

Urgent Action

In Focus

An insight into the stories behind UAs

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GLOBAL DAY OF ACTION FOR IRANIAN TRADE UNIONISTS MAHMOUD SALEHI AND MANSOUR OSSANLU

"When I was in prison and heard of all the support my spirits rose. In this struggle it is very valuable to get so much support from so many thousands of miles away." - Mansour Ossanlu speaking to AIUK activists shortly before his arrest in July 2007

[PHOTO]

Demonstration at the Iranian Embassy, London. 9 August 2007

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On 9 August 2007, Amnesty International (AI) joined the International Trade Union Confederation and the International Transport Workers' Federation in support of the International Day of Action for prisoners of conscience Mansour Ossanlu and Mahmoud Salehi.

Mansour Ossanlu and Mahmoud Salehi have both been detained on vaguely worded charges in order to halt their efforts to build strong trade unions capable of defending the human rights of workers against the discriminatory laws and practices that curtail workers' rights in Iran.

Protest pickets, demonstrations and delegations to Iranian embassies took place in 24 cities around the world, from Melbourne to Kathmandu, from Paris to Mumbai and from Cairo to Washington D.C. to call for an immediate end to their detention.

In London, demonstrators, including activists from AI-UK, learned that five executive committee members of Mansour Ossanlu's union had been detained while taking part in the Day of Action event in Tehran, Iran. Shane Enright, Trade Unions Campaign Manager for AIUK said, "The situation for trade unionists and human rights defenders is clearly critical in Iran, but the collaboration between Amnesty International and the global unions bodes well for our shared efforts to free Ossanlu and Salehi."

[PHOTO]

Trade Union and Amnesty activists protesting outside the Iranian embassy on the Global Action ©AI

Mansour Ossanlu, head of the Union of Workers of the Tehran and Suburbs Bus Company (*Sherkat-e Vahed*), had already spent a total of nine months in detention between December 2005 and December 2006 for his trade union activities and was facing trial. On 10 July 2007 at around 7pm, he was reportedly pushed into a car by men in plain clothes who beat him. On 12 July it was reported that he was being held in Section 209 of Evin

Prison in Tehran. His health is known to be deteriorating and he has been refused treatment in prison.

He had travelled to Europe shortly before his arrest to build international support for an independent trade union movement in Iran. During a visit to AI-UK, he thanked AI and said that the appeals from AI members and trade union activists "made us know that we were not alone. When I was in prison and heard of all the support my spirits rose. In this struggle it is very valuable to get so much support from so many thousands of miles away. This campaigning has also disclosed the repression and made sure that the authorities know that they are being watched by the outside world."

Mahmoud Salehi, a spokesperson for the Organisational Committee to Establish Trade Unions and former head of the Saqez Bakers' Union, the first recognisably independent trade union in Iran, has been imprisoned since 9 April 2004. He was arrested along with six other trade union activists after a peaceful demonstration to celebrate May Day 2004. In November 2005 he was sentenced to five years' imprisonment and three years' internal exile in the city of Ghorveh, in the north-western province of Kordestan. Mahmoud Salehi's trade union activities, including a meeting with officials of the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU), were cited as evidence against him.

From his jail cell in Sanandaj Prison, Mahmoud Salehi issued a statement saying, "I have always seen myself as a part of the world's working class, a class that has always been engaged in a struggle for the achievement of its rights... I believe workers in Iran are in a delicate situation in which they are moving beyond lack of organisations to a new stage in which mass organisations are being formed. We have to be out during this stage. Our freedom gives this assurance to millions of workers that they can achieve their rights, including the right to organise and the independent celebration of international workers' day, without having to pay heavily for it."

Mahmoud Salehi has one kidney and frequently suffers from a serious related illness. In prison he has allegedly not been receiving the specialist medical treatment he needs. He has expressed his "deep gratitude towards all labour activists and friends who, given the harsh political and economic conditions in Iran, endured so much to launch a campaign in my defence and for the release of Mr. Osanloo."

Mansour Ossanlu is a member of Iran's Azerbaijani minority, and Mansour Ossanlu is a Kurd.

For more information about Mahmoud Salehi see UA 176/07, MDE 13/082/2007, 6 July 2007, and for information about Mansour Ossanlu see UA 08/06, MDE 13/002/2006, 9 January 2006.

The AI-UK website (www.amnesty.org.uk/tradeunions) also features an action for the men and Mahmoud Salehi's complete message.