

EXTERNAL (for general distribution)

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Fear for the lives of church leaders

6 July 1994

IRAN Rev. Mehdi Dibaj, a pastor in the Assemblies of God Church
Rev. Tatavous Michaelian, aged 62, Chairman of the Council of Protestant
Ministers

In the past four days Reverend Mehdi Dibaj and Reverend Tatavous Michaelian have been found dead. Amnesty International is gravely concerned by their deaths and fears for the safety of other church leaders in Iran.

Rev. Tatavous Michaelian, an Armenian Christian, had reportedly not been seen since leaving his home on 29 June. Reports indicate that on 2 July his son was called by the authorities to identify the body of his father, who had allegedly been shot several times in the head.

Rev. Mehdi Dibaj had reportedly not been seen since 24 June. On 5 July 1994 the Iranian News Agency (IRNA) is reported to have quoted a police official saying that *"while conducting investigations into the death of Michaelian who had disappeared last week, we found an unidentified body later identified by Dibaj's relatives to be the body of Dibaj"*. The report indicated that the law enforcement officials had found the body in a forest located in West Tehran.

Rev. Mehdi Dibaj had been arrested in 1984, apparently because he had converted from Islam to Christianity, some 45 years ago, and held in a prison in Sari until early 1994. He was reportedly never given a reason for his arrest, but Amnesty International believes that he was detained solely for peacefully exercising his right to freedom of religion and speech, and that he was therefore a prisoner of conscience. These rights are guaranteed under the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights to which Iran is a state party.

On 21 December 1993 an Islamic Revolutionary Court in Mazandaran province sentenced Mehdi Dibaj to death on charges of apostasy - because of his conversion 45 years ago - and he was given 20 days to appeal against the sentence. Although Mehdi Dibaj was released on 16 January 1994, the charges against him were reportedly not dropped (see UA 05/94, MDE 13/01/94, 12 January 1994 and MDE 13/02/94, 18 January 1994).

On 20 January 1994, three days after Mehdi Dibaj's release, another church leader Rev. Haik Hovsepian Mehr, Superintendent of the Church of the Assemblies of God in Iran, was found dead. He had been outspoken in his defence of Mehdi Dibaj and had campaigned against his death sentence. The family of Rev. Haik Hovsepian Mehr was reportedly not informed of his death until 30 January.

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send telegrams, telexes and airmail letters either in English or in your own language:

- expressing grave concern at the deaths of Rev. Mehdi Dibaj and Rev. Tatavous Michaelian;
- calling on the authorities to take immediate steps to ensure the safety of all other church leaders in Iran;
- urging an immediate thorough and independent investigation into the circumstances surrounding the deaths of Mehdi Dibaj and Rev. Tatavous Michaelian;
- urging that the conclusions and methods of the investigation be made public.

APPEALS TO

1) His Excellency Hojatoleslam
 Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani
 The Presidency
 Palestine Avenue
 Azerbaijan Intersection
 Tehran
 Islamic Republic of Iran

Telegrams: President Rafsanjani, Tehran, Iran

Telexes: 214231 MITI IR; 213113 PRIM IR (marked for the attention of President Rafsanjani)

Salutation: Your Excellency

2) His Excellency Ayatollah Mohammad Yazdi
 Head of the Judiciary
 Ministry of Justice
 Park-e Shahr
 Tehran
 Islamic Republic of Iran

Telegrams: Justice Minister, Tehran, Iran

Telexes: 214231 MITI IR; 213113 PRIM IR (marked for the attention of the Justice Minister)

Salutation: Your Excellency

3) His Excellency
 Mohammad Ali Besharati Jahromi
 Minister of Interior
 Ministry of Interior
 Dr Fatemi Avenue
 Tehran
 Islamic Republic of Iran

Telegrams: Interior Minister Besharati Jahromi, Tehran, Iran

Telexes: 214231 MITI IR, 213113 PRIM IR (marked for the attention of the Interior Minister)

Salutation: Your Excellency

COPIES OF YOUR APPEALS TO:

His Excellency
 Dr Ali Akbar Velayati
 Minister of Foreign Affairs
 Ministry of Foreign Affairs
 Sheikh Abdolmajid Keshk-e Mesri Avenue
 Tehran
 Islamic Republic of Iran

Mr Sa'id Raja'i Khorasani
 Head of Islamic Consultative Assembly's Human Rights Committee
 Imam Khomeini Avenue
 Tehran
 Iran

and to diplomatic representatives of Iran accredited to your country

PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY. Check with the International Secretariat,

or your section office, if sending appeals after 16 August 1994.