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Roxana Saberi released from prison in Iran

New York, May 11, 2009--The Committee to Protect Journalists welcomed the release today of freelance journalist Roxana Saberi, and called on the Iranian government to safeguard the rights of several other journalists currently in jail.

Saberi, who was initially [sentenced](http://cpj.org/2009/04/in-iran-roxana-saberi-sentenced-to-eight-years-in.php) to an eight-year prison term for espionage on April 18, was released from Tehran's Evin Prison today after an appeals court reduced her punishment to a two-year suspended sentence. Although exact details about the charges against Saberi remain unknown, the BBC reported that the initial charge of "passing secret information" had been reduced to "having access to classified information," allowing for the commuted sentence. Saberi was also banned from reporting from Iran for five years.

Saberi's father and lawyer both confirmed that she had left the prison with her family earlier today and was headed to an unknown location in Tehran, according to international news reports. Her father told the press that she would be leaving the country in the coming days.

"We are pleased that Roxana Saberi has been released from prison and hope that other imprisoned journalists in Iran are also given the opportunity defend themselves and receive due process under the law," said CPJ Executive Director Joel Simon.

Saberi, 32, an Iranian-American freelance reporter, was first [detained](http://cpj.org/2009/03/us-journalist-held-in-iran-without-charge.php) in January, although she was not charged with a crime. She told her father that she was held for buying a bottle of wine. A spokesman for Iran's Foreign Ministry said later that Saberi was being detained for reporting without proper accreditation. In early April, Iranian authorities finally [charged](http://cpj.org/2009/04/in-iran-roxana-saberi-charged-with-espionage.php) Saberi with espionage, but did not release any additional information or evidence about the charges Saberi was facing.

Throughout Saberi's ordeal, CPJ mounted a vigorous international [campaign](http://cpj.org/tags/saberi) calling on Tehran to free the imprisoned journalist. CPJ released a [background paper](http://cpj.org/2009/05/cpj-background-paper-describes-legal-issues-in-sab.php) detailing the legal particularities of the case, circulated a [petition](http://cpj.org/2009/03/cpj-circulates-petition-for-release-of-roxana-sabe.php) calling for Saberi's release that garnered more than 10,000 signatures, and along with 34 other international press freedom groups [called](http://cpj.org/blog/2009/04/press-freedom-groups-call-for-saberis-release.php) on Iran's judiciary to release her.

"Press freedom must be protected at all times, but additional vigilance is necessary as journalists cover the impending presidential elections scheduled for June," said CPJ Middle East and North Africa Program Coordinator Mohamed Abdel Dayem. "The Iranian government must ensure that journalists are allowed to operate freely as they report on the upcoming elections."

At least five other journalists were [imprisoned](http://cpj.org/imprisoned/2008.php) in Iran when CPJ conducted its annual census on December 1, 2008. Since that time, CPJ has documented the cases of two additional journalists: One,

Hossein Derakhshan, an Iranian-Canadian blogger, remains in [detention \(http://cpj.org/2009/04/iranian-blogger-detained.php\)](http://cpj.org/2009/04/iranian-blogger-detained.php) and another, Omidreza Mirsayafi, [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) in prison in March under suspicious circumstances.

EDITOR'S NOTE: *The first paragraph has been changed to clarify that several journalists are currently behind bars in Iran.*

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