

PUBLIC

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Fear of torture or ill treatment/ incommunicado detention

IRAN

Dr Mehdi Zakerian (m), academic

Dr Mehdi Zakerian, an academic, was detained on or around 15 August, though the exact circumstances of his arrest are not clear. His family has been permitted to meet him once since then, in a Tehran courtroom, but they do not know where he is held. He has not been charged with any offence, and may be at risk of torture or other ill-treatment. Amnesty International believes that his detention may be a politically motivated attempt to stop him travelling to the USA to start a new job at a university.

According to the Iranian online publication *Rooz*, Dr Mehdi Zakerian has been “in a Ministry of Intelligence detention centre for the past two weeks”. On 6 or 7 September, Dr Mehdi Zakerian was able to meet his family in Branch 12 of the Revolutionary Court, in Tehran. The meeting was supervised by court officials and possibly attended by Ministry of Intelligence officials as well. The meeting took place in a courtroom, but it is not clear whether this was also a formal court appearance. At the meeting, family members learned that Dr Mehdi Zakerian has been accused of offences relating to national security including espionage, but has not been charged. According to his family, Dr Mehdi Zakerian appeared to be weak, and they believe he may have been tortured or otherwise ill-treated. They have not had any contact with him since then.

Dr Mehdi Zakerian is a scholar of international relations and international law. He was an assistant professor at Islamic Azad University in Tehran until September 2007, when he was dismissed from the post without explanation. He had taught for over 10 years, holding posts at a number of important Iranian universities, and has written numerous articles. Dr Mehdi Zakerian was recently appointed chair of the International Studies Association of Iran (ISAI), also known by its French name and acronym *Association iranienne des études internationales* (AIEI), an independent body aimed at promoting the teaching, research and debate on international relations. Its board members are leading academics in the field of international relations. The ISAI has over 200 members and publishes a quarterly journal, of which he was the editor. He had recently accepted a fellowship at the University of Pennsylvania, USA, and was awaiting his visa when he was detained.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Following the election of President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad in 2005, Iranian intelligence authorities 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.

In a press conference in May 2007, an official at the Ministry of Intelligence warned Iranian academics not to have contact with foreigners. He said, “Unfortunately our academics are subject to intelligence threats, and, with the methods they use, they first establish an initial contact, and this academic contact soon turns into an intelligence link.”

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

- urging the authorities to inform Dr Mehdi Zakerian’s family of his whereabouts immediately, and to either charge him with a recognizably criminal offence or release him without delay;

- calling on the authorities to ensure that Dr Mehdi Zakerian has access to his family and legal representation of his choosing, and to any medical treatment that is recommended by an independent medical examiner;
- calling on the authorities to ensure Dr Mehdi Zakerian is treated humanely in detention, and not tortured or otherwise ill-treated;
- asking for more information on the circumstances of and reasons for Dr Mehdi Zakerian's arrest.

APPEALS TO:

Head of the Judiciary

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 subject line write: **FAO Ayatollah Shahroudi**)

Salutation: **Your Excellency**

COPIES TO:

Director, Human Rights Headquarters of Iran

His Excellency 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: int_aff@judiciary.ir (In the subject line: **FAO Mohammad Javad Larijani**)

President

His Excellency Mahmoud Ahmadinejad

The Presidency, Palestine Avenue, Azerbaijan Intersection, Tehran, Islamic Republic of Iran

Fax: **+ 98 21 6 649 5880**

Email: dr-ahmadinejad@president.ir (via website: <http://www.president.ir/email/>)

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 31 October 2008.