



Monthly Report of Association for the Defense of Azerbaijani Political Prisoners in Iran - March 2009

As in previous months, March also saw Azerbaijani cultural activists under increasing pressure from Iranian security forces. Even though Article 27 of the Iranian Constitution states that any demonstration except those against Islam is allowed, the Azerbaijani activists charged with participating in peaceful demonstrations are sentenced to heavy jail terms. They are subjected to arbitrary detentions and are held in prisons without trial, without access to legal representation or to their families. During detention, security forces often coerce the detainees to confess to crimes they have not committed by means of torture or other abuse in order to ensure that heavy sentences will be imposed upon them.

Excruciating torture of Azerbaijani ethnic rights activists

Azerbaijani ethnic rights activist Ramin Sadeghi has been harshly tortured by Ardebil Intelligence Service forces. He was arrested on February 5, 2009 and is still being held in Ardebil Intelligence Service custody. The reason for his detention has not been released.

Sadeghi and his brother Mohammad Sadeghi were hanged from one leg for two

days. Mohammad was released on bail of 300 million rials (\$38,000) on March 14, 2009 after 17 days of detention. The two were held in cells and tortured using electric shock to sensitive areas of their bodies, severe beatings, whippings with cable, sleep deprivation, and also insults and humiliation.

According to a witness, the Sadeghi brothers were forced to give false confessions under torture. During the interrogations they declared that they, along with three other Azerbaijani activists, crossed the Aras River (which flows along the border between Iran and Azerbaijan) and met with members of foreign organizations, who gave them advice in distributing CDs and articles about the Azerbaijani National Movement in Iran. The brothers were also coerced into giving false confessions about other Azerbaijani activists, including Abbas Lisani (a prominent ethnic rights activist) and his wife.

The authorities had told Ramin's family that he would be released during Nevruz Eve (March 21-26) after the investigation was completed. But after refusing to confess when he was presented to answer



Monthly Report of Association for the Defense of Azerbaijani Political Prisoners in Iran - March 2009

the questions of prosecutor, the judge sent him back to the Ardebil Intelligence Service.

Prior to this, Ebrahim Sadeghi, another brother of the detainee, was released on bail after two weeks of detention.

Ramin was also arrested in 2007 during the International Mother Tongue ceremonies (February 21), and was released on bail after one month of detention. Amnesty International released a public action at the time, deeming him a prisoner of conscience and called Iranian authorities to release him.

Jail sentences for Azerbaijani ethnic rights activists

Azerbaijani human rights activist Vadud Asadi and Husein Rahimi, a civil engineering student at Rasht University, were sentenced to one year and six months' imprisonment, respectively. They were charged with "propaganda against regime" and "propaganda of ethnicity."

The last session of their trial took place on February 28, 2009 in Rasht Revolutionary Court. The trial was not public and the activists' advocate was not present.

Asadi and Rahimi were detained by Rasht security forces in Jun 2008 and were released after one month of detention in Rasht Intelligence Service custody. They were held in a cell for almost the entire jail term and were subjected to physical and psychological torture. They were not allowed to visit their families and were not permitted access a lawyer. Their families were not informed of their place of detention.

Front Line (The International Foundation for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders) released an action on August 15, 2008 and called upon Iranian authorities to release human Asadi.



Asadi has a geology degree from Rasht Azad University and is the former president of the Islamic association in that. He was also the Editor in chief of the *Seher* student journal, recently closed down by the government.



Monthly Report of Association for the Defense of Azerbaijani Political Prisoners in Iran - March 2009

Asadi was also arrested during demonstration against a cartoon comparing Azerbaijani Iranians to cockroaches, published in state-run *Iran* newspaper which most Azerbaijanis found offensive. He was detained for 40 days and was released on bail to be tried later.

Azerbaijani ethnic rights activist Iraj Hasani was sentenced to two years' imprisonment on appeal on March 1, 2008. Hasani was not present at the trial. Prior to this, he had been sentenced to four months' imprisonment and 30 lashes on September 9, 2008. He was charged with "violation of public order" and "participating in illegal demonstrations."

Iraj Hasani was arrested during the demonstrations against the cartoon in Tabriz on May 21, 2008. He was released on bail to be tried later.

Azerbaijani ethnic rights activist Beytollah Barzger, was sentenced to five months' suspended imprisonment by Meshginshahr Revolutionary Court. He was charged with "propaganda against the regime" and "propaganda of ethnicity by distributing articles." The trial was not public and Barzger's advocate was not present.

Azerbaijani student to be tried

Sixteen-year-old Azerbaijani student Ebrahim Nuri was detained during the demonstrations marking the anniversary of the publication of the offensive cartoon in May 2007. The warrant stated that Nuri was to present himself in the Ahar revolutionary Court on March 25, 2009, but the judge postponed the trial to April 4, 2009.



Nuri had previously been suspended from school for three days because of his involvement in the Azerbaijani ethnic rights movement.

Azerbaijan student activists deprived of higher education

Azerbaijani student activists are faced with increasingly pressurized by the disciplinary boards of universities as well as state security forces. Most student activists called to disciplinary boards are suspended from the university for one or sometimes



Monthly Report of Association for the Defense of Azerbaijani Political Prisoners in Iran - March 2009

even more than one semester. University authorities collect the names of ethnic rights defenders and prevent them from being admitted to graduate schools.

The Administrative Justice Tribunal of Iran and Article 90 Commission (named for the article in Iran's Constitution empowering the Parliament to investigate complaints against any of the three branches of government) rejected the objection of Azerbaijani student activist Ghader Kiyani, who was denied admittance to a graduate studies program in 2008-2009. He earned one of the best grades in the graduate studies entrance exam but the ministry of Science, Research, and Technology refused to let him pursue a masters degree. (In Iran the graduate studies entrance exam is given by the ministry of Science, Research, and Technology, and Universities are not given more chances to take place their own exams.) When Kiyani questioned his rejection, the authorities told him he was denied entrance because of his activities in defence of Azerbaijani ethnic rights.

Other student activists, including Amin Emami, Nahid Babazade, Samad Pashayi, Mehdi Haj Mohammadi, Yashar Karami and Nader Mahd Gharadagh from the

University of Tabriz were also prevented from pursuing higher educations.

The Turkish names of the shops and stores are to be changed

Even though the Interior Ministry declared that the order to change Turkish names on Azerbaijani shops to Persian no longer valid after Azerbaijani members of parliament objected, in some cities and towns of Azerbaijan, authorities force shop owners to do so anyway. In some cities, authorities close down shops with Turkish names.

Recently in Ardebil, authorities ordered Abbas Lisani, a prominent Azerbaijani ethnic rights activist, to change his shop name "Chanlibel". Lisani was issued the warrant on March 19, 2009. He has been told that his shop will be shut down if does not change the name.

In Sulduz (Naghadeh) another Azerbaijani city, the barber shop of Afshin Puyende has been shut down because of its name "Gozellik Salonu," which is in Turkish. The authorities also cancelled his work permit.



Monthly Report of Association for the Defense of Azerbaijani Political Prisoners in Iran - March 2009

Pressures on Azerbaijani artists

Azerbaijan, a music education centre directed by Hasan Demirchi, was closed down on March 11, 2009. This is the third time that this centre has been shuttered by authorities.

During the Azerbaijani demonstrations against the cockroach cartoon in May 2006, Demirchi was arrested and the music centre was closed down. Demirchi's subsequent efforts resulted in the centre being reopened.



The Azerbaijan music centre is one of the most well-known Azerbaijani cultural institutions in Tabriz. Musicians trained at the centre have performed many concerts in different Azerbaijani cities in Iran and internationally.

Azerbaijani student journal closed down

Yaghish, a student journal at the University of Urmia, was shut down by the cultural council of the university before it even went to press for the first time. According to Editor-in-chief Amir Gaharhramani, the journal was shuttered because there was another journal with the same name at the university, which was dealing with ethnic problems. It, too, was closed down.

According to the Commission of the Student Journals (national commission which watch the student journals in Iran) no body has the right to control or censor written material, or to pressure the student journals because of what's printed in them. However, all editors of student journals are forced to submit the papers to cultural council for approval.

Many Azerbaijani student journals have been closed down by the government over the last year in the universities. Some of them include: *Bulud, Ulus, Nasim, Araz, Ozluk, Oyanish, Sattar Khan, Kimlik, Yoldash, Yagish, Aydin Gelecel, Gunesh, Yarpaq, Telenger, Yashil, Yol, Anayurdu, Achiq Soz, Sayan, Isil Ay* and *Khalaj*.