations. Some of those detained were allegedly tortured, with some requiring hospital treatment. Publication of the newspaper was suspended on 23 May and the editor-in-chief and the cartoonist were arrested. Iranian Azerbaijani sources have claimed that dozens were killed and hundreds injured by the security forces. The security forces have generally denied that anyone was killed, although on 29 May a police official acknowledged that four people had been killed and 43 injured in the town of Naqada. Some have been sentenced to prison terms and flogging in connection with the demonstrations.

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

- welcoming the release on bail of Asgar Akbarzadeh;
- asking for details of any charges brought against him, of the evidence against him, and of any trial which may be held;
- calling for an investigation into the allegations that he was tortured, and for those responsible to be brought to justice;
- calling on the authorities to ensure that any judicial proceedings against Asgar Akbarzadeh conform to international standards for fair trial
- stating that if Asgar Akbarzadeh were to be imprisoned after conviction of charges solely related to his peaceful activities on behalf of the Iranian Azerbaijani community, or to his peaceful exercise of his right to freedom of expression or association, Amnesty International would consider him to be a prisoner of conscience, who should be released immediately and unconditionally.

APPEALS TO:

Leader of the Islamic Republic

His Excellency Ayatollah Sayed 'Ali Khamenei, The Office of the Supreme Leader
Shoahada Street, Qom, Islamic Republic of Iran

Email: info@leader.ir

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Fax: +98 251 774 2228 (mark "FAO the Office of His Excellency, Ayatollah al Udhma Khamenei")

Salutation: Your Excellency

Head of the Judiciary

His Excellency Ayatollah Mahmoud Hashemi Shahroudi
Ministry of Justice, Park-e Shahr, Tehran, Islamic Republic of Iran

Salutation: Your Excellency

Minister of Intelligence

Gholam Hossein Mohseni Ejeie
Ministry of Intelligence, Second Negarestan Street, Pasdaran Avenue, Tehran, Islamic Republic of Iran

Email: iranprobe@iranprobe.com

Salutation: Your Excellency

COPIES TO:

President

His Excellency Mahmoud Ahmadinejad
The Presidency, Palestine Avenue, Azerbaijan Intersection, Tehran, Islamic Republic of Iran

Fax: +981 6 674 790 (Via foreign ministry. Mark "Please forward to H.E. Mahmoud Ahmadinejad")

Email: dr-ahmadinejad@president.ir
via website: www.president.ir/email

Salutation: Your Excellency

Speaker of Parliament

His Excellency Gholamali Haddad Adel
Majles-e Shoura-ye Eslami
Imam Khomeini Avenue,
Tehran, Islamic Republic of Iran

Fax: + 98 21 6 646 1746

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 16 March 2007.