

# URGENT ACTION

## TRADE UNIONIST GRANTED LEAVE REMAINS AT RISK

**Iranian trade unionist Jafar Azimzadeh, the Chair of the Free Union of Workers of Iran, ended his two-month-long hunger strike on 30 June after he was granted leave. He remains at risk of being returned to prison. If jailed, he will be a prisoner of conscience.**

**Jafar Azimzadeh**, a welder and the Chair of the Free Union of Workers of Iran, ended his 63-day-long hunger strike on 30 June after the prosecution authorities granted him a five-day period of leave on bail secured by payment of 4.5 billion rials (US\$150,000), and informed his lawyer informally that his "application for retrial" (*e'adeh dadres*), which he had previously submitted to the Supreme Court, would be considered. Although the prosecution authorities have made informal promises to Jafar Azimzadeh and his lawyer that they may extend his leave past the initial five-day period, he remains at risk of being returned to prison. If Jafar Azimzadeh's application for retrial is accepted, the Supreme Court will quash the conviction and return the case to a court of first instance for retrial.

Jafar Azimzadeh was sentenced in March 2015 to six years in prison after an unfair trial before a Revolutionary Court in Tehran, which convicted him of "gathering and colluding to commit crimes against national security" and "spreading propaganda against the system". He also received a two-year ban on "membership in political and social parties, groups or collectives" and "engagement in online space, media and press". The conviction was based solely on his peaceful trade union activities, including: his work collecting 40,000 workers' signatures on a petition for a rise in the national minimum wage; his interviews with media outlets based outside Iran; his involvement with founding the Free Union of Workers of Iran; his participation in the 2009 International Workers' Day rally in Laleh Park in Tehran and other peaceful demonstrations in front of Parliament and the Ministry of Co-operatives, Labour and Social; and his meetings with other trade unionist groups, such as the Syndicate of the Workers of Haft Tapeh Sugar Cane Company and the Syndicate of Workers of Tehran and Suburbs Bus Company. He began serving his sentence on 8 November 2015.

He started an indefinite hunger strike on 29 April in protest at the arrest and conviction of himself and other trade unionists and teachers on trumped-up national security-related charges; the repression of trade unionists' peaceful assemblies and strikes; the ban on independently organized events for International Workers' Day and World Teachers' Day; and the continuing existence of wages that fall below the poverty line.

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

- Calling on the Iranian authorities to ensure that Jafar Azimzadeh is not returned to prison, and that his conviction and sentence are quashed, as they arise solely from his peaceful trade union activities;
- Reminding them of their obligations under the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), both of which impose on them an obligation, among others, to respect and protect the right of everyone to form and join trade unions.

**PLEASE SEND APPEALS BEFORE 12 AUGUST 2016 TO:**

Head of the Judiciary  
Ayatollah Sadegh Larijani  
**Salutation: Your Excellency**

Minister of Co-operatives, Labour and Social Welfare  
Dr Ali Rabiei  
**Salutation: Your Excellency**

**And copies to:**  
Office of the Supreme Leader  
Ayatollah Sayed 'Ali Khamenei

**Also send copies to diplomatic representatives accredited to your country. If there is no Iranian embassy in your country, please mail the letter to the Permanent Mission of the Islamic Republic of Iran to the United Nations, 622 Third Avenue, 34th Floor, New York, NY 10017, USA. Please insert local diplomatic addresses below:**

Name Address 1 Address 2 Address 3 Fax Fax number Email Email address Salutation Salutation

Please check with your section office if sending appeals after the above date. This is the first update of UA 152/16. Further information: <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/MDE13/4358/2016/en/>

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### ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Throughout his prolonged hunger strike, Jafar Azimzadeh lost consciousness several times. He also experienced heart palpitations; intestinal bleeding and kidney, bladder and urinary problems; and numbness on the left side of his body. His hearing and eyesight also became impaired. According to his family, the Prosecutor General of Tehran initially dismissed their pleas for help, saying that he would not do anything, even if it meant that Jafar Azimzadeh would die. In protest at this attitude, Jafar Azimzadeh did not allow the prison clinic to take his blood pressure. The deterioration of his health ultimately prompted the authorities to transfer him to hospital on 18 June.

Prior to starting a hunger strike, Jafar Azimzadeh, along with another trade union activist, Ismail Abdi, wrote an open letter in April 2016 stating their intention to go on hunger strike on International Workers' Day on 1 May to protest the authorities' repressive responses to trade unionists' activities and protests. The men demanded that the authorities drop the charge of "gathering and colluding to commit crimes against national security" and other national security charges in their cases. In their letter, they said: "According to the evidence used to issue the verdicts against us, you could say that any efforts... to improve the lives and livelihood of teachers and workers in Iran are considered acts against national security".

Jafar Azimzadeh was one of the co-ordinators of the 40,000-signature campaign seeking a rise in the national minimum wage. Prior to his arrest on 30 April 2014, on the eve of International Workers' Day, along with numerous other trade unionists and workers, including teachers, he wrote several letters to the Ministry of Cooperatives, Labour and Social Welfare about the plight of workers and the growing crackdown on trade union activists. Since their letters received no replies, they sent a final letter to the Ministry, stating their intention to hold a peaceful gathering outside the Ministry building on International Workers' Day on 1 May 2014. Jafar Azimzadeh was subsequently arrested at his home and held incommunicado for 46 days in Section 209 of Evin Prison before being released on bail. In March 2015, while at liberty, he was convicted and sentenced by Branch 15 of the Revolutionary Court in Tehran to six years in prison in connection with his peaceful trade union activities. He subsequently appealed his conviction and sentence and his case was sent before Branch 54 of the Court of Appeal in Tehran. Around 27 October 2015, he received a short written summons from the Office for the Implementation of Sentences, which said that he needed to present himself to Evin Prison to begin serving his six-year sentence. Although he has never received a written confirmation, the summons indicates that the Court of Appeal has upheld his conviction and sentence.

In an open letter to the Deputy Minister of Work Relations, Dr Seyed Hassan Hefdahtan, on 17 June 2016, Jafar Azimzadeh wrote that, in recent years, "most union activists have faced hefty criminal and political charges and long imprisonment sentences". He continued: "Most of these activists have been arrested by the Ministry of Intelligence and all of them have been charged with 'gathering and colluding to commit crimes against national security' and their cases have been referred to Revolutionary Courts with a demand for the highest punishments for them." He noted in the letter that trade unionists have suffered this treatment for basic activities, such as associating with one another, helping out with gathering petition signatures, and holding peaceful gatherings in front of official buildings.

Article 22 (1) of the ICCPR states: "Everyone shall have the right to freedom of association with others, including the right to form and join trade unions for the protection of his interests". Article 8 of the ICESCR guarantees both "the right of everyone to form trade unions and join the trade union of his choice" and "the right of trade unions to function freely subject to no limitations other than those prescribed by law and which are necessary in a democratic society in the interests of national security or public order or for the protection of the rights and freedoms of others."

Name: Jafar Azimzadeh

Gender m/f: m

Further information on UA: 152/16 Index: MDE 13/4378/2016 Issue Date: 1 July 2016