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In Iran, Roxana Saberi charged with espionage

New York, April 8, 2009--The Committee to Protect Journalists is alarmed by news reports that the Iranian government has charged Iranian-American journalist Roxana Saberi with espionage.

Hassan Haddad, deputy public prosecutor, told the Iranian Students News Agency ([ISNA \(http://isna.ir/ISNA/NewsView.aspx?ID=News-1314013\)](http://isna.ir/ISNA/NewsView.aspx?ID=News-1314013)) that Saberi "without press credentials and under the name of being a reporter, was carrying out espionage activities." In its report, published today, ISNA quoted the prosecutor as saying that "she has been arrested under the laws of the Islamic Republic of Iran."

Saberi has been notified of the charges, her lawyer, Abdolsamad Khorramshahi, told The Associated Press. Khorramshahi told [Agence-France Presse \(http://www.google.com/hostednews/afp/article/ALeqM5jT4RKFcWDs0BzOvfhW7ogIY43vw\)](http://www.google.com/hostednews/afp/article/ALeqM5jT4RKFcWDs0BzOvfhW7ogIY43vw) that he has not seen detailed information about the charges. He said he would seek judicial permission to review the charges.

"News reports that the Iranian authorities have charged Roxana Saberi with espionage are deeply worrying," said CPJ Middle East and North Africa Program Coordinator Mohamed Abdel Dayem. "Saberi has been working openly as a journalist in Iran for years. The public prosecutor must clarify why these charges have been brought and allow Saberi's attorney to view them immediately."

Saberi, 31, a dual citizen of the United States and Iran, has worked for National Public Radio, the BBC, ABC News, and other international media outlets. She was first [detained \(http://cpj.org/2009/03/us-journalist-held-in-iran-without-charge.php\)](http://cpj.org/2009/03/us-journalist-held-in-iran-without-charge.php) in January, although no formal charges were disclosed. She told her family that she was initially held for buying a bottle of wine. A spokesman for Iran's Foreign Ministry said later that Saberi was detained for reporting without proper accreditation.

An investigating judge told Iranian state television that Saberi could stand trial as early as next week, AP reported.

She is being held in Tehran's [Evin Prison \(http://cpj.org/2009/03/us-journalist-held-at-tehrans-evin-prison.php\)](http://cpj.org/2009/03/us-journalist-held-at-tehrans-evin-prison.php), where political prisoners are often jailed. At least two journalists have died at Evin Prison in the last six years amid circumstances that have not been fully explained, CPJ research shows. Omidreza Mirsayafi, a blogger serving a 30-month sentence on a charge of insulting religious figures, [died \(http://cpj.org/2009/03/blogger-jailed-for-insulting-leaders-dies-in-irans.php\)](http://cpj.org/2009/03/blogger-jailed-for-insulting-leaders-dies-in-irans.php) at the prison this month under mysterious circumstances. In 2003, Iranian-Canadian photojournalist Zahra Kazemi [died \(http://cpj.org/2004/07/government-agent-acquitted-in-photographers-death.php\)](http://cpj.org/2004/07/government-agent-acquitted-in-photographers-death.php) from a brain hemorrhage that resulted from a beating at Evin Prison. An intelligence agent charged in the killing was acquitted after a flawed trial. Kazemi had been jailed because she took photographs outside the prison.

More than 10,000 people worldwide signed a [CPJ petition \(http://cpj.org/2009/03/cpj-calls-for-iranian-presidents-intervention-in-s.php\)](http://cpj.org/2009/03/cpj-calls-for-iranian-presidents-intervention-in-s.php) expressing concern about Saberi's detention. CPJ presented the petition to the Islamic Republic of Iran's Permanent Mission to the United Nations in New York.

The journalist's parents, Reza and Akiko Saberi, have traveled to Iran from their home in North Dakota. After visiting her at the prison on Monday, Reza Saberi told NPR that she was pale and weak but appeared to be in good spirits.

The U.S. State Department [has sought \(http://cpj.org/blog/2009/03/saberis-parents-go-to-iran-state-department-calls.php\)](http://cpj.org/blog/2009/03/saberis-parents-go-to-iran-state-department-calls.php) Saberi's release. Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton told reporters today that the department is "deeply concerned by the news that we're hearing."

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