

PUBLIC

AI Index: MDE 13/105/2007

23 August 2007

UA 220/07 **Prisoner of Conscience/Fear of torture or ill-treatment/Medical concern**

IRAN **Saleh Kamrani (m), aged about 35, lawyer and human rights defender**

Human rights defender Saleh Kamrani was arrested on 18 August, and is held in Section 209 of Evin Prison in Tehran, run by the Ministry of Intelligence. He is at risk of torture or ill-treatment. He needs regular medication for a heart condition.

Amnesty International believes that he is a prisoner of conscience, detained solely in connection with his legitimate activities as a lawyer and for the peaceful exercise of his internationally recognized rights to freedom of expression and association in support of greater rights for the Iranian Azerbaijani community.

He was arrested at a family wedding in the city of Karaj, near Tehran. Four men in plain clothes took him away from the wedding to the house where he was staying, where they confiscated his computer, documents, family photographs and his wife's camera, as well as documents and photographs belonging to the owner of the house.

His family did not know what had happened until 21 August, when he was allowed a brief phone call in which he told his wife that he was in Section 209. He was apparently not allowed to speak in his native language, Azerbaijani Turkic, so could not speak to his mother, who does not understand Persian. He apparently said he did not know why he had been arrested, but believed it might have been connected to his arrest in 2006, when he was detained for three months because of his work representing Iranian Azerbaijanis and others, and for the peaceful exercise of his internationally recognized rights to freedom of expression and association in support of greater rights for the Iranian Azerbaijani community.

He had been arrested on 14 June 2006 on the way home from work. His family only found out on 18 June that he was being held in Section 209 of Evin Prison. He spent 97 days in solitary confinement and was subjected to psychological torture, including threats that his wife would be arrested. He was questioned about all aspects of his life and was threatened. The evidence against him reportedly included speeches, interviews and correspondence from the previous 15 years, recorded telephone conversations, SMS messages, statements from his brothers which had been extracted under torture and even included a picture of Saleh Kamrani wearing a tie, regarded by the authorities as a sign of western influence. He was accused of contacting human rights organisations such as Amnesty International, and having contact with foreigners, including Israelis. He was not allowed to take the medication he needs to control his heart rate because of a defective heart valve, and his condition reportedly worsened as a result. (See UA 171/06, MDE 13/067/2006 and follow-ups.) On 18 September 2006 he was sentenced to one year's imprisonment, suspended for five years, for "spreading propaganda against the system". He was released, but the authorities retained his lawyer's card, without which he could not return to work as a lawyer.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Iranian Azerbaijanis, who are mainly Shi'a Muslims, are the largest minority in Iran, constituting at least 25-30 per cent of the population. They live mainly in the north and north-west of Iran. There is a growing demand for greater cultural and linguistic rights among Iranian Azerbaijanis, including the right to education in their mother tongue of Azerbaijani Turkic. A small minority advocate secession of Iranian Azerbaijan from the Islamic Republic of Iran and union with the Republic of Azerbaijan. Those who seek to promote Iranian Azerbaijani cultural identity are viewed with suspicion by the Iranian authorities, who often accuse them of vague charges such as "promoting pan-Turkism".

In May 2006, massive demonstrations took place in towns and cities in north-western Iran, where the majority of the population is Iranian Azerbaijani, in protest at a cartoon published on 12 May by the state-owned daily newspaper *Iran*, which many Iranian Azerbaijanis found offensive. Hundreds were arrested during and after the demonstrations. Other waves of arrests have occurred around dates significant to the Azerbaijani community, such as a boycott of the start of the academic year in September 2006, after demonstrations in February 2007 on the occasion of International Mother Tongue day, and on the anniversary of the May 2006 demonstrations.

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send appeals to arrive as quickly as possible, in Persian, Arabic, English, French or your own language:

- expressing concern that Saleh Kamrani was detained on 18 August, and calling on the authorities to release him immediately and unconditionally, as he is a prisoner of conscience, held solely for his peaceful activities on behalf of the Iranian Azerbaijani community;
- asking why he was arrested, including any charges brought against him;
- urging the authorities to protect him from torture or ill-treatment;
- urging them to give him immediate and regular access to his family and a lawyer of his choice, and to all necessary medical treatment.

APPEALS TO:

Leader of the Islamic Republic

His Excellency Ayatollah Sayed 'Ali Khamenei, The Office of the Supreme Leader
Islamic Republic Street - Shahid Keshvar Doust Street, Tehran, Islamic Republic of Iran

Email: info@leader.ir

Salutation: Your Excellency

Minister of Intelligence

Gholam Hossein Mohseni Ejeie

Ministry of Intelligence, Second Negarestan Street, Pasdaran Avenue, Tehran, Islamic Republic of Iran

Salutation: Your Excellency

Head of the Judiciary

Ayatollah Mahmoud Hashemi Shahroudi

Ministry of Justice, Ministry of Justice Building, Panzdah-Khordad Square, Tehran, Islamic Republic of Iran

Fax: +98 21 3390 4986 (please keep trying)

Email: info@dadgostary-tehran.ir (In the subject line write: **FAO Ayatollah Shahroudi**)

Salutation: Your Excellency

COPIES TO:

President

His Excellency Mahmoud Ahmadinejad

The Presidency, Palestine Avenue, Azerbaijan Intersection, Tehran, Islamic Republic of Iran

Email: dr-ahmadinejad@president.ir

via website: www.president.ir/email

Salutation: Your Excellency

Speaker of Parliament

His Excellency Gholamali Haddad Adel

Majles-e Shoura-ye Eslami, Baharestan Square, Tehran, Islamic Republic of Iran

Fax: +98 21 3355 6408

Email: hadadadel@majlis.ir

and to diplomatic representatives of Iran accredited to your country.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY. Check with the International Secretariat, or your section office, if sending appeals after 4 October 2007.