

URGENT ACTION

IRANIAN CLERIC RELEASED ON BAIL

Iranian cleric Ayatollah Mohammad Taghi Khalaji was released on bail on 1 February, after nearly three weeks in Evin prison in Iran's capital, Tehran. Although not formally charged, he could face criminal charges and trial in the future. Before his arrest, he had criticized the use of violence against peaceful protestors.

Ayatollah Mohammad Taghi Khalaji, aged 61, was released after surrendering the deeds to his house in Qom. His passport and personal property seized during his arrest have not been returned. He was arrested at his home in Qom, northern Iran, on 12 January. He was a supporter of the prominent cleric Grand Ayatollah Montazeri, who was a critic of the Iranian government. Protests erupted upon Grand Ayatollah Montazeri's death on 20 December, and on the holy days of Tasoaa and Ashoura on 26 and 27 December, which were violently broken up by security forces.

His family said that since the disputed presidential election in June 2009, Ayatollah Mohammad Taghi Khalaji has made several speeches critical of the authorities, including their use of violence against peaceful protestors. The last critical speech he made was just before Ashoura. He has also called for a peaceful resolution of the tension between the government and the opposition. He had received warnings from the Iranian authorities after his previous speeches.

The Iranian government banned all gatherings outside the city of Qom for Grand Ayatollah Montazeri's funerals; police used tear gas and pepper gas to disperse the crowd and arrested dozens of people at an unauthorized mourning ceremony for Grand Ayatollah Montazeri in Esfahan on 23 December. On 27 December, the seventh day of mourning for Grand Ayatollah Montazeri as well as the important Shi'a religious day of Ashoura, hundreds of thousands of people demonstrated on the streets of Tehran and other major cities, including Mashhad, Esfahan, Shiraz, Tabriz, and Qom. Hundreds were arrested and some killed. The authorities have at various times acknowledged between eight and 15 deaths, although later revised the figure down to seven.

The Iranian authorities have made statements suggesting that protestors who "riot" or commit violent acts such as arson will be charged with *moharebeh* (being at enmity with God), a criminal offence which can carry the death penalty. On 18 January, five unnamed people went on trial on charges of *moharebeh*, in connection with the demonstration on Ashoura. On 28 January, two men were executed for *moharebeh*, accused of orchestrating the demonstrations in June and July, although they had been detained prior to the June election. According to Fars News Agency on 2 February, the Deputy Head of the Judiciary, Ebrahim Raisi, has said that another nine people will be executed "soon" for having participated in the demonstrations "with the aim of creating disunity and toppling the system".

Since the Ashoura demonstrations, well over 180 journalists, human rights activists and members of political parties linked to Mir Hossein Mousavi and former President Khatami are reported by opposition Persian news website *Jaras* to have been detained, among them Emadaddin Baghi, recipient of the 2009 Martin Ennals Award, a human rights prize. See UA: 05/10 Index: MDE 13/003/2010. For further information about the post-election events, see *Iran: Election contested, Repression compounded*, December 2009, (Index: MDE 13/123/2009), <http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/info/MDE13/123/2009/en>

No further action is requested from the UA network. Many thanks to all who sent appeals.

This is the first update of UA 25/10 (MDE 13/013/2010). Further information: <http://amnesty.org/en/library/info/MDE13/013/2010/en>

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