

URGENT ACTION



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26 January 2010

UA 25/10

Prisoner of conscience

IRAN

Ayatollah Mohammad Taghi Khalaji (m), aged 61

Ayatollah Mohammad Taghi Khalaji was arrested in Iran on 12 January and was taken to Evin Prison in Tehran where he is held without charge in solitary confinement, without access to a lawyer or family visits. He had criticized the use of violence against peaceful protestors.



Ayatollah Mohammad Taghi Khalaji, aged 61, 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 the death of Grand Ayatollah Montazeri on 20 December, and on the holy days of Taso 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. He could now face trial in the Special Court for the Clergy, which is under the authority of the Supreme Leader and outside the framework of the judiciary.

The four officials that arrested Ayatollah Mohammad Taghi Khalaji were from the Ministry of Intelligence. The officials also confiscated books, letters, a computer and his family's passports. The passports, except for that of Ayatollah Mohammad Taghi Khalaji, were returned on 20 January. His family was reportedly threatened with punishment if they complained about his arrest. Agents also raided the home of his daughter on 15 January, confiscating personal effects.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Following the post-12 June election crackdown, a number of prominent Shi'a clerics sharply criticized Iranian authorities for committing human rights violations. The most prominent and outspoken of those critics was Grand Ayatollah Hossein Ali Montazeri, who had once been close to Ayatollah Khomeini, the first Supreme Leader of the Islamic Republic of Iran, but who fell out with him after the executions of thousands of dissidents in the late 1980s. Grand Ayatollah Montazeri died on 20 December 2009 at the age of 87. Massive crowds attended his funeral, which turned into a protest against the government. Iranian authorities responded with violence and large numbers of arrests. Plain clothes officials, believed to be Basij paramilitaries, attacked the offices of Ayatollah Yusuf Sane'i and Ayatollah Seyed Ali Mohammad Dastghayb, also critics of the government. There were also reportedly clashes outside Grand Ayatollah Montazeri's home between security forces and mourners, who threw stones.

At least five people, including human rights activists, were arrested while on their way to attend the funeral of Grand Ayatollah Montazeri. Shiva Nazar Ahari, Kouhyar Goudarzi, and Saeed Haeri, all human rights activists and members of the Committee of Human Rights Reporters (CHRR), were arrested by police officers and officials from the Ministry of Intelligence on 20 December in Tehran. They were taken from a bus which was about to drive to the northern city of Qom, where the funeral of Grand Ayatollah Montazeri took place on 21 December. Also on board the bus were civil society activists and relatives of some of those arrested following the disputed 12 June 2009 presidential election. Two other men were arrested on 20 December in separate incidents. Press reports suggest that Ahmad Qabel, a religious scholar and student of Grand Ayatollah Montazeri, was arrested with family members. He was travelling to Qom from the north-eastern city of Mashhad, and is

Amnesty International's mission is to undertake research and action focused on preventing and ending grave abuses of the rights to physical and mental integrity, freedom of conscience and expression, and freedom from discrimination, within the context of its work to promote all human rights.

thought to be detained in Mashhad. Mohammad Nourizad, a filmmaker and former journalist at the Tehran daily newspaper Kayhan, was also arrested. Since the June 2009 presidential election he has written blogs critical of the authorities. He may have been arrested to prevent him from writing about Grand Ayatollah Montazeri (See UA 347/09)

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 Isfahan 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 offense which can carry the death penalty. On 18 January, five unnamed people went on trial charged with *moharebeh*, in connection with the demonstration on Ashoura.

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.

For further information about the post-election events please see Iran: Election contested, Repression compounded, December 2009, <http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/info/MDE13/123/2009/en>

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send appeals to arrive as quickly as possible:

- Calling on the Iranian authorities to release Ayatollah Mohammad Taghi Khalaji immediately and unconditionally, as he is a prisoner of conscience solely detained for peacefully expressing views critical of the authorities;
- Urging them to ensure that, while detained, he is protected from torture and other ill-treatment, and has access to his family, a lawyer of his own choosing, and any medical treatment he may require;
- Reminding the authorities that, as a state party to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, Iran is obliged to uphold the rights to freedom of expression, assembly and association.

APPEALS TO:

Leader of the Islamic Republic

Ayatollah Sayed 'Ali Khamenei
The Office of the Supreme Leader
Islamic Republic Street – End of Shahid Keshvar Doust
Street,
Tehran, ISLAMIC REPUBLIC OF IRAN

Email: info_leader@leader.ir
via website:

<http://www.leader.ir/langs/en/index.php?p=letter>
(English)

Salutation: Your Excellency

Head of the Judiciary

Ayatollah Sadeq Larijani
Howzeh Riyasat-e Qoveh Qazaiyeh
(Office of the Head of the Judiciary)
Pasteur St., Vali Asr Ave., south of Serah-e Jomhouri,
Tehran, 1316814737

ISLAMIC REPUBLIC OF IRAN

Email: **Via website:**

<http://www.dadiran.ir/tabid/75/Default.aspx>

(First starred box: your given name; second starred box:
your family name; third: your email address)

Salutation: Your Excellency

COPIES TO:

Director, Human Rights Headquarters of Iran

His Excellency Mohammad Javad Larijani
Bureau of International Affairs
Office of the Head of the Judiciary
Pasteur St., Vali Asr Ave. south of Serah-e Jomhouri,
Tehran 1316814737

ISLAMIC REPUBLIC OF IRAN

Email: bia.judi@yahoo.com

Fax: 011 98 21 5 537 8827 (please keep
trying)

Iran does not presently have an embassy in the United
States. Instead, please send copies to:

Iranian Interests Section
2209 Wisconsin Ave NW
Washington DC 20007

Phone: 202 965 4990

Fax: 202 965 1073

Email: requests@daftar.org

PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY.

Check with the AIUSA Urgent Action office if sending appeals after 9 March 2010.