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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Doctors, Medical Students Rally at Iranian UN Mission to Free Imprisoned Colleagues

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Today at noon, Physicians for Human Rights (PHR) and a coalition of health and human rights groups held a silent vigil and press conference in front of the Iranian

Mission to the United Nations (622 3rd Avenue, NY) to call for the release of two imprisoned Iranian Physicians. Dr. Kamiar Alaei and his brother Dr. Arash Alaei, both internationally known HIV/AIDS doctors, have been detained without charge by the Iranian government in the notorious section 209 of Iran's Evin prison since late June 2008. To date, the brothers have been allowed only one meeting with their attorney and family. The event was timed to coincide with Iranian President Ahmadinejad's visit to New York City for the UN General Assembly.

Sign the petition at
IranFreeTheDocs.org

For over a decade, the brothers have worked in and promoted clinics to treat drug addicts and other vulnerable populations in prisons and in communities in Iran. Iran has the world's highest rate of intravenous drug users - a phenomenon that drives the country's HIV/AIDS epidemic. The brothers' work has been supported by religious leaders and Iran's Ministry of Health, whose harm reduction programs to treat injecting drug users have become models in the region and beyond.

Doctors and medical students wore their white coats to symbolize solidarity with their imprisoned Iranian colleagues. They also carried large posters showing the faces of the brothers and the web address of a clearing house site launched by PHR - IranFreeTheDocs.org. The site offers updates on the campaign, and an online petition. To date, more than 3200 individuals - mostly health professionals - from 85 countries have signed the petition in support of the Drs. Alaei. The list includes many of the world's leading AIDS researchers and physicians.

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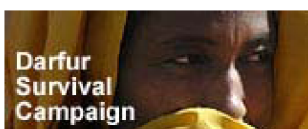
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"As a physician in training, I believe it is imperative for health professionals to speak out in defense of human rights of our colleagues at risk. Dr. Kamiar Alaei should be in Albany now, continuing his second year of doctoral studies at SUNY School of Public Health where he is enrolled," said Ali Khan, a medical student at Virginia Commonwealth University School of Medicine and a board member of PHR. "His brother, Dr. Arash Alaei, should be preventing and treating HIV/AIDS at a clinic in his home region of Kermanshah in northwest Iran. Instead, these two respected HIV/AIDS physicians are languishing in prison."

"Students from SUNY Albany School of Public Health have traveled to the Iranian Mission to the UN today to speak out in behalf of their missing classmate, Kamiar," said SUNY Albany School of Public Health Assistant Professor, Punkin Clay Stephens, one of Kamiar's professors. "We urge Iran to release the Drs. Alaei so that they may continue their life saving work for the benefit of the people of Iran and the world."

Although the physicians have still not been formally charged, the prosecutor investigating their case has stated in interviews with the Iranian press that they are suspected of fomenting a "velvet revolution." He has cited as evidence the fact that the Drs. Alaei have traveled to international AIDS conferences, drawn the attention of international non-governmental organizations, and recruited and trained people in public health. "That's not a crime, that's good medicine," said Khan. "As the UN General Assembly convenes this week, governments should be fulfilling the UN's Millennium Development Goals on Prevention and Treatment of AIDS, not persecuting their prominent public health leaders," he added.

Physicians for Human Rights (PHR) mobilizes the health professions to advance the health and dignity of all people by protecting human rights. As a founding member of the International Campaign to Ban Landmines, PHR shared the 1997 Nobel Peace Prize.

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[^ TO TOP OF PAGE](#)

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