

PUBLIC

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02 February 2006

UA 26/06 Fear of torture or ill-treatment/ incommunicado detention/ possible prisoners of conscience

IRAN Ebrahim Madadi (m), Deputy Head of the Union of Workers of the United Bus Company of Tehran (*Sherkat-e Vahed*)
Naser Gholami (m), Secretary of Union of Workers of the United Bus Company of Tehran
Mansour Heyat Gheibi (m)
Seyed Davoud Razavi (m)
Sa'id Torabian (m)
Ali Zade Hossein (m)
Abdolreza Tarazi (m)
Yaghoub Salimi (m)
Hossein Shahsavari (m)
Ata Babakhani (m)
Yousef Moradi (m)
and at least 500 other workers of the United Bus Company of Tehran

The 11 men named above, and at least 500 other employees of the United Bus Company of Tehran (*Sherkat-e Vahed*), have been arrested since 25 January. They are believed to be detained incommunicado, mostly at Tehran's Evin prison, and are at risk of torture and ill-treatment. Amnesty International believes that they are prisoners of conscience, detained solely for their peaceful trade union activities.

The arrests began after the Union of Workers of the United Bus Company of Tehran issued a call for a strike to be held on 28 January. The purpose of the strike was to call for the release of Mansour Ossanlu, the head of the Union, who has been detained since 22 December 2005 (see UA 08/06, MDE 13/002/2006, 09 January 2006), and to call for legal recognition of the union, and a pay increase.

Leaflets publicizing the strike were reportedly distributed widely in Tehran on 24 January. Hosseini Tabar, a member of the Union's Executive Committee, was reportedly detained briefly while distributing the leaflets. The following day, Ebrahim Madadi, Mansour Heyat Ghaybi, Sayed Davoud Razavi, Sa'id Torabian, Ali Zad Hossein and Gholamreza Mirza'i, all members of the Executive Committee, were summoned to appear at the Public Prosecutor's Office in Tehran on 26 January. After they refused to obey the Public Prosecutor's order to call off the strike, they were arrested and taken to Evin Prison. In an interview with the state news agency IRNA, the Mayor of Tehran reportedly said that the union was illegal and indicated that the strike would not be allowed to take place. Managers of the United Bus Company of Tehran threatened Union members that they would lose their jobs if they participated in the strike.

On 27 January 2006, security forces began mass arrests of union members planning to participate in the strike. The wives of Executive Committee members Mansour Hayat Ghaybi, Sayed Davoud Razavi, and Yaghoub Salimi, and five children aged between 2 and 15 years old, were also arrested, though they have now been released.

On 28 January, the day of the strike, hundreds more Union members were reportedly arrested. Most of them were taken to Evin Prison. Many bus drivers protesting on picket lines were reportedly threatened in order to force them to drive their buses, and were beaten, kicked, and hit with batons by members of the security forces and members of the *Basij*, a volunteer security force under the command of the Revolutionary Guard, who had reportedly been brought in to drive some of the buses. In some places, the authorities allegedly used tear gas and fired shots into the air. Scores more were reportedly arrested on 29 and 30 January.

Currently, only 30 to 50 of those detained are reported to have been released, apparently after they agreed under duress to sign guarantees that they would not participate in strikes or other protest actions. At least 500 others are believed to remain in detention, mostly in Evin prison, without access to family and lawyers. Some are reported to have begun a hunger strike on 29 January to protest their detention. It is not known if they are receiving any medical treatment. The Union has called for another strike on 2 February.

As a party to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), the Iranian government is obliged to guarantee freedom of association, "including the right to form and join trade unions." Article 26 of the Iranian Constitution permits "the formation of parties, societies, political or professional associations." The right to strike is recognized by Iran's Labour Law.

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send appeals to arrive as quickly as possible, in Persian, Arabic, English or your own language:

- expressing concern at the arrests of the 11 people named above and approximately 500 other employees of the United Bus Company of Tehran detained in connection with the strike called by the Union of Workers of the Tehran and Suburbs Bus Company;
- expressing concern at reports that many of those detained are being held incommunicado in Evin prison, and urging the authorities to grant them immediate access to lawyers, their family, and any necessary medical treatment;
- calling for their immediate and unconditional release if they are held solely on account of their peaceful trade union activities;
- if this is not the case, calling on the authorities to charge them promptly with a recognizably criminal offence and bring them to trial promptly and fairly;
- reminding the authorities of their obligations under the ICCPR, the Iranian Constitution and Labour Law;
- calling for an independent investigation, the result of which should be made public, into reports that security forces and members of the volunteer Basij force used excessive force against peaceful protestors.

APPEALS TO:

Supreme Leader of the Islamic Republic

His Excellency Ayatollah Sayed 'Ali Khamenei

The Office of the Supreme Leader, Shoahada Street, Qom, Islamic Republic of Iran

Fax: + 98 251 7 774 2228 (mark "FAO the Office of His Excellency, Ayatollah al Udhma Khamenei")

Email: istifaa@wilayah.org OR info@leader.ir

Salutation: Your Excellency

Head of the Judiciary

His Excellency Ayatollah Mahmoud Hashemi Shahroudi

Ministry of Justice, Park-e Shahr, Tehran, Islamic Republic of Iran

Email: via the Judiciary's website: wwwiranjudiciary.org/feedback_en.html

Fax: + 98 21 8 879 6671 / 6 640 4018 / 6 640 4019

Salutation: Your Excellency

Minister of the Interior

Hojatoleslam Mustafa Purmohammadi

Ministry of the Interior, Dr Fatemi Avenue, Tehran, Islamic Republic of Iran

Fax: + 98 21 8 896 203/ 899 547/ 6 650 203

Salutation: Your Excellency

COPIES TO: Diplomatic representatives of Iran accredited to your country.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY. Check with the International Secretariat, or your section office, if sending appeals after 16 March 2006.