

URGENT ACTION

INHUMANE PRISON CONDITIONS NEED ATTENTION

Iranian prisoner of conscience and human rights defender Saeed Shirzad ended his 39-day hunger strike on 14 January after the authorities at Karaj's Raja'i Shahr Prison made an oral promise to address his grievances about the inhumane treatment of political prisoners in the prison. He is now in need of specialized medical care.

Saeed Shirzad, a human rights defender sentenced to five years in prison, sewed his lips shut and started a hunger strike on 7 December 2016 in protest at what he described in a letter to judicial officials as "the quiet death of prisoners" at Raja'i Shahr Prison in the city of Karaj, near the capital, Tehran. The letter listed reasons for his hunger strike which included: the denial of medical care; beatings; the prison officials' degrading treatment of inmates and their families during visits through invasive and abusive body searches; and poor air circulation due to the fact that windows in Section 4, Room 12, where political prisoners are held, were covered with metal sheets. On 14 January, Saeed Shirzad ended his 39-day strike after the prison's Associate Prosecutor (*Dadyar-e Zendan*) met with him and promised to address his grievances. Saeed Shirzad's health declined during his hunger strike. He was transferred to hospital on 12 January after his blood pressure dropped to dangerously low levels and he lost consciousness. He has lost about 10kg in weight and is suffering from muscle weakness, heart palpitations, and pain in his kidneys, chest and stomach.

On 4 January, a group of political prisoners wrote a letter in support of Saeed Shirzad, denouncing the authorities' failure to address the inhumane prison conditions. The most common complaints about the situation at Raja'i Shahr Prison include: the deliberate indifference of prison officials to prisoners' medical needs; their refusal to transfer critically ill prisoners to hospitals outside the prison; long periods of time without hot water for washing and bathing; inadequate space; poor ventilation; unsanitary conditions; insect infestations near kitchen areas; insufficient cleaning supplies; and meagre rations of (poor quality) food. Such conditions are believed to have put inmates at risk of infection and various skin and respiratory diseases. Reports from Karaj's Raja'i Shahr Prison also indicate a pattern of guards beating, verbally assaulting and sexually harassing political prisoners, particularly when transferring them to and from hospital and court.

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

- Calling on the Iranian authorities to release Saeed Shirzad immediately and unconditionally as his conviction and sentence stems solely from his peaceful work as a human rights defender;
- Calling on them to ensure that, pending his unconditional release, he is granted access to adequate specialized medical care in a hospital outside prison, as the care he needs it is not available inside;
- Calling on them to take immediate steps to protect prisoners at Raja'i Shahr Prison from torture and other ill-treatment, ensuring that they are treated humanely in accordance with international law and standards, including the Nelson Mandela Rules, and allow national and international monitors to conduct inspection visits to Raja'i Shahr Prison.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS BEFORE 2 MARCH 2017 TO:

Head of the Judiciary
Ayatollah Sadegh Larijani
c/o Public Relations Office
Number 4, Deadend of 1 Azizi
Vali Asr Street Tehran,
Islamic Republic of Iran

Associate Prosecutor
Kohandani
Raja'i Shahr Prison,
Moazzen Blvd., Karaj, Alborz
Province, Islamic Republic of Iran

And copies to:
President
Hassan Rouhani
Pasteur Street, Pasteur Square
Tehran, Islamic Republic of Iran

Also send copies to diplomatic representatives accredited to your country.

Please check with your section office if sending appeals after the above date. This is the second update of UA 250/14. Further information:

www.amnesty.org/en/documents/mde13/3798/2016/en/

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ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Saeed Shirzad was sentenced to five years in prison in September 2015, after Branch 15 of the Revolutionary Court convicted him of “gathering and colluding to commit crimes against national security”. The conviction stems solely from his peaceful human rights activities, including contact with the families of political prisoners, and communicating with the office of the UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Iran. Saeed Shirzad’s trial, which took place over a year after his arrest, was grossly unfair. He was allowed to meet his lawyer for the first time during his court hearing, which lasted about half an hour. The authorities denied his lawyer access to casefile material until shortly before the hearing.

Saeed Shirzad was arrested, without a warrant, by Ministry of Intelligence officials on 2 June 2013 after he arrived at his workplace in a refinery in Tabriz, East Azerbaijan province, in the north-west of the country. He was subsequently transferred to Section 209 of Evin Prison in Tehran, which is under the control of the Ministry of Intelligence. Saeed Shirzad was held for 70 days in solitary confinement in a small cell without toilet facilities. He was denied access to his family and lawyer and was put under pressure to make a video-taped “confession”. In August 2013, he was transferred to Section 8, where people jailed for non-political crimes are held in poor conditions, and detained there until February 2014, when he was taken to Raja’i Shahr Prison. For the first five months after his transfer to Raja’i Shahr Prison, he was kept in a ward that mostly houses prisoners convicted of murder. Later in July 2014, he was transferred to Section 4, Room 12, where political prisoners are held. Iranian authorities are believed to transfer political prisoners from Evin Prison to Raja’i Shahr Prison in order to further punish them. Saeed Shirzad’s transfer took place after he complained against the abusive practices of the head of Section 8 at Evin Prison.

Saeed Shirzad has said that, while in solitary confinement, Ministry of Intelligence officials accused him of supporting the banned political opposition group the People’s Mojahedin Organization of Iran (PMOI), and regularly threatened to have him convicted of “enmity against God” (moharebeh), an offence that carries the death penalty. They also threatened him with execution. He has consistently maintained that he has no relation with the PMOI and that the accusation is a spurious one, made merely because of his support in 2014 for the daughter of a PMOI prisoner who was at risk of dropping out of university due to financial difficulties resulting from her father’s imprisonment.

Amnesty International’s research shows that the Office of the Prosecutor and prison authorities deliberately deny political prisoners access to adequate medical care, in many cases as an intentional act of cruelty intended to intimidate and punish political prisoners, or to extract forced “confessions”. Common practices that threaten the health and lives of political prisoners in Iran include: deliberately delaying or refusing urgent and/or specialized medical care - including screening and treatment; downplaying or outright dismissing the seriousness of prisoners’ medical grievances, and prescribing them ordinary painkillers and sedatives without addressing the underlying medical problem they complain of; withholding medication; refusing to release prisoners who are critically ill on compassionate grounds, making medical leave conditional on extortionate bail amounts; and forcing prisoners who have been transferred to hospital or granted medical leave to interrupt their treatment and return to prison against medical advice. Amnesty International has also learnt that Iranian officials subject political prisoners with health problems to a whole range of abusive practices that amount to torture or other ill-treatment. These include the unnecessary or excessive use of restraints such as handcuffs and leg shackles on prisoners receiving medical care, beatings on sick prisoners during their transfer to hospital, and intrusions on the privacy of prisoners undergoing intimate medical examinations (*see Health taken hostage: Cruel denial of medical care in Iran’s prisons*, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/mde13/4196/2016/en/>).

Name: Saeed Shirzad
Gender m/f: m

Further information on UA: 250/14 Index: MDE 13/5515/2017 Issue Date: 19 January 2017