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Iran: Jailed Dissidents Denied Medical Care

Human Rights Groups Protest Ill-Treatment of Rights Defenders, Journalists

**Human Rights Watch
Amnesty International
The International Federation for Human Rights
Reporters without Borders
Nobel Peace prize winner Shirin Ebadi**

(New York, June 15, 2005) The Iranian Judiciary should immediately release prisoners of conscience, particularly those in urgent need of medical treatment, a group of leading international human rights organizations said today.

Akbar Ganji, Nasser Zarafshan, Reza Alijani, Taqi Rahmani and Hoda Saber have been imprisoned solely because of their political views and peaceful activities, the organizations said. The authorities should release them immediately and unconditionally.

Joined by Nobel Peace prize winner Shirin Ebadi, Human Rights Watch, Amnesty International, the International Federation for Human Rights and Reporters Without Borders today expressed concerns for the health and safety of these dissidents.

Two vocal critics of the government, Akbar Ganji and Nasser Zarafshan, have been denied medical care in prison. The prison administration's request for their medical care was overruled by the Judiciary.

Akbar Ganji, an investigative journalist who uncovered the involvement of government officials in the murder of intellectuals and journalists in the 1990s, was jailed in April 2000. He was subsequently sentenced to six years in prison on vaguely worded charges including "acting against national security" in connection with his participation at a conference in Berlin. He has served more than 62 months in prison.

"Akbar Ganji is in prison just for peacefully criticizing the authorities," said Shirin Ebadi, who is also Ganji's lawyer. "His mistreatment in prison is a serious violation of fundamental human rights standards."

Akbar Ganji is suffering from acute asthma and is currently being held in solitary confinement at Tehran's Evin prison. He is barred from any contact with his family or lawyers. He was briefly released for

medical care on May 30, but was reimprisoned on June 10 before obtaining treatment. According to his wife, Akbar Ganji started a hunger strike as soon as he was returned to Evin prison.

Nasser Zarafshan is a lawyer who represented the families of intellectuals and journalists murdered by intelligence ministry agents in 1998. In 2002 he was sentenced following a manifestly unfair trial in a military court to five years in prison for "dissemination of confidential information."

Nasser Zarafshan suffers from kidney disease and requires immediate medical attention. Zarafshan's lawyer, Mohammed Ali Dadkhah, told Human Rights Watch that his client is not receiving any specialist care inside the prison. In protest to his condition, Nasser Zarafshan also started a hunger strike on June 7 and his health is reportedly deteriorating.

Both Ganji and Zarafshan are seriously ill and in urgent need of medical care. Denial of medical care amounts to cruel, inhuman and degrading punishment, forbidden under Iranian law and Article 7 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, to which Iran is a state party.

Human Rights Watch, Amnesty International, the International Federation for Human Rights, and Reporters without Borders, along with Nobel Peace Prize winner Shirin Ebadi, said that the Iranian authorities are responsible for the health and safety of all those detained by the state, including Akbar Ganji and Nasser Zarafshan.

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