

PUBLIC

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UA 229/07 Prisoner of conscience/fear of torture

IRAN Amir Abbas Banayi Kazimi (m), Azerbaijani language rights activist

Azerbaijani language rights activist Amir Abbas Banayi Kazimi was beaten and detained on 14 May at his home in Tabriz: he was reportedly first held at a Ministry of Intelligence detention centre, then moved on around 1 August to Tabriz's central prison, where his mother was able to visit him. She told an interviewer from the Voice of America (VOA) Azerbaijani-language radio station that he had been tortured. The following day he was apparently moved to a Ministry of Intelligence detention centre somewhere in Tabriz, where he is at grave risk of torture. He has not been formally charged with any offence.

On 4 August, his mother, Jamileh Kazimi, had told the VOA Azerbaijani-language service that her son had been detained for his defence of Iranian Azerbaijanis' right to use their language. She said that he had been tortured, causing his teeth to be broken, hair to be pulled from his scalp, and blue bruising marks all over his face and body.

His father, Rahim Banayi Kazimi, who has been able to visit him once, reportedly stated that his son had begun a hunger strike to draw attention to his plight, but it is not known whether he is continuing with it.

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 the country. They are increasingly demanding greater cultural and linguistic rights, 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, Azerbaijani Turkic, Turkish, Arabic, English, French or your own language:

- expressing concern at reports that Amir Abbas Banayi Kazimi has been detained since 14 May without access to legal representation of his choice or medical care, and has been tortured;
- urging the authorities to investigate his alleged torture and protect him from further torture or other ill-treatment;
- calling on the authorities to enable Amir Abbas Banayi Kazimi to seek independent medical care;
- asking why he was arrested, including details of any charges brought against him;
- urging the authorities to release Amir Abbas Banayi Kazimi unless he is to be charged with an internationally recognisable criminal offence;
- expressing concern that Amir Abbas Banayi Kazimi appears to be a prisoner of conscience, held solely for his defence of the right of the Azerbaijani people in Iran to use their own language.

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**

Parliamentary representative for Tabriz, Oskou and Azar Shahr

Akbar A'lami,

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

Fax: +98 21 3355 6408

Email: alami@majlis.ir

Salutation: **Dear Sir**

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**

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 12 October 2007.