

PUBLIC

AI Index: MDE 13/033/2009

16 April 2009

Further Information on UA 77/09 (MDE 13/022/2009, 16 March 2009) Possible prisoner of conscience

IRAN **Roxana Saberi (f), aged 31, journalist, joint US-Iranian national**

Roxana Saberi was brought before a Revolutionary Court in Tehran on 13 April and charged with espionage, in proceedings that took place behind closed doors. She appears to be a prisoner of conscience, detained solely for the peaceful exercise of her right to freedom of expression in the course of her work as a journalist. The charge of espionage appears to be politically motivated, and she appears to have been targeted because of her US nationality.

Roxana Saberi was arrested on 31 January 2009, and has been held since then in Evin Prison. Her family said in late February that she had told them in a phone call, apparently with prison officers listening, that she had been arrested for buying a bottle of wine. Consumption of wine is punishable under article 174 of the country's Penal Code. On 2 March the Foreign Ministry spokesman said that she had been arrested for "illegally gathering news," as her press credentials had been revoked in 2006 by the Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance, which provides accreditation to journalists. The following day, the Judiciary spokesman said he did not know what Roxana Saberi was accused of, but a Revolutionary Court had decided she should be detained. Revolutionary courts normally deal with cases relating to national security.

Roxana Saberi's parents were able to visit her in prison for 30 minutes on 6 April. They said that she was in "good health and in good spirits."

Roxana Saberi has reported for National Public Radio (NPR) in the USA, which produces news and cultural programming, the BBC and Fox News. She has been living in Iran for six years, working as a journalist and pursuing a master's degree in Iranian studies and international relations.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Following the election of President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad in 2005, Iranian intelligence agencies have increased pressure on journalists, academics, human rights defenders and others perceived as having links with foreign countries or having been involved in initiatives to build Iran's civil society. Those with links to the USA have been particularly targeted as the Iranian authorities have frequently accused the US of attempting to foment a "soft overthrow" of the Iranian government. On 19 January 2009, an Intelligence Ministry official, commenting on the case of two detained doctors (see UA 216/08, MDE 13/108/2008, 6 August 2008, and follow ups), said that Iran had discovered and dismantled a "soft overthrow" project against the government.

Iran is a state party to the International Convention on Civil and Political Rights and as such must uphold Article 19 which guarantees the right to freedom of expression and includes the freedom to seek, receive and impart information and ideas of all kinds, regardless of frontiers, either orally, in writing or in print.

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

- expressing concern that the charge of "espionage" against Roxana Saberi appears to arise from her peaceful exercise of her right to freedom of expression in the course of her work as a journalist, and pointing out that if

she were to be imprisoned on this charge for legitimately exercising her human rights, she would be a prisoner of conscience who should be released immediately and unconditionally;
- expressing concern that proceedings before Revolutionary Courts do not meet international standards for fair trial and that, consequently, she is unlikely to receive a fair trial.

APPEALS TO:

Head of the Judiciary

Ayatollah Mahmoud Hashemi Shahroudi
c/o Director, Judiciary Public Relations and Information Office
Ardeshir Sadiq
Judiciary Public Relations and Information Office
No. 57, Pasteur St., corner of Khosh Zaban Avenue
Tehran, Iran

Email: info@dadiran.ir (In the subject line write: **FAO Ayatollah Shahroudi**)
Salutation: **Your Excellency**

Leader of the Islamic Republic

Ayatollah Sayed 'Ali Khamenei
The Office of the Supreme Leader
Islamic Republic Street – End of Shahid Keshvar Doust Street
Tehran, Islamic Republic of Iran

Email: info_leader@leader.ir
via website: <http://www.leader.ir/langs/en/index.php?p=letter> (English)
<http://www.leader.ir/langs/fa/index.php?p=letter> (Persian)
Salutation: **Your Excellency**

COPIES TO:

President

His Excellency Mahmoud Ahmadinejad
The Presidency
Palestine Avenue, Azerbaijan Intersection
Tehran, Islamic Republic of Iran

Fax: **+ 98 21 6 649 5880**
Email: **via website:** <http://www.president.ir/email/>

Director, Human Rights Headquarters of Iran

Mohammad Javad 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

Fax: **+98 21 3390 4986 (please keep trying)**
Email: info@dadgostary-tehran.ir (In the subject line write: **FAO Javad Larijani**)
Salutation: **Dear Mr Larijani**

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 29 May 2009.