

URGENT ACTION

PRISONER OF CONSCIENCE ON HUNGER STRIKE

Spiritual teacher Mohammad Ali Taheri has been on hunger strike since 13 August to protest against his death sentence and the Iranian authorities' refusal to allow him access to his lawyers. His health is deteriorating. He is a prisoner of conscience.

Spiritual teacher **Mohammad Ali Taheri** has been on hunger strike (taking only water) for 57 days. His hunger strike is in protest at his death sentence, as well as the Iranian authorities' refusal to allow him access to his lawyers, whom he has not been able to meet since 22 August, and their refusal to allow him a copy of the written court verdict, which cites the reason for his death sentence. He is also protesting against the omission of a 200-page defence statement from his casefile that he had previously written and given to his interrogator, and the prison authorities denying him pen and paper to write a new statement for his Supreme Court appeal. Mohammad Ali Taheri's lawyers submitted an appeal against his death sentence on 18 August and his case was sent to the Supreme Court, which has so far declined to provide any information about the status of the appeal. Mohammad Ali Taheri's physical health is deteriorating: he has lost weight and is suffering from low blood pressure. He was taken to the prison clinic for a few hours on 18 September after he lost consciousness.

Mohammad Ali Taheri was sentenced to death on 1 August on the charge of "spreading corruption on earth" (*efsad-e fel arz*). He was tried before Branch 26 of the Revolutionary Court in two sessions, on 11 March and 29 April. He had previously been convicted in October 2011 of several offences, including "insulting Islamic sanctities", and sentenced to five years' imprisonment, 74 lashes and a fine of nine billion rials (US\$300,000). Both sets of convictions stem from his spiritual teachings and practices, including establishing the spiritual group *Erfan-e Halgheh*. Mohammad Ali Taheri has been serving his sentence in solitary confinement in Section 2A of Tehran's Evin Prison, which is run by the Revolutionary Guards.

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

- Calling on the Iranian authorities to quash Mohammad Ali Taheri's death sentence and release him immediately and unconditionally, as he is a prisoner of conscience, held solely for the peaceful exercise of his rights to freedom of belief, expression and association;
- Expressing concern that Mohammad Ali Taheri has been sentenced to death for his spiritual teachings, and pointing out that under international human rights law, the death penalty may only be used for "the most serious crimes", which under international standards is limited to crimes involving intentional killing;
- Urging them to ensure that, pending his release, Mohammad Ali Taheri is not held in solitary confinement, and is provided with any medical care he requires.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS BEFORE 19 NOVEMBER 2015 TO:

Leader of the Islamic Republic
Ayatollah Sayed 'Ali Khamenei
The Office of the Supreme Leader
Islamic Republic Street- End of Shahid
Keshvar Doust Street,
Tehran, Islamic Republic of Iran
Twitter: @khamenei_ir (English)
@Khamenei_es (Spanish)
Email (via website):
<http://www.leader.ir/langs/en/index.php?p=suggest>
Salutation: Your Excellency

Head of the judiciary
Ayatollah Sadegh Larijani
c/o Public Relations Office
Number 4, Deadend of 1 Azizi
Above Pasteur Intersection
Vali Asr Street
Tehran, Islamic Republic of Iran
Email: info@humanrights-iran.ir
Salutation: Your Excellency

And copies to:
President of the Islamic Republic of Iran
Hassan Rouhani
The Presidency
Pasteur Street, Pasteur Square
Tehran, Islamic Republic of Iran
Email: media@rouhani.ir
Twitter: @HassanRouhani (English)
@Rouhani_ir (Persian)

Also send copies to diplomatic representatives accredited to your country. 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 third update of UA 212/14. Further information:

<https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/MDE13/047/2014/en/>

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ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Mohammad Ali Taheri has undertaken 12 hunger strikes previously and attempted suicide four times in protest at his prolonged solitary confinement, lack of access to his family and lawyers and repeated threats to kill him and his wife and children. After his 12th hunger strike, from 6 to 26 December 2014, the authorities granted him access to a lawyer of his own choosing. He has since been allowed weekly meetings with his wife and children, and monthly meetings with his brother and sister. These visits take place in a "cabin" (behind a glass screen) and communications are monitored by prison officials.

Mohammad Ali Taheri has not been allowed visits from any of his three lawyers since 22 August 2015. One of his lawyers visited the Supreme Court on 28 September 2015 in order to find out the progress of his appeal but the Court refused to provide the lawyer with any information, including which branch of the Court will examine his appeal.

Prior to the start of Mohammad Ali Taheri's most recent trial, the Iranian authorities and state-associated media, including news agencies Fars, Raja and Adyan, had several times declared him guilty of "spreading corruption on earth." On 21 November 2014, for example, Iran's National Prosecutor General, Hojjat al-Eslam Ebrahim Raisi, referred to Mohammad Ali Taheri as a "Corrupter on Earth" (*mofsed fel arz*). In August 2011, Channel Two of the Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting aired Mohammad Ali Taheri's televised "confessions" in which he denounced his own teachings and called on his followers to refrain from disseminating his audio and written materials. Such actions disregard the presumption of innocence, which is a fundamental part of the right to a fair trial.

Mohammad Ali Taheri has spent over four years in section 2A of solitary confinement in Evin Prison – since his 4 May 2011 arrest. This section of the prison, under the administration of the Revolutionary Guards, is without adequate oversight by the Judiciary and prison authorities. The Human Rights Committee, which monitors the implementation of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), to which Iran is a state party, stated in its General Comment 20 that prolonged solitary confinement may violate the prohibition of torture and other ill-treatment, which is prohibited by Article 7 of the ICCPR.

Mohammad Ali Taheri introduced the spiritual doctrine of *Erfan-e Halgheh* after 13 years of receiving what he claims were "spiritual inspirations" that empowered him to connect with a larger "Cosmic Consciousness". He lawfully opened a cultural and educational institute, also called *Erfan-e Halgheh*, in Tehran in 2006 to develop and disseminate his newly found spiritual beliefs, and practice them with his followers, in "healing sessions" apparently focused on alternative non-medicinal treatments. The three offices of the institute in Tehran were shut down by the Iranian authorities in August 2010: Mohammad Ali Taheri had been arrested on 18 April 2010 and detained for over two months. According to the state-sponsored Fars News Agency, at least 30 *Erfan-e Halgheh* teachers have received prison sentences ranging from one to five years for "insulting Islamic sanctities". Article 18 of the ICCPR protects "the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion". This right includes freedom to have or adopt a belief of one's choice. It also includes freedom to manifest the belief in observance, practice and teaching, either individually or in community with others in public or private.

Name: Mohammad Ali Taheri
Gender m/f: m

Further information on UA: 212/14 Index: MDE 13/2618/2015 Issue Date: 8 October 2015