



Monthly Report of Association for the Defense of Azerbaijani Political Prisoners in Iran – August 2009

The systematic violation of the ethnic and human rights of Azerbaijanis in Iran continued throughout August. Pressure on Azerbaijani student activists increased and some were denied access to higher education as a result of their activities in the Azerbaijani cultural and linguistic rights movement. Many Azerbaijanis were prevented from participating in cultural ceremonies, while those who did participate were arrested. Arbitrary arrests and detentions continued throughout the month. Many detainees were subjected to torture and other ill-treatment. In most cases, the cause for arrest and the location of the detainees were not given. The activists are usually prohibited from access to a lawyer and visits from their families. Authorities do not provide health care in prisons and prisoner requests to be treated outside the prisons are denied.

Azerbaijani journalist and human rights activist suffers from health problems in prison

Said Matinpour is an Azerbaijani activist and journalist serving an eight-year jail term in Evin Prison. Matinpour has serious health issues including digestive problems, stomach bleeding, backache, heart disease,

and severe headaches. Although health condition is rapidly deteriorating, he is prevented from seeing a doctor.



Said Matinpour

In May 2007, Said Matinpour was arrested in Zanjan. He was released on bail of 5 billion Rials (\$500,000) after 278 days of detention in solitary confinement. Matinpour was held in pre-trial detention by the Ministry of Intelligence (MOIS) in Evin Prison. He reported serious back problems and digestive difficulties after his release from prison as a result of both harsh treatment and unsanitary cell conditions. MOIS officers tortured Said Matinpour in order to obtain a video-recorded confession from him. He was not allowed access to a lawyer or visits from his family. Moreover, Iranian authorities detained his younger brother as a means to increase pressure on him.



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Matinpour's trial was not made public. He was charged with "connections to foreigners" and "propaganda against the regime" based on the confession obtained through torture. He was sentenced to eight years in prison. The appeal trial also issued the same verdict.

Atiye Taheri, Matinpour's wife, objects to the trial and has said, "If judiciary authorities had evidence against him, why should they try him based on confessions taken during interrogations involving psychological and physical torture? Instead they should have tried him based on the evidence."

According to Atiye Taheri, the condition of Matinpour's health is very poor. He is being held in a section of the prison reserved for common criminals, which moreover has deplorable sanitary conditions. She explains that the prison has no medical facilities and thus he cannot receive treatment inside the prison. He is in dire need of both adequate rest and physiotherapy.

Matinpour is a graduate of Philosophy from Tehran University. He was a writer for the journals *Yarpaq* and *Moj-e Bidari*. He has also been moderating a blog called

Haq (Right) in which he wrote about the ethnic discrimination policies of Iranian authorities toward Iranian Azerbaijanis. He has also written many articles about the Azerbaijani language and national rights.

Amnesty International, Reporters without Borders, Front Line and Association for the Defense of Journalist Rights released urgent action documents on his behalf. They described Matinpour as a prisoner of conscience and called for his unconditional release.

Detained Activists Suffer Long-Term Arbitrary Detentions

Security forces arrested Aydin Zakeri, an Azerbaijani cultural rights activist in Meshginshahr (Khiyav), on May 31, 2009. He is still in custody after three months of arbitrary detention in MOIS custody. He has not been tried or even charged with any crime. He is not allowed access to a lawyer. Local sources believe that he was arrested following the distribution of articles about Azerbaijani ethnic rights in Meshginshahr. However authorities have not informed his family of the reasons for his detention.



Monthly Report of Association for the Defense of Azerbaijani Political Prisoners in Iran – August 2009



Naghi Ahmadi Azer

Naghi Ahmadi Azer, Azerbaijani writer and historian, was arrested on April 4, 2009 by Tabriz security forces and is still being held after five months of arbitrary detention in Tabriz Prison. According to Ahmadi's family, the judge prevents them from visiting him, having succeeded in blocking their visits for over a month. Though authorities do not provide any reason for his detention, local sources believe he was arrested for his attendance at cultural events in the Republic of Azerbaijan.

Ahmadi was a writer for the weekly journal *Shams Tabriz*, which was shut down by the Iranian government. He is an author of Azerbaijani literature and history and has translated several books into Azerbaijani Turkish. He is a member of the "Iranian Writers Association" and is a

distinguished member of the "Azerbaijani Writers Association".



Hassan Abdollah (Umidoglu)

Tabriz intelligence officers arrested Azerbaijani writer and Azerbaijani Turkish teacher Hassan Abdollahi (Umidoglu) in his home on July 13, 2009. After two months of arbitrary detention, he is still being held in custody. It is believed that he will be charged with "establishing an illegal group against national security" by preparing and distributing CDs about Azerbaijani ethnic and language rights.

Azerbaijani student activist sent to prison

Pressure on Azerbaijani student activists has increased in recent years. Most of the student journals and associations which have advocated for broader rights for Iranian Azerbaijanis have been closed down. The majority of the well-known Azerbaijani activists in universities have been suspended for some semesters or have even been dismissed entirely from



Monthly Report of Association for the Defense of Azerbaijani Political Prisoners in Iran – August 2009

their universities. Some have been detained and charged with undefined crimes and sentenced to prison. Iranian authorities are now preventing Azerbaijani activists from gaining acceptance into graduate schools.

Majid Makuyi, an Azerbaijani student activist from Esfahan's Malek Ashftar University, has been sentenced to one year of imprisonment and two years of probation. He was arrested on August 18, 2009 and sent to Tabriz Prison to serve his jail term.



Majid Makuyi

During the summer of 2008, Tabriz Intelligence officers arrested Makuyi and seven other student activists from Tabriz University. He was detained for three months, during which time he was reportedly tortured. He was released on bail to be tried later.

On February 8, 2009, Makuyi was tried and charged with establishing a blog called

Azoh-Azerbaijan Student Movement; “participating in, establishing and managing an illegal group that is against national security;” and “propaganda against regime.” He was sentenced to one year of imprisonment and two years of probation. The appeal court also issued the same sentences in May 2009.

Prior to this, Student activists Faraz Zehtab, Aydin Khajeyi, and Ehsan Najafinasab were sentenced to three years of imprisonment by the same court and have been serving their jail term since July 2009.

Azerbaijani Students Are Prevented From Entering Graduate Schools

Following the announcement of the results of the Iran's state universities' graduate school exams, Behzad Jeddi, Ebrahim Shahbazi, and Shahram Shoghi were not allowed to apply to graduate programs even though they had earned the minimum score on their entrance exams. Iran's Ministry of Science, Research, and Technology has classified them as unfit for graduate studies.

Tabriz Azad University also refused to register Navid Mohammadi, an Azerbaijani



Monthly Report of Association for the Defense of Azerbaijani Political Prisoners in Iran – August 2009

student activist and political director of a student organization called “Arman”. Mohammadi was accepted to the graduate program in computer engineering.

Last year, a number of Azerbaijani student activists were barred from admission to graduate schools. They include Ebrahim Rashidi, Amin Sadeghi, Samad Pashayi, Mehdi Hajmohammadi, and Nahid Babazade.

The restrictions on Azerbaijani student activists are not limited to blocking access to graduate education. In recent weeks Vahid Sheykhbeglu, who is in his last semester of his M.S. program, was expelled from his university just weeks before the defence of his dissertation. Behnam Torkanpur was in the second semester of his M.S. in Industrial Management program and Yunes Zareiyun in the last semester of his M.S. in Political Science, when they were both dismissed from their universities. It has been reported that Azerbaijani students are being expelled under direct written orders from agents of the MOIS.

Azerbaijani Activist Released on Bail to Be Tried Later

Alireza Farshi, an Azerbaijani scholar and cultural activist, was released on August 25 on a bail of 700 million rials (\$76,000) after 95 days of detention in Tabriz Prison. Farshi was detained during a rally in Tabriz on May 22, 2009. Following that date, security forces detained his wife Sima Didar for one month in order to increase psychological pressure on him. She was released on a bail of 500 million rials (\$50,000) to be tried later.



Alireza Farshi

Alireza Farshi was detained for propaganda against the regime and also for ethnic propaganda. The documents on which these claims are based revolve around his activities involving Azerbaijani ethnic rights.

Jafar Aghamohammadi, an Azerbaijani student activist, was released on bail after 29 days of detention. He was arrested for



Monthly Report of Association for the Defense of Azerbaijani Political Prisoners in Iran – August 2009

propaganda against the regime after he distributed an article in Meshginshahr condemning former Iranian President Khatemi's insults against Azerbaijanis. Aghamohammadi was arrested in his home on July 21, 2009. Security forces searched his home taking some of his books, handwritten notes and several other personal effects.



Jafar Aghamohammadi

Babek Hosseini Moghaddam, another Azerbaijani activist from Tabriz, was detained on the anniversary of the demonstrations against the cartoon that humiliated and insulted Azerbaijanis, published in May 2006 in the state-run newspaper "Iran". He was tried and sentenced to six months of detention. He was released on August 28, 2009 after serving his jail term. He was charged with "propaganda against the regime" and "separatism" for distributing articles and for inviting people to participate in demonstrations.

Former Azerbaijani MP and Activists Called to Court

Akbar Alami, former Tabriz Member of Parliament, was called to Tabriz court to answer to the complaints from the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corp (IRGC).

The Army's complaint involved Alami's questioning of a top IRGC official during his term as a parliamentarian. Alami questioned Iran's Minister of Defense about the IRGC and the Basij militia's use of force against Tabriz residents during demonstrations against May 2006 cartoon. During the protests, dozens of people were killed and many were arrested. Alami was also confronted in court about an alleged insult he made against holy beliefs in one of his speeches in parliament, his questioning of the Parliament's Minister of Internal Affairs and about his investigation of the rape of an 18-year-old girl by relatives of a state authority.

According to the Iranian Constitution, parliamentarians are granted freedom of speech and opinion in addressing matters within the Iranian parliament.

In recent years, Azerbaijani activists have held protests against the ban on the use of



Monthly Report of Association for the Defense of Azerbaijani Political Prisoners in Iran – August 2009

Azerbaijani Turkish in schools, usually one month before the start of the school year. The protests are limited to graffiti on walls in Iran's Azerbaijani cities or to the distribution of articles about the freedom for children to learn their mother tongues in schools. The demonstrations continued again this year. Three Azerbaijani activists, Hossein Asadi, Ali Mirzayi, and Behnam Abdi, were summoned to a MOIS office for writing "Education in the mother tongue should be provided for everybody" on walls in the city of Naghadeh (Sulduz).

Azerbaijanis are Prevented From Organizing Cultural Ceremonies

Security forces attacked people during a ceremony organized in Babek Castle. Using force against the participants, they arrested some of those present including Mostafa Ghasemi, Mir Musa Ziya Zargar, and Rasul Irani. The detainees were released after 5 days. They were arrested for organizing an illegal gathering, provoking public disorder, and dancing traditional Azerbaijani dances.

Babek Castle is near the city of Kaleyber in northwest Iran, and was the home of the Azerbaijani national hero, Babek.

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