

Amnesty International UK

PRESS RELEASE

IMMEDIATE: Friday 21 December 2007

IRAN: TRADE UNION LEADER COLLAPSES IN PRISON

Amnesty International demands the immediate release of Mahmoud Salehi

Amnesty International today called for immediate release of an Iranian trade union leader who was rushed to hospital after collapsing in prison.

Amnesty International has received reliable reports that Mahmoud Salehi, a spokesperson for the Organisational Committee to Establish Trade Unions, was taken unconscious to Tohid hospital in Sanandaj on 11 December, after repeatedly collapsing in prison between 4-10 December as a result of his health problems.

Salehi has a long-term history of kidney and heart complaints. In May 2007, his doctor made a request asking for Salehi to receive specialist treatment. That request continues to be ignored.

Amnesty International regards Salehi as a prisoner of conscience and has ongoing concerns for his well-being.

The case is the latest example of the Iranian authorities continual disregard for the health of prisoners.

Following his admission to the hospital, Salehi received a brain scan. This revealed that blood vessels in his brain have been damaged.

His wife, Najibeh Salehzadeh, said:

“The physical health of my partner is extremely severe. One of his kidneys has stopped working and because of being deprived of proper medical treatment the other kidney is losing its functions. His blood pressure fluctuates and his blood sugar is surging.

“He falls unconscious about twice daily. The lack of treatment of his kidney has affected his heart as well. His feet and legs are swollen and the excessive injections of tranquilizers have seriously endangered his well-being.”

Shane Enright, Amnesty International UK's Trade Union Campaigns Manager, added:

“Mahmoud Salehi's life is at risk. He urgently needs proper and sustained treatment outside prison. The Iranian government must release him now.

“Amnesty will work tirelessly with our partners in the international trade union movement to secure the safety and freedom of Salehi and other jailed trade unionists and to challenge this callous and cruel disregard of Iran’s humanitarian obligations.”

Background:

- Mahmoud Salehi was arrested after a peaceful demonstration to celebrate May Day 2004.
- In November 2005 he was sentenced to five years’ imprisonment and three years’ internal exile in the city of Ghorveh, Kordestan. At his trial, the prosecutor reportedly cited his trade union activities as evidence against him, and referred to a meeting he had held with officials from the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU) – now reconstituted as the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC) – in April 2004, shortly before the May Day demonstrations. His conviction was overturned on appeal, but after a retrial he was sentenced on 11 November 2006 to four years’ imprisonment for “conspiring to commit crimes against national security”. He was free until the appeal hearing on 11 March, when his sentence was reduced to a three-year suspended prison sentence and one year’s imprisonment, which commenced with his imprisonment on 9 April 2007.
- Mahmoud Salehi was among 20-30 prisoners forcibly moved on 4 December from one section to another in Sanandaj Central Prison. Given very little time to collect personal items, Mahmoud Salehi required more time than other prisoners to comply with the order because of his poor health. As a result of his perceived slowness he was insulted and, according to reports, a prison guard threatened to kill him. Mahmoud Salehi experienced raised blood pressure, as a likely consequence of the stress he had experienced during his transfer between prison sections, and he was taken to Tohid Hospital on or around 4 December, where he was restrained to his bed and administered tranquilisers prior to his return to prison, the date of which is not known to Amnesty International.
- Mahmoud Salehi has been denied visits from his lawyer and family.

ENDS

Amnesty International UK media information:

Niall Couper: 020 7033 1549, niall.couper@amnesty.org.uk

Neil Durkin: 020 7033 1547, neil.durkin@amnesty.org.uk

Out of hours: 07721 398984, www.amnesty.org.uk