

URGENT ACTION

IRANIAN TRADE UNIONIST FACES SIXTEEN YEARS IN JAIL

Ismail Abdi, prisoner of conscience and Secretary General of Iran's Teachers' Trade Association (ITTA), has been sentenced on charges related to his peaceful trade union activities. He is awaiting an appeal date and has announced he will go on hunger strike on International Workers' Day on 1 May to protest the repression of trade unionists.

Ismail (Esmail) Abdi was informed in February that he had been sentenced by Branch 15 of the Revolutionary Court in Tehran to six years' imprisonment on the charges of "spreading propaganda against the system" and "gathering and colluding to commit crimes against national security". The charges stem from his trade union activities, including peaceful demonstrations held by teachers and members of the ITTA outside the Iranian parliament in May 2015 in protest against poor wages, low education budget, and imprisonment of teacher trade unionists. Ismail Abdi has appealed the verdict and is awaiting a date for his hearing. His trial was in breach of international fair trial standards; in particular he was denied access 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. Amnesty International understands that the authorities' denial of Ismail Abdi's right to access a lawyer of his choosing was based on a provision in Iran's new 2015 Code of Criminal Procedures, which restricts access to legal counsel during the investigative phase for people facing certain offences including those related to national security. Under this provision, they may only choose a lawyer from a list of those pre-approved by the Head of Judiciary.

In April, Ismail Abdi wrote an open letter, in which he said that he intends to go on hunger strike on 1 May 2016, stating "according to the evidence used to issue the verdicts against [me] you could say that any efforts...to improve the lives and livelihood of teachers and workers in Iran are considered acts against national security".

Ismail Abdi was arrested on 27 June 2015 and transferred to solitary confinement in Section 2A of Tehran's Evin Prison, run by the Revolutionary Guards, and interrogated for at least 17 days without access to his family or lawyer. He may face a total of 16 years' imprisonment if his new sentence is upheld. This is due to a previous suspended 10-year sentence that he received following a 2011 conviction on trumped up national security charges, related to his peaceful trade union activities.

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

- Calling on the Iranian authorities to release Ismail Abdi immediately and unconditionally, as he is a prisoner of conscience held solely for his peaceful trade union activities, and to ensure his conviction and sentence are quashed;
- Reminding them that Iran has ratified the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), both of which place an obligation on Iran to respect and protect the right of everyone to form and join trade unions for the protection of their interests.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS BEFORE 31 MAY 2016 TO:

Office of the Supreme Leader
Ayatollah Sayed 'Ali Khamenei
Salutation: Your Excellency

Head of the Judiciary
Ayatollah Sadegh Larijani
Salutation: Your Excellency

And copies to:
President
Hassan Rouhani

Please send your appeals to the care of diplomatic representatives accredited to 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 first update of UA 171/15. Further information: <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/mde13/2208/2015/en/>

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ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Ismail Abdi, along with another trade union activist, J'afar Azimzadeh, wrote an open letter in April 2016 stating their intention to go on hunger strike on International Workers' Day on 1 May to protest the authorities' repressive responses to teachers' and trade unionists' protests. The men demanded that the authorities drop the charge of "gathering and colluding to commit crimes against national security" and other national security charges in their cases. In their letter they said: "according to the evidence used to issue the verdicts against us, you could say that any efforts...to improve the lives and livelihood of teachers and workers in Iran are considered acts against national security".

Ismail Abdi had been 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 seventh Education International World Congress in Canada in July 2015. Before his arrest, intelligence officials had summoned Ismail Abdi for interrogation a number of times, and had pressured him to resign from his post as ITTA General Secretary and to cancel planned nationwide demonstrations that the ITTA, a legally constituted entity in Iran, had helped organize. During these interrogations, intelligence officials also warned Ismail Abdi against associating with international teachers' trade unions, including Education International, and said his participation in their international gatherings was a "red line".

On 3 May 2015, one day after the National Iranian Teachers' Day and four days before the scheduled date of a nationwide protest, intelligence officials summoned Ismail Abdi and threatened him, saying that a suspended 10-year sentence from 2011 would be immediately implemented unless he made a formal announcement on Facebook that he was resigning from his ITTA post and would not be taking part in any upcoming demonstrations. Ismail 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.

During a meeting with the Minister of Education and a number of teachers on 6 May 2015, Iran's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Sayed 'Ali Khamenei said: "Teachers are pious, noble and smart people and they watch out for plots [hatched] by enemies and those bearing a grudge against the Islamic establishment who intend to fabricate seditious, factional and political slogans under the pretext of the teachers' livelihoods and cause trouble to the [Islamic] establishment."

On 22 July 2015, thousands of teachers attempted to gather in front of parliament to protest against the harassment and abuse of trade unionist teachers and demand Ismail Abdi's release. Security forces stationed around parliament from early morning, however, disrupted the gathering and arrested scores of protesting teachers, though, according to an announcement by Iran's Minister of Education on 27 July 2015, the teachers were later released. At least three other teachers in Iran are also serving prison sentences in connection with their legitimate trade union activities, including Ali Akbar Baghani, Alireza Hashemi and Rasoul Bodaghi.

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."

Name: Ismail Abdi
Gender m/f: m

Further information on UA: 171/15 Index: MDE 13/3843/2016 Issue Date: 19 April 2016