

PUBLIC

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UA 74/08 Prisoner of conscience/Torture

IRAN Abbas Lisani (or Leysani) (m), activist for Iranian Azerbaijani rights

Prisoner of conscience Abbas Lisani was moved to a new prison on 6 March so that his flogging sentence can be carried out. He is now in imminent danger of being flogged, which is cruel and inhuman treatment amounting to torture; Iran is a state party to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), which expressly prohibits torture.

He is serving a sentence of 18 months' imprisonment and 50 lashes, confirmed on appeal in October 2006, after he was convicted of taking part in a May 2006 demonstration by Iranian Azerbaijanis in his home town of Ardabil against a cartoon published in an Iranian newspaper which many Iranian Azerbaijanis found offensive. He had been held in Ahar Prison, 112km from Ardabil. He has now been moved to Yazd Central Prison, 2,000km away. The guards at Ahar Prison had refused to carry out the flogging sentence. Ahar is in West Azerbaijan Province, where Abbas Lisani is very popular; in Yazd there are few Iranian Azerbaijanis and he is not known locally, making it easier to have the flogging sentence carried out. He is also serving another prison sentence of one year passed in August 2006 and confirmed later on appeal, in connection with his participation in a peaceful cultural gathering at Babek Castle in 2003.

He has begun a hunger strike in protest at his removal to Yazd, which he believes is intended not only to facilitate his flogging, but to prevent him from regular contact with his family, a right accorded to prisoners under international human rights standards. In a phone call from prison on 14 February 2008 he said that he was being tortured, at which point the phone was cut off.

Abbas Lisani is the subject of UA163/06 (MDE 13/063/2006, 8 June 2006) and follow-ups.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Iranian Azerbaijanis speak a Turkic language and are mainly Shi'a Muslims. The largest minority in Iran, they live mainly in the north and north-west of the country, and in the capital, Tehran. Many Iranian Azerbaijanis demand greater cultural and linguistic rights, including implementation of their constitutional right to education in Azerbaijani Turkic. Article 15 of Iran's Constitution states that "the use of regional and tribal languages in the press and mass media, as well as for teaching of their literature in schools, is allowed in addition to Persian."

A small minority want Iranian Azerbaijani provinces to break away from Iran and join with the Republic of Azerbaijan. In recent years the authorities have grown increasingly suspicious of Iran's minority communities, many of which are situated in border areas, and have accused foreign powers such as the US and UK of stirring unrest among them. Those who seek to promote Azerbaijani cultural identity and linguistic rights are often charged with vaguely worded offences such as "acting against state security by promoting pan-Turkism".

International human rights standards, such as the ICCPR and the UN Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners provide for humane treatment of those in detention including access to the outside world, family and friends.

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

- expressing concern that Abbas Lisani has been moved to a prison in Yazd so that a sentence of flogging can be carried out and to inhibit contact with his family;
- expressing concern at reports that he is being tortured in Yazd Central Prison;
- pointing out that Iran is a state party to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, which expressly prohibits punishments such as flogging, which amount to torture, and urging the authorities to commute that part of his sentence immediately;
- calling on the authorities to release him immediately and unconditionally, as he is a prisoner of conscience, held solely for the peaceful exercise of his rights to freedom of expression .

APPEALS TO:

Head of the Judiciary

His Excellency Ayatollah Mahmoud Hashemi Shahroudi
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: info@dadgostary-tehran.ir (In the subject line write: **FAO Ayatollah Shahroudi**)

Salutation: Your Excellency

Governor of Yazd

Mohammad Reza Fallahzadeh
Bureau of the Governor (Howzeh Istandar)
Governorate (Istandar)

Yazd

Iran

Email: via website: <http://www.ostan-yz.ir/modules.php?name=contact>

(Mark the first box NONE, as prompted. Write your given name in the first blank space under NONE and your family name in the box to the left. Give your email address in the box below your given name. Put the subject of the email in the box below your family name. Write your message in the large box. Send it by clicking on the right hand button below the box.)

COPIES TO:

President

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

Email: dr-ahmadinejad@president.ir

via website: www.president.ir/email

Salutation: Your Excellency

Speaker of Parliament

His Excellency Gholamali Haddad Adel
Majles-e Shoura-ye Eslami
Imam Khomeini Avenue,
Tehran, Islamic Republic of Iran

Fax: + 98 21 6 646 1746

Email: hadadadel@majlis.ir (Ask for your message to be copied to the Article 90 Commission)

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 28 April 2008.