

PUBLIC

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UA 330/03 Possible "disappearance"/ fear for safety

IRAN Ahmad Batebi (m), aged 25, student

Student activist Ahmad Batebi has reportedly "disappeared" while on leave from prison, following a meeting with a United Nations (UN) official on 8 November. Amnesty International is gravely concerned for his safety.

Ahmad Batebi is serving a ten-year prison sentence in connection with his participation in student-led demonstrations in the capital Tehran in 1999. On 20 October 2003 he began a twenty-day period of leave (*morakhasi*) from Tehran's Evin Prison, reportedly for medical reasons, though no further information is known about his health. He was scheduled to return to prison on 10 November.

On 8 November, Ahmad Batebi reportedly met with Ambeyi Ligabo, the UN Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Expression, who was visiting Iran. Following the meeting, Ahmad Batebi allegedly then set out with friends for Tehran University, where he was to take part in an *iftar*, or the breaking of the Ramadan fast. According to reports, Ahmad Batebi's father Mohammad Baqer Batebi became concerned for his son's safety after two hours, as he had not contacted his family and was not answering his mobile telephone. Mohammad Baqer Batebi then reportedly attempted to locate Ahmad Batebi by contacting friends, judicial officials and prison officials, but without success. There has been no further information on Ahmad Batebi's whereabouts.

Mohammad Baqer Batebi reportedly stated on 11 November that several unidentified people had repeatedly contacted his family and made death threats against Ahmad Batebi and other family members. Mohammad Baqer Batebi allegedly also said that if he did not receive an unambiguous reply regarding his son's whereabouts, and assurances regarding his safety, then he would refer the matter to human rights organizations.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Ahmad Batebi, then a student of film-making at Tehran University, was detained on 7 July 1999, during student-led demonstrations against the closure of the newspaper *Salam* (Peace). Like thousands of other students, he took part in the protests. It is widely believed that international publication of a photograph of Ahmad Batebi holding up the bloodied shirt of a fellow student who had been injured in the demonstration aggravated judicial officials, prejudicing consideration of his case. While in detention, he was ordered to confess to false allegations and under extreme duress, he signed a "confession" fearing that his family would be in danger. He was sentenced to death on charges relating to endangering national security following an unfair and secret trial by a Revolutionary Court in Tehran. His sentence was later commuted on appeal to 15 years' imprisonment and has since been reduced to 10 years.

A letter dated 4 February 2003 and attributed to Ahmad Batebi and other student prisoners has been widely distributed. In the letter the students state that:

"We want to show our respect for the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Universal Peace, Non-violence [sic], Environmental Protection, Permanent Progress, and all the other noble covenants sanctioned by the mankind. We hope to alleviate despotism and totalitarianism, setting the vote of the people as the gauge for governance. We aspire to redeem the rights of our sisters which have been ignored for so long, and establish an all encompassing equality between men and women. We want to [...] promote [the] Persian creed of 'good deeds', 'good speech' and 'good thoughts'. We have bore [sic] the burden of endless tortures. We actually witnessed executions of our friends...."

Amnesty International continues to campaign on behalf of Ahmad Batebi (see web action, http://web.amnesty.org/web/content.nsf/pages/gbr_iran)

In October and November 1998, several prominent Iranian writers, who had all previously been questioned by government authorities in connection with their attempt to establish an independent writers association also "disappeared". Four of them, including the leader of the Iran Nation party (*Hezb-e Mellat-e Iran*), and his wife were later found dead. Intelligence officials were tried and found guilty in connection with at least two of the murders, following a flawed trial which denied the defendants the right to a full defence.

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 Ahmad Batebi, who has not been seen since 8 November;
- urging police and judicial officials to conduct an immediate enquiry into the circumstances surrounding the reported "disappearance" of Ahmad Batebi, to determine whether any state-supported or tolerated bodies may have been responsible for his "disappearance";
- urging judicial, intelligence and prison officials to conduct an urgent review of prisoners to determine whether Ahmad Batebi may have been transferred to places under their respective jurisdiction, and if so, to confirm his whereabouts and physical and mental condition;
- in case Ahmad Batebi is determined to have been detained, reminding officials of their obligations in respect to the administration of justice that all detainees should be made aware of the reasons for their arrest and have prompt access to family, legal representation and medical treatment if required, in keeping with Articles 9 and 14, respectfully, of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), to which Iran is a state party.

APPEALS TO:

President

His Excellency Hojjatoleslam val Moslemin Sayed Mohammad Khatami

The Presidency, Palestine Avenue

Azerbaijan Intersection, Tehran, Islamic Republic of Iran

Telegram: His Excellency Hojjatoleslam val Moslemin Sayed Mohammad Khatami, 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 Shahroudi

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:

Law Enforcement Forces (LEF, or the police)

If possible, please copy your appeal to the "Islamic Republic of Iran Police Force", noting that it is a copy of an appeal, at:

<http://www.policeiri.org/fpage/contactus.html>

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 25 December 2003.