

URGENT ACTION

ACTIVIST IN SOLITARY CONFINEMENT FOR MONTHS

Ministry of intelligence agents are torturing Iranian political activist Abbas Vahedian by holding him in prolonged solitary confinement at an informal detention facility in Mashhad, Khorasan-e Razavi province, and denying him adequate healthcare, bedding, warm clothing, fresh air and regular family visits. He must be released immediately; revolutionary courts sentenced him to 21 years' imprisonment solely for his peaceful activism for a democratic secular Iran.

TAKE ACTION: WRITE AN APPEAL IN YOUR OWN WORDS OR USE THIS MODEL LETTER

Head of judiciary, Gholamhossein Mohseni Ejei
c/o Embassy of Iran to the European Union
Avenue Franklin Roosevelt No. 15, 1050 Bruxelles, Belgium

Dear Mr Gholamhossein Mohseni Ejei,

Political activist Abbas Vahedian, aged 51, has been held in solitary confinement nearly 24 hours a day in an informal, unmarked ministry of intelligence detention facility in Mashhad since his arbitrary arrest on 1 September 2021, with no access to fresh air, natural light and contact with other prisoners. He is held in a windowless cell where bright lamps are kept on 24 hours, causing him sleep deprivation and distress. Every few days, he is taken to a hallway for a short walk while blindfolded. He is also being denied adequate healthcare, bedding, warm clothing, and regular family visits. Ministry of intelligence agents told him that for his detention conditions to improve, he must denounce his political activities in writing and reveal the password to his phone. These abuses amount to torture, a crime under international law.

Intelligence agents and prosecutions authorities have been refusing to vaccinate Abbas Vahedian against Covid-19 and refer him to a specialist for his lung complications including breathing difficulties and coughs. They did not give him the inhalers brought by his family until January 2022. As such, he is at increased risk of severe illness if he contracts Covid-19 in detention. He also suffers from gum disease, which emerged during his previous 11-month imprisonment in 2019 and 2020 as a result of medical neglect of the open wounds he sustained in his mouth during arrest. In December 2021, after repeated follow-ups by his family, he was transferred to a dental clinic outside detention and two of his teeth were pulled. No adequate pain relief or further care were provided, despite warnings by his dentist that he would risk worsening gum infections and tooth loss without long-term routine dental treatment. Since his arrest, he has also developed severe neck pain due to sleeping on the ground without a pillow and a mattress.

Abbas Vahedian was sentenced to 11 years' imprisonment in December 2021 on spurious national security charges solely stemming from his peaceful work with political groups, which characterize the Islamic Republic as a "theocratic dictatorship" and call for the formation of a secular democratic system. He has only been allowed to meet his lawyer once in late December 2021 after his verdict was issued. He also has a 10-year prison sentence, imposed in October 2021 for authoring and co-signing an open letter, published in June 2019, which called for the resignation of Iran's Supreme Leader and a fundamental change to the country's constitution. Such peaceful political activities are protected by international human rights law.

I urge you to immediately and unconditionally release Abbas Vahedian as he is held solely for

the peaceful exercise of his rights to freedom of expression and association. Pending his release, I urge you to ensure that he is fully vaccinated against Covid-19, provided with any specialised medical care he requires outside detention, including dental care, protected from further torture and other ill-treatment, including through solitary confinement and denial of medical care, and granted regular visits with his family and lawyer.

Yours sincerely,

Additional information

Abbas Vahedian is sentenced to a total of 21 years in prison, consisting of an 11-year prison sentence, issued by Branch 3 of the Revolutionary Court of Mashhad in December 2021, and a 10-year prison sentence, issued by Branch 5 of the Revolutionary Court of Mashhad in October 2021. In both cases, he was suddenly taken, without prior notice and information about the nature of charges against him, from detention to the Revolutionary Court of Mashhad, told by judges whom he has described as aggressive and biased that he is on trial for acting against national security, and asked if he has anything to present in his defence. In both instances, he responded that due to the serious legal breaches committed, he did not recognize the legitimacy of the sessions convened and insisted for his lawyer's presence. In both cases, the presiding judges ended the sessions within minutes and refused to reconvene. His 10-year prison sentence was finalized 20 days after it was issued following his refusal to file an appeal. His appeal against the 11-year sentence is currently pending.

The 11-year prison sentence consists of one year for "spreading propaganda against the system" and 10 years for "founding groups with the purpose of disrupting national security". The groups cited in the court verdict are the Convergence Council of Iranian Movements, known by its Persian acronym Shahjaa, and Iran Think Room (Otagh-e Fekr-e Iran). The former group, Shahjaa, advocates, according to its website, for the transition of Iran, through peaceful means, from the Islamic Republic system, which it characterizes as a "corrupt and oppressive theocracy", to a secular democratic system committed to international human rights law. Abbas Vahedian has noted that he was not a founding member of Shahjaa, but served as its spokesperson since its establishment on 8 April 2021 until 17 May 2021. The latter group, Iran Think Room, was an informal brainstorming group which led on several online campaigns launched in the months prior to Iran's presidential elections in June 2021, including "No to the Islamic Republic" and "The Campaign to Create Shame". The separate 10-year prison sentence is solely in connection with an open letter that Abbas Vahedian and 13 other co-signatories published on 12 June 2019 calling for the resignation of Iran's Supreme Leader, Ali Khamenei, and a fundamental change to the country's constitution. This peaceful activity formed the foundation of multiple spurious charges of which he was convicted, including "insulting the Supreme Leader", "gathering and colluding against national security", "spreading propaganda against the system", and "disrupting public opinion".

Abbas Vahedian was arrested by several ministry of intelligence agents in a village near Rezvanshahr in northern Gilan province on 1 September 2021 following his participation in an online debate wherein he reiterated his political beliefs. Apart from two brief family visits in December and January 2021, which took place in the presence of intelligence agents, his contact with his family has been limited to weekly calls, which generally last a few minutes and are made in the presence of an agent, preventing him from speaking freely.

In recent years, Iranian authorities have subjected Abbas Vahedian to arbitrary detention, enforced disappearance, torture, and other ill-treatment on multiple occasions because of his peaceful political activism. He was last arbitrarily detained between 18 August 2019 and 19 July 2020 due to the aforementioned June 2019 open letter. His arrest at that time was carried out in a violent way; an intelligence agent hit him in the face with a sharp object, causing open wounds in his mouth. Following his arrest, the authorities concealed his fate and whereabouts for two months from his family, thereby, subjecting him to enforced disappearance. After his transfer to Mashhad's Vakilabad prison, he told his family that he had been held in solitary confinement in an informal, unmarked ministry of intelligence detention facility in Mashhad. In Vakilabad prison, he was held in a general ward next to prisoners convicted of violent crimes and several prisoners there repeatedly threatened to kill or otherwise harm him. He says that on one occasion, several prisoners attempted to stab him in the neck with a knife. On at least three other occasions, he said that a prisoner jumped on him while he was asleep, causing him head injuries. In the first quarter of 2020, he contracted pulmonary tuberculosis in prison, likely through an infected cellmate, leading to severe coughing, chest pain and breathing difficulties for weeks as well as weight loss. Even though the specialist medical care he required was not available in prison, prosecution and prison officials refused to transfer him to a medical facility outside prison. Soon afterwards, he contracted Covid-19, for which he did not receive adequate medical care either. Following numerous follow-ups by his family, he was eventually released on bail on 19 July 2020. He has since suffered from chronic lung complications, which according to the doctors he consulted following his release from prison is due to the lack of proper medical care for his lung infection during his imprisonment.

PREFERRED LANGUAGE TO ADDRESS TARGET: Persian, English

You can also write in your own language.

PLEASE TAKE ACTION AS SOON AS POSSIBLE UNTIL: 30 March 2022

Please check with the Amnesty office in your country if you wish to send appeals after the deadline.

NAME AND PREFERRED PRONOUN: Abbas Vahedian (he/him)

Additional TARGETs

Mr Baharvand Mohsen
Embassy of the Islamic Republic of Iran
16 Prince's Gate SW7 1PT
Fax: 020 7589 4440
iranemb.lon@mfa.gov.ir

SOCIAL MEDIA GUIDANCE

Suggested tweets:

- *Ministry of intelligence agents of @khamenei_ir are torturing Iranian unjustly jailed activist #AbbasVahedian by holding him in solitary confinement since Sept 2021 & denying him healthcare, bedding, fresh air & regular family visits. He must be released NOW [insert UA link]*
- *Tortured detainee #AbbasVahedian is sentenced to 21 yrs in prison solely for calling for the resignation of @khamenei_ir & the formation of a secular democratic system in Iran. Such peaceful activities are protected by human rights law. He must be released [insert UA link]*