

PUBLIC

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UA 77/09 Possible prisoner of conscience

IRAN Roxana Saberi (f), aged 31, journalist, joint US-Iranian national

Journalist Roxana Saberi, who is a dual US-Iranian national, was arrested on 31 January. She is currently detained in Tehran's Evin Prison. Amnesty International is concerned that she may be a prisoner of conscience, detained solely for the peaceful exercise of her right to freedom of expression in the course of her work as a journalist.

It is not clear why she has been detained: her family said in late February that she had told them over the phone apparently with prison officers listening, that she had been arrested for buying a bottle of wine. Consumption of wine, which is available in Iran, is punishable under article 174 of the country's Penal Code. However, Iranian officials later said that she had been arrested for "illegally gathering news" and that her case was being dealt with by a Revolutionary Court, Revolutionary courts normally deal with cases relating to national security. Amnesty International fears that these justifications are politically motivated and that the reason for her arrest may be in connection with her US nationality

Roxana Saberi, who was born in the USA to an Iranian-born father and Japanese-born mother, has reported for US-based National Public Radio (NPR), which produces news and cultural programming, the BBC and Fox News. She has been living in Iran for six years, working as a journalist and pursuing in Iran a master's degree in Iranian studies and international relations.

Since her arrest, Roxana Saberi has been able to telephone her family in the US at least twice (on 10 February and 9 March), saying that she was not being physically tortured, but was finding the experience of being in prison very difficult; she told her family not to give interviews about her case. She has been able to meet her lawyer twice, on 8 and 9 March. After the first visit, her lawyer said that he had not yet been given a proper explanation about her arrest and could therefore not comment on why she had been detained,

On 2 March the Foreign Ministry spokesman said that she had been arrested for "illegally gathering news" as her press credentials had been revoked in 2006 by the Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance, which provides accreditation to journalists working with foreign media. The following day, the Judiciary spokesman said he did not know what Roxana Saberi was accused of, but announced that a Revolutionary Court had decided she should be detained. Tehran's Deputy Prosecutor said on 6 March that Roxana Saberi would be released within a few days, but this has not happened.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Following the election of President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad in 2005, Iranian intelligence agencies have increased pressure on journalists, academics, human rights defenders and others perceived as having links with foreign countries or having been involved in initiatives to build Iran's civil society. Those with links to the USA have been particularly targeted as the Iranian authorities have frequently accused the US of attempting to foment a "soft overthrow" of the Iranian government. On 19 January 2009, an Intelligence Ministry official, commenting on the case of two detained doctors (see UA 216/08, MDE 13/108/2008, 6 August 2008, and follow ups), said that Iran had discovered and dismantled a "soft overthrow" project against the government.

Iran is a state party to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and as such must uphold Article 19 which guarantees the right to freedom of expression and includes the freedom to seek, receive and impart information and ideas of all kinds, regardless of frontiers, either orally, in writing or in print.

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

- asking for the reasons of Roxana Saberi's arrest, including any charges brought against her;
- calling on the authorities to release Roxana Saberi, unless she is to be charged with a recognizably criminal offence and brought promptly to trial in proceedings that meet international standards for fair trial;
- urging the authorities to ensure that while she is in custody she has immediate and regular access to her family and her lawyer;
- calling on the authorities to ensure that she is not tortured or otherwise ill-treated, and to allow her any medical treatment she may require.

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:

President

His Excellency Mahmoud Ahmadinejad

The Presidency

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

Fax: + 98 21 6 649 5880

Email: **via website:** <http://www.president.ir/email/>

Director, Human Rights Headquarters of Iran

His Excellency 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, Islamic Republic of Iran

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

Email: int_aff@judiciary.ir (In the subject line: **FAO Mohammad Javad 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 27 April 2009.