

PUBLIC

AI Index: MDE 13/035/2009

20 April 2009

Further Information on 77/09 (MDE 13/022/2009, 16 March 2009) and follow-up (MDE 13/033/2009, 16 April 2009) - Prisoner of conscience

IRAN **Roxana Saberi (f), aged 31, journalist, joint US-Iranian national**

Roxana Saberi, who is a dual US-Iranian national, was sentenced to eight years' imprisonment after being convicted of espionage on 18 April. Amnesty International believes she is a prisoner of conscience, held either for political reasons related to Iran-US relations or for the peaceful exercise of her right to freedom of expression. She should be released immediately and without condition.

Roxana Saberi, who was born in the USA to an Iranian-born father and Japanese-born mother, has reported for US-based National Public Radio (NPR), which produces news and cultural programming, the BBC and Fox News. She has been living in Iran for six years, working as a journalist and pursuing in Iran, a master's degree in Iranian studies and international relations.

Since her arrest on 31 January 2009, Roxana Saberi was accused first of illegally buying alcohol, banned in Iran, then of continuing to work as a journalist after her press credentials were revoked, and finally of unspecified "espionage". According to her father, Reza Saberi, Roxana Saberi was deceived into "confessing" to certain activities when questioned in detention before her trial as she had been told that she would be released if she cooperated. Roxana Saberi retracted her "confessions" during the trial. Her lawyer intends to lodge an appeal against the conviction and sentence.

On 19 April, Iran's President, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, instructed the Tehran General Prosecutor to ensure that Roxana Saberi receives her full legal rights in defending herself. On 20 April, the Head of the Judiciary instructed the judiciary to ensure a quick and fair appeal for her.

Amnesty International believes that the changing nature of the accusations against her and the fact that no evidence has been produced for public scrutiny indicate that the Iranian authorities wished to detain her solely for political reasons, and that she should be released.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Several dual-national Iranians have been detained in Iran in recent years since the US Congress announced an extra US\$75 million funding for "supporting democracy" in Iran, including Dr Haleh Esfandiari, Kian Tajbakhsh, Parnaz Azima and Ali Shakeri. Other Iranians with links to the USA have also been detained. Most have been accused of acting against national security, particularly with relation to participation in an alleged "soft revolution" in Iran. The USA also holds five Iranian diplomats arrested in Iraq in 2007. In a meeting with the Swiss President on 19 April, President Ahmadinejad called for their release. Some commentators have also suggested that Roxana Saberi's detention and trial may also be in part due to internal rivalries in the Iranian system in regard to the election of President Obama in the USA and his recent overtures towards Iran.

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

- calling for the immediate and unconditional release of Roxana Saberi as, on the basis of the available evidence, she is a prisoner of conscience;

- calling for her “confessions” to be disregarded as Roxana Saberi may have been deceived into making incriminating “confessions” while held in pre-trial detention.

APPEALS TO:

Head of the Judiciary

Ayatollah Mahmoud Hashemi Shahroudi
c/o Director, Judiciary Public Relations and Information Office
Ardehsir Sadiq
Judiciary Public Relations and Information Office
No. 57, Pasteur St., corner of Khosh Zaban Avenue
Tehran, Iran

Email: info@dadiran.ir (In the subject line write: **FAO Ayatollah Shahroudi**)
Salutation: Your Excellency

Leader of the Islamic Republic

Ayatollah Sayed ‘Ali Khamenei
The Office of the Supreme Leader
Islamic Republic Street – End of Shahid Keshvar Doust Street
Tehran, Islamic Republic of Iran

Email: info_leader@leader.ir
via website: <http://www.leader.ir/langs/en/index.php?p=letter> (English)
<http://www.leader.ir/langs/fa/index.php?p=letter> (Persian)
Salutation: Your Excellency

COPIES TO:

President

His Excellency Mahmoud Ahmadinejad
The Presidency
Palestine Avenue, Azerbaijan Intersection
Tehran, Islamic Republic of Iran

Fax: + 98 21 6 649 5880
Email: via website: <http://www.president.ir/email/>

Director, Human Rights Headquarters of Iran

Mohammad Javad Larijani
Howzeh Riyasat-e Qoveh Qazaiyeh / Office of the Head of the Judiciary
Pasteur St, Vali Asr Ave., south of Serah-e Jomhuri
Tehran 1316814737, Iran

Fax: +98 21 3390 4986 (please keep trying)
Email: info@dadgostary-tehran.ir (In the subject line write: **FAO Javad Larijani**)
Salutation: Dear Mr Larijani

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 1 June 2009.