

URGENT ACTION

DERVISHES AND LAWYERS ARRESTED IN IRAN

Over 60 individuals, mostly dervishes (members of a religious order), were arrested in the Iranian cities of Kavar, Tehran and Shiraz between 3 and 14 September. At least three lawyers who represent the group were also arrested on 4 September. All are currently held in Evin Prison in Tehran and are at risk of torture or other ill-treatment.

On 3 September, approximately 60 Gonabadi dervishes were arrested in Kavar in Fars Province following a confrontation with volunteer paramilitary Basij forces. The names of 30 of the dervishes are known to Amnesty International. Fifteen of those arrested were released, but the remaining 45 have reportedly been transferred to Evin Prison, Tehran. Five other dervishes who were injured at the time of the confrontation, taken to hospital and later arrested there have also reportedly been taken to Evin Prison. All are held without access to lawyers or communication with family.

On 4 September, at least three lawyers representing the Gonabadi dervishes were invited by the Governor of Kavar to negotiate for the release of the dervishes. They were arrested upon arrival at the Governor's office. The lawyers are currently being held in Section 209 of Evin Prison. Twelve journalists for Mazjooban-e Noor, a Gonabadi dervish news website, were arrested, reportedly without arrest warrants, in the Mazjooban-e Noor office on 5 September by plain-clothes individuals believed to be from the Ministry of Intelligence. The authorities may also be seeking the arrest of the website administrator, whose mother was arrested in her home in Shiraz on 14 September. On 7 September, the administrator of another dervish website, Mast-e Yar, was arrested in Tehran and his home searched by security forces. The journalists from both websites are currently being held in Evin Prison.

Please write immediately in Persian, Arabic, English or your own language:

- Call for the immediate and unconditional release of anyone arrested on account of their links or association with the Gonabadi dervishes, if they are held solely because of their beliefs and/or their peaceful activities on behalf of the Gonabadi dervishes;
- Call for the release of anyone else arrested unless they are to be charged with internationally recognizable criminal offences and tried according to international fair trial standards;
- Urge the authorities to ensure that those arrested are protected from torture and other ill-treatment, and granted immediate and regular access to family, a lawyer of their choice and necessary medical care.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS BEFORE 28 OCTOBER 2011 TO:

Head of the Judiciary
Ayatollah Sadegh Larijani
 [care of] Public relations Office
 Number 4, 2 Azizi Street
 Vali Asr Ave., above Pasteur Street
 intersection
 Tehran,
 Islamic Republic of Iran
 Email: bia.judi@yahoo.com (In subject
 line: FAO Ayatollah Sadegh Larijani)
Salutation: Your Excellency

Head of Fars Province Judiciary
 Mr Zabihollah Khodaiyan,
 Judiciary of Fars,
 Pirooz Street,
 Shiraz, Fars Province,
 Islamic Republic of Iran
 Email: khodaiyan@dadfars.ir
Salutation: Dear Sir

And copies to:
Secretary General, High Council for
Human Rights
 Mohammad Javad Larijani
 High Council for Human Rights
 [Care of] Office of the Head of the
 Judiciary,
 Pasteur St., Vali Asr Ave. south of
 Serah-e Jomhouri, Tehran
 1316814737, Islamic Republic of Iran
 Email: int_aff@judiciary.ir (subject line:
 FAO Mohammad Javad Larijani)
 Fax: +98 21 3390 4986

Please check with your section office if sending appeals after the above date.

AMNESTY
INTERNATIONAL



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ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Members of religious minorities in Iran, including Baha'is, Christian converts, Sunni Muslims, dissident Shi'a clerics and the Ahl-e Haq, as well as dervish communities, suffer discrimination, harassment, arbitrary detention, and attacks on community property. "Demonization" of such groups has been increasing in recent years.

Gonabadi dervishes in Iran consider themselves to be Shi'a Muslims. They are Sufis who describe Sufism as neither a religion nor a sect, but rather a way of life by which individuals – from any religion – may find God. In Iran, the head of the Gonabadi dervishes is Dr Nour Ali Tabandeh, who was forced in May 2007 to leave his home in Bidokht, their main centre in Iran, and take up residency in Tehran.

The arrests of the Gonabadi dervishes follow weeks of rising tension after the Supreme Leader gave a speech in Qom, the main centre for religious study, denouncing "false mysticism" and encouraging his audience to speak to the public about the "dangers" of religious minorities in Iran, including Sufis. Members of the Basij, apparently organized by a seminary student, travelled to Kavar in the days before 3 September. On 3 September they gathered in the town square armed with batons chanting anti-dervish slogans and setting fire to stores displaying photos of dervish leaders on the windows. Security forces were called in to break up the crowds that had gathered to protest, using tear gas and firing shots into the air.

On 4 September, other Gonabadi dervishes from the nearby town of Sarvestan, approximately 30km to the east of Kavar, attempted to enter Kavar on foot to show solidarity with the dervishes of Kavar. Some were injured by security forces, who were monitoring the roads leading into the town. At least six people were shot and taken to hospital. Five of them were later arrested in hospital and eventually transferred to Evin Prison, Tehran. The sixth, 24-year-old Vahid Banani, died in hospital. Government authorities announced his death on 6 September, though it is not clear exactly when he died. His family were denied access to him until they came to retrieve his body for the funeral.

Gonabadi dervishes have faced rising harassment in recent years. Several prominent clerics in Iran have issued fatwas attacking Sufis. For example Ayatollah Lankarani said in 2006 that Sufis were "misleading Iranian youth" and that "any contact with them was forbidden". Hundreds were arrested in Qom in February 2006 following protests over the destruction of their place of worship (hosseinieh); see UA 43/06 (Index: MDE 13/018/2006), 22 February 2006. Hosseiniehs in other towns and cities have been destroyed or forcibly closed. At least four teachers were dismissed from their employment in 2008 on account of their participation in Sufi practices. In October 2008, seven were arrested in Esfahan, and five in Karaj, near Tehran, apparently on account of their affiliation to the order.

At least six Sufis were arrested on the island of Kish in December 2008 following the enforced closure of the hosseinieh on the island. Two lawyers who took up their cases - Farshid Yadollahi and Amir Eslami - have reportedly been placed under investigation by the Kish Public Prosecutor for allegedly "creating unease in the public mind", after they had been summoned, reportedly on the orders of the Joint Intelligence Bureau of Hormozgan Province.

Fourteen Gonabadi dervishes were flogged 25 times each in. They had been sentenced in May 2010 by Branch 101 of the General Court in Gonabad to flogging and three-month suspended prison sentences after conviction of "disturbing the peace by holding an illegal gathering" after they had participated in a demonstration in July 2009 in front of a Judiciary building in Gonabad in protest at the arrest of another dervish, Hossein Zara'i, who had allowed the burial of a dervish in the cemetery. The local authorities had banned further burials in the cemetery in March 2009, reportedly under pressure from the security forces.

Name: Gonabadi dervishes and lawyers

Gender m/f: both

UA: 280/11

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