

URGENT ACTION

AZERBAIJANI MINORITY MEMBERS DETAINED IN IRAN

Twenty-nine people, including Abdollah Sadoughi, a member of the Iranian Azerbaijani minority, were arrested on 24 August in Tabriz, north-west Iran. Abdollah Sadoughi's health has deteriorated following a hunger strike. They may all be prisoners of conscience, held solely for their peaceful activities in defence of their minority's rights.

Abdollah Sadoughi was among 29 people arrested on 24 August 2011. The group, who broke the Ramadan fast together, had discussed the lack of governmental action over the rapid shrinking of Lake Oroumieh, a large salt lake in north-west Iran. All 29 were arrested, reportedly in connection with their discussions over the lake. Some or all were first held in an Intelligence Ministry detention centre. Abdollah Sadoughi and 13 others are currently believed to be held without charge or trial in Tabriz Central Prison. The other 15 are said to have been convicted of "gathering and colluding with intent to harm national security" and sentenced to three months' in prison, with a further two years' suspended sentence. On or around 19 September, these 15 were reportedly returned to a Ministry of Intelligence detention facility for further questioning.

Abdollah Sadoughi's brother said in an interview on 17 September that he had met his brother on one occasion and that a one month detention order had been issued, although he had not been formally charged. He said that Abdollah Sadoughi had gone on hunger strike after he was arrested, which led to stomach bleeding, and that he had been taken to a prison medical centre. Abdollah Sadoughi ended his hunger strike after 17 days, but it left him with digestive problems. At least two others of those arrested – **Mousa Barzin Khalifehlu**, a lawyer, and **Mehdi Hamidi Shafiqh** – went on hunger strike at the same time as Abdollah Sadoughi.

Please write immediately in Persian, Arabic, English or your own language:

- Express concern that Abdollah Sadoughi and others arrested with him appear to be prisoners of conscience detained solely for the legitimate exercise of their human rights, in which case they should be released immediately and unconditionally;
- Call on the Iranian authorities to ensure that all those detained are given immediate access to adequate medical care, are protected from torture and other ill-treatment, and are allowed access to their lawyers and families;
- Urge the authorities to remove unlawful restrictions on freedoms of expression, association and assembly.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS BEFORE 4 NOVEMBER 2011 TO:

Head of the Judiciary
Ayatollah Sadegh Larijani
 [care of] Public relations Office
 Number 4, 2 Azizi Street
 Vali Asr Ave., above Pasteur Street
 intersection
 Tehran,
 Islamic Republic of Iran
 Email: bia.judi@yahoo.com (In subject
 line: FAO Ayatollah Sadegh Larijani)
Salutation: Your Excellency

Head of East Azerbaijan Province
Judiciary
 Hojjatoleslam Sharifi,
 Judiciary of East Azerbaijan,
 Central Complex, Beginning of Vali-Asr
 Hill, Tabriz, East Azerbaijan
 5157733135,, Islamic Republic of Iran
 Online: [http://www.dadgostari-
 as.ir/tabid/100/Default.aspx](http://www.dadgostari-as.ir/tabid/100/Default.aspx)
 (Please enter full name in top box &
 email address in third; enter appeal in
 bottom box; click on bottom right text to
 send)
Salutation: Dear Sir

And copies to:
Secretary General, High Council for
Human Rights
 Mohammad Javad Larijani
 High Council for Human Rights
 [Care of] Office of the Head of the
 Judiciary, Pasteur St., Vali Asr Ave.
 south of Serah-e Jomhuri, Tehran
 1316814737, Islamic Republic of Iran
 Email: info@humanrights-iran.ir
 (subject line: FAO Mohammad Javad
 Larijani)

Also send copies to diplomatic representatives accredited to your country. Please insert local diplomatic addresses below:

Please check with your section office if sending appeals after the above date.

AMNESTY
INTERNATIONAL



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ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Iranian Azerbaijanis speak a Turkic language and are mainly Shi'a Muslims. As the largest minority in Iran, they make up 25 to 30 per cent of the population; they live mainly in the north and north-west of the country and in Tehran. Although generally well integrated into Iranian society, in recent years members of their community have increasingly called for greater cultural and linguistic rights, including the right to education in Azerbaijani Turkic. It is not recognized as an official language in Iran, and those who seek to promote Azerbaijani cultural identity and linguistic rights are viewed with suspicion by the Iranian authorities.

From January to March 2010, Abdollah Sadoughi, was detained after he was accused of "acts against national security" and supporting "Pan-Turkism", for publishing posters in the Azerbaijani Turkic language featuring the Traktor Sazi football team, which has become a symbol of the Azerbaijani culture in the city of Tabriz. He went on hunger strike; soon after starting this he was transferred to solitary confinement and held there for 22 days in filthy conditions. On 2 March, having lost considerable weight and suffering from various medical problems, he was transferred to the clinic within Tabriz prison. He was not allowed to contact his lawyer and family for his first month in detention, although he was allowed access to them after this time. After his release in March 2010 he told Amnesty International that he was subjected to inhuman and degrading treatment whilst in detention, for example, he had to ask permission to use the toilet and was only allowed to do so once a day. The guards also told him he was in prison because he spoke Azerbaijani Turkic. It is not known if he was ever tried as a result of his arrest in 2010. Prisoners in Iran are routinely denied access to adequate medical treatment. Additionally, prison conditions in Iran are notoriously poor, and sometimes amount to cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment.

The 29 people arrested in Tabriz on 24 August 2011 broke the Ramadan fast, or *iftar*, at the house of Azerbaijani cultural rights activist Mostafa Evezpoor. Amnesty International has received the names of at least 25 of the 29 people arrested, including Abdollah Sadoughi. The others are: Morteza Evezpoor, Mostafa Evezpoor, Mahmoud Fazli, Jalil Alamdar Milani, Taghi Salahshour, Yusef Salahshour, Mehdi Hamid Shafigh, Jamshid Zarei, Hassan Ark (also known as Hasan Ali Hajabollu), Mehdi Mohajer, Aziz Pourvali, Ahmad Alizadeh, Yasser Salmani Rezai, Ilghar Karimi, Mehdi Nouri, Ahmad Riazi Mobaraki, Farzad Mahdavi, Mousa Barzin Khalifelou, Yaghoub Ramezani, Vahid Sheikh Beglou, Mohammad Ali Moradi, Ali Shirnak, Mohammad Amiri and Taghi Soufiani. One unconfirmed report also refers to Hossein Nasiri, Akbar Mohajeri and a person named only as Ali.

Lake Oroumieh (also spelt Urmu, Urmia, Urumieh, Oroumiye) is a salt lake in north-western Iran which is culturally significant for Iranian Azerbaijanis. The lake is situated between the Iranian provinces of East Azerbaijan and West Azerbaijan. It is the largest lake in the Middle East and the third largest salt water lake on Earth. More than 40 dams have been built over 13 rivers that feed the lake and the recent drought, which started in 1999, has significantly decreased the annual amount of water the lake receives. This in turn has increased the salinity of the water prompting fears of an ecological disaster in the region. A great many Azerbaijani people who live in the region around the lake have taken part in protests over a recent parliamentary decision not to support measures aimed at increasing the lake's water levels. The government has since announced measures aimed at preventing further degradation of the lake.

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Gender m/f: M (believed to all be male)

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