

THE OBSERVATORY - PRESS RELEASE

IRAN: Several trade unionists sentenced to long prison terms while one unionist is released on leave

Geneva-Paris, December 2, 2011. *The Observatory for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders, a joint programme of the World Organisation Against Torture (OMCT) and the International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH), expresses its deepest concern about the ongoing arbitrary detention of several trade unionists and human rights defenders in Iran, while it notes with appreciation the release of Mr. Ebrahim Madadi, Vice-President of the Syndicate of Workers of Tehran and Suburbs Bus Company (Sherkat-e Vahed).*

Several trade unionists and human rights defenders have recently been sentenced to unjust terms of prison and others remain in arbitrary detention in Iran, often in horrendous conditions, with the only aim to sanction the legitimate exercise of their human right activities, amid the continuing repression of the Iranian civil society.

In particular, the situation of Mr. **Reza Shahabi**, the Treasurer and board member of the Syndicate of Sherkat-e Vahed Workers, who has been in pre-trial detention for 18 months since his arrest on June 12, 2010, has deteriorated in the past few days, after beginning a hunger strike on November 22, in protest of the Evin prison authorities' lack of medical treatment and attention to his illness. According to the information received, the authorities are intent on keeping him in pre-trial detention and denying him medical treatment to break him. Shortly before, Mr. Shahabi had been transferred to the hospital due to having pain in his back and neck, and doctors told him after an MRI that some of the vertebra in his neck have deteriorated and are in need of surgery followed by six months of complete rest, and that without hospitalisation his left side might become paralysed. However, the prison authorities have not taken any action for him yet. In addition, his family has reportedly been refused access to him since November 20, and has received no news about his state of health.

Moreover, several other trade unionists have recently been sentenced, notably Messrs. **Ali Nejati, Shahrokh Zamani, Mohammad Jarrahi, Nima Poryaghoub, Sassan Vahevivash** and **Behnam Ebrahimzadeh**.

Mr. Ali Nejati, former President of the Independent Syndicate of Workers of Haft Tappeh Cane Sugar Company, started serving a one-year imprisonment sentence in Dezfoul prison for his trade union activities on November 12, 2011 following his sentencing in March 2011 by Branch 13 of the Islamic Revolution Court in the southern city of Ahvaz. He had previously served six months for the same charges and was subsequently expelled from work after 25 years of working. It was reported that doctors consider him unfit for detention due to a recent heart surgery.

On November 21, 2011, the sentences of Mr. Shahrokh Zamani, a member of the provisional board for reopening the Building Painting Workers Syndicate who was arrested on June 7, 2011, Mr. Mohammad Jarrahi, a unionist member of "the Committee to Pursue Establishment of Labour Unions" who was arrested on June 20, 2011, Mr. Nima Poryaghoub and Mr. Sassan Vahevivash, student activists, to respectively eleven years, five years, six years and six months of imprisonment were upheld by the Appeal Court on charges of "propaganda against the system" and "establishment or membership of a group opposed to the system"¹.

¹ The four and a fifth trade unionist, Mr. **Biuck Sayyedlar**, were tried together as one group on August 18, 2011 by the Islamic Revolution Court in Tabriz without lawyers. Mr. Biuck Sayyedlar was acquitted of the charges. Mr. Sassan Vahevivash was released on bail on August 20. Mr. Nima Poryaghoub was released on bail on September 8. Mr. Shahrokh Zamani was released on bail on October 19. Mr. Mohammad Jarrahi was released on bail on October 3. The four stand risk of arrest at any time because their sentences were upheld in appeal.

Finally, Mr. Behnam Ebrahimzadeh, a unionist member of “the Committee to Pursue Establishment of Labour Unions,” and a child rights activist, who was arrested on June 12, 2010 and later sentenced to 20 years of imprisonment, was reportedly sentenced in appeal to a reduced sentence of five years in late October 2011 for “assembly” and “collusion against the system”.

On a positive note, the Observatory welcomes the release on November 30, 2011 of Mr. **Ebrahim Madadi** from Evin prison as part of a furlough. He had been detained on the basis of a three and a half-year imprisonment sentence, which was issued against him in December 2008 on false charges of “endangering national security”.

Accordingly, the Observatory urges the Iranian authorities to put an end to these acts of harassment against human rights defenders, to immediately and unconditionally release those presently detained in the country, to take all necessary measures to guarantee, in all circumstances, their physical and psychological integrity, and more generally to conform to the United Nations Declaration on Human Rights Defenders, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and international human rights instruments ratified by Iran.

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