

PUBLIC

AI Index: MDE 13/030/2009
08 April 2009

UA 95/09

Prisoners of conscience/ Medical concern

IRAN

Maryam Rostampour (f), aged 27

] Iranian Christians

Marzieh Amirizadeh Esmaeilabad (f), aged 30]

Two members of the Christian community in Iran, Maryam Rostampour and Marzieh Amirizadeh Esmaeilabad were arrested on 5 March 2009 by members of the security forces in Tehran. In a telephone call on 28 March Marzieh Amirizadeh Esmaeilabad said that they are both suffering from an infection and high fever and have not received adequate medical attention. They remain detained without charge at Evin Prison in a overcrowded cell with 27 other women. Maryam Rostampour and Marzieh Amirizadeh Esmaeilabad may be prisoners of conscience, detained solely on account of their religious beliefs. Amnesty International is concerned for the women's health.

Maryam Rostampour and Marzieh Amirizadeh Esmaeilabad have been participating in religious gatherings and handing out Bibles. On 5 March, one of the two women was summoned to appear at the office of the Ministry of Intelligence from where she was taken to the apartment they both shared. They were then both arrested on 5 March by members of the security forces and their personal belongings, computers, books, including Bibles, were confiscated from their home. Maryam Rostampour and Marzieh Amirizadeh Esmaeilabad were interrogated and held in several police stations before appearing before Branch 2 of the Revolutionary Court in Tehran on 18 March. They were then taken to Evin Prison where they have remained since.

Maryam Rostampour and Marzieh Amirizadeh Esmaeilabad have not been afforded a lawyer. However they have been allowed to receive family visits once a week and to make a one-minute daily telephone call. The women's families were told that they would be released on a US\$ 400,000 bail and that they are accused of "acting against state security" and "taking part in illegal gatherings". The families presented the title deeds of their homes. This however, has not yet been accepted by the judge handling the cases.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Although Christianity is a recognized religion in Iran, evangelical Christians, some of whom have converted from Islam, often face harassment by the authorities. Converts from Islam can risk arrest, attack or the death penalty. Conversion from Islam (apostasy) is considered as forbidden under Islamic Law, which requires apostates to be put to death if they refuse to reconvert to Islam. There is no specific provision in the Iranian Penal Code for apostasy, but judges are required to use their knowledge of Islamic Law to rule on cases where no specific legislation exists in the Penal Code.

A new version of the Iranian Penal Code is currently under consideration by the *Majles* (Parliament) and prescribes the death penalty for those considered to be apostates.

Article 23 of the Iranian Constitution states: "The investigation of individuals' beliefs is forbidden, and no one may be molested or taken to task simply for holding a certain belief." Article 18 (1) of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), to which Iran is a state party, states: "Everyone shall have the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion. This right shall include freedom to have or to adopt a religion or belief of his choice, and freedom, either individually or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in worship, observance, practice and teaching."

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

- calling on the authorities to release Maryam Rostampour and Marzieh Amirizadeh Esmailabad immediately and unconditionally, if they have been arrested solely on account of their religious beliefs, or to promptly charge them with a recognizably criminal offence and try them in fair proceedings;
- calling for them to be granted immediate and unconditional access to a lawyer; and any medical treatment they require;
- urging the Iranian authorities to ensure that they are not being tortured or ill-treated while in detention.

APPEALS TO:

Head of the Judiciary

Ayatollah Mahmoud Hashemi Shahroudi

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

Salutation: Your Excellency

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

Email: info_leader@leader.ir

via website: <http://www.leader.ir/langs/en/index.php?p=letter> (English)

<http://www.leader.ir/langs/fa/index.php?p=letter>(Persian)

Salutation: Your Excellency

COPIES TO:

Director, Human Rights Headquarters of Iran

Mohammad Javad 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, Iran

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

Email: info@dadgostary-tehran.ir (In the subject line write: FAO Javad Larijani)

Salutation: Dear Mr Larijani

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 20 May.