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A Political Prisoner Binds his Lips Together

February 13, 2008

"Be assured, all he wants is the respect of his rights and nothing more."

— *Khadijeh Yari, wife of Iranian political prisoner Babak Dadbakhsh*

There are numberless ways to punish a prisoner, some as easy as a transfer to a more dangerous prison or ward. Iranian political prisoner Babak Dadbakhsh, in the fourth year of a five year sentence for "attempts to threaten national security," has recently been relocated to the Rajaei Shahr Prison, outside of Tehran. According to information posted on the Amir Kabir University (Tehran) information website, Dadbakhsh and other political prisoners have resorted to a hunger strike to draw attention to several grievances. Referring to Iranian law governing prison practices, they protest their "illegal transfer from one prison to another and one section to another, the absence of classification and segregation among prisoners, the lack of security, and threats to their lives." According to the same source, Mr. Dadbakhsh is also protesting against being "exiled [transferred] away from the Evin prison 21 times during the past three years, being illegally deprived of visitations and phone calls."

In the past month, Mr. Dadbakhsh has written letters addressing the Head of Prisons, as well as the Head of the Judiciary and the international human rights community, to protest his detention conditions and the retaliation he has been subjected to following his contribution to a report on corruption in prisons. (See his letter dated 15 January 2008 (25 Day 1386).)

The report, entitled "Laneh Fesad" (Nest of Corruption), was published by [Human Rights Activists in Iran](#) (HRAI) last fall, using information provided by inmates, including Mr. Dadbakhsh. This report details corruption and racketeering on the part of prison administrators at Ghezel Hesar and Evin Prisons, where Dadbakhsh has spent most of his incarceration. It describes corrupt and criminal structures within the prisons' management, responsible in various wards and parts of these prisons for the abuse and mistreatment of inmates by prison officials and other prisoners, including:

extracting fees from prisoners for essential amenities; money laundering and sale of narcotics such as crack and opium; sexual abuse, slavery, and prostitution of minors, and of male and female adult inmates; the promotion of addiction and gambling among inmates; the promotion of mafia gangs among prisoners and access to weaponry; and the lack of

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access to translation and legal representation for non-Iranian inmates.

The report also refers to two dangerous and violent wards, numbers 1 and 5, of Rajae Shahr Prison, where prisoners convicted of violent crimes and inmates on death row are held, precisely the prison where Mr. Dadbakhsh and other prisoners have been transferred as a punishment for sharing information used in the "Laneh Fesad" report and for insisting upon fair and legal treatment within the prisons where they had been held.

HRAI reports that in the weeks following the release of "Laneh Fesad" by HRAI, several delegations visited the prisons mentioned in the report and talked to inmates, including Mr. Dadbakhsh. On January 22, HRAI released information according to which Babak Dadbakhsh had been transferred to ward 5 (room 13) in Rajae Shahr. To underline the seriousness of Mr. Dadbakhsh's situation, the Organization also provided a list of 13 individuals killed in "clashes," 8 cases of suicides, 13 suspicious deaths, and 11 cases of broken bones in the past 18 months in Room 13 of [Rajae Shahr prison](#).

Such a transfer constitutes a violation of Article 1 of the [Bylaws of the National Prisons' Association](#) in Iran, whereby prisoners must be segregated according their gender, age, crime, legal status and health. The bylaws define four classes of crimes on which basis inmates must be categorized. Accordingly, Babak Dadbakhsh and other prisoners convicted of undermining national security (category J) must be imprisoned in wards separated from those who are convicted of murder, rape, kidnapping and armed robbery (category A).

Further, prisoners' rights are also protected under international and human rights treaties that are legally binding on Iran. Article 10.1 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, ratified by Iran in 1975, requires that, "All persons deprived of their liberty shall be treated with humanity and with respect for the inherent dignity of the human person." The [International Human Rights Standards for Prison Officials](#) and of the [Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners](#) also provide safeguards for prisoners and guidelines for their treatment. The latter requires that, "The different categories of prisoners shall be kept in separate institutions or parts of institutions taking account of their sex, age, criminal record, the legal reason for their detention and the necessities of their treatment." It also protects prisoners' rights to complain about their detention to judicial authorities and prison inspectors.

By failing to segregate prisoners, to protect their right to freedom of expression, to seriously investigate their complaints, and to provide them with a safe physical and

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psychological environment, the Iranian authorities are in violation of their obligations under national and international law.

Facing the abusive conditions at Rajaei Shahr, a number of prisoners (such as Mostafa Alavi, Mehrdad Lohrasbi, Behrouz Javid Tehrani, and Babak Dadbakhsh) began a hunger strike in January 2008 to starve themselves in protest. In Dadbakhsh's appeal to Ayatollah Shahroudi, the Head of the Judiciary in Iran, on 15 January 2008, he announced his decision to join the hunger strike. According to the latest report by HRAI, dated 30 January 2008 (10 Bahman 1386), he is now in a coma. By literally sewing his lips together, thereby both objecting to and symbolizing his circumstances, Dadbakhsh has committed himself to a course of protest that now threatens his life.

In her own letter of 5 February 2008, Khadijeh Yari, the wife of Mr. Dadbakhsh addressed Ayatollah Shahroudi in a plea for his life:

"After three years, I have nothing left in my house to sell and pay for justice except for two old carpets and a disconnected phone. For three years, alone with my three-year-old son, and I am less than 21 years old, I have tried to seek justice and to see the law enforced. ...I continually traveled between Tehran and Ardebil, ...visited the offices of high ranking judicial authorities, but I was not eligible for justice because I don't have anyone [influential]." She added, "I and my three-year-old child, Benjamin, have only one request: do not allow that they, as it is rumored, kill my husband in Rajaei Shahr prison in order to silence his call for respecting the law. Be assured that all he wants is the respect of his rights and nothing more."

Mr. Dadbakhsh's plea is not a first. Over the years, numerous prisoners in Iran have protested their prison conditions and the prison authorities' violation of their right to dignity and security. Many have resorted to hunger strikes, in a desperate attempt to draw attention to their plight. Some have died while on hunger strike.

With Babak Dadbakhsh in a potentially life-threatening condition, ABF calls on independent local and international human rights activists and organizations to disseminate the appeal by Babak Dadbakhsh and to help expedite demands for a fair and independent inquiry into his and other similar cases.

Furthermore, ABF calls on the Iranian Judiciary:

1. to guarantee that Babak Dadbakhsh and other hunger strikers receive adequate medical care and are not permitted to die in custody;

2. to guarantee to all prisoners a physically and psychologically safe environment. to ensure their right to an

effective grievance procedure and an impartial investigation, and to prevent retaliation against complainants by prison authorities;

3. to seriously investigate and punish prison employees and administrators who retaliate against prisoners for calling attention to their detention conditions;

4. to adhere to its own law and its international commitments, requiring segregation of prisoners to protect their dignity and security.

5. To allow an independent investigations in the cases of prisoners who died in suspicious circumstances or while on hunger strike, such as [Akbar Mohammadi](#) and [Valiollah Feiz Mahdavi](#).

Copies of the original Farsi and English translation of the appeal by Babak Dadbakhsh are available at:

<http://www.abfiran.org/english/document-316-742.php>

<http://www.abfiran.org/farsi/document-316-743.php>