

# URGENT ACTION



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*Note: Please write on behalf of these persons even though you may not have received the original UA when issued on September 2, 2009. Thanks!*

3 November 2009

Further information on UA 231/09 (2 September 2009) – Possible prisoner of conscience

IRAN                      Hengameh Shahidi (f), journalist

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Hengameh Shahidi, a female journalist, was released on bail on 1 November after four months detained without trial in Iran's capital, Tehran. She had been on hunger strike in protest at her detention for approximately six days before her release.

Hengameh Shahidi, aged about 34, is a member of the National Trust Party, an opposition political party headed by reformist cleric Mehdi Karroubi who was a candidate in Iran's presidential election, held in June 2009, the disputed outcome of which resulted in mass demonstrations. Currently studying for a PhD at a university in the UK, she had returned to Iran to act as an advisor on women's issues to Mehdi Karroubi during his election campaign. She was arrested on 30 June and was held in solitary confinement in Evin Prison in the capital Tehran for 50 days before being transferred to a cell holding another woman.

Prison officials threatened Hengameh Shahidi that she would be punished if she continued her hunger strike. This contrasts with the impunity enjoyed by security officials responsible for abuses. The Norooz website reported how she said to her family: "Were the individuals who beat me in the basements of Evin prison brought before the [prison] disciplinary committee?"

Hengameh Shahidi suffers from a heart condition and depression, for which she requires regular medication, which she had refused to take during her hunger strike. According to the Committee of Human Rights Reporters, she told her family: "This is the only way I can protest the situation I am in. Either my corpse will come out of Evin prison, or I'll be freed." On her release from detention, she was taken to hospital. Her current state of health is not known.

She was released on bail of 900 million rials (over US\$90,000). A trial hearing is scheduled for 4 November in Branch 26 of the Revolutionary Court in Tehran. According to her lawyer, who was denied access to her until early October, she is facing charges of "participating in illegal demonstrations, conspiring with the aim of harming state security, propaganda against the system, disturbing public confidence, and insulting the presidency of the Islamic Republic of Iran".

## BACKGROUND INFORMATION

In the days following the 13 June announcement that incumbent Mahmoud Ahmadinejad had won the presidential election, hundreds of thousands of Iranians took part in generally peaceful mass demonstrations throughout the country, disputing the election results. The authorities quickly imposed sweeping restrictions on freedom of expression, association and assembly and telephone and internet systems were severely disrupted. Iranian publications were banned from publishing information about the nationwide unrest and foreign journalists were banned from the streets, their visas not renewed and some arrested or expelled from the country. Around 20 journalists detained since the disputed presidential elections on 12 June are believed to be still detained or imprisoned.

In response to the mass protests, the security forces, notably the paramilitary Basij, were widely deployed. At least 4,000 people were arrested in the three to four weeks following the election, including prominent political figures close to either presidential candidates Mir Hossein Mousavi and Mehdi Karroubi, or former President Khatami, who supported Mir Hossein Mousavi's campaign. Some human rights defenders and journalists were also detained. They have been denied access to legal representation, but have generally

been able to meet family members. Arrests of others have continued sporadically, including students who have continued to protest on campuses since the new academic year began in September.

The security forces used excessive force, killing dozens of protestors and injuring hundreds more. Some died later of their injuries. Others have been injured and died as a result of torture while in custody.

Mass trial sessions of hundreds that started on 4 August were grossly unfair, including the latest, which was held on 25 August. Detainees “confessed” to vaguely worded charges, often not recognizably criminal offences. These “confessions”, apparently obtained under duress, were accepted by the court. Some of those on trial were filmed making similar “confessions”, which were aired on TV before their trials took place. At least four people have been sentenced to death, and more could face the death penalty. Dozens are said to have been sentenced to prison terms, including at least one of 15 years.

Iranian officials have confirmed that at least some of those detained after the post-election protests have been tortured or otherwise ill-treated, and that abuses took place in at least one detention center, Kahrizak, outside Tehran, since closed on the order of Iran’s Supreme Leader, Ayatollah Khamenei. Twelve police officials and a judge who had been involved in transferring detainees to Kahrizak are said to be facing trial for their role in the abuses. On 9 September, Farhad Tajari, a member of the Iranian parliament’s Special Parliamentary Committee set up to review post-election arrests, told the Fars News Agency that a “court hearing for addressing law violations by suspects in the Kahrizak case will be held in the near future.”

On 7 September, Iranian security officials closed the office of the committee co-founded by Mehdi Karroubi and Mir Hossein Mousavi. They confiscated testimonies the committee had gathered on abuses of protesters and detainees in the course of the demonstrations following the presidential election. Amnesty International expressed concern that its confiscation would place those who had provided testimony at risk of reprisals by the security forces (see: <http://www.amnesty.org/en/news-and-updates/iranian-rape-and-torture-victims-renewed-risk-20090910>). A case against Mehdi Karroubi in connection with his public allegations of rape and other torture has been lodged in the Special Court for the Clergy, which hears cases against clerics and is outside of the control of the judiciary.

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

- Welcoming the release on bail of Hengameh Shahidi, but expressing concern that she is facing charges which appear to be related solely to her peaceful exercise of her right to freedom of expression;
- Urging that these charges be dropped, as, if she were to be convicted and imprisoned, she would be a prisoner of conscience;
- Calling for an impartial investigation into her allegations of beatings while in detention and for anyone found responsible for abuse to be brought to justice.

**APPEALS TO:**

**Head of the Judiciary in Tehran**

Mr Ali Reza Avaei  
Karimkhan Zand Avenue  
Sana’i Avenue, Corner of Ally 17, No 152  
Tehran, ISLAMIC REPUBLIC OF IRAN  
**Email:** [avaei@Dadgostary-tehran.ir](mailto:avaei@Dadgostary-tehran.ir)  
**Salutation:** Dear Mr Avaei

**Head of Special Parliamentary Committee to review post-election arrests**

Parviz Sorouri, Majles-e Shoura-ye Eslami, Baharestan Square  
Tehran, Islamic Republic of Iran  
**Fax:** 011 9821 33440 309  
**Email:** [sorouri@majlis.ir](mailto:sorouri@majlis.ir)  
**Salutation:** Your Excellency

**COPIES TO:**

**Secretary-General of National Trust Party**

Mehdi Karroubi  
**Email:** via website  
**<http://www.etemademelli.ir/contactus/>**  
**(put name in first box, subject in fifth box and text in large box)**

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  
**Fax:** 1 202 965 1073  
**Email:** [requests@daftar.org](mailto:requests@daftar.org)

**PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY.**

**Check with the AIUSA Urgent Action office if sending appeals after 15 December 2009.**