

URGENT ACTION

MOHAMMAD ALI TAHERI SENTENCED TO DEATH

Mohammad Ali Taheri has been sentenced to death in Iran for “spreading corruption on earth” through his spiritual beliefs and teachings. He is a prisoner of conscience.

Mohammad Ali Taheri received a death sentence on 1 August for “spreading corruption on earth” (*efsad-e fel arz*) by establishing a new spiritual group called *Erfan-e Halgheh*. He had been tried before Branch 26 of the Revolutionary Court in two sessions, on 11 March and 29 April. He has until 20 August to appeal, which he intends to do.

Amnesty International understands that Mohammad Ali Taheri’s death sentence for the charge of “spreading corruption on earth” is based on the same spiritual teachings and practices which were relied upon in October 2011 to convict him of several offences, including “insulting Islamic sanctities”, and sentence him to five years’ imprisonment, 74 lashes and a fine of nine billion rials (US\$300,000). Mohammad Ali Taheri has been since serving this prison sentence in solitary confinement in Section 2A of Tehran’s Evin Prison, which is run by the Revolutionary Guards. Amnesty International is concerned that the death sentence for the charge of “spreading corruption on earth” has come as a result of pressure from the Revolutionary Guards, which raises alarms about the judiciary’s independence and impartiality in Iran.

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

- Expressing concern that Mohammad Ali Taheri has been sentenced to death for his religious teachings, and pointing out that under international human rights law, the death penalty may only be used for “the most serious crimes”, which international standards limit to crimes involving intentional killing;
- Calling on them to quash the death sentence and release Mohammad Ali Taheri immediately and unconditionally, as he is a prisoner of conscience, held solely for the peaceful exercise of his rights to freedom of belief, expression and association;
- Calling on them to ensure that pending his release, Mohammad Ali Taheri is not held in solitary confinement, as prolonged solitary confinement violates the absolute prohibition of torture and other ill-treatment.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS BEFORE 21 SEPTEMBER 2015 TO:

Leader of the Islamic Republic
Ayatollah Sayed ‘Ali Khamenei
The Office of the Supreme Leader
Islamic Republic Street- End of Shahid
KeshvarDoust Street,
Tehran, Islamic Republic of Iran
Twitter: @khamenei_ir (English)
@Khamenei_es (Spanish)
Email (via website):
<http://www.leader.ir/langs/en/index.php?p=suggest>
Salutation: Your Excellency

Head of the Judiciary
Ayatollah Sadegh Larijani
c/o Public Relations Office
Number 4, 2 Azizi Street intersection
Tehran, Islamic Republic of Iran
(Subject line: FAO
Ayatollah Sadegh Larijani)
Salutation: Your Excellency

And copies to:
President of the Islamic Republic of Iran
Hassan Rouhani
The Presidency
Pasteur Street, Pasteur Square
Tehran, Islamic Republic of Iran
Email: media@rouhani.ir
Twitter: @HassanRouhani (English)
@Rouhani_ir (Persian)

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

Name Address 1 Address 2 Address 3 Fax Fax number Email Email address Salutation Salutation

Please check with your section office if sending appeals after the above date. This is the second update of UA 212/14. Further information:
<https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/mde13/1637/2015/en/>

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ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Mohammad Ali Taheri has undertaken 12 hunger strikes and attempted suicide four times in protest at his prolonged solitary confinement, lack of access to his family and lawyer and repeated threats to kill him and his wife and children. After Mohammad Ali Taheri's 12th hunger strike, from 6 to 26 December 2014, the authorities granted him access to a lawyer of his own choosing. He has since been allowed access to his lawyer and weekly meetings with his wife.

The Iranian authorities and state-associated media, including news agencies Fars, Raja and Adyan, have several times declared Mohammad Ali Taheri guilty of "spreading corruption on earth" before his trial, disregarding the presumption of innocence which is a fundamental part of the right to fair trial. Iran's National Prosecutor General, Hojjat al-Eslam Ebrahim Raisi, referred to Mohammad Ali Taheri as a "Corrupter on Earth" (*mofsed fel arz*) on 21 November 2014, while denying press reports that he had visited Mohammad Ali Taheri while he was in hospital as a result of another hunger strike. In August 2011, Channel Two of the Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting aired Mohammad Ali Taheri's televised "confessions" in which he denounced his own teachings and called on his followers to refrain from disseminating his audio and written materials.

The Human Rights Committee, which monitors the implementation of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), to which Iran is a state party, stated in its General Comment 20 that prolonged solitary confinement may violate the prohibition of torture and other ill-treatment, which is prohibited by Article 7 of the ICCPR. Mohammad Ali Taheri has spent over four years in solitary confinement in Tehran's Evin Prison – since his 4 May 2011 arrest.

Article 18 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, to which Iran is a party, protects "the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion". This right includes freedom to have or adopt a belief of one's choice. It also includes freedom to manifest the belief in observance, practice and teaching, either individually or in community with others in public or private.

Mohammad Ali Taheri introduced the spiritual doctrine of *Erfan-e Halgheh* after 13 years of receiving what he claims were "spiritual inspirations" that empowered him to connect with a larger "Cosmic Consciousness". He lawfully opened a cultural and educational institute, also called Erfan-e Halgheh, in Tehran in 2006 to develop and disseminate his newly found spiritual beliefs, and practice them with his followers, in "healing sessions" apparently focused on alternative non-medicinal treatments. The three offices of the institute in Tehran were shut down in August 2010: Mohammad Ali Taheri had been arrested on 18 April 2010 and detained for over two months. According to the state-sponsored Fars News Agency, at least 30 *Erfan-e Halgheh* teachers have received prison sentences ranging from one to five years for "insulting Islamic sanctities".

Name: Mohammad Ali Taheri
Gender m/f: m

Further information on UA: 212/14 Index: MDE 13/2245/2015 Issue Date: 10 August 2015