

URGENT ACTION

ACTIVIST'S HEALTH TURNS DIRE IN SOLITARY CELL

Ministry of intelligence and prosecution authorities in Mashhad, Khorasan-e Razavi province, are endangering the life and safety of tortured Iranian activist Abbas Vahedian by deliberately denying him adequate medical care and keeping him in prolonged solitary confinement. The authorities are concealing the circumstances leading to two episodes of emergency hospitalization between 24 and 28 February 2022 and denying him visits with his family and lawyer.

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,

Ministry of intelligence and prosecution authorities in Mashhad, Khorasan-e Razavi province, are endangering the life and safety of arbitrarily detained activist Abbas Vahedian, aged 51, by deliberately denying him adequate medical care. Amnesty International learned that on 26 February 2022, Abbas Vahedian, who suffers from breathing difficulties and persistent coughs, was transferred, while semi-conscious, to a hospital in Mashhad and admitted to a department specializing in drug toxicity. The authorities have refused to provide his family with any information about the causes and circumstances leading to his partial loss of consciousness and hospitalization. According to an informed source, he said at the hospital that his health deteriorated after the authorities put unknown drugs in his food. On 28 February 2022, his family learned from hospital staff that he had been forcibly discharged against medical advice and while still disoriented.

The authorities held him incommunicado for 48 hours and refused to provide his family with any information about his fate or whereabouts until his relatives spoke out publicly. In a brief phone call granted shortly after on 2 March 2022, he told his family that he had been returned to the informal, unmarked ministry of intelligence detention facility in Mashhad where he has been held in solitary confinement since 1 September 2021. He confirmed to his family that he had fainted after eating tainted food. He also said that three nights before his latest hospitalization, that is, on 24 February 2022, he had also been brought to hospital with dangerously high blood pressure. The authorities interrupted his treatment on that occasion as well and returned him to prison against medical advice. The authorities have refused to provide his family with any detailed information about his health and well-being and denied their requests for visits. The mental anguish that the authorities have inflicted on the family through these circumstances amounts to ill-treatment.

Abbas Vahedian's health has turned dire after over six months of solitary confinement, coupled with inhumane conditions and deliberate denial of medical care, which together amount to torture. In response to his lawyer's complaints that his ongoing solitary confinement is unlawful, prosecution and intelligence officials have justified his treatment on the grounds that he is a "special security prisoner". In 2021, Revolutionary Courts sentenced him to 21 years' imprisonment solely for his peaceful activism for a democratic secular Iran.

I urge you to immediately and unconditionally release Abbas Vahedian as he is held solely for the peaceful exercise of his human rights to freedom of expression and association. Pending his release, I urge you to ensure that he is provided with any specialised medical care he requires outside prison, protected from further incommunicado detention, torture and other ill-treatment, including through solitary confinement and denial of medical care, and granted regular visits with his family and lawyer. All reports of his torture

must be independently and efficiently investigated and those responsible must be held accountable in fair trials.

Yours sincerely,

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Since his arbitrary arrest on 1 September 2021, Abbas Vahedian has been 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. Since his arrest, he has also been 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 serious human rights violation and a crime under international law.

Intelligence agents and prosecution 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 persistent 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 prison and two of his teeth were pulled out. 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.

Abbas Vahedian was 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 was on trial for acting against national security, and asked if he had anything to present in his defence. In both instances, he responded that due to the serious legal breaches committed in the course of his criminal proceedings, he did not recognize the legitimacy of the court hearings and insisted that his lawyer be present. In both cases, the presiding judges ended the hearings 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 between its establishment on 8 April 2021 and 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 was issued 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 fundamental changes 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 2021 and January 2022, which took place in the presence of intelligence agents, his contact with his family has been limited to weekly calls, which have generally lasted a few minutes and made in the presence of an agent, preventing them from speaking freely.

PREFERRED LANGUAGE TO ADDRESS TARGET: Persian, English

You can also write in your own language.

PLEASE TAKE ACTION AS SOON AS POSSIBLE UNTIL: 4 June 2022

NAME AND PRONOUN: Abbas Vahedian (he/him)

LINK TO PREVIOUS UA: <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/mde13/5206/2022/en/>

ADDITIONAL TARGET

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:

The health of tortured Iranian activist #AbbasVahedian has turned dire after over 6 months of solitary confinement, coupled with inhumane conditions & deliberate denial of medical care, which together amount to torture. He must be released NOW @khamenei_ir [insert UA link]

1/2 Tortured Iranian activist #AbbasVahedian has said he was transferred, while semi-conscious, to a hospital on 26 February after the authorities put unknown drugs in his food. Two days later, he was forcibly discharged against medical advice and put back in solitary confinement.

2/2 Join us in urging Iran's authorities to provide him with specialised medical care outside prison & protect him from further incommunicado detention, torture & other ill-treatment, including through solitary confinement and denial of medical care [insert UA link]