

Doc\_Number: GDE00018

# URGENT ACTION

## FOOTBALL JOURNALIST STILL AT RISK

Football journalist and member of the Azerbaijani minority in Iran, Abdollah Sadoughi, was released on 11 March, after seven weeks of detention in Tabriz Prison, north-west Iran. In the next 10 days, he is likely to be given a trial date, and the trial itself could follow soon after. If convicted and imprisoned, Amnesty International fears that he would be a prisoner of conscience.

Abdollah Sadoughi was arrested in the city of Tabriz on 18 January 2010 and accused of "acts against national security" and "supporting "Pan-Turkism", for publishing posters in the Azerbaijani Turkic language featuring the Traktor Sazi team, which has become the symbol of Azerbaijani culture in the city of Tabriz. Azerbaijani Turkic is not recognized as an official language in Iran.

He was held in solitary confinement for 22 days and was only allowed to meet with his lawyer and family a month after his arrest. He says prison guards insulted and threatened him. While detained, he was required to ask permission to use the toilet and allowed to do so only once each day.

The precise conditions of Abdollah Sadoughi's release are unclear, but he told Amnesty International that he expects to be informed of the date of his trial in the next 10 days. If convicted and imprisoned on charges related to his legitimate exercise of the right to freedom of expression, Amnesty International would consider Abdollah Sadoughi to be a prisoner of conscience, held for peacefully expressing his views and would call for his immediate and unconditional release.

Following his release Abdollah Sadoughi expressed his gratitude to all those who campaigned for his release, stating: "If it were not for Amnesty International's appeals, I would not have been released. Thank you to all the people who supported me!" He told Amnesty International that he fears that he may be rearrested at any time.

### PLEASE WRITE IMMEDIATELY in Persian, Turkic or your own language:

- √ Welcoming the release from detention of Abdollah Sadoughi, but expressing concern that he is still facing trial on charges which appear to be related solely to his peaceful exercise of his right to freedom of expression;
- √ Urging that any such charges against him are dropped, and stating that if he were to be convicted and imprisoned, Amnesty International would consider him to be a prisoner of conscience;
- √ Calling for an impartial investigation into his allegations of ill-treatment while in detention and for anyone found responsible for abuse to be brought to justice.

### PLEASE SEND APPEALS BEFORE 28 APRIL 2010 TO:

#### Head of East Azarbaijan Province

Judiciary  
Hojjatoleslam Sharifi,  
Judiciary of East Azarbaijan,  
Central Complex,  
Beginning of Vali-Asr Hill,  
Tabriz, East Azarbaijan 5157733135,  
Islamic Republic of Iran  
Fax: 009841133201109

Salutation: Dear Sir

#### Head of the Judiciary

Ayatollah Sadeq Larijani  
Howzeh Riyasat-e Goveh Qazaiyeh  
(Office of the Head of the Judiciary)  
Pasteur St., Vali Asr Ave., south of  
Serah-e Jomhuri, Tehran,  
1316814737  
Islamic Republic of Iran

Email: Via website:

<http://www.dadiran.ir/tabid/75/Default.aspx>  
(First starred box: your given name;  
second starred box: your family name;  
third: your email address)

Salutation: Your Excellency

#### And copies to:

Secretary General, High Council for  
Human Rights

Mohammad Javad Larijani  
Howzeh Riassat-e Ghoveh Ghazaiyeh  
Pasteur St, Vali Asr Ave., south of  
Serah-e Jomhuri  
Tehran 1316814737  
Islamic Republic of Iran

Fax: +98 21 3390 4986

Email: [bia.judi@yahoo.com](mailto:bia.judi@yahoo.com) (In subject line: FAO Mohammad Javad Larijani)

Salutation: Dear Mr Larijani

Also send copies to diplomatic representatives accredited to your country. Please check with your section office if sending appeals after the above date. This is the 1<sup>st</sup> update of UA 51/10. Further information: <http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/info/MDE13/030/2010/en>

# AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL



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### ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Iranian Azerbaijanis, who are mainly Shi'a Muslims, are recognized as the largest minority in Iran and are generally believed to constitute 25 to 30 per cent of the population of Iran. They are located mainly in the north and north-west of Iran. Although generally well integrated into society, in recent years they have increasingly called for greater cultural and linguistic rights, such as the right to be educated in the Azerbaijani Turkic language, which they believe is provided for under Iran's Constitution, and to celebrate Azerbaijani culture and history at cultural events. Azerbaijanis who have campaigned for such rights have suffered harassment, arrest and imprisonment.

Football games involving the Traktor Sazi football team in Tabriz have reportedly become the focus for the expression of Azerbaijani culture. During games, calls – in Azerbaijani Turkic – are reported to be made by supporters, for linguistic and cultural rights for Iranian Azerbaijanis.

Both before, and particularly since, the disputed presidential election in June 2009, the Iranian authorities have severely restricted freedom of expression in Iran, arresting journalists (of whom scores are believed to remain in detention), imposing restrictions on the use of the internet, including social networking sites, and shutting down newspapers. Demands by ethnic minority rights activists for greater rights have, for many years, been suppressed. This pattern continues in the context of a wide and generalized suppression of most forms of dissent over government policy.

In February 2010, Iran's human rights record was reviewed before the UN Human Rights Council, in the framework of the Universal Periodic Review. Iran accepted several recommendations made by other states to guarantee freedom of expression and press activities (see para 90, recommendations 52-58 at [http://www.upr-info.org/IMG/pdf/A\\_HRC\\_WG-6\\_7\\_L-11\\_Iran.pdf](http://www.upr-info.org/IMG/pdf/A_HRC_WG-6_7_L-11_Iran.pdf)), but it rejected other recommendations calling for an end to measures such as harassment and arbitrary arrest of writers, journalists and bloggers. It appears that, despite such public commitments, in practice, the Iranian authorities are continuing to disregard their human rights obligations relating to freedom of expression. Iran also rejected recommendations to take all appropriate measures to end all forms of discrimination and harassment against persons belonging to religious, ethnic, linguistic and other minorities (see para 92).

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