

PUBLIC

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UA 263/06 Incommunicado detention/ Possible prisoners of conscience

IRAN	Fereshteh Dibaj (f) aged 28] Husband and wife
	Reza Montazemi (m) aged 35]

Fereshteh Dibaj and her husband Reza Montazemi, who are both Christians, are being held incommunicado. They are possible prisoners of conscience, who may be detained solely on account of their religious beliefs.

Fereshteh Dibaj and Reza Montazemi were reportedly arrested in the early morning of 26 September at their home in Mashhad, northeastern Iran. According to reports, security forces personnel in plain clothes entered their home, claiming to have permission from the appropriate authorities, and conducted a thorough search of the house. They reportedly confiscated the family computer, all the Christian literature in the house, and other personal items. Reza Montazemi reportedly managed to telephone his mother, asking her to come and fetch their 6 year-old daughter Christine and look after her. The couple were then taken away in an unmarked car. Reza Montazemi's mother reportedly asked the security forces personnel where her son and his wife were being taken, and was told that they would be at the local police station. However, when family members went to the police station, police officers denied that the couple were held there. The relatives continued their search throughout the day and finally located Fereshteh Dibaj and Reza Montazemi at a local office of the Ministry of Intelligence. No reason was given for their arrest and the family was not allowed to see the couple.

Two days later, on 28 September, Reza Montazemi's elderly parents were told that Fereshteh Dibaj and Reza Montazemi would appear before a Revolutionary Court at 4pm. However, after waiting for two hours, the judge reportedly told them that he did not know why the police had failed to bring the couple to court. Unconfirmed reports have suggested that the couple may have attended a secret court session on 28 September.

Fereshteh Dibaj is the daughter of Reverend Mehdi Dibaj, a Christian priest in Iran who was murdered in 1994 shortly after his release from prison. He had been arrested in 1984, and December 1993 he was sentenced to death for apostasy on account of his conversion to Christianity some 45 years previously. Although he was released after international pressure, including from Amnesty International, the charges against him were reportedly not dropped. He disappeared on 24 June 1994, and was found dead on 5 July.

Reza Montazemi reportedly converted to Christianity when he was in his twenties. He and his wife reportedly lead an independent house church in Mashhad.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Although Christianity is a recognized religion in Iran, evangelical Christians, some of whom have converted from Islam, often face harassment by the authorities. Converts from Islam can risk arrest, attack or the death penalty. Conversion from Islam (apostasy) is forbidden under Islamic Law, which requires apostates to be put to death if they refuse to reconvert to Islam. There is no specific provision in the Iranian Penal Code for apostasy, but judges are required to use their knowledge of Islamic Law to rule on cases where no specific legislation exists in the Penal Code.

Article 23 of the Iranian Constitution states: "The investigation of individuals' beliefs is forbidden, and no one may be molested or taken to task simply for holding a certain belief." Article 18 (1) of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), to which Iran is a state party, states: "Everyone shall have

the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion. This right shall include freedom to have or to adopt a religion or belief of his choice, and freedom, either individually or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in worship, observance, practice and teaching.”

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

- expressing concern that Fereshteh Dibaj and Reza Montazemi may be prisoners of conscience, imprisoned solely on account of their religion;
- calling on the authorities to release them immediately and unconditionally, or else promptly charge them with a recognizably criminal offence and give them a fair trial;
- asking for clarification of their whereabouts and of the reasons for their arrest;
- calling for them to be granted immediate and unconditional access to a lawyer, family members, and any medical treatment they may require;
- seeking assurances that they are not being tortured or ill-treated while in detention;
- reminding the authorities that freedom of belief is provided for under the Iranian Constitution, and Article 18 of the ICCPR.

APPEALS TO:

Leader of the Islamic Republic

His Excellency Ayatollah Sayed 'Ali Khamenei, The Office of the Supreme Leader
Shoahada Street, Qom, Islamic Republic of Iran

Email: info@leader.ir
istiftaa@wilayah.org

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: Please send emails via the feedback form on the Persian site of the website:

<http://www.iranjudiciary.org/contactus-feedback-fa.html>

(The text of the feedback form translates as: 1st line: name, 2nd line: email address, 3rd line: subject heading, then enter your email into the text box)

Salutation: Your Excellency

Minister of Intelligence

Gholam Hossein Mohseni Ejeie
Ministry of Intelligence, Second Negarestan Street
Pasdaran Avenue, Tehran, Islamic Republic of Iran

Email: iranprobe@iranprobe.com

Salutation: Your Excellency

COPIES TO:

President

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

Email: dr-ahmadinejad@president.ir

via website: www.president.ir/email

Speaker of Parliament

His Excellency Gholamali Haddad Adel
Majles-e Shoura-ye Eslami, Imam Khomeini Avenue, Tehran, Islamic Republic of Iran

Fax: + 98 21 6 646 1746

PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY. Check with the International Secretariat, or your section office, if sending appeals after 13 November 2006.