

March 2007

Further Information on UA 221/06 (MDE 13/093/2006, 17 August 2006) – Incommunicado detention/Fear of torture/Possible prisoner of conscience

IRAN Mehdi Babaei Ajabshir (known as Oxtay) (m), aged about 32, activist

Prominent Iranian Azerbaijani activist Mehdi Babaei Ajabshir (known as Oxtay) was released in January from Tabriz Prison after completing a six-month sentence.

On or around 2 September 2006 Mehdi Babaei Ajabshir had been tried and sentenced to six months' imprisonment by Branch One of the Revolutionary Court of Tabriz. He had been found guilty of belonging to "an illegal organization with the intent to disrupt security in the country", under Article 499 of the Islamic Penal Code. Amnesty International considered him to be a prisoner of conscience, detained solely for his peaceful activities to promote the rights of the Iranian Azerbaijani community.

Amnesty International believes that Mehdi Babaei Ajabshir's trial did not conform to international fair trial standards, as much of the "evidence" used against him concerned his lawful participation in Iranian Azerbaijani cultural and political events. These included taking part in demonstrations in May 2006; participation in a gathering at Babek Castle; attending Turkish and Azeri language classes at the Islamic Azad University in Tabriz; being "absorbed into nationalistic circles as a result of reading Turkish-language books and newspapers"; attending the funeral of Azerbaijani linguist and scholar Mohammad Ali Farzaneh in 2005; and "browsing the internet to visit nationalistic sites".

Mehdi Babaei Ajabshir was arrested in the street by Ministry of Intelligence officials on 11 July 2006. On 28 June, 16 police officers had visited his house in Tabriz to arrest him. Finding that he was not at home, they confiscated Azerbaijani-Turkic-language CDs, books, the family's computer, a poster and family photograph albums. They allegedly threatened members of his family that when they caught Mehdi Babaei Ajabshir he would be tortured, or even shot. That night, Ministry of Intelligence officials made repeated telephone calls to the family's house, demanding that they reveal the whereabouts of Mehdi Babaei Ajabshir. His brother Ali was arrested in the raid, and released the following day, on the condition that he would convince his brother Mehdi to report to the Tabriz Ministry of Intelligence office.

Following his arrest, his family did not know his whereabouts until 21 July, when he telephoned them and told them that he was held in a detention facility run by the Ministry of Intelligence in Tabriz. There he was allegedly tortured. He was then transferred to Tabriz Prison.

No further action is required at present. Many thanks to all who sent appeals.
