

PUBLIC

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UA 163/06 Incommunicado detention/Fear of torture/Medical concern

IRAN Abbas Lisani (or Leysanli) (m), aged 38, activist

Abbas Lisani, a prominent activist for the rights of Iranian Azeri Turks, was arrested on 3 June and is held at an unknown location, where he is at risk of torture. He may require medical attention for injuries he suffered during a demonstration before he was arrested.

He was arrested at his home in the north-western town of Ardebil. His wife reportedly said that more than 30 plainclothes security officials shot the lock off their door and entered the house without showing any warrant, which is required by law. She said they beat Abbas Lisani in front of her and their two young sons, and insulted her when she asked them not to beat him. Saying they had orders allowing them to shoot him, they handcuffed him and took him away. They also took two mobile phones, CDs, books and a computer.

There has been unrest, sometimes violent, in the Iranian Azeri Turkish community since 12 May, when the state-owned daily newspaper *Iran* published a cartoon which many of them found offensive. The community (who sometimes call themselves Iranian Azerbaijanis) live mainly in the north-west of the country. In cities in the region there were demonstrations, sometimes violent, which have reportedly led to hundreds of people being arrested (see UA 151/06, MDE 13/055/2006). Some of those detained have allegedly been tortured. Publication of the newspaper was suspended on 23 May and the editor-in-chief and the cartoonist were arrested, but despite this there was a demonstration in Ardebil on 27 May. Abbas Lisani was reportedly injured during this demonstration, but managed to escape and went into hiding for about a week. He was arrested after he returned home. Before he was arrested, he told his family and friends he would go on hunger strike if detained.

Azeri sources have claimed that dozens have been killed and hundreds injured by the security forces. On 29 May a police official acknowledged that four people had been killed and 43 injured in the town of Naqada. Amnesty International recognizes that criminal damage occurred during at least some of the demonstrations, and that governments have a right and a responsibility to bring to justice those responsible for recognizably criminal offences. However, the Iranian authorities are also obliged to act in accordance with international human rights law and human rights standards, including those relating to the policing of demonstrations, the prohibition of torture and fair trial standards.

Abbas Lisani has been arrested several times since 1997 in connection with his political activity. He has been subjected to psychological and physical torture in custody, and harassed when he is at liberty. He told Amnesty International in May that the most severe torture he experienced was in June 2004, when he took part in a sit-in protest by Azeri Turks at the Sarcheshme Mosque in Ardebil. After the security forces took control of the mosque, they beat him severely and suffocated him until he passed out. He spent a month in custody, 20 days of which were in solitary confinement. He had severe injuries, including broken ribs and a broken nose, for which he was denied medical treatment. He went on hunger strike twice to demand medical care, but without success. After two days in custody he was taken before Branch 7 of the Revolutionary Court in Ardebil, where the judge refused to order medical treatment for him and told him that the Intelligence service "should have done worse". On release he was fined 800,000 Rials (approx US\$87,000) and given a suspended sentence of 15 lashes. He is still suffering health problems caused by the torture.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Iranian Azeri Turks, at around 25-30% of the population, are the largest minority in Iran and live mainly in the north-west. Mainly Shi'a Muslims, like the majority of the population, they are not subject to the same kinds

of discrimination as minorities of other religions, and are well-integrated into the economy, but in recent years there has been a growing demand for greater cultural and linguistic rights, such as the right to be taught in Turkish. A small minority advocate the secession of Iranian Azerbaijani provinces and union with the Republic of Azerbaijan. Activists who promote Azeri Turkish cultural identity are viewed with suspicion by the Iranian authorities, who often charge them with vaguely worded offences such as "promoting pan-Turkism".

The Iranian authorities have accused outside forces, particularly the USA, of stirring up the unrest in Iranian Azeri provinces. The USA has denied this.

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send appeals to arrive as quickly as possible, in Persian, Arabic, English, French or your own language:

- expressing concern for the safety of Abbas Lisani, who was reportedly detained in Ardebil on 3 June and is held in an unknown location;
- asking the authorities to ensure that he is not tortured or ill-treated;
- urging the authorities to release him immediately, unless he is to be charged with a recognizably criminal offence;
- asking the authorities to reveal where he is detained, and to allow him unrestricted access to his family, lawyers of his own choosing, an interpreter and any medical treatment he may require;
- urging the authorities to conduct a prompt and impartial investigation into his allegation that he was tortured in custody in 2004, and for anyone found responsible to be brought to justice.

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

Fax: + 98 251 774 2228 (mark "FAO the Office of His Excellency, Ayatollah al Udhma Khamenei")

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

Salutation: Your Excellency

Minister of Intelligence

Gholam Hossein Mohseni Ejeie
Ministry of Information, Second Negarestan Street, Pasdaran Avenue
Tehran, Islamic Republic of Iran

Email: iranprobe@iranprobe.com

Salutation: Your Excellency

COPIES TO:

Head of the Judiciary

His Excellency Ayatollah Mahmoud Hashemi Shahroudi
Ministry of Justice, Park-e Shahr, Tehran, Islamic Republic of Iran

Email: Please send emails via the feedback form on the Persian site of the website
<http://www.iranjudiciary.org/contactus-feedback-fa.html>

The text of the feedback form translates as:

1st line: name, 2nd line: email address, 3rd line: subject heading;
then enter your email into the text box

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 20 July 2006.