

## [FIDH President calls for attention to the plight of Iranian prisoners of conscience](#)

### **Letter addressed to the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Zeid Ra'ad Al Hussein**

22 April 2016

Mr. High Commissioner,

I am writing to request your urgent attention to the plight of Iranian prisoners of conscience and political prisoners, and in particular prisoners who are denied proper medical treatment.

Before offering information on sick prisoners, I may recall briefly some of the relevant UN rules as well as prison rules in Iran.

Article 22 (2) of the Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners adopted by UN Economic and Social Council on 13 May 1977 provides: Sick prisoners who require specialist treatment must be transferred to specialised institutions or to civil hospitals.

Article 45 (3) of the same Rules: The transport of prisoners shall be carried out at the expense of the administration and equal conditions shall obtain for all of them.

And those provisions are based on Article 6 (1), which provides: The following rules shall be applied impartially. There shall be no discrimination on grounds of race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status.

The United Nations Basic Principles for the Treatment of Prisoners (1990) states that all "prisoners shall have access to the health services available in the country without discrimination on the grounds of their legal situation" (Paragraph 9).

The Body of Principles for the Protection of All Persons under Any Form of Detention or Imprisonment, adopted by the UN General Assembly in 1988, provides: "A proper medical examination shall be offered to a detained or imprisoned person as promptly as possible after his admission to the place of detention or imprisonment, and thereafter medical care and treatment shall be provided whenever necessary. This care and treatment shall be provided free of charge" (Principle 24).

The Rules of Procedure of Iran's Prisons Organisation provide for treatment of all prisoners both within and outside prisons: "The medical care and health requirements of the sick inmates must be provided for as much as possible within the institution or prison... In cases necessary, the prisoner shall be allowed to receive treatment outside with the prison's Health Section approval, permission of the prison governor and ratification of the observer judge" (Article 103).

It is appalling that the Islamic Republic of Iran authorities have consistently refused to observe the international obligations as expressed in the UN Rules and even their own regulations, in particular in respect of prisoners of conscience, to have access to proper and regular medical treatment. As you will note below, their failure to provide the sick political prisoners with adequate health and medical care even within the State's prisons and prison health facilities – in line with their systematic denial of many other rights of political prisoners – may amount to a systematic practice aiming at further intimidating civil society voices critical of the regime and possibly to the crime of 'torture, inhuman punishments and ill treatment.'

Indeed, the authorities punish prisoners of conscience twice: first by arbitrarily arresting and imprisoning them for their peaceful activities, then by creating unbearable conditions of detention, including deprivation from medical treatment for sick prisoners that aggravates further their bad health and physical conditions.

I regret to emphasise that the information below is by no means comprehensive. They are only a few of the many more sick prisoners of conscience in need of medical treatment.

## Death in custody

FIDH and other human rights groups have documented cases of nearly 50 mostly political prisoners who have lost their lives in prisons across Iran since 2003 under unusual conditions for various reasons, including: beating and subsequent failure to provide treatment, torture and lack of medical care.

In some cases, the authorities appear to have deliberately refused timely medical treatment, leading to death of prisoners (e.g. Messrs **Akbar Mohammadi** in 2006, **Hoda Saber** in 2011 and several others). In other cases, prisoners have died under torture, e.g. Mr. **Sattar Beheshti**, a blogger and worker, who died in police custody in 2012. The latest related case concerned the 51-year-old Mr. **Shahrokh Zamani** (a unionist), who died in highly dubious conditions in Rajai-Shahr prison in September 2015. Although the authorities indicated that they would undertake an investigation, to this date they have not published any information in this regard.

## Experience of the newly released prisoners

\* Mr. **Mohammad Seifzadeh**, human rights lawyer and a founding member of the Defenders of Human Rights Center (FIDH member organisation), who was released from prison on 10 March 2016 after serving five years for his peaceful human rights activities, has recalled that he was not taken to a doctor for some time when he suffered a stroke in prison. His hands and feet were numb and then he lost some of his eyesight and hearing. Much later, in March 2016, the Forensic Medicine Commission found that he had suffered several strokes while in prison. The Prosecutor's Office had been warned four times about the possibility of Mr. Seifzadeh's death in prison.

Furthermore, when Mr. Seifzadeh was hospitalised for breathing problems, he had to pay for all hospital expenses, because the prison or its Health Section would never pay it for a prisoner. Mr. Seifzadeh reaffirmed that all prisoners are in similar conditions and the authorities have not allocated any budget for hospital expenses of prisoners. If prisoners don't pay, they will stay in the queue for a long time and they may not stay alive. Additionally, every prisoner has to pay for the expenses of three prison officers who guard them.

\* Mr. **Alireza Rajaie**, a journalist and university professor, who was released on 4 October 2015 after serving more than four years for his peaceful activities, had been suffering from dental complications while in prison. After release, he has been diagnosed with jaw and facial cancer and is undergoing regular chemotherapy.

## Some of the more urgent cases

Ms. **Zeynab Jalalian**, a Kurdish political prisoner, who is serving a life-sentence, is fast losing her eyesight, reportedly as a result of injuries and severe torture during pre-trial detention.

Mr. **Hossein Ronaghi-Maleki**, blogger, lost one of his kidneys and suffers from insufficiency of the other kidney (both as a result of torture and ill-treatment during his long pre-trial detention). He also suffers from digestive problems, prolapsed disc, arthritis of the neck and knees. Since his arrest in the aftermath of the 2009 Presidential Election protests and subsequent trial for using his right to freedom of expression in his blog, he has been serving a 15-year prison sentence.

Ms. **Nargess Mohammadi**, spokesperson of Defenders of Human Rights Center (FIDH member organisation), suffers from muscular paralysis and lung complications. During a brief transfer to hospital in October 2015, she was chained to the hospital bed. Ms. Mohammadi was sentenced to 6 years imprisonment for her human rights activities and was arrested on 21 April 2012 to serve her sentence. However, the authorities released her on medical grounds on 31 July 2012, but they arrested her again on 5 May 2015 even though her diseases had not been cured. She has been facing new charges related to her peaceful human rights activities. The latest hearing against her was held on 20 April 2016.

Mr. **Issa Saharkhiz**, journalist, has probably a cancerous tumour in his adrenal glands. Mr. Saharkhiz was released from prison on 3 October 2013 after serving more than four years in prison on charges relating to his criticisms of the authorities and in particular of the Supreme Leader Ayatollah Khamenei. The authorities arrested him again on 2 November 2015. Since then, he has suffered concussions but remains in pre-trial detention.

Mr. **Afshin Sohrabzadeh**, a Kurdish political prisoner, suffers from cancer of intestine and respiratory

problem. He has been serving a 25-year prison sentence since 2010 for waging war against God (*moharebeh*) through his membership of a Kurdish opposition group. He was reportedly severely tortured during pre-trial detention.

### **Some other sick prisoners**

Mr. **Ahmad Daneshpour-Moghaddam**, a political prisoner, is suffering from ulcerative colitis. He has been on death row since 2009 on charge of contacts with an opposition group abroad.

Mr **Mohsen Daneshpour-Moghaddam**, a political prisoner, is suffering from heart ailment, knee arthritis, and possibly Alzheimer. He has been on death row since 2009 on charge of contacts with an opposition group abroad.

Mr. **Behnam Ebrahimzadeh**, a unionist, suffers from arthritis of the neck and has had internal bleeding, severe headaches, and kidney and intestinal complications. Mr. Ebrahimzadeh served a 5-year prison sentence for his peaceful union activities from 2010-2015. Before completing his sentence, the authorities brought new charges against him and sentenced him to a new prison term of 7 years and 10 months.

Ms. **Bahareh Hedayat**, a student and women's rights defender, could be deprived from the possibility to have children, by denial of the right to pursue treatment outside of prison. Ms. Hedayat, who has been in prison since 2009 for her peaceful activities, was due to be released in August 2015, but the authorities retained her in prison to serve a two-year prison sentence that had been suspended.

Mr. **Mohammad-Seddiq Kaboudvand**, president of Human Rights Organisation of Kurdistan, suffers from heart ailment, prostate and kidney problems, and high blood pressure. During his term in prison, he has suffered a heart attack and strokes. Mr. Kaboudvand has been serving a 10.5-year prison sentence since July 2007 for his human rights activities.

Mr. **Mohammad Hossein Kazemeyni-Borujerdi**, a religious leader, suffers from diabetes, asthma, Parkinson's disease, kidney and heart problems and loss of vision in one of his eyes. Since 2006, Mr. Kazemeyni-Borujerdi has been serving an 11-year prison sentence for his criticism of the Supreme Leader and the State's religious ideology.

Mr. **Omid Kokabee**, a distinguished young physicist, who has been serving a 10-year prison sentence since February 2011 for refusing to cooperate in the country's military research programmes, was recently diagnosed with 'Renal Cell Carcinoma'. He underwent an operation on 20 April 2016 and one of his kidneys was removed.

Mr. **Abdolfattah Soltani**, human rights lawyer and founding member of DHRC, suffers from digestive disease and heart ailment. Mr. Soltani has been serving a 13-year prison sentence (recently reduced to 10 years) since 2011.

**In conclusion**, I urge you to call upon the Iranian authorities to promptly guarantee all prisoners immediate access to appropriate and adequate medical treatment and health care in full compliance with international law, to immediately and unconditionally release all prisoners of conscience since they are arbitrarily detained, and to conform with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the ICCPR and all other international human rights instruments ratified by Iran.

All the best,

**Karim Lahidji**, FIDH President

CC. Dr **Ahmed Shaheed**, UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Iran

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FIDH is an international human rights NGO federating 178 organizations from close to 120 countries. Since 1922, FIDH has been defending all civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights as set out in the Universal Declaration for Human Rights. FIDH's headquarters are in Paris and the organization has offices in Abidjan, Bamako, Brussels, Conakry, Geneva, The Hague, New-York, Pretoria and Tunis.