

URGENT ACTION

MOHAMMAD ALI TAHERI'S WHEREABOUTS UNKNOWN

Iranian spiritual teacher Mohammad Ali Taheri, who started a hunger strike on 28 September, has been held incommunicado since 16 October. The authorities are refusing to provide his family with any information about his fate and whereabouts.

Iranian spiritual teacher **Mohammad Ali Taheri**, who has been languishing in solitary confinement in Section 2A of Tehran's Evin Prison for over five years, has been deprived of all contact with his family since 16 October. His family are in great distress over his fate and whereabouts, particularly because his health has deteriorated since he started a hunger strike on 28 September. They have gone to various prison and judicial officials to enquire about his conditions and whereabouts but the authorities have refused to provide them with any information. Judicial officials appear to have informally told his lawyers that Mohammad Ali Taheri lost consciousness on the night of 18 October and was transferred to a Tehran hospital where the Revolutionary Guards frequently take people who are in their custody and hospitalize them under pseudonyms. This information, however, has not been confirmed to his family.

His family have said that his main interrogator and a masked man entered his cell on the fifth day of his hunger strike, took him to an interrogation room, and put him under pressure to give video-recorded "confessions". They have said that he was beaten when he resisted.

Mohammad Ali Taheri, who has been in detention since May 2011, started his latest hunger strike in protest at the authorities' refusal to release him even though he had completed serving his five-year prison sentence, which had been imposed on him for "insulting Islamic sanctities" for establishing a spiritual doctrine and group called *Erfan-e Halgheh*. In June 2016, he was acquitted of a second charge of "spreading corruption on earth", for which he had been previously sentenced to death in August 2015.

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

- Calling on the Iranian authorities to immediately disclose Mohammad Ali Taheri's fate and whereabouts, and allow him to have regular visits and phone calls with his family;
- Urging them to 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;
- Calling on them to ensure he has access to a qualified health professional who can provide health care in compliance with medical ethics, including the principles of confidentiality, autonomy and informed consent;
- Calling on them to ensure that he is protected from any punishment for his hunger strike and to order an independent and impartial investigation into his allegations of torture and other ill-treatment, including his prolonged solitary confinement, which violates the absolute prohibition of torture and other ill-treatment, and bring those responsible to justice in a fair trial without recourse to the death penalty.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS BEFORE 1 DECEMBER 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 fifth update of UA 212/14. Further information: <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/MDE13/3433/2016/en/>

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ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

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 in August 2010.

Mohammad Ali Taheri was first arrested in April 2010 and was released after two months. He was re-arrested in May 2011 and subsequently sentenced by a Revolutionary Court in Tehran to five years’ imprisonment for “insulting Islamic sanctities” for establishing a spiritual doctrine and group called *Erfan-e Halgheh*. His prison sentence was considered complete in February 2016 taking into account the time he had also spent in pre-trial detention in 2010.

In August 2015, a Revolutionary Court in Tehran further convicted him of “spreading corruption on earth” for his spiritual teachings and practices and sentenced him to death. In December of the same year, the Supreme Court quashed the death sentence, after concluding that Mohammad Ali Taheri’s activities before he was arrested in 2011 had not amounted to “spreading corruption on earth” as defined under the old Islamic Penal Code (which was in effect until 2013, when a new Islamic Penal Code was adopted). The court also noted the existence of a number of open but inactive investigation files against Mohammad Ali Taheri which addressed various allegations, including “apostasy” (*ertedad*), “insulting the Prophet” (*sabbo al-nabi*), “gathering and colluding against national security” through his membership of the opposition guerrilla group Fadaiyan Khalq in the early years of the Islamic Republic, and “committing crimes against the physical integrity of multiple individuals and on a mass scale”, but said the investigations conducted into these allegations were incomplete and flawed. The Supreme Court, therefore, returned the case to the Revolutionary Court to order further investigations that could support these charges. In June 2016, Mohammad Ali Taheri was acquitted of the charge of “spreading corruption on earth” and the other charges against him were dropped.

Over the course of his imprisonment, Mohammad Ali Taheri has undertaken a total of 16 hunger strikes and attempted suicide four times in protest at his prolonged solitary confinement, lack of access to his family and lawyer and repeated death threats against him and his family.

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 absolute prohibition of torture and other ill-treatment, in accordance to Article 7 of the ICCPR. The UN Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners (Nelson Mandela Rules) prohibits the practice of prolonged solitary confinement, considered to be a time period in excess of 15 consecutive days. Mohammad Ali Taheri has spent over five years in solitary confinement in Tehran’s Evin Prison – since his 4 May 2011 arrest.

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 13/5018/2016 Issue Date: 20 October 2016