

## Amnesty International USA December 2013 Newsletter on Iran with Information and Action Ideas



*prisoner of conscience Omid Kokabee*

Amnesty International will soon be launching a campaign around the repression of academic freedom—including the persecution of students, scholars and scientists. Below you will find information about two recent programs Amnesty International USA co-sponsored to highlight this issue, as well as actions around some of the featured cases in the campaign: Majid Tavakkoli, Bahareh Hedayat, Zia Nabavi and Omid Kokabee. There is also some news about activism around imprisoned Iranian physicist Omid Kokabee, especially carried out by his friends and colleagues at the University of Texas, Austin.

There is also an action urging the authorities to allow serious ill prisoners of conscience Hossein Ronaghi Maleki and Ayatollah Hossein Kazemeyni Boroujerdi the medical attention they need. See also the piece on the AIUSA blog: <http://blog.amnestyusa.org/middle-east/death-trap-prisons-in-iran/>. The issue of denial of medical care and refusal to grant medical furloughs to which these prisoners are entitled has been addressed recently by a number of human rights organizations as well as in the latest report from Ahmed Shaheed, the U.N. Rapporteur on the Situation of Human Rights in the Islamic Republic of Iran: <http://shaheedoniran.org/english/dr-shaheeds-work/latest-reports/october-2013-report-of-the-special-rapporteur-on-the-situation-of-human-rights-in-the-islamic-republic-of-iran-2/>

Sadly, even though the year is not yet over, the Iranian authorities have already executed more people in 2013 than they did last year. To our profound regret, four Iranian Arab political prisoners--Ghazi Abbasi, Abdul-Reza Amir-Khanafereh, Abdul-Amir Mojaddami and Jasim Moghaddam Payam, were executed. According to Iranian law, lawyers must be told 48 hours prior to the execution of their clients, but in this case, as in so many others, the government failed to carry out the required prior notification. Ministry of Intelligence merely told the families on 2 December 2013 that the men had already been executed, but not on what date, and they also did not reveal where the men were buried. The four men had been sentenced to death on 15 August 2012 after an unfair trial in a Revolutionary Court in Ahvaz, for involvement in a series of shootings. Confessions extracted under torture were admitted as “evidence” against the men who were convicted of the vague but commonly used charges of moharebeh (enmity against God) and ifsad fil arz (corruption on earth). For more information please see: <http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/info/MDE13/052/2013/en>

Despite the bad news, we can celebrate the release of several prominent prisoners of conscience and political prisoners in the last several months, including human rights attorney Nasrin Sotoudeh, journalist Issa Saharkhiz and Canadian-Iranian businessman Hamid Ghassemi-Shall. All three had been the subjects of persistent activism by Amnesty International and other human rights organizations. Their release is likely a testament to the effectiveness of such committed campaigning on the part of so many caring people. Amnesty International also welcomed the vote by the U.N. General Assembly Third Committee on November 19, 2013 to pass Resolution A/C.3/68/L.57 on the promotion and protection of human rights in the Islamic Republic of Iran. Amnesty had joined 24 other NGOs in a joint letter calling for a vote in favor of this resolution.

## **Recent Amnesty International USA programs on Iran**

### **Amnesty International programs in NY and DC around repression of academic freedom**

On the evening of Wednesday November 13, Amnesty International USA, in partnership with the Center for Public Scholarship (CPS) at the New School, held a program entitled, "Iran: Silenced, Expelled & Imprisoned." The program was also co-sponsored by the International Campaign for Human Rights in Iran and Scholars at Risk. Professor Arien Mack of CPS made opening remarks and the speakers included Hadi Kahalzadeh, Visiting Scholar, Political Science, Valdosta State University; former economist for Iran's Social Security Organization, Mahboubeh Abbasgholizadeh, Institute for Women's Leadership, Scholar Rescue Fund Fellow, Rutgers University, Hadi Ghaemi, the executive director of the International Campaign for Human Rights in Iran, and Mehdi Arabshahi, and exiled Iranian student activist who is currently pursuing his studies at SUNY, Albany. The event was moderated by Gissou Nia, the executive director of the Iran Human Rights Documentation Center. The program can be viewed in its entirety at: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=q3jAQL-YJsI> and <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=q3jAQL-YJsI&list=PLEEDF068B6959FF33&index=11>. A special thanks to Professor Arien Mack and Roberta Sutton of CPS for their outstanding work on this program.

Iran: Silencing Scientists and Squelching Scholarship was the second program, held in conjunction the Georgetown University Amnesty International student chapter, and the Georgetown University Science and Human Rights Group. This event highlighted the case of imprisoned Iranian physicist Omid Kokabee. Professor Ali Arab, professor of statistics at Georgetown, and a member of the American Association for the Advancement of Science's Scientific Responsibility, Human Rights and Law Program, and Joe Lanzilla of the Georgetown Amnesty chapter worked together to make this program possible. Speakers included Dr. Arash Alaei, former prisoner of conscience in Iran and prominent specialist in the prevention and treatment of HIV/AIDS, currently at the Global Institute for Health and Human Rights at SUNY Albany, Professor Herb Berk and Ellen Hutchison, Omid Kokabee's advocates at the University of Texas, Austin, Professor Hossein Sadeghpour, the Chair, Committee for International Freedom of Scientists of the American Physical Society and Director, Institute for Theoretical Atomic Molecular and Optical Physics at Harvard University, Eugene Chudnovsky, Co-Chair of the Committee of Concerned Scientists and Distinguished Professor of Physics at the City University of New York and distinguished journalist Rudi Bakhtiar, former CNN anchor. The panel was moderated by Jessica Wyndham of the American Association for the Advancement of Science. The program was co-sponsored by the Abdorrahman Boroumand Foundation, the Committee of Concerned Scientists, the American Physical Society, the International Campaign for Human Rights in Iran, and United4Iran. The program was covered by Voice of America Persian Service journalist Kourosh Sehati and can be seen at <http://ir.voanews.com/media/video/1791983.html>. Two days later, VOA Persian's Ofogh program did a long piece about Omid Kokabee (<http://ir.voanews.com/media/video/horizon/1792499.html?z=1566&zp=1>)

### **Amnesty International Belmont/Watertown, Massachusetts group hosts screening of EUF**

On November 19, the Amnesty International Belmont/Watertown, Massachusetts group hosted a screening of the documentary *Education Under Fire* which is about the denial of higher education to members of Iran's Baha'i community and the persecution of the Baha'i Institute for Higher Education (BIHE) which was created to provide an alternative education to those excluded from Iran's public universities. The film was presented by Amnesty International and has been shown at more than 200 venues in the U.S. and overseas. The program was held at the Watertown Public Library and included a discussion with BIHE graduates Nikkan Milani and Mojdeh Rohani, who appear in the film, and moderator Tim Wood.

## **Blogger Hossein Ronaghi Maleki and Cleric Sayed Hossein Kazemeyni Boroujerdi in Urgent Need of Medical Care**



Hossein Ronaghi Maleki



Hossein Kazemeyni Boroujerdi

Political prisoners in Iran, including prisoners of conscience, are routinely subjected to inhuman and degrading prison conditions, including overcrowding, poor food and water, dirty and unsanitary facilities, and medical neglect. Many of them suffered severe injuries as a result of torture in custody that have never been properly treated while many others contract chronic and debilitating ailments including kidney and lung infections. Political prisoners who seek medical leave to enable them to receive urgent or specialized medical care, as permitted under Iranian law, often see their requests arbitrarily rejected and appear to be routinely discriminated against by the prison administration.

Blogger Hossein Ronaghi Maleki was arrested on 22 August 2012 when police and plain-clothed security forces reportedly attacked a relief camp in East Azerbaijan province where he and others were offering supplies for earthquake victims. Hossein Ronaghi Maleki had been sentenced to 15 years in prison after an unfair trial in 2010 on charges including “membership of the [illegal] internet group ‘Iran Proxy,’” “spreading propaganda against the system” and “insulting the Leader and the President,” apparently in connection with articles he posted on his blog, *14 Tir*. When he had complained of being tortured, the judge at his trial told him that he “deserved it.” He had been released from prison on 2 July 2012 to receive needed medical treatment for his serious kidney condition, upon payment of a large sum of money for bail. He has now been charged with “distributing unclean and non-hygienic goods” and is reported to have been tortured during questioning. He was reportedly beaten so severely in the kidney area that the wound from his recent surgery started bleeding.

On 4 November 2013 Hossein Ronaghi Maleki was transferred to Tehran’s Hasheminejad Hospital but was taken back to Evin Prison after only three hours and without receiving the treatments he requires. Reports indicate that doctors have diagnosed him with a kidney infection in his one remaining kidney, as well as a condition called Hydronephrosis, where the kidney becomes stretched and swollen as a result of a build-up of urine inside the kidney. Hossein Ronaghi Maleki needs ongoing specialized treatment on his remaining kidney, which he cannot get in prison. Since his arrest, he has launched a number of hunger strikes in protest at the authorities’ refusal to grant him medical leave, their harsh treatment of political prisoners, and disregard for prisoners’ welfare, have resulted in further deterioration of his health.

Hossein Ronaghi Maleki’s mother, Zoleikha Mousavi had launched her own hunger strike on 20 August 2013 in protest at the authorities’ refusal to release her son. His hunger strike prompted letters from dozens of political prisoners and hundreds of journalists, academics and civil, political and human rights activists to the Iranian authorities, urging them to release him. Former president, Mohammad Khatami,

also wrote a letter asking Hossein Ronaghi Maleki to end his hunger strike and expressing concern that the constraints and restrictions on Iranian people still continue today.

Ayatollah Hossein Kazemeyni Boroujerdi, age 55, a dissident cleric and prisoner of conscience detained in the Special Clerical ward at Evin prison, is suffering from various illnesses and has been prohibited from receiving medical treatment. He has served seven years in prison and has never been given any furlough from prison. Ayatollah Boroujerdi advocates the separation of religion from the political basis of the Iranian state. He was arrested at his home in Tehran on October 8, 2006, along with more than 300 of his followers. He and some of his followers were initially sentenced to death after an unfair trial in Branch 3 of the Special Court for the Clergy in June 2007, although his sentence was commuted in August 2007 to eleven years in prison. In addition to this, Ayatollah Boroujerdi was also defrocked (banned from wearing his clerical robes and thereby from practicing his clerical duties), and his house and all his belongings were confiscated. He had reportedly been found guilty of at least 30 charges, including "waging war against God" (*moharebeh*); acts against national security; publicly calling political leadership by the clergy (*velayat-e faqih*) unlawful; having links with anti-revolutionaries and spies; and using the term "religious dictatorship" instead of "Islamic Republic" in public discourse and radio interviews.

Ayatollah Boroujerdi has reportedly been tortured and otherwise ill-treated on numerous occasions since his arrest. He is said to have been beaten, thrown against a wall, and had cold water thrown on him when he was sleeping. He suffers from a heart condition, pulmonary issues, diabetes, severe problems with his eyes including untreated cataracts, and kidney stones. His legs are swollen which makes it very difficult for him to walk. His hands also shake as a result of his Parkinson's disease. While in detention, he has not been receiving necessary medical treatment and has lost a considerable amount of weight. He was reportedly attacked and beaten in prison on 17 November 2013, perhaps as a result of letters he wrote that have been published on various web sites.

#### Take Action:

Head of the Judiciary  
Ayatollah Sadegh Larijani  
c/o Public relations Office  
Number 4, 2 Azizi Street  
Vali Asr Ave., above Pasteur Street intersection  
Tehran, ISLAMIC REPUBLIC OF IRAN  
Email: bia.judi@yahoo.com  
Salutation: Your Excellency

I am writing to you to express my concern over the situation of two prisoners of conscience, Hossein Ronaghi Maleki and Hossein Kazemeyni Boroujerdi, who are seriously ill and in urgent need of proper medical care, which they are not receiving in prison.

Blogger Hossein Ronaghi Maleki is serving a 15-year prison sentence imposed after an unfair trial in 2010 on charges including "membership of the [illegal] internet group 'Iran Proxy,'" "spreading propaganda against the system" and "insulting the Leader and the President," apparently in connection with articles he posted on his blog, *14 Tir*. He had one kidney removed already and needs specialized treatment for a severe infection of his remaining kidney.

Ayatollah Hossein Kazemeyni Boroujerdi has been in prison since his arrest in October 2006 and has not received a single medical furlough. He is serving an 11-year sentence for having peacefully expressed his opinion about the separation of religion from the political basis of the Iranian state. He has been subjected to brutal mistreatment in detention and suffers from a variety of ailments including a heart condition, pulmonary issues, diabetes, severe problems with his eyes including untreated cataracts, drastic weight loss and kidney stones. His legs are swollen which makes it very difficult for him to walk. His hands also shake as a result of his Parkinson's disease.

The failure to provide adequate medical care to vulnerable prisoners is a breach of international human rights standards, including the prohibition against torture and other ill-treatment under the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, to which Iran is a party. The UN Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners also states that prisoners who require specialist treatment must be transferred to specialist institutions or civil hospitals. Equipment and pharmaceutical supplies in prison medical facilities are required to be proper for the medical care and treatment of sick prisoners. Iran's own prison regulations require that prisoners who are suffering from serious medical conditions that cannot be treated inside prison, or whose conditions will worsen if they stay in prison, be granted medical leave in order to receive treatment.

I urge you to ensure that Hossein Ronaghi Maleki and Hossein Kazemeyni Boroujerdi are treated humanely in prison, and that they be granted medical furloughs to receive appropriate medical treatment, if such treatment cannot be provided to them while they are in prison. Furthermore, both are prisoners of conscience and I also urge that they be immediately and unconditionally released from prison and that their sentences be overturned.

Thank you for your attention to this matter.



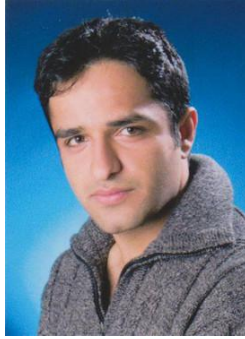
### **Activism on behalf of Omid Kokabee**

Very often people ask me, "what can just one person do—can I really make any difference?" Well, in order to answer that question, I will just point out Ellen Hutchison, a young undergraduate physics major at the University of Texas at Austin. She befriended Omid Kokabee during his brief time there, doing graduate work in his specialty of laser optics, before he was unexpectedly arrested in Iran in January 2011 during a visit to his family. Ellen was inspired by listening to Dr. Kamiar and Dr. Arash Alaei speak at an event on Omid's behalf at UT Austin in November 2012 and has been working tirelessly since then to secure his release from prison. Ellen and her colleagues created a video which can be seen at: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JK8N9FfzyYc>, and which is now also available in Persian



She also prepared letters to Iranian and International officials deploring the violations of due process in his case, that can be viewed on the web site of the Committee of Concerned Scientists: <http://concernedscientists.org/2013/08/new-appeal-for-omid-kokabee-details-specific-human-rights-law-violations/> as well as a petition for change.org: <http://www.change.org/petitions/university-of-texas-at-austin-allow-physics-department-to-make-an-official-statement-on-omid-kokabee>. Among the other actions she was involved in was a dramatic balloon release held in Austin in October 2013. Ellen's dedication and enterprising spirit are a great inspiration to me as it demonstrates that one person's efforts can make a huge difference.





Your Excellency:

We urge you to order the immediate and unconditional release of prisoner of conscience Zia Nabavi, a chemical engineering student at Noshirvani University of Technology in Babol, a member of the Central Council of the Islamic Association of the university and of the organization called the Council to Defend the Right to Education to defend the rights of students who were banned from higher education for ideological reasons. He is serving a ten year prison sentence (reduced from fifteen years) for “gathering and colluding against national security”; “spreading propaganda against the system”; “disturbing public order”; as well as “moharebeh” (enmity against God) for his alleged links to and cooperation with the People’s Mojahedin Organization of Iran (PMOI), a banned political group.

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Supreme 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





Your Excellency:

We urge you to order the immediate and unconditional release of prisoner of conscience Bahareh Hedayat, an activist with the women's rights organization The Campaign for Equality and a member of the Central Committee of the Office for the Consolidation of Unity, a national student body which has been active in calling for political reform and opposing human rights violations in recent years. She is currently serving a ten-year prison sentence in Evin Prison and has suffered a number of health problems due to the harsh conditions.

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