

PUBLIC

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UA 109/05 Arbitrary arrest/fear of torture and ill-treatment

IRAN Yousuf Azizi Bani Toruf (m), writer and journalist

Writer and journalist Yousuf Azizi Bani Toruf was arrested on 25 April at 2pm, after he returned from a press conference where he spoke in support of anti-government protestors. Seven or eight members of the security forces in plain clothes came to his home and took him away; they told his wife they had an arrest warrant, but refused to present it. Amnesty International fears he may be tortured to force him to confess.

The officers who detained him reportedly seized his papers, computer and telephone address book, and ransacked the house, in the city of Ahvaz, near the border with Iraq. His wife has reportedly received anonymous telephone threats warning her not to talk to the media.

When he was arrested Yousuf Azizi Bani Toruf had just returned to his home from a press conference at the Human Rights Centre in the capital, Tehran, attended by lawyer and human rights defender Shirin Ebadi, who won the 2003 Nobel Peace Prize for her work in defence of human rights in Iran. Yousuf Azizi Bani Toruf condemned the security forces' violent suppression of anti-government demonstrations in the province of Khuzestan.

According to a 1 May report in the daily newspaper *Eqbal*, Yousuf Bani Toruf was taken to a prison in Ahvaz, and his wife said that he had been charged with "acting against the national security and provoking people." He is now believed to be held at Evin prison, in Tehran.

Yousuf Azizi Bani Toruf apparently managed to telephone his wife on 3 May, and told her that he is scheduled to meet his lawyer, Soleh Nikbakht, on 7 May. Amnesty International is concerned that the authorities may not allow the meeting to go ahead, or may not allow private, confidential discussion.

Yousuf Azizi Bani Toruf is a member of the Writers' Association (*Kanoun-e Nevisandigan*). He has written books both in Persian and Arabic and had articles published in the press. For 12 years he worked as a journalist for the Iranian daily paper *Hamshahri*.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

His arrest comes after unrest which reportedly began on 15 April in the Shalang Abad (also known as Da'ira) area of central Ahvaz. Around 1,000 demonstrators reportedly assembled to protest at the contents of a letter, reports of which had begun to circulate on 9 April, allegedly written in 1999 by an advisor in the office of President Khatami. The letter sets out policies for the reduction of the Arab population of the province of Khuzestan: these include resettling Arabs in other regions of Iran, resettling non-Arabs in the province, and replacing Arabic place names with Persian ones. Government sources, including the letter's supposed author, have strongly denied that it is genuine. The text, with an English translation, can be found at <http://www.ahwaz.org.uk/images/ahwaz-khuzestan.pdf>; the supposed author's denial that he wrote the letter, along with an explanation of the contents, can be found (in Persian) at <http://www.webneveshteha.com/>. The security forces appear to have used excessive force in stopping the demonstration. The government has reportedly begun a limited enquiry into the unrest, as has the parliament, but these do not appear to be sufficiently wide-ranging or impartial.

At the 25 April press conference Yousuf Azizi Bani Toruf defended the protestors and condemned the heavy-handed approach of the security forces.

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send appeals to arrive as quickly as possible, in Persian, English, French or your own language:

- expressing concern for the safety of Yousuf Azizi Bani Toruf, and seeking assurances that he is not being tortured or ill-treated in detention;
- asking where Yousuf Azizi Bani Toruf is now held;
- seeking assurances that he will be allowed to meet with his lawyer on 7 May, in private and in confidence;
- calling on the authorities release him immediately, or else charge him with a recognizably criminal offence;
- reminding the authorities that confessions extracted under duress are prohibited by Article 38 of the constitution of Iran, which says that "All forms of torture for the purpose of extracting confession or acquiring information are forbidden," and that Iran is a state party to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), of which Article 7 states that "No one shall be subjected to cruel, inhuman or degrading punishment."

APPEALS TO:

Leader of the Islamic Republic

His Excellency Ayatollah Sayed >Ali Khamenei,
The Presidency, Palestine Avenue, Azerbaijan Intersection, Tehran, Islamic Republic of Iran

E-mail: webmaster@wilayah.org (address may be unreliable; please try to resend if returned; on the subject line write: For the attention of the office of His Excellency, Ayatollah al Udhma Khamenei, Qom)

Salutation: Your Excellency

President

His Excellency Hojjatoleslam val Moslemin Sayed Mohammad Khatami
The Presidency, Palestine Avenue, Azerbaijan Intersection, Tehran, Islamic Republic of Iran

E-mail: khatami@president.ir (please resend your message if it does not get through the first time)

Salutation: Your Excellency

Head of the Judiciary

His Excellency Ayatollah Mahmoud Hashemi Shahrudi
Ministry of Justice, Park-e Shahr, Tehran, Islamic Republic of Iran

Fax: + 98 21 879 6671 (please keep trying; please mark "care of Director of International Affairs, Judiciary")

Salutation: Your Excellency

COPIES TO:

Islamic Human Rights Commission

Mr Mohammad Hassan Zia'i-Far
Secretary, Islamic Human Rights Commission
PO Box 13165-137, Tehran, Islamic Republic of Iran

Fax: + 98 21 204 0541

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 17 June 2005.