

PUBLIC

AI Index: MDE 13/070/2007

7 June 2007

UA 140/07 Fear of torture or ill-treatment/ incommunicado detention

IRAN Mehdi Mohammadpour (m)]
Hossein Nasiri (also known as Hüseyn Nəsiri) (m)] Azerbaijani rights activists

Iranian Azerbaijani rights activists Mehdi Mohammadpour and Hossein Nasiri (also known as Hüseyn Nəsiri) are reportedly being detained incommunicado and are consequently at risk of torture or ill-treatment. Both men appear to have been detained in connection with their participation in demonstrations for Azerbaijani linguistic and cultural rights.

Mehdi Mohammadpour was reportedly arrested on 19 May by a number of plain-clothes officials from the Ministry of Intelligence in the city of Ardabil in north-western Iran. His whereabouts and the reason for his detention are unknown, and the authorities have allegedly refused to confirm that they are holding him. Mehdi Mohammadpour's family were informed of his apparent arrest by an eyewitness who saw him being taken away.

Mehdi Mohammadpour had previously been detained between 11 May and 14 May by Ministry of Intelligence officials. Reports suggest that he was ill-treated in detention, and had to be taken to hospital by his family on his release. He was discharged from hospital on 17 May. Amnesty International has no information on his current state of health nor whether he was charged with any offence.

Hossein Nasiri was reportedly arrested and detained on 27 April by Ministry of Intelligence officials and is said to have been tortured in order to force him to make "confessions", the nature of which is unknown to Amnesty International. On 4 June he was reportedly transferred from a Ministry of Intelligence detention facility to Tabriz's central prison, indicating that he will not be granted bail.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Iranian Azerbaijanis speak a Turkic language and are mainly Shi'a Muslims. The largest minority in Iran, they are believed to constitute between 25-30 per cent of the population and are located mainly in the north and north-west of Iran and in the capital, Tehran. There is a growing demand for greater cultural and linguistic rights in Iranian Azerbaijan, including implementation of their constitutional right to education through the medium of Azerbaijani Turkic. Those who seek to promote Azerbaijani Turkic cultural identity and linguistic rights are viewed with suspicion by the Iranian authorities.

Throughout May 2007, Iranian Azerbaijanis demonstrated to mark the first anniversary of protests against the publication in a national newspaper of a cartoon which was offensive to many Iranian Azerbaijanis. In the course of the May 2006 demonstrations, up to 19 individuals were reportedly killed and hundreds arrested.

During the May 2007 demonstrations, which asserted Azerbaijani linguistic and cultural rights, demonstrators shouted slogans such as "*Türk dilinde medrese olmalıdır her kese*" (Schooling in Azerbaijani Turkic for all). The events resulted in a considerable increase in tension in a range of the areas where Iranian Azerbaijanis live. The authorities have increased the security presence in mainly Azerbaijani cities and Amnesty International has received reports of scores of arrests, harassment of demonstrators and passers-by in cities such as Tabriz. Reports suggest that in late May, police in the cities of Urumiye, Naghadeh and Miyandoab were stopping and searching young people who were walking in groups of two and three on the street.

According to the Committee for the Defence of Azerbaijani Political Prisoners (Azerbaycan Siyasi Mahpuslarını Müdafaa Komitesi, ASMEK) website, more than 500 political activists have been detained or have been the victims of enforced disappearance in recent weeks. On 7 May, the Minister of the Interior was

summoned to parliament to respond to concerns over the use of force and violence against demonstrators, expressed by parliamentarians from Azerbaijani regions. Amnesty International is seeking further information about a number of Iranian Azerbaijanis who are believed to have been arrested.

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

- expressing concern at reports that Mehdi Mohammadpour and Hossein Nasiri (also known as Hüseyin Näsiri) are being detained incommunicado, noting that incommunicado detention facilitates torture;
- calling on the authorities to grant Mehdi Mohammadpour and Hossein Nasiri immediate and regular access to their families, legal representatives of their choice, and any medical treatment the two men may require;
- calling for assurances that the two men are being treated humanely while in detention and are not being tortured or ill-treated;
- stating that if Mehdi Mohammadpour and Hossein Nasiri are being detained solely as a result of the expression of their conscientiously held beliefs, Amnesty International would consider them prisoners of conscience and call for their immediate and unconditional release.

APPEALS TO:

Leader of the Islamic Republic

His Excellency Ayatollah Sayed 'Ali Khamenei, The Office of the Supreme Leader
Shoahada Street, Qom, Islamic Republic of Iran

Email: info@leader.ir, istiftaa@wilayah.org

Fax: +98 251 774 2228 (mark FAO Office of His Excellency Ayatollah al Udhma Khamenei)

Salutation: Your Excellency

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

COPIES TO:

Speaker of Parliament

His Excellency Gholamali Haddad Adel

Majles-e Shoura-ye Eslami, Baharestan Square, Tehran, Islamic Republic of Iran

Fax: +98 21 3355 6408

Email: hadadadel@majlis.ir

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 19 July 2007.