

PUBLIC

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UA 110/07 Prisoner of conscience

IRAN Dr Haleh Esfandiari (f), aged 67, academic, joint US-Iranian national

US-based academic Haleh Esfandiari was detained on 8 May after being summoned for questioning by Ministry of Intelligence officials. She is believed to be held without charge in Evin Prison's Section 209, which is run by the Ministry of Intelligence. On 12 May the newspaper *Kayhan* accused her of spying for the US and Israel and of trying to incite a democratic revolution in the country. Amnesty International considers her a prisoner of conscience, detained solely for her peaceful activities, including her academic work. Amnesty International fears that she is at risk of torture or ill-treatment, including a prolonged period of solitary confinement, in order to place pressure on her to "confess" to the allegations against her.

Haleh Esfandiari is the Head of the Middle East Program at the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars in the US capital, Washington DC, and is a well-known advocate of dialogue between the US and Iranian governments, which broke off diplomatic relations in 1980. She had travelled to Iran in December to visit her elderly mother. On 30 December, while on her way to the airport to return to the USA, her taxi was stopped by armed, masked men, who took both her passports and her belongings. Since then, her repeated requests for a new passport have not been answered, and she has been summoned for lengthy interrogation sessions totalling over 50 hours. She has not yet been permitted any family visits, although she has been permitted to telephone her mother.

A statement by the Woodrow Wilson Center (which may be read at http://www.wilsoncenter.org/index.cfm?fuseaction=news.item&news_id=236704) alleges that during the interrogation sessions before her arrest, which ended on 14 February, the questioning focused almost entirely on the activities and programs of the Middle East Program at the Wilson Center, and that, during the interrogation, Haleh Esfandiari was repeatedly "pressured to make a false confession or to falsely implicate the Wilson Center in activities in which it had no part".

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

In recent months the Iranian authorities have increased pressure on journalists, academics and others perceived as having links with foreign countries. Journalist Ali Farabakhsh was convicted of espionage and "receiving money from foreigners", and is now serving a three-year sentence. He was arrested on 27 November 2006, when he returned from a conference in the Thai capital, Bangkok, on government and the media, organised by Thai NGOs. (See UA 40/07, 16 February 2007, MDE 13/018/2007.)

An academic with joint Iranian and Canadian citizenship, Ramin Jahanbegloo, spent four months in Section 209 of Evin Prison in 2006. Following his release in August, he gave an interview in which he stated that in the course of his academic work, he "had acted against national security, but with the proviso that [he] did not know that what [he] was doing was acting against national security".

Parnaz Azima, an Iranian journalist with Radio Farda, the Persian-language service run jointly by Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty and Voice of America, had her passport confiscated in January 2007 and has since been unable to leave Iran.

People held in Section 209 often spend prolonged periods in solitary confinement, described by Iranians as "white torture". Some of those who have experienced it have described it as being far worse than physical abuse.

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 Haleh Esfandiari immediately and unconditionally, as she is held solely for her peaceful activities, including her academic work;
- urging the authorities to ensure that while she is in custody she has unconditional access to her family and a lawyer of her choice;
- asking for a detailed account of the reasons for her arrest, including any charges brought against her;
- calling on the authorities to ensure that she is not tortured or ill-treated, and to allow her immediate access to any medical treatment she may require;
- reminding the authorities that Iran is a state party to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, and that under Article 14 (g), everyone has the right not to be compelled to testify against him or herself or to confess guilt.

APPEALS TO:

Leader of the Islamic Republic

His Excellency Ayatollah Sayed 'Ali Khamenei, The Office of the Supreme Leader
Shoahada Street, Qom, Islamic Republic of Iran

Email: info@leader.ir
istiftaa@wilayah.org

Fax: +98 251 7774 2228 (mark FAO Office of His Excellency Ayatollah al Udhma Khamenei)

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

Minister of Intelligence

Gholam Hossein Mohseni Ejeie

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

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

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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 25 June 2007.