

# URGENT ACTION

## IRANIAN TRADE UNIONIST ON HUNGER STRIKE

**Iranian trade unionist Esmail Abdi started a hunger strike on 24 April, to protest against the treatment of teachers and workers in Iran, on the one hand, and the denial of his requests for prison leave, on the other. Esmail Abdi is a prisoner of conscience serving a six-year sentence in Tehran's Evin prison for his peaceful trade union activities.**

Mathematics teacher Esmail Abdi, who is a member of the board of directors of the Teachers' Trade Association of Tehran, announced his intention to begin a hunger strike on 17 April in an open letter on 11 April. Esmail Abdi delayed the start of his hunger strike by a week after officials from the prosecutor's office promised to address his concerns. His wife said that, when the officials failed to do so, he began his hunger strike on 24 April.

In his letter, Esmail Abdi criticized the inequitable distribution of wealth and access to education in the country, poor wages below the poverty line for those working in education, and the continued cuts to the country's education budget. He also expressed concern that some trade unionists are facing national security charges and that some entities of the establishment have put "pressure on the judicial system to issue indictments and verdicts, reject requests for judicial review before the Supreme Court, deny requests for conditional leave, even intervening in the granting of prison leave to prisoners". Finally, he demanded that his requests for prison leave be granted.

Esmail Abdi was first arrested by Revolutionary Guards officials on 27 June 2015 and held for 40 days in solitary confinement. In February 2016, he was sentenced to six years in prison after an unfair trial before Branch 15 of the Revolutionary Court in Tehran, which convicted him of "spreading propaganda against the system" and "gathering and colluding to commit crimes against national security" for his peaceful trade union activities. He was released on bail on 14 May 2016 following a two-week hunger strike. In October 2016, Esmail Abdi's sentence was upheld on appeal and he began serving it after being arrested on 9 November 2016. He has made two requests for his case to be subjected to judicial review, but the Supreme Court rejected both, in February and October 2017 respectively.

### 1) TAKE ACTION

**Write a letter, send an email, call, fax or tweet:**

- Calling on the Iranian authorities to release Esmail Abdi immediately and unconditionally, as he is a prisoner of conscience held solely for his peaceful trade union activities, and ensure, in the meantime, that he has access to a qualified health professional who can provide health care in compliance with medical ethics;
- Calling on them end the misuse of the criminal justice system against those who peacefully exercise their rights to freedom of expression and association;
- Calling on them to respect and protect the right of everyone to form and join the trade union of their choice, which is guaranteed under the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), both of which Iran has ratified.

**Contact these two officials by 6 June, 2018:**

Head of the Judiciary  
Ayatollah Sadeghi Larijani  
c/o Public Relations Office  
Number 4, Dead end of 1 Azizi  
Above Pasteur Intersection  
Vali Asr Street, Tehran, Iran  
**Salutation: Your Excellency**

H.E. Gholamali Khoshroo, Permanent Representative  
of the Islamic Republic of Iran to the United Nations  
622 Third Avenue, 34th Floor  
New York, NY 10017  
Phone: (212) 687-2020 | Fax: (212) 867-7086  
Email: iran@un.int  
**Salutation: Dear Excellency**

### 2) LET US KNOW YOU TOOK ACTION

[Click here](#) to let us know if you took action on this case! *This is Urgent Action 171.15*

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### ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

In an open letter published on 11 April 2018, Esmail Abdi wrote: "I hereby declare my solidarity with all the teachers and workers of the world, and as a teacher and board member of the Teachers' Trade Association of Tehran... I warn about the ominous consequences of the unlawful and arbitrary practices of the judiciary". The full text of Esmail Abdi's letter is available at the following link:

<https://www.workers-iran.org/imprisoned-iranian-teacher-email-abdi-to-begin-hunger-strike-as-of-april-17-2018/>.

Esmail Abdi was arrested on 27 June 2015 after he went to the prosecutor's office in Evin prison to inquire about the travel ban imposed on him. He had been prevented from travelling to Armenia to apply for a visa to attend the 7th Education International World Congress in Canada in July 2015. Before his arrest, intelligence officials had repeatedly summoned Esmail Abdi for interrogation. During these interrogations, intelligence officials warned him against associating with international organizations such as Education International, a global teacher's union, and said his participation in international gatherings was a "red line". His sentence of six years in prison for "spreading propaganda against the system" and "gathering and colluding to commit crimes against national security" was imposed for his peaceful trade union activities, including associating with Education International and organizing peaceful demonstrations by teachers outside parliament in April 2015 to protest against poor wages, the inadequate education budget and imprisonment of teacher trade unionists.

For their legitimate trade union activities, workers' rights defenders have been sacked without justification or forced into early retirement; subjected to reprisals for peacefully protesting to claim unpaid wages; arbitrarily arrested and detained; and sentenced to long prison terms on spurious national security offences. Mahmoud Beheshti Langroodi, spokesperson of the Teachers' Trade Association of Tehran, is another teacher serving a prison sentence in Iran for his trade unionist activities. Trade unionists are protected under the UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders, which highlights the obligation on states to respect the right to defend human rights, which includes trade union rights, and protect human rights defenders from harassment, arbitrary arrest and detention, torture and other ill-treatment.

Amnesty International's research consistently shows that Iran's judiciary lacks independence and remains particularly susceptible to pressure from security and intelligence forces to convict human rights defenders and other dissidents and impose harsh sentences. The lack of independence in the country's criminal justice system also allows intelligence and security officials to exercise unlawful influence and power over decision-making processes concerning prisoners' access to adequate medical care, prison leave and conditional release. Intelligence and security officials also regularly target prisoners for reprisal when they speak out against human rights abuses from behind bars.

The International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), both of which Iran has ratified, impose an obligation on the Iranian authorities to respect and protect the rights to freedom of expression, association and peaceful assembly, as well as the right to form and join trade unions of one's choice. Although the Teachers' Trade Association of Tehran has legal registration, Iran broadly bars the formation of independent trade unions. (For more information, see [Caught in a web of state repression: Iran's human rights defenders under attack](#).) 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".

Name: Esmail Abdi  
Gender m/f: m

Further information on UA: 171/15 Index: MDE 18/8278/2018 Issue Date: 25 April 2018