

PUBLIC

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Further Information on UA 280/08 (MDE 13/148/2008, 14 October 2008) Arbitrary arrest/Fear of Torture

IRAN

Negin Sheikholeslami (f), Human rights defender and journalist, aged 34

Negin Sheikholeslami was released from Section 209 of Evin Prison in the capital, Tehran, on bail of 500,000,000 rials, equivalent to almost US\$50,000, on 23 November. During her detention, Negin Sheikholeslami was able to meet with family members twice.

Branch 1 of the Revolutionary Court in Tehran ordered Negin Sheikholeslami's release until her trial begins, for which no date has yet been set. There is no precise information available concerning what charges she may be facing, but many human rights defenders in Iran have faced vaguely-worded charges of "acting against state security".

A human rights defender from the Kurdish minority in Iran, Negin Sheikholeslami was arrested at her home in Tehran on the night of 4 October. A guest who was staying with her was also detained for about an hour, and then released. Negin Sheikholeslami's initial whereabouts were unknown, but her husband was told on 9 October 2008 that she was being held in Section 209 of Evin Prison, which is controlled by the Ministry of Intelligence. He was not told the reasons for her arrest and was informed that she would not be allowed to meet anyone until the investigation into her case was complete.

A month before Negin Sheikholeslami was arrested she underwent heart surgery and was still recovering from the operation at the time of her arrest. Her health following her release is said to be reasonably good.

Negin Sheikholeslami is the founder of the Azar Mehr Women's Social and Cultural Society of Kurdistan, which was founded in Sanandaj in Kordestan Province in 2000. It organizes training and sports activities for women in the city of Sanandaj and elsewhere in Kordestan Province. She is also associated with another human rights organization, the Human Rights Organisation of Kurdistan (HROK), which reports on human rights violations against Kurds in Iran.

Negin Sheikholeslami was previously arrested in February 2001 for participating in a demonstration in front of the United Nations office in Tehran, and was released two months later. She was again arrested in January 2002 and was released three months later.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Several prominent human rights defenders from Iran's Kurdish minority are currently detained or imprisoned in Iran after being charged or sentenced on vaguely-worded "security" charges in violation of their right to freedom of expression and association. The founder of the HROK, prisoner of conscience Mohammad Sadigh Kabudvand is serving an 11-year sentence in Tehran. Another activist associated with the HROK and with the women's movement, Zeynab Beyezidi, was arrested in July 2008 and sentenced to four years' imprisonment to be spent in internal exile. Her sentence was confirmed on appeal on 23 August 2008. Two other members of Azar Mehr, Ronak Safarzadeh and Hana Abdi, have been detained since October and November 2007. Hana Abdi was sentenced to five years' imprisonment to be spent in internal exile; this was reduced on appeal to 18 month's imprisonment to be spent in Razan, Hamedan province. Ronak Safarzadeh is still awaiting the outcome of her trial on the charge of "moharebeh" (enmity against God) which can carry the death penalty, although she was sentenced to nine months imprisonment in a "side" case for crossing the

border illegally and possessing a satellite dish (see UA 197/07, MDE 13/130/2007, 7 November 2007 and follow-ups).

Iran's Kurdish minority lives mainly in the west and north-west of the country, in Kordestan and neighbouring provinces, bordering Kurdish areas of Turkey and Iraq. They have long suffered extensive discrimination. Human rights defenders from this community, including community activists and journalists, risk arbitrary arrest and torture.

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

- welcoming the release on bail of Negin Sheikholeslami;
- asking to be informed of any charges against her and the date of her trial;
- urging that any charges relating solely to her peaceful exercise of her right to freedom of expression and association, including in the context of her work as a human rights defender, be dropped, as if convicted and imprisoned on the basis of such charges, she would be a prisoner of conscience, detained solely for the peaceful exercise of her right to freedom of expression and association and Amnesty International would call for her immediate and unconditional release.

APPEALS TO:

Head of the Tehran Judiciary

Ali Reza Avaie
No. 152, corner of 17th Alley
Before Shahid Motahhary Ave.,
Sanaei Ave., Karimkhan Zand Ave.,
Tehran, Islamic Republic of Iran
Fax: +98 21 8832 6700 (works intermittently)
Email: avaei@dadgostary-tehran.ir
info@dadgostary-tehran.ir
Salutation: Dear Mr Avaie

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:

Head of the Judiciary

Ayatollah Mahmoud Hashemi Shahroudi
Howzeh Riyasat-e Qoveh Qazaiyeh
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**)

Director, Human Rights Headquarters of Iran

His Excellency Mohammad Javad Larijani
Howzeh Riassat-e Ghoveh Ghazaiyeh (Office of the Head of the Judiciary)
Pasteur St, Vali Asr Ave., south of Serah-e Jomhuri, Tehran 1316814737, Iran
Fax: +98 21 3390 4986 (please keep trying)
Email: fsharafi@bia-judiciary.ir (In the subject line: **FAO Mohammad Javad Larijani**)
int_aff@judiciary.ir (In the subject line: **FAO Mohammad Javad 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 23 January 2009.