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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Physicians for Human Rights and 20 Countries Demand Iran Release AIDS Doctors

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A Nobel Peace Prize laureate organization and a coalition of health and human rights activists held simultaneous events in New York, Washington, DC, and 20 countries on Tuesday to call for the release of two Iranian physicians imprisoned since June.

Sign the petition at
IranFreeTheDocs.org

Physicians for Human Rights (PHR) organized the "Global Day of Action for the Alaeis" to demand the release of Drs. Kamiar and Arash Alaei, world-renowned HIV/AIDS specialists who were indicted in December by the Iranian government on charges of communicating with an "enemy government." The rallies and PHR's campaign work on behalf of the Alaei brothers were noted in editorials in Tuesday's New York Times, Los Angeles Times and Boston Globe.

The brothers traveled across the US and the world to share Iran's model of HIV prevention and treatment. The Iranian government alleges they were working to recruit people to foment a "velvet revolution."

"Such allegations hurt the future of public health and indicate a dangerous trend toward punishing health professionals for working in the US or having US citizenship," said Sarah Kalloch, PHR's Director of Outreach. "Physicians for Human Rights believes that treating AIDS is not a crime—it's good medicine."

In January, Kamiar and Arash Alaei were sentenced to prison terms of three and six years respectively in Tehran's notorious Evin Prison. According to sources close to the brothers' case, the appellate court received their appeals on March 17 and the following day—without a hearing—rejected their appeals and upheld their sentences.

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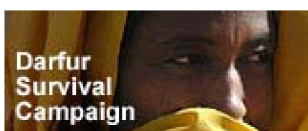
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Their attorney, Massoud Shaffiie filed a final appeal on May 7 to Iran's judiciary chief Ayatollah Mahmoud Hashemi Shahrudi under Article 118 of the Iranian Constitution.

"It appears that the jailing of people on trumped-up charges has more to do with appeasing the conservatives in advance of Iran's national elections in June," said Jonathan Hutson, PHR's Chief Communications Officer. "The case of these physicians is part of a crackdown on international scientific and academic exchange, which undermines efforts of all who seek to protect the health of the Iranian people."

"Imprisoning AIDS doctors who are getting vital health services to people with and at risk of HIV—including people who inject illegal drugs—is not only a violation of basic human rights, it's also a prescription for further spread of the epidemic," said Richard Elliott, Executive Director of the Canadian HIV/AIDS Legal Network.

Dr. Kamiar Alaei is a doctoral candidate at the SUNY Albany School of Public Health in Albany, NY and was expected to resume his studies there in the fall of 2008. In 2007, he received a Master's of Science from the Harvard School of Public Health. Dr. Arash Alaei is the former director of the International Education and Research Cooperation of the Iranian National Research Institute of Tuberculosis and Lung Disease.

Since 1998, the doctors have worked on HIV/AIDS treatment and prevention programs in Iran, particularly focused on harm reduction for injecting drug users. Their efforts helped earn Iran recognition as a model of best practice by the World Health Organization.

Tuesday's vigils were held at Ralph J. Bunche Park across from the UN in New York City, and the Iranian Interests Section at the Embassy of Pakistan in Washington, DC. Protestors represented 20 countries including Argentina, Bulgaria, Germany, Guyana, Hungary, Italy, Kenya, Malaysia, Mexico, Netherlands, Poland, Russia, South Africa, Switzerland, Thailand, Turkey, Uganda, Ukraine, and the US.

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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