

## AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL PUBLIC STATEMENT

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# IRAN: RELEASE AHWAZI ARAB MAN FORCIBLY DISAPPEARED IN REPRISAL FOR HIS RELATIVES' ACTIVISM

The Iranian authorities must immediately reveal the whereabouts of **Falah Heidari**, a member of Iran's disadvantaged Ahwazi Arab minority, and release him immediately and unconditionally as he is arbitrarily detained solely because of his family association with his activist brother and son abroad, Amnesty International said today. The organization warned that his ongoing enforced disappearance since his arrest on 20 May 2021 has placed him at increased risk of torture and other ill-treatment.

Falah Heidari, aged 58, was summoned by telephone to the office of the intelligence unit of the Revolutionary Guards in Ahvaz, Khuzestan province on 20 May 2021, and, once there, he was put under arrest and transferred to an unidentified location. The authorities have since concealed his whereabouts, thereby subjecting him to enforced disappearance, a crime under international law.

Falah Heidari has only been allowed to call his family several times for a few seconds, telling them he is "fine", but did not share information about his place of detention. His family members have repeatedly asked officials at the office of the intelligence unit of the Revolutionary Guards as well the public relations office of the ministry of intelligence in Ahvaz about his legal status and whereabouts, but the authorities have refused to provide them with any information. The authorities have also refused to accept the medication brought by his family and said they would "take care" of his medical needs themselves. Falah Heidari suffers from a number of health problems, including a heart condition, high blood pressure and diabetes, and has special dietary requirements.

A day before his enforced disappearance, at around 1pm, several armed security and intelligence agents raided Falah Heidari's house in Ahvaz and arrested him and his 29-year-old son, Safa Heidari. The agents also searched the house and seized all the mobile phones found. According to an informed source, the agents refused to present a search and seize order or an arrest warrant, and when two of Falah Heidari's sons, Safa Heidari and Baha Heidari, protested, they slapped the former and threw the latter on the ground and beat him.

Falah Heidari and his son Safa Heidari were subsequently transferred to an unidentified location, where they were detained and interrogated for several hours, and were then released. According to an informed source, the interrogation questions focused on the political activities of Falah Heidari's brother, Abdorrahman Heidari, who is based abroad and acts as the spokesperson of the Patriotic Arab Democratic Movement in Ahwaz, a political group which seeks self-determination for Iran's Ahwazi Arab minority and peacefully advocates for independence. The interrogators also asked him about the religious beliefs and practices of Falah Heidari's son, Alaa Heidari, who escaped Iran several years ago and sought asylum abroad after converting from Shiism to Sunnism and has since engaged in online proselytizing activities.

According to information gathered by Amnesty International, Falah Heidari, a retired teacher, is not politically involved himself, and has been targeted solely because of his relatives' activities abroad. His current enforced disappearance and arbitrary detention follow several years of harassment against him and one of his other bothers in Iran by ministry of intelligence officials who have asked them to pressure Abdorrahman Heidari and Alaa Heidari to stop their activities or relay their threats to murder, or abduct and forcibly return them to Iran.

On 30 May 2021, the intelligence unit of the Revolutionary Guards summoned by phone Falah Heidari's 15-year-old daughter, Feyha Heidari for interrogation. According to an informed source interviewed by Amnesty International, despite her young age, she was interrogated alone by a man, and denied her right to be accompanied by a parent, lawyer or another adult guardian, and after she burst into tears due to fear and anxiety, a female guard entered the interrogation room and remained there throughout the questioning. The interrogations, which lasted for several hours, focused on her and her family's contact with her paternal uncle and brother abroad as well as her family's political opinions and religious beliefs.

Amnesty International has previously documented the authorities' practice of pressuring human rights defenders, journalists and dissidents, including those based abroad, to stop their work by detaining or otherwise harassing their relatives.

Iran's Ahwazi Arab minority face entrenched discrimination curtailing equal access to education, employment, adequate housing and political office. Continued under-investment in Khuzestan province by the central government has exacerbated poverty and marginalization. Despite repeated calls for linguistic diversity, Persian remains the sole language of instruction in primary and secondary education in the province.