

URGENT ACTION

FOOTBALL JOURNALIST HELD WITHOUT CHARGE

Football journalist Abdollah Sadoughi was arrested in the city of Tabriz, north-west Iran, on 18 January, after publishing a poster supporting the city's Traktor Sazi football team. He is held without charge at Tabriz prison, and is on hunger strike in protest at what he considers to be his baseless detention. He is a prisoner of conscience, held for peacefully expressing his views.

Abdollah Sadoughi, aged 33, a member of Iran's Azerbaijani minority, writes for the Iranian publications *Goal, Corner* and *Khosh Khabar* (Good News). He supports Tabriz's Traktor Sazi football team. The authorities have accused him of acts "against national security" including supporting "Pan-Turkism" for publishing posters, one of which says, in the Azerbaijani Turkic language, "All of Azerbaijan feels pride with you", alongside an image of the football team. Abdollah Sadoughi maintains he had permission from the relevant authorities to the print posters. Azerbaijani Turkic is not recognized as an official language in Iran. Those who seek to promote Azerbaijani cultural identity and linguistic rights are viewed with suspicion by the Iranian authorities.

In late February, Abdollah Sadoughi began a hunger strike. According to media reports, soon after starting his hunger strike he was transferred to solitary confinement and held in filthy conditions, and then moved to a cell with criminal convicts. On 2 March 2010, having lost considerable weight and suffering from various medical problems, he was transferred to the clinic within Tabriz prison. Abdollah Sadoughi has been able to meet his lawyer and his family, most recently on 6 March, when he said he would continue his hunger strike until he is released or brought before a court.

PLEASE WRITE IMMEDIATELY in Persian, Turkish or your own language:

- Calling on the Iranian authorities to immediately and unconditionally release Abdollah Sadoughi, as he is a prisoner of conscience held solely for his peaceful exercise of the right to freedom of expression;
- Urging the authorities to ensure that he receives adequate medical treatment, as well as regular visits from his lawyers and family, and is protected from torture and other ill-treatment;
- Reminding the authorities that, as a state party to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, Iran is obliged to uphold the right to freedom of expression and that linguistic minorities have the right to use their own language.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS BEFORE 20 APRIL 2010 TO:

Head of East Azarbaijan Province

Judiciary

Hojjatolislam Sharifi,
Judiciary of East Azarbaijan,
Central Complex,
Beginning of Vali-Asr Hill,
Tabriz, East Azarbaijan 5157733135,
Islamic Republic of Iran
Fax: 009841133201109

Salutation: Dear Sir

Head of the Judiciary

Ayatollah Sadeq Larijani
Howzeh Riyasat-e Qoveh Qazaiyeh
(Office of the Head of the Judiciary)
Pasteur St., Vali Asr Ave., south of
Serah-e Jomhuri, Tehran,
1316814737

Islamic Republic of Iran
Email: Via website:

<http://www.dadiran.ir/tabid/75/Default.aspx>

**First starred box: your given name;
second starred box: your family name;
third: your email address**

Salutation: Your Excellency

And copies to:

Secretary General, High Council for
Human Rights

Mohammad Javad Larijani
Howzeh Riassat-e Ghoveh Ghazaiyeh
Pasteur St, Vali Asr Ave., south of
Serah-e Jomhuri
Tehran 1316814737

Islamic Republic of Iran

Fax: +98 21 3390 4986

**Email: bia.judi@yahoo.com (In subject
line: FAO Mohammad Javad Larijani)**

Salutation: Dear Mr Larijani

Also send copies to diplomatic representatives of Iran accredited to your country. Please check with your section office if sending appeals after the above date.

**AMNESTY
INTERNATIONAL**



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ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Iranian Azerbaijanis, who are mainly Shi'a Muslims, are recognized as the largest minority in Iran and are generally believed to constitute 25 to 30 per cent of the population of Iran. They are located mainly in the north and north-west of Iran. Although generally well integrated into society, in recent years they have increasingly called for greater cultural and linguistic rights, such as the right to be educated in the Azerbaijani Turkic language, which they believe is provided for under Iran's Constitution, and to celebrate Azerbaijani culture and history at cultural events.

Football games involving the Traktor Sazi football team in Tabriz have reportedly become the focus for the expression of Azerbaijani Turkic culture. During games, calls – in Azerbaijani Turkic – are reported to be made by supporters, for linguistic and cultural rights for Iranian Azerbaijanis.

Both before, and particularly since, the disputed presidential election in June 2009, the Iranian authorities have severely restricted freedom of expression in Iran, arresting journalists (of whom scores are believed to remain in detention), imposing restrictions on the use of the internet, including social networking sites, and shutting down newspapers. Demands by ethnic minority rights activists for greater rights have, for many years, been suppressed. This pattern continues in the context of a wide and generalized suppression of most forms of dissent over government policy.

In February 2010, Iran accepted several recommendations to guarantee freedom of expression and press activities made by other states as part of a review of its human rights record before the UN Human Rights Council in the framework of the Universal periodic review (see para 90, recommendations 52-58 at http://www.upr-info.org/IMG/pdf/A_HRC_WG-6_7_L-11_Iran.pdf) but rejected other recommendations calling for an end to measures such as harassment and arbitrary arrest of writers, journalists and bloggers. It appears that, despite such public commitments, in practice, the Iranian authorities are continuing to disregard their human rights obligations relating to freedom of expression . Iran also rejected recommendations to take all appropriate measures to end all forms of discrimination and harassment against persons belonging to religious, ethnic, linguistic and other minorities (see para 92,)

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