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Torture/possible prisoners of conscience/medical concern

IRAN

**Behrouz Seferi (Safari in Azerbaijani Turkic) (m), Iranian Azerbaijani  
Layla Heydari (f), his wife**

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Iranian Azerbaijani Behrouz Seferi, who has campaigned for Iran's Azerbaijani minority to be given greater rights to use their mother tongue, is now known to have been detained without charge or trial since late May or early June 2007. His wife, Layla Heydari, has been detained since 28 August. Both are held in Tehran's Evin Prison, where they have allegedly been tortured. Neither has been allowed to consult a lawyer.

Behrouz Seferi was arrested shortly after demonstrations around the first anniversary of the publication of a cartoon in an Iranian newspaper which many Iranian Azerbaijanis found offensive. He was held in his home town of Zanjan until 4 December, when he was moved to Evin Prison.

Layla Heydari ran a shop selling Azerbaijani books, music and other cultural material until the authorities closed it down in 2006. She obeyed official warnings not to publicise her husband's arrest, but on 28 August she was summoned to visit him at the Ministry of Intelligence detention centre where he was held at the time, and was arrested. She too was moved to Evin Prison on 4 December.

Their families were allowed to visit them on 31 December, and say they think both have been tortured to make them give "confessions". Layla Heydari is apparently in poor health, suffering from severe headaches, but has been given very little medical help. She has also reportedly suffered from heart problems, and has had to be treated on the medical wing, whose staff apparently recommended that she be allowed medical treatment outside prison

#### **BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

Iranian Azerbaijanis, who live mainly in the north and north-west of the country and are mainly Shi'a Muslims, are the largest minority in Iran (at least 25-30% of the population). They are increasingly demanding greater cultural and linguistic rights, including the right to education in Azerbaijani Turkic. A small minority want Iranian Azerbaijani provinces to break away from Iran and join with the Republic of Azerbaijan. The Iranian authorities view those who seek to promote Iranian Azerbaijani cultural identity with suspicion, and often charge them with vaguely worded offences such as "acting against state security by promoting pan-Turkism".

In May 2006, there were massive demonstrations in towns and cities in north-western Iran in protest at a cartoon published on 12 May by the state-owned daily newspaper *Iran*, which many Iranian Azerbaijanis found offensive. Hundreds were arrested during and after the demonstrations. Other waves of arrests have occurred around dates significant to the Azerbaijani community, such as a boycott of the start of the academic year in September 2006; after demonstrations in February 2007 on the occasion of International Mother Tongue day; and on the anniversary of the May 2006 demonstrations.

In recent years the authorities have grown increasingly suspicious of Iran's minority communities, many of which are situated in border areas, and have accused foreign powers such as the US and UK of fomenting unrest among them.

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

- expressing concern that Behrouz Seferi and his wife, Layla Heydari, have been detained without charge for some months, and asking why they were arrested;

- calling on the authorities to release them immediately and unconditionally if they are held solely for their peaceful activism on behalf of Iran's Azerbaijani minority, or else charge them with recognisably criminal offences and try them promptly and fairly;
- urging them to investigate reports that Behrouz Seferi and Layla Heydari have been tortured, and bring anyone found responsible for abuses to justice;
- reminding the authorities that the use of confessions extracted under duress is prohibited by Article 38 of the constitution of Iran.

**APPEALS TO:**

Leader of the Islamic Republic

His Excellency Ayatollah Sayed 'Ali Khamenei

The Office of the Supreme Leader, Islamic Republic Street - Shahid Keshvar Doust Street

Tehran, Islamic Republic of Iran

**Email:** [info@leader.ir](mailto:info@leader.ir)

**Salutation:** **Your Excellency**

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 Jomhour, Tehran 1316814737, Islamic Republic of Iran

**Email:** [info@dadgostary-tehran.ir](mailto:info@dadgostary-tehran.ir) (In the subject line write: **FAO Ayatollah Shahroudi**)

**Salutation:** **Your Excellency**

Minister of Intelligence

Gholam Hossein Mohseni Ejeie

Ministry of Intelligence, Second Negarestan Street, Pasdaran Avenue, Tehran, Islamic Republic of Iran

**Salutation:** **Your Excellency**

**COPIES TO:**

President

His Excellency Mahmoud Ahmadinejad

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

**Email:** [dr-ahmadinejad@president.ir](mailto:dr-ahmadinejad@president.ir)

**via website:** [www.president.ir/email](http://www.president.ir/email)

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](mailto:hadadadel@majlis.ir) (Please ask that your message be brought to the attention of the **Article 90 Commission**)

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 7 March 2008.