

URGENT ACTION

PRISONER OF CONSCIENCE STARTS HUNGER STRIKE
Human rights defender and prisoner of conscience Saeed Shirzad started a hunger strike on 31 March in protest at the authorities' disregard for regulations governing separation of different categories of prisoners. Saeed Shirzad is held in Raja'i Shahr Prison in Karaj near Tehran, awaiting the outcome of his appeal against his five-year prison term.

Saeed Shirzad, a human rights defender and active member of the Society for Defending Street and Working Children, started a hunger strike on 31 March. He is protesting the transfer of three prisoners, convicted of national security offences, from Section 12 to the sections of Raja'i Shahr Prison, where apparently prisoners jailed for serious non-political crimes such as murder and physical assault are held, despite Iran's prison regulations requiring separation of different categories of prisoners.

Saeed Shirzad was sentenced to five years in prison in September 2015, after Branch 15 of the Revolutionary Court convicted him of the charge of "gathering and colluding to commit crimes against national security". He was acquitted of the charge of "disturbing the public order" which he had not been formally informed of prior to this hearing. Instead, he had been charged with "spreading propaganda against the system" which did not appear in his indictment. The charges against Saeed Shirzad relate to his peaceful human rights activities including contacts with the families of political prisoners and cooperating with the office of the UN Special Rapporteur on the Situation of Human Rights in Iran. Saeed Shirzad's trial, which took place over a year after his arrest, was grossly unfair. He was allowed to meet his lawyer for the first time during his court hearing which lasted about half an hour. The authorities had denied his lawyer access to casefile material until shortly before the hearing.

Following his arrest on 2 June 2014, Saeed Shirzad was held for 70 days in solitary confinement in a small cell without toilet facilities in Section 209 of Tehran's Evin Prison. He was denied access to his family and lawyer and was put under pressure to make a video-taped "confession". He was subsequently transferred to Section 8, where people jailed for non-political crimes are held in poor conditions, before being taken to Raja'i Shahr Prison.

Please write immediately in English, Persian, Arabic, French, Spanish or your own language:

- Calling on the Iranian authorities to release Saeed Shirzad immediately and unconditionally and quash his conviction and sentence as they arise from his peaceful work as a human rights defender;
- Calling on them to ensure that he is protected from torture and other ill-treatment, including any possible punishment for his hunger strike, and that he has regular access to a lawyer of his choice and to his family, and any medical treatment he might require;
- Reminding them that the UN Standard Minimum Rules on the Treatment of Prisoners (Mandela Rules) requires, so far as possible, separate prisons or sections of a prison for the treatment of different classes of prisoners.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS BEFORE 20 MAY 2016 TO:

Office of the Supreme Leader
 Ayatollah Sayed 'Ali Khamenei
 Salutation: Your Excellency

Head of the Judiciary
 Ayatollah Sadegh Larijani
 Salutation: Your Excellency

And copies to:
President
 Hassan Rouhani

Please send your appeals to the care of diplomatic representatives accredited to your country, listed below. If there is no Iranian embassy in your country, please mail the letter to the Permanent Mission of the Islamic Republic of Iran to the United Nations, 622 Third Avenue, 34th Floor, New York, NY 10017, United States.

Name Address 1 Address 2 Address 3 Fax Fax number Email Email address Salutation Salutation

Please check with your section office if sending appeals after the above date. This is the first update of UA 250/14. Further information:
<https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/MDE13/055/2014/en/>

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ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Saeed Shirzad, along with two other prisoners held in Section 12 of Raja'i Shahr Prison, Mas'oud Choubdar and Afshin Baymani, started a hunger strike on 31 March. They are protesting the transfer of three prisoners who have been transferred to the sections of the prison where apparently prisoners jailed for serious non-political crimes are held. Iraj Hatami, Farid Azmoudeh, and Behzad Tarrahomi were taken out of Section 12, which houses political prisoners, on 13 March. Two of them started a hunger strike in protest on the same day. All three men were among the signatories to an open letter to the UN Human Rights Council in March, which called on the Council to renew the mandate of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Iran.

Saeed Shirzad was arrested, without a warrant, by officials of the Ministry of Intelligence on 2 June after he arrived at his workplace in a refinery in Tabriz, East Azerbaijan province, in the north-west of the country. He was held overnight in a Ministry of Intelligence detention centre in Tabriz and then transferred to Section 209 of Evin Prison in Tehran, which is believed to be under the control of the Ministry of Intelligence. He was allowed to make a phone call to his family one month after his arrest and was only permitted to meet his lawyer for the first time in the courtroom. Saeed Shirzad has said that while he was in solitary confinement, Ministry of Intelligence interrogators accused him of supporting the banned political opposition group People's Mojahedin Organization of Iran (PMOI), and regularly threatened to have him convicted of "enmity against God" (*moharebeh*) an offence that carries the death penalty. They also threatened him with execution. Saeed Shirzad has consistently maintained that he has no relation with the PMOI and the accusation is a spurious one, made merely because of his support in 2014 to the daughter of a PMOI prisoner who was at risk of dropping out of university, due to financial difficulties resulting from her father's imprisonment. In a phone call from prison, Saeed Shirzad asked a friend to write a Facebook post on his behalf, saying that "as a human rights and children's rights activist, I can see no difference between the family of a prisoner with organizational affiliations and the family of a leftist, liberal, Kurdish or Baluch prisoner."

Prior to his September 2015 trial, Saeed Shirzad's court hearing had been scheduled on three occasions including in May 2015 when he left the courtroom in protest as his lawyer was not present and had not been allowed to access his casefile. He had refused to attend his scheduled hearings twice before that for the same reasons. He is now awaiting the outcome of his appeal. Saeed Shirzad had been previously arrested on 21 August 2012 when he and several other activists were in the earthquake-stricken town of Varzaghan in East Azerbaijan province to deliver aid to earthquake victims. He was held in Ahar prison in Azerbaijan province for 19 days and then released on bail. In January 2013, Branch 26 of the Revolutionary Court in Tehran sentenced him to one year in prison, suspended for five years. If his recent conviction and sentence are upheld on appeal, he will have to serve the one year suspended sentence bringing his prison term to a total of six years.

The UN Secretary General stated in his August 2015 report on cooperation with the UN, its representatives and mechanisms in the field of human rights, presented to the 30th Session of the Human Rights Council, that a number of UN Special Rapporteurs had expressed their concern at reported reprisals against various people in Iran who had engaged with UN human rights mechanisms.. He reiterated that any act of intimidation or reprisal against individuals or groups for their engagement with the UN, its mechanisms and representatives in the field of human rights is completely unacceptable and must be halted immediately and unconditionally.

Name: Saeed Shirzad
Gender m/f: m

Further information on UA: 250/14 Index: MDE 13/3798/2016 Issue Date: 8 April 2016