

EXTERNAL

AI Index: MDE 13/36/96

UA 269/96 Fear for safety / Possible Prisoner of Conscience 20 November 1996

IRAN Faraj Sarkouhi, editor

Amnesty International is extremely concerned for the safety of Faraj Sarkouhi, editor of *Adineh* magazine, who has not been seen since 3 November 1996, when he was supposed to board a plane at Tehran airport to visit relatives in Germany.

Amnesty International fears that he may be held as a prisoner of conscience in unacknowledged detention in Iran, where he would be at risk of torture or ill-treatment.

There has been no official information on his whereabouts since 3 November, although the *Jomhuri-Eslami* newspaper was reported to have stated on 13 November that he had boarded the plane to Germany and that "inquiries about anything that might have happened to him should be addressed to the passport control section ... in Hamburg and thereafter". Other sources, however, have indicated that Faraj Sarkouhi is being held in a north Tehran house belonging to the intelligence services, said to be off Avenue Pasdaran.

If Faraj Sarkouhi is indeed in detention, Amnesty International believes that he is very likely a prisoner of conscience, held solely for non-violent activities related to the internationally recognised right to freedom of expression. If this is the case, he should be immediately and unconditionally released, and in any event be allowed immediate and regular access to his family and to a lawyer of his choice, and be allowed the opportunity for a judicial review of his continued detention.

Faraj Sarkouhi had earlier been arrested on 8 September 1996, while at a meeting with several other Iranian writers to discuss the final draft of a new charter of the Iranian Writers' Association. He was reportedly released without charge after three days.

Amnesty International wrote to the Iranian authorities on 6 November seeking urgent clarification of Faraj Sarkouhi's situation and urging his release if held as a prisoner of conscience, but has not received any response.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Writers in Iran have in the past been victims of human rights violations relating to their activities. For example, Ali Akbar Saidi-Sirjani was arrested in March 1994 and was held in incommunicado detention. He was accused in the press of a number of offences (see UA 168/94 and follow-ups). Amnesty International believes the real reason for his arrest had been open letters he had sent to the government objecting to censorship of dissenting voices in Iran. He died in custody on 27 November 1994. Amnesty International called for a thorough and independent investigation into the circumstances of his death, but is unaware of any such investigation having been carried out.

In November 1995, Mohammad Sadeq Javadi Hessari, the editor of *Touss* magazine, was sentenced to six months' imprisonment and 20 lashes on charges of "slander" and "divulging secrets" after he had reportedly criticised a court order temporarily suspending the magazine, particularly for the lack of information about the charges against it.

In January 1996, Abbas Maroufi, the editor of *Gardoon* magazine, was sentenced to a prison term and flogging after conviction of "publishing lies", "insults" to the Leader of the Islamic Republic, and of publishing poems deemed "immoral".

In July 1996 Heshmatollah Tabar-Zadi, the editor of *Payam-e Daneshju* newspaper was fined and banned from running the paper for five years after conviction of "publishing lies and causing public confusion". He was arrested in November 1996 following an official complaint that he had published the paper without prior permission following suspension of publication in 1995. A limited distribution of copies had reportedly been circulated by staff members on the grounds that they did not consider the July 1996 court judgment to constitute a publication ban. He was released on bail after about a week.

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

- seeking urgent clarification of Faraj Sarkouhi's whereabouts, and urging his immediate and unconditional release if he is currently detained in Iran as a prisoner of conscience;
- seeking assurances that, if held, he is being humanely treated and is protected from torture or ill-treatment;
- urging that, if held, he should in any case be granted immediate and regular access to relatives and a lawyer of his choice.

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) The President

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) Minister of Information

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

4) Minister of the Interior

His Excellency Mohammad Ali Besharati Jahromi
Ministry of the Interior
Dr Fatemi Avenue
Tehran, Islamic Republic of Iran
Fax: +98 21 655 426
Telegrams: Interior 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

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 31 December 1996.