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The Problem of Southern Azerbaijan

No.: 504/2008
Date: 11 August 2008

The Office of High Commissioner for Human Rights, Geneva,

Please circulate this Communication to the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on human rights defenders, also this is of interest to:

- Special Rapporteur on the independence of judges and lawyers
- The Working Group on Arbitrary Detention
- Special Rapporteur on the Promotion and Protection of the Right to Freedom of Opinion and Expression
- Special Rapporteur on contemporary forms of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance
- The Independent Expert on Minority Issues

CC Mr. Dyke and Mrs. Harrison, Amnesty International, London
Also: Human Rights Watch and Human Rights Server

Mr. İlqar Merendli



Dear sir/madam

UPDATE 1: ARBITRARY SENTENCE AGAINST MR. İLQAR MERENDLI

Further to our Communication (Ref: 471/2007; Date: 9 December 2007), please find enclosed Update 1 to safeguard human rights of Mr. İlqar Merendli (his official name is Yaqub Saliki-niya), a prominent Southern Azerbaijani human rights defender, who was persecuted earlier by the Iranian authorities.

Mr. Merendli was detained on 31 October 2007 but without known charges, although he is a well-known Southern Azerbaijani human rights defender and a prolific writer. He was released on 19 December 2007 on bail for a surety of 80 million Tumen (approximately \$80,000). He was tried in a closed court on 11 May 2008 in Branch 115 of the Revolutionary Court, Tehran, and the sentence was passed on 10 June 2008 (<http://haqqimiz1.blogfa.com/post-22.aspx>, please see also Table 1) comprising an arbitrary punitive sentence of one year for the charge of “publicity against the Islamic Republic.” The sentence was suspended for five years, effectively gagging him for an unintelligible charge.

We would like to stress that the compilation and submission of this Update is due to our initiative and we have not consulted with Mr. Merendli, his family members or anyone representing their interests. We have to state this to manage reprisal risks against the victims by the Iranian authorities.

Once again we appeal to your kind attention to this case, requesting your campaign against the gagging order of Iranian authorities against Southern Azerbaijani activists and Mr. Mərəndli. We hope you will make a strong representation to the Iranian authorities against their futile attempt to undermine national and human rights of the nation of Azerbaijan in Southern Azerbaijan. Thank you in advance for your care.

Yours faithfully,

Eli Tashkent

The Committee for the Defence of the Rights of World Azerbaijanis



**Table 1 The Statement by Reporters without Border on the Arbitrary Sentences Passed
Against Mr. Merendli : http://www.rsf.org/article.php3?id_article=27446**

11 June 2008

Two journalists get suspended jail terms for “publicity” against the government

Reporters Without Borders condemns the suspended prison sentences that have been passed on journalists Said Matinpour and Yaghoub Salaki Nia in separate cases. Matinpour’s jail term was eight years. Nia’s was one year. In each case, the sentences were handed down in closed door hearings without their lawyers being present. They both plan to appeal.

At the same time, the organisation welcomes the news that Masoud Rafai Taleghani of the daily Farhangh Ashati was released at the end of May after being imprisoned arbitrarily for more than a month. The grounds for his arrest were never revealed. His release brings the number of journalists imprisoned in Iran to seven.

“As is customary in Iran, the authorities prosecute and sentence journalists with a complete lack of transparency,” Reporters Without Borders said. “The lawyers were not given the details of the charges against their clients. It is also worrying to see that trials involving journalists are being held behind closed doors with increasing frequency.”

Matinpour, who reports for Yarpagh, an Azeri-language weekly based in Tehran, was given his eight-year suspended sentence by a Tehran revolutionary court today for “maintaining relations with foreigners” and “publicity against the Islamic Republic.” He was arrested at his home in the northwestern city of Zanzan on 28 May 2007 and was held in pre-trial detention for nearly eight months until his family was able to pay the exorbitant sum of 500 million toumen (500,000 euros) demanded as bail.

Nia, a freelancer, got his one-year suspended sentence from the same court for “publicity against the Islamic Republic.” He spent 50 days in Tehran’s Evin prison at the end of last year, until his release on 19 December on payment of 80 million toumen (80,000 euros) in bail.

Note: Mr. Merendli’s official name is Yaqub Saliki-niya but the transcription of his name from Farsi into English may be given as in this article: Yaghoub Salaki Nia