

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 March 2010

Further information on UA 231/09 (2 September 2009) and follow-ups (3 November and 10 December 2009) – Prisoner of conscience

IRAN Hengameh Shahidi (f), journalist

Hengameh Shahidi, a female journalist, was rearrested on 25 February to begin serving a six-year prison sentence. An appeal court upheld her conviction for charges related to her political and journalistic activities. She is held in Evin Prison, Tehran, and Amnesty International considers her to be a prisoner of conscience

Hengameh Shahidi was rearrested on 25 February 2010 and taken to Evin Prison, after being summoned to the Ministry of Intelligence investigations office “to answer a few questions”. Initially unaware of the reasons for his client’s rearrest, on 27 February her lawyer Mohammad Mostafaei went to Branch 54 of the Revolutionary Court where he was shown an appeal court ruling upholding her six-year prison sentence, issued the day before her rearrest.

The six-year prison sentence includes five years’ imprisonment for “gathering and colluding with intent to harm state security” and one year’s imprisonment for “propaganda against the system” The appeal court overturned her conviction of 91 days and a fine for “insulting the president”.

Hengameh Shahidi, who was an advisor on women’s issues to defeated presidential candidate Mehdi Karroubi during his election campaign and is a member of his National Trust party, was originally arrested on 30 June 2009 and held in Evin prison for over four months, until she was released on bail on 1 November. During her detention, she says she was tortured: her interrogators threatened to arrest other family members, and on several occasions she was threatened with execution. She also said that on one occasion she subjected to a mock execution.

Hengameh Shahidi suffers from a heart condition, for which she requires regular medication.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Hengameh Shahidi was originally arrested on 30 June 2009 and was held in solitary confinement in Evin Prison in the capital, Tehran, for 50 days before being transferred to a cell where another woman was held. She was eventually released on bail of 900 million rials (over US\$90,000) on 1 November 2009, after she went on hunger strike in protest at her continued detention. Before her release on bail, prison officials threatened Hengameh Shahidi that she would be punished if she continued her hunger strike. According to the Norooz website, a Persian news site, she asked “Were the individuals who beat me in the basements of Evin prison brought before the [prison] disciplinary committee?” Amnesty International is not aware of any official investigation of these allegations.

At her trial on 4 November, Hengameh Shahidi was accused of taking part in demonstrations against the disputed election result between 13 and 17 June, giving an interview to the media, collecting signatures for the “One Million Signatures Campaign (also known as the Campaign for Equality - which aims to end discrimination against women in Iranian law), supporting a campaign to end executions by stoning in Iran, signing numerous statements addressed to United Nations human rights bodies about human rights violations in Iran, and publishing articles on her blog.

Since the disputed presidential election in June 2009, over 5,000 people have been arrested, including over 1,000 during and following mass demonstrations on the religious festival of Ashoura on 27 December. Those detained include political figures and political activists, students, human rights defenders and journalists. Many have been tried in grossly unfair trials, resulting in long prison term sentences and some sentences of flogging. At least 13 have been sentenced to death, of whom two have been executed and three have had their

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.

sentences commuted to prison terms. Those known to be on death row include Ahmad Karimi and Amir Reza Arefi, convicted of “*moharebel*” (enmity against God) for alleged membership of the Anjoman-e Padashahi Iran, a group which advocates the restoration of a monarchy in Iran, and five unnamed individuals (two women and three men) said to have been tried and convicted in January 2010 of “*moharebel*” for alleged membership of the People’s Mojahedin Organization of Iran and organizing the Ashoura demonstrations. On 9 February, the Tehran judiciary’s public relations office said that another unnamed individual – believed to be one of 16 tried in a mass trial in previous days - had also been sentenced to death. Some Iranian sources have suggested this may be 20-year old Damghan university student Mohammad Amin Valian, who was one of five people charged with “*moharebel*” during the trial. He was charged with “*moharebel*” after video footage of him throwing stones during the Ashoura demonstrations were shown in court.

The Iranian authorities are continuing to severely restrict freedom of expression in Iran, arresting journalists (of whom scores are believed to remain in detention), imposing restrictions on the use of the internet, including social networking sites, and shutting down newspapers. Most recently the daily newspaper E’tamad, run by Elias Hazrati, a supporter of Mehdi Karroubi, and the weekly journal Iran Dokht (run by Mehdi Karroubi’s son) were closed by the Press Supervisory Board on 1 March 2010. The Press Supervisory Board operates under the Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance (MICG), and has the power to revoke licenses, ban publications, and refer complaints to a special Press Court.

According to an Iranian Students News Agency report, E’tamad was found to have breached Article 6 of the Press Law which places vaguely-worded limits on what may be published. In 2004, the UN Special Rapporteur on the right to freedom of opinion and expression expressed serious concern that the Press Law unduly restricts the right to freedom of expression and recommended its review. In addition, the Iranian authorities are continuing to deny permission for anti-government demonstrations to take place, and have taken brutal measures to suppress such demonstrations, thereby restricting freedom of assembly. The authorities have acknowledged over 40 deaths; opposition sources put the true figure much higher, at over 80.

In February 2010, Iran accepted several recommendations to guarantee freedom of expression and press activities made by other states in the framework of the Universal Periodic Review of its human rights record before the UN Human Rights Council (see paragraph 90, recommendations 52-58 at http://www.upr-info.org/IMG/pdf/A_HRC_WG-6_7_L-11_Iran.pdf) but rejected other recommendations calling for an end to measures such as harassment and arbitrary arrest of writers, journalists and bloggers. It appears that, despite such public commitments, in practice, the Iranian authorities are continuing to disregard their human rights obligations relating to freedom of expression and assembly

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

- Calling for the immediate and unconditional release of Hengameh Shahidi as she is a prisoner of conscience, held solely for her peaceful exercise of her rights to freedom of expression, association and assembly;
- Urging the Iranian authorities to ensure that while imprisoned, she is granted access to her family, her lawyer and to all necessary medical treatment.
- Calling for an immediate, thorough and impartial investigation into Hengameh Shahidi’s allegations of torture in detention and for anyone found responsible to be brought to justice promptly and fairly.

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
Salutation: Dear Mr Avaei

Head of the Judiciary

Ayatollah Sadeqh Larijani
Howzeh Riyasat-e Qoveh Qazaiyeh (Office of the Head of the Judiciary)
Pasteur St., Vali Asr Ave., south of Serah-e Jomhuri
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:

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

PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY.

Check with the AIUSA Urgent Action office if sending appeals after 14 April 2010.