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Seriously ill Iranian blogger must be released from prison immediately

An Iranian prisoner of conscience and blogger on hunger strike to protest his unfair detention must be released immediately and unconditionally to receive treatment as his health deteriorates, Amnesty International said.

Hossein Ronaghi Maleki, 28, is serving a 15-year prison sentence for “membership of the [illegal] internet group ‘Iran Proxy’”, “spreading propaganda against the system” and “insulting the Leader and the President”, among other charges.

“Hossein Ronaghi Maleki’s worsening health is extremely worrying and despite repeated requests by his parents, the Iranian authorities are refusing to release him or even grant him temporary leave,” said Hassiba Hadj Sahraoui, Middle East and North Africa Deputy Director at Amnesty International.

“Not only have the authorities unfairly put him behind bars simply for expressing his views on his blog but they are now also jeopardizing his health and ultimately his life by not allowing him to receive the medical care he urgently needs.”

Hossein was originally detained on 13 December 2009 after the unrest that followed the disputed presidential election in Iran the previous June.

He was then held in solitary confinement for over a year and says he was tortured, which has apparently resulted in him now suffering from severe kidney, gastro-intestinal, bladder and heart problems.

The blogger has been on several hunger strikes, including in May 2012, when the authorities refused to grant him permission to leave the prison to receive medical treatment for his kidney ailment.

He was released on bail on 2 July 2012 and resumed writing his blog shortly after. On 22 August, Hossein was re-arrested together with a number of activists who were assisting earthquake victims at a relief camp in East Azerbaijan province. They were all charged with “distributing unclean and non-hygienic goods”.

On 28 August 2013 he was taken to hospital due to his deteriorating health but was returned to prison the same day without receiving medical treatment. This contradicted medical advice that he needed hospitalization for renal and gastrointestinal bleeding.

His mother, Zoleikha Mousavi, has also gone on hunger strike in protest at the authorities’ refusal to release her son, saying: “If Hossein is to die, I prefer to die, too.”

Writing from inside Evin Prison on the occasion of his birthday on 5 July this year, Hossein said: “say your [birthday] greetings to my mother and do not allow the absence of her son to cause her pain. And let us not forget that prison days have no birthdays.”

“That a mother would go to the extreme of a hunger strike to get the authorities’ attention underscores the serious shortcomings in the administration of justice in Iran,” said Hassiba Hadj Sahraoui.