

URGENT ACTION

BRITISH-IRANIAN LABOUR ACTIVIST DETAINED

Mehran Raof, a British-Iranian national and a labour rights activist, is being arbitrarily detained in Tehran's Evin prison. Revolutionary Guards agents arrested him on 16 October 2020. He is being held in prolonged solitary confinement, in violation of the absolute prohibition of torture and other ill-treatment. He is a prisoner of conscience and must be immediately and unconditionally released.

TAKE ACTION: WRITE AN APPEAL IN YOUR OWN WORDS OR USE THIS MODEL LETTER

*Head of judiciary, Ebrahim Raisi
c/o Embassy of Iran to the European Union
Avenue Franklin Roosevelt No. 15,
1050 Bruxelles, Belgium*

Dear Mr Raisi,

*I am writing to express serious concern at the continued arbitrary detention of labour rights activist **Mehran Raof**, 64, in Section 2A of Evin prison since his arrest on 16 October 2020. Agents from the intelligence unit of the Revolutionary Guards raided his home in Tehran, searched it and confiscated personal items including his computer. He was subjected to incommunicado detention for a month following his arrest, after which he was allowed to make a brief telephone call to a distant relative in Iran. He has been denied calls with his immediate family, all of whom live outside Iran, and the right to access legal counsel, even from the judiciary-approved lawyers that his family have retained on his behalf. He has been held in prolonged solitary confinement for months. Amnesty International fears that he is at serious risk of further torture and other human rights violations, especially given the Revolutionary Guards' pattern of subjecting detainees to torture to extract forced "confessions" which are later used to issue convictions in unfair trials.*

Mehran Raof is a dual British and Iranian national and lives between Iran and the UK. Amnesty International understands that his friends have tried to retain an independent lawyer of his choice on his behalf, but the authorities have refused to grant the lawyer access to his case file until trial. Mehran Raof was detained around the same time as several other labour rights activists across the country in October 2020 in a coordinated crackdown to quash advocacy on workers' rights. One of those arrested has since been sentenced to 16 years in prison on spurious national security charges, leading to fears of long sentences against them all. Amnesty International considers Mehran Raof a prisoner of conscience, detained solely for peacefully advocating for workers' rights in Iran and supporting trade unions.

Mehran Raof is among dozens of dual nationals arrested and detained in Iran in recent years. The UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Iran has expressed concern at the continued arbitrary detention of dual nationals and has said that the authorities have subjected them to "sham trials", convicted them based on "fabricated evidence or...no evidence at all" and "attempted to use them as diplomatic leverage." He noted that several relatives of detained dual nationals consider the detention of their loved ones to be "hostage-taking".

I ask you to immediately and unconditionally release Mehran Raof, as he is a prisoner of conscience detained solely for the peaceful exercise of his human rights through his labour rights activism. Pending his release, I ask you to ensure that he has regular access to his family outside Iran, a lawyer of his choosing and any health care he needs. I urge you to immediately end his prolonged solitary confinement and protect him from further torture and other ill-treatment, and ensure that he is allowed access to consular assistance from the United Kingdom authorities.

Yours sincerely,

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

The efforts of workers, trade unionists and labour rights activists in Iran to raise concerns about unpaid wages, precarious working conditions, staggering inflation and poor living standards have consistently led to crackdowns by the Iranian authorities. Despite undue restrictions on the right to freedom of association and a ban on independent trade unions in Iran, many workers and their allies continue to courageously form such unions and workers' rights organizations. Their efforts have often led to dismissals without justification or being forced into early retirement, attacks and beatings by security forces policing workers' protests, reprisals for organizing or participating in peaceful protests, arbitrary arrest and detention, torture and other ill-treatment, and long prison sentences on spurious national security charges. At least one labour rights activist, Arash Johari, who was arrested during the crackdown in October 2020, has since been sentenced to 16 years in prison in connection with his labour rights activism, leading to fears that others, including Mehran Raouf, could also face harsh prison sentences.

Amnesty International has documented a pattern of systematic violations of the right to a fair trial in Iran, beginning from the time of arrest right up until when defendants stand trial. Individuals detained, investigated and prosecuted, especially those who are dual nationals or who are arrested on politically motivated charges, including human rights defenders, are subjected to grossly unfair judicial proceedings. Most are arrested without warrants and held in undisclosed locations without access to their families or lawyers. Prosecution authorities and interrogators belonging to security and intelligence bodies, including the Revolutionary Guards, systematically deny detainees their right to access a lawyer from the time of arrest, including even lawyers vetted and approved by the judiciary, and during the investigation phase of their case. Torture and other ill-treatment against individuals arrested in politically-motivated cases is widespread and systematic, especially during interrogations, and prison and prosecution authorities also deliberately deny prisoners of conscience and other prisoners held for politically motivated reasons access to adequate health care, including medication. Intelligence and security agents often hold detainees in poor and unsanitary conditions in prolonged solitary confinement, including in section 2A of Evin prison, which is under the control of the Revolutionary Guards, for up to 24 hours a day for weeks or months and only remove them from their cells for interrogations. Detainees in solitary confinement are held without any access to natural light and fresh air, often in filthy cells that are infested with insects. Such cells often lack adequate sanitary facilities and products for detainees to maintain personal hygiene, detainees sleep on the floor with typically one blanket and are given meagre rations of poor-quality food. Former detainees interviewed by Amnesty International have consistently said that detention in prolonged solitary confinement caused them immense psychological pain and suffering and was used to coerce them to make "confessions". Under such circumstances, prolonged solitary confinement in and of itself amounts to torture. Forced "confessions" obtained under torture and other ill-treatment and without a lawyer present are consistently used as evidence by courts to issue convictions.

International human rights law prohibits the arbitrary deprivation of liberty. The UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention has found that detention can be arbitrary even when allowed by domestic law if it contravenes international standards or is incompatible with other human rights such as the rights to freedom of expression, association and peaceful assembly. Detainees have a right to communicate with the outside world and to receive visits. Prolonged solitary confinement, that is solitary confinement imposed for periods beyond 15 days for 22 hours or more a day, violates the absolute prohibition of torture and other ill-treatment. Torture is an international crime and its use is prohibited under all circumstances. Statements elicited as a result of torture, ill-treatment or other forms of coercion must be excluded as evidence in criminal proceedings, except those brought against suspected perpetrators of such abuse. The right to a fair trial is legally binding on all states as part of customary international law. Those facing criminal proceedings must have the right to access legal counsel of their choosing from the time of arrest and throughout the pre-trial and trial proceedings; not to be compelled to testify against themselves or to confess guilt; not to be detained on vague charges; to receive a fair, public hearing before a competent, independent and impartial tribunal; and to be provided with a public, reasoned judgement.

PREFERRED LANGUAGE TO ADDRESS TARGET: Persian, English

You can also write in your own language.

PLEASE TAKE ACTION AS SOON AS POSSIBLE UNTIL: [20 April 2021]

Please check with the Amnesty office in your country if you wish to send appeals after the deadline.

NAME AND PREFERRED PRONOUN: Mehran Raouf (He; him)