

PUBLIC

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UA 219/05

Fear for safety/fear of torture or ill-treatment/
possible prisoner of conscience

24 August 2005

IRAN

Hojjatoleslam Ezimi Qedimi (m), aged 32, Muslim cleric

Hojjatoleslam Ezimi Qedimi was reportedly arrested on 5 August. He is believed to be held in a prison in Tabriz, the capital of the Iranian province of East Azerbaijan and may be at risk of torture or ill-treatment. Unconfirmed reports suggest that he may have gone on hunger strike and it is not clear whether he has been able to meet family members or a lawyer of his choice.

Hojjatoleslam Ezimi Qedimi is an ethnic Azeri Muslim cleric from Verziqan near Tabriz. He was arrested in Tabriz at the mausoleum of an Azeri hero called Baghir Khan as security forces reportedly broke up a celebration of the anniversary of the 1906 Constitution, which the then Shah of Iran was forced to introduce and which led to the first elected parliament.

Unconfirmed reports suggest Hojjatoleslam Ezimi Qedimi may be facing the charges of leading an illegal gathering on Constitution Day at the Mausoleum of Bagher Khan; giving an interview to the *Shams-e Tabriz* website; giving an interview to *Ana Yurdu* television station; opposition to the Islamic Republic; contempt of court; aiding the setting up and distribution of the publication "*Rasul*"; and misleading young religious students in the city of Qom.

Amnesty International is concerned that Hojjatoleslam Ezimi Qedimi may be held solely on account of the non-violent expression of his ethnic and cultural identity and if so would consider him to be a prisoner of conscience who should be released immediately and unconditionally.

Hojjatoleslam Ezimi Qedimi was previously arrested in 2004 during a sit-in protest against the Iranian government's cultural and economic policies towards ethnic Azeris in Iran. He was reportedly held for 10 days, and then exiled for two years to the city of Qom. He is then said to have gone without permission to Tabriz to take part in the meeting at the Baghir Khan mausoleum.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Ethnic Azeris are the largest minority group in Iran. Although generally well-integrated into society, growing calls for a greater freedom of expression of their ethnic and cultural identity in recent years have been dealt with harshly by the Iranian authorities. Iranian Azeris have complained about the lack of Azeri language schools, and there have been reports that newspapers written in Azeri (a form of Turkish) have been banned. At the end of June 2005, scores of people were reportedly arrested following an Azeri cultural gathering at Babek Castle in the city of Kalaybar. Similar events in previous years have also met with repression.

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

- expressing concern at reports of the arrest and detention of Hojjatoleslam Ezimi Qedimi;
- calling for his immediate and unconditional release if held solely on account of the peaceful expression of his cultural and ethnic identity;
- otherwise calling for him to be charged with a recognizably criminal offence and tried promptly and fairly;
- seeking assurances that he is being treated humanely and in accordance with international human rights standards;
- seeking assurances that he is being permitted access to his family and to an independent lawyer of his choice.

APPEALS TO: (Fax numbers and e-mail addresses for Iran are unreliable so please send letters if you cannot get through)

Leader of the Islamic Republic

His Excellency Ayatollah Sayed 'Ali Khamenei
The Presidency
Palestine Avenue
Azerbaijan Intersection
Tehran
Islamic Republic of Iran

Fax: + 98 21 649 5880 (please mark 'For the attention of the Office of His Excellency, Ayatollah al Udhma Khamenei')

Email: info@wilayah.org

Salutation: Your Excellency

Head of the Judiciary

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

Email: irjpr@iranjudiciary.org (mark 'Please forward to HE Ayatollah Shahroudi')

Salutation: Your Excellency

COPIES TO:

Speaker of Parliament

Gholamali Haddad Adel
Majles-e Shoura-ye Eslami (Parliament)
Imam Khomeini Avenue
Tehran
Islamic Republic of Iran

Fax: + 98 21 646 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 5 October 2005.