

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL PUBLIC STATEMENT

AI Index: MDE 13/047/2013
19 November 2013

Iran: Physicist Omid Kokabee must be released

Amnesty International has launched a campaign calling for the immediate and unconditional release of **Omid Kokabee**, a 31-year-old Iranian physicist pursuing a PhD in the USA, serving a 10-year prison sentence in Tehran's Evin Prison. The organization considers Omid Kokabee a prisoner of conscience, held solely for his refusal to work on military projects in Iran and as a result of spurious charges related to his legitimate scholarly ties with academic institutions outside of Iran.

Omid Kokabee, a member of Iran's Turkmen minority who was undertaking post-graduate studies at the University of Texas in the USA in optics and photonics, which includes studying the detection of light, was arrested at Imam Khomeini Airport in Tehran on 30 January 2011 while waiting for his flight back to the USA after visiting his family during a university break. He was held in solitary confinement for 15 months and was subjected to prolonged interrogations, and pressured to make "confessions".

In an open letter written from prison in April 2013 Omid Kokabee said: "During interrogations which were conducted in solitary confinement, while all my communication with my family and the outside world was cut off, and while I was constantly being put under pressure and threats by receiving news about the horrible physical and mental state of my family, I was asked again and again to write up various versions of my personal history after 2005".

Omid Kokabee has also said that since his graduation from university in 2005 he had been "invited several times to work as a scientist and technical manager for military and intelligence projects." These instances include being offered admission to a PhD program with full sponsorship by the Atomic Energy Organization of Iran. He declined all invitations.

His trial on 13 May 2012 before Branch 15 of Tehran's Revolutionary Court was marred with irregularities. It was televised on Iran state TV in breach of Omid Kokabee's right to the presumption of innocence. He was denied the right to be represented by a lawyer until his trial and no evidence was presented against him in court other than his well known and public affiliations with academic institutions in the USA. He was sentenced to 10 years' imprisonment for having "connections with a hostile government". He was tried together with at least 12 others, who were prosecuted for espionage.

The sentence was upheld by Branch 36 of the Tehran Court of Appeals in August 2012. In November 2012, according to *Kalame*, a Persian-language news website close to opposition leader Mir Hossein Mousavi, Branch 1057 of Tehran's General Court sentenced him to a further 91 days' imprisonment for receiving "illicit payments" in connection with the scholarships he had received for his studies.

Omid Kokabee achieved one of the highest score for the university entrance exam across Iran and was selected among a group of top students to meet with the Supreme Leader Ayatollah Sayed 'Ali Khamenei in 2000. He has always been interested in science and undertook a double degree in Applied Physics and Mechanical Engineering at Tehran's Sharif University of Technology and pursued graduate studies at the Institute of Photonic Studies in Spain.

Scientists around the world have been campaigning for Omid Kokabee's release as well, including in Spain, the UK, and the USA.

Background

The majority of trials in Iran are grossly unfair, particularly those before Revolutionary Courts, which are used to prosecute national security offences. These offences are often on the basis of vaguely worded laws that do not meet standards for an internationally recognizable crime. Defendants are routinely denied access to lawyers in the preliminary pre-trial investigation stage.

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