

EXTERNAL

AI Index: MDE 13/17/96

UA 124/96 Unacknowledged detention / Fear of "disappearance" 17 May 1996

IRAN Ayatollah Ya'sub al-Din Rastgari, aged 70

Amnesty International fears for the safety of Ayatollah Ya'sub al-Din Rastgari, who was reportedly detained in late February 1996 and taken to an unknown destination. Some of his possessions are also said to have been seized at the time of his arrest. Since then, no news has been received as to his whereabouts or circumstances.

Ayatollah Rastgari, who is said to be critical of certain government policies, has reportedly been detained in the past, the first time after holding a mourning ceremony for the late Grand Ayatollah Shariatmadari who died in 1986, when he was reportedly sentenced to two-and-a-half years' imprisonment on charges said to include supporting Grand Ayatollah Shariatmadari and opposition to the Islamic Republic of Iran. Amnesty International does not have details of his subsequent arrests.

In a letter to the Iranian authorities dated 4 April 1996, Amnesty International sought urgent clarification of Ayatollah Rastgari's legal status, including any charges against him, and his place of detention. It urged that his family be informed of his whereabouts, that he be granted immediate and regular family visits, as well as access to a lawyer of his choice, and to medical attention, if necessary. The organization also called for his immediate release if he was not to be promptly charged and fairly tried for a recognizably criminal offence, and sought assurances that he was being humanely treated. No response has yet been received.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

There has been a pattern in Iran of detention of religious figures critical of government policies and their followers. During 1994, a number of followers of Grand Ayatollah Shirazi were arrested, including Sheikh Makki Akhound, who was allegedly severely beaten. In addition, at least nine followers of Grand Ayatollah Hussein Ali Montazeri were reportedly arrested in October 1994, after he had publicly criticised the authorities in an open letter. Five of his followers were also arrested in 1993.

In July and August 1995, Javad Rouhani, the son of Grand Ayatollah Sadeq Rouhani, and at least 25 of his supporters were arrested after Grand Ayatollah Rouhani had written a critical letter to the President which included a complaint that he had been held under house arrest for more than 10 years. Javad Rouhani was released in December 1995 (see UA 221/95, MDE 13/15/95, 15 September 1995 and follow-ups MDE 13/16/95, 28 September and MDE 13/22/95, 19 December).

Between September 1995 and January 1996, at least 23 followers of Grand Ayatollah Shirazi were arrested. Many, if not all, are reported to have been severely tortured in detention (see UA 266/95, MDE 13/21/95, 29 November 1995 and follow-ups MDE 13/03/96, 23 January 1996 and MDE 13/10/96, 22 March).

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send telegrams/telexes/faxes/express/airmail letters in English or your own language:

- asking for information about the current whereabouts of Ayatollah Rastgari;
- urging that his family be informed immediately of his whereabouts and that he be granted access to a lawyer of his choice, an independent doctor and to a judicial review of his detention;

- seeking information about his current legal status including any charges or trial proceedings, and calling for his release if he is not to be charged with a recognizably criminal offence, and given a fair and prompt trial;
- seeking assurances that he is being humanely treated and is protected from torture or ill-treatment.

APPEALS TO:

1) Leader of the Islamic Republic
His Excellency Ayatollah Sayed 'Ali Khamenei
The Presidency, Palestine Avenue
Azerbaijan Intersection, Tehran, Islamic Republic of Iran
Telegrams: Ayatollah Khamenei, Tehran, Iran
Salutation: Your Excellency

2) His Excellency Hojjatoleslam
Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani
The Presidency, Palestine Avenue
Azerbaijan Intersection, Tehran, The Islamic Republic of Iran
Telegrams: President Rafsanjani, Tehran, Iran
Salutation: Your Excellency

3) Head of the Judiciary
His Excellency Ayatollah Mohammad Yazdi
Ministry of Justice
Park-e Shahr, Tehran, Islamic Republic of Iran
Telegrams: Head of Judiciary, Tehran, Iran
Salutation: Your Excellency

4) Minister of Information
His Excellency Hojjatoleslam Ali Fallahian
Ministry of Information
Tehran, Islamic Republic of Iran
Telegrams: Information Minister, Tehran, Iran
Salutation: Your Excellency

COPIES TO:

Minister of Foreign Affairs
His Excellency Dr Ali Akbar Velayati
Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Sheikh Abdolmajid Keshk-e Mesri Avenue
Tehran, Islamic Republic of Iran

Sa'id Raja'i Khorasani
Chairman of the Islamic Consultative Assembly's Human Rights Committee
Imam Khomeini Avenue, Tehran, Islamic Republic of Iran

Mr Hussain Farahi, Secretary, Islamic Human Rights Commission
PO Box 13165-137, Tehran Islamic Republic of Iran

and 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 10 July 1996.