

# URGENT ACTION

## TEACHER UNION ACTIVIST MUST BE RELEASED

**Iranian teacher union activist Esmail Abdi, the Secretary General of the Iranian Teachers' Trade Association (ITTA), was arrested on 9 November and taken to Tehran's Evin Prison to begin serving a six-year prison sentence. He is a prisoner of conscience targeted solely for his peaceful trade union activities.**

Six intelligence and security officials arrested teacher union activist **Esmail (Ismail) Abdi**, a high school maths teacher and the Secretary General of the Iranian Teachers' Trade Association (ITTA), at his house on 9 November 2016 and took him to Evin Prison to begin serving his six-year prison sentence. Amnesty International understands that the officials carrying out the arrest refused to provide identification documents or an arrest warrant. Esmail Abdi was sentenced to six years in prison in February 2016 after Branch 15 of the Revolutionary Court in Tehran convicted him of trumped-up national security offences including "spreading propaganda against the system" and "gathering and colluding to commit crimes against national security". The charges stem from his peaceful trade union activities, including associating with Education International, the world's largest federation of unions, and organizing peaceful demonstrations by teachers and members of the ITTA outside Iran's parliament in May 2015 in protest against the level of both the education budget and wages in the sector, both of which they considered low, and the imprisonment of teacher union activists. The sentence was upheld on appeal in October 2016.

Esmail Abdi was first arrested by Revolutionary Guard officials on 27 June 2015, following his attempt to obtain a visa to attend the 7<sup>th</sup> Education International World Congress in Ottawa, Canada, in July 2015. He was held in solitary confinement in Section 2A of Evin Prison, which is run by the Revolutionary Guards, for 40 days, and then transferred to Sections 7 and 8 of Evin Prison, where he was held with prisoners convicted of ordinary crimes for 10 months in poor conditions. He was released on bail on 14 May 2016. His release came 14 days after he started a hunger strike in protest at the imprisonment of himself and other trade unionists and teachers on spurious national security charges; the repression of trade unionists' peaceful assemblies and strikes; the ban on independently organized events for International Workers' Day and World Teachers' Day; and the continuing existence of wages that fall below the poverty line. In an open letter from inside prison in April 2016, Esmail Abdi wrote: "Going by the evidence used to issue the verdicts against [me], you could say that any effort... to improve the lives and livelihood of teachers and workers in Iran can be considered acting against national security".

### **Please write immediately in English, Persian, Arabic, French and Spanish or your own language:**

- Calling on the Iranian authorities to release Esmail Abdi immediately and unconditionally, as he is a prisoner of conscience held solely for his peaceful trade union activities;
- Calling on them to investigate his subjection to prolonged solitary confinement, which violates the prohibition on torture and other cruel, inhuman and degrading punishment, and hold those suspected of responsibility to account in a fair trial;
- Calling on them to respect and protect the right of everyone to form and join the trade union of their choice, which is guaranteed under the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), both of which Iran has ratified.

### **PLEASE SEND APPEALS BEFORE 24 JANUARY 2017 TO:**

Supreme Leader

Ayatollah Sayed 'Ali Khamenei

Head of the Judiciary

Ayatollah Sadegh Larijani

**And copies to:**

Minister of Education

Fakhreddin Ahmadi Danesh Ashtiani

**Please send your appeals to the Iranian embassy in your country, listed below. If there is no Iranian embassy in your country, please mail the letter to the Permanent Mission of the Islamic Republic of Iran to the United Nations, 622 Third Avenue, 34th Floor, New York, NY 10017, United States. 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. This is the second update of UA 171/15. Further information:

[www.amnesty.org/en/documents/mde13/3843/2016/en/](http://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/mde13/3843/2016/en/)

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### ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

The trial leading to Esmail Abdi's conviction violated international fair trial standards: he was denied access to a lawyer of his choice during the entire investigative phase and his lawyer was not allowed to obtain and review his court file before the trial. Esmail Abdi was originally arrested on 27 June 2015 after he went to the Prosecutor's Office in Evin Prison to inquire about the travel ban placed on him. He had been prevented from travelling to Armenia to apply for a visa to attend the 7<sup>th</sup> Education International World Congress in Canada in July 2015. On 22 July, thousands of teachers attempted to gather in front of parliament to demand his release and protest against the harassment and abuse of teacher union activists. However, security forces stationed around parliament from early morning disrupted the gathering and arrested scores of protesting teachers, though, according to an announcement by Iran's Minister of Education on 27 July, they were later released.

Before his arrest, intelligence officials had repeatedly summoned Esmail Abdi for interrogation and pressured him to resign from his post as ITTA General Secretary. During these interrogations, intelligence officials also warned Esmail Abdi against associating with trade union organizations based outside Iran such as Education International, and said that his participation in international gatherings was a "red line". On 3 May 2015, intelligence officials summoned Esmail Abdi again and threatened that a suspended 10-year sentence which he had received in 2011 for his peaceful trade union activities would be activated unless he made a formal announcement on Facebook that he was resigning from his ITTA post and would not be taking part in a nationwide protest scheduled for four days later. Amnesty International understands that Esmail Abdi made the announcement under pressure, but the ITTA did not accept his resignation. The protest went ahead as planned, with thousands of teachers gathering in front of the parliament building in Tehran and outside the offices of the Ministry of Education in different cities.

Article 22 (1) of the ICCPR states: "Everyone shall have the right to freedom of association with others, including the right to form and join trade unions for the protection of his interests". Article 8 of the ICESCR guarantees both "the right of everyone to form trade unions and join the trade union of his choice" and "the right of trade unions to function freely subject to no limitations other than those prescribed by law and which are necessary in a democratic society in the interests of national security or public order or for the protection of the rights and freedoms of others."

Amnesty International is deeply concerned about the dire situation of human rights defenders, including trade unionists, in Iran. The Iranian authorities have intensified their crackdown on human rights defenders, subjecting them to surveillance, intimidation, arbitrary arrest and detention, and increasingly harsh prison sentences. The UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders highlights states' obligation to create conditions in the social, economic, political and other fields, as well as the legal guarantees and legislative and administrative measures, that are necessary to ensure that all persons under their jurisdiction are able to enjoy their rights and freedoms, including the right to defend human rights. States have an obligation not to interfere, obstruct or violate the right to defend human rights and to protect that right from interference, obstruction and abuse by others, whether they are state agents or not. States also have a responsibility to take necessary measures to protect everyone against any violence, threats, retaliation or any arbitrary action as a consequence of their legitimate exercise of the right to defend human rights.

The UN Special Rapporteur on Torture has defined prolonged solitary confinement as any period of solitary confinement in excess of 15 days. Prolonged solitary confinement amounts to torture and other cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment.

Name: Esmail (Ismail) Abdi

Gender m/f: m

Further information on UA: 171/15 Index: MDE 13/5332/2016 Issue Date: 13 December 2016