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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Two Years Too Long: Iranian AIDS Doctors Arash and Kamiar Alaei Still in Prison

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(Vienna, Austria) – As the XVIIIth International AIDS Conference begins in Vienna, Austria, two prominent international voices remained silenced. In June 2008,

Drs. Kamiar and Arash Alaei – Iranian brothers famous for working with health workers across the globe to find solutions to the HIV/AIDS pandemic – were arrested in Tehran before they were to appear at the XVIIth International AIDS Conference in Mexico City. The brothers remain in jail, more than two years after their arrest.

Held without charges for six months, the brothers were eventually accused of attempting to “foment a velvet revolution.” After a perfunctory trial in December 2008, Kamiar and Arash were convicted of “communicating with an enemy government” and sentenced to three and six years, respectively, in Evin Prison in Tehran.

“Traveling to international HIV/AIDS conferences to help combat a global pandemic is not grounds for imprisonment – it’s simply good medicine,” said Frank Donaghue, CEO of Physicians for Human Rights. “HIV/AIDS knows no borders and demands a coordinated international response, for the good of the Iranian people and all of us. Physicians for Human Rights and the global AIDS community continue to call on the Iranian government to release Drs. Arash and Kamiar.”

“This case sends an ominous signal regarding the Iranian government’s willingness to stifle international scientific exchange,” Donaghue continued. “The charges are illegitimate and the case is marked by clear violations of due process. Their trial lasted less than a day and included secret charges and secret evidence their lawyer was unable to see or refute.”

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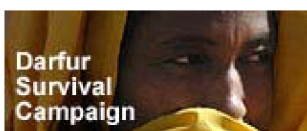
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Since their arrest, the scientific and medical community has rallied around the Alaeis. The World Medical Association, The American Medical Association, The European Union, and The International AIDS Society have all called for the Alaeis' release. Leading scientific publications including *Nature Magazine*, *The Lancet* and the *British Medical Journal* have all condemned the Alaeis' conviction as a violation of scientific freedom. Thousands of health professionals and human rights activists from more than 80 countries have signed petitions urging their release. At the conference in Vienna, supporters of the Alaeis will continue to highlight the brother's unjust imprisonment.

"Physicians and health professionals from across the globe stand in solidarity with the Alaeis this week," said Dr. Robert Lawrence, Chair of PHR's Board of Directors.

Dr. Kamiar Alaei was a doctoral candidate at the SUNY Albany School of Public Health in Albany, New York at the time of his arrest, and was expected to resume his studies there on the fall of 2008. In 2007, he received a Master of Science degree in Population and International Health from the Harvard School of Public Health in Boston. Students and faculty from both institutions have led efforts for the Alaeis' release.

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 Drs. Alaei have spearheaded HIV/AIDS treatment and prevention programs, particularly focused on harm reduction for injecting drug users.

In addition to their work in Iran, the Alaei brothers have held training courses for Afghan and Tajik medical workers and have worked to encourage regional cooperation among 12 Middle Eastern and Central Asian countries. Their efforts expanded the expertise of doctors in the region, advanced the progress of medical science, and earned Iran recognition as a model of best practice by the World Health Organization.


The Alaeis were also named recipients of the 2009 Heinz R. Pagels Human Rights of Scientists Award from the New York Academy of Sciences in September 2009.

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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