

URGENT ACTION

IRAQI CLERIC DETAINED, WHEREABOUTS UNKNOWN

Iraqi cleric and commentator Ahmed al-Qubbanji was detained on 17 or 18 February in Qom, central Iran, while visiting a member of his family. He is not known to have been formally charged, but media reports citing officials state that he was arrested for allegedly “spying for Israel” and could face the death penalty. His whereabouts are not known and he is at risk of torture or other ill-treatment and may be subjected to enforced disappearance. He is believed to be a prisoner of conscience.

Ahmed al-Qubbanji (56), a Shi'a Muslim cleric, who fled from Iraq in 1979 and later settled in Iran until his return to Iraq in 2008, has reportedly provided written and spoken interpretations of Islam that draw on rationality and progressive approaches, which are rejected by leading clerics in both countries. Ahmed al-Qubbanji was visiting a family member in Qom when he was arrested by officials from Iran's Ministry of Intelligence on 17 or 18 February. According to media reports, an Iranian Intelligence official claimed on an Iranian radio station that Ahmed al-Qubbanji was suspected of “spying for Israel” but his family has dismissed the allegation. The authorities have not disclosed his whereabouts to his family. On 21 February, Ahmed al-Qubbanji's supporters are reported to have held a protest outside the Iranian Embassy in Baghdad, calling for his release.

According to a 26 February 2013 report in the Iraqi Arabic-language newspaper *al-Aalem*, Mohammad Mehdi Alasfi – the Representative of Iran's Supreme Leader in Najaf in Iraq, a city of religious importance for Shi'a Muslims – is reported to have called Ahmed al-Qubbanji's views regarding the Qur'an, the Prophet Muhammad and other religious tenets of Islam “false and perverted”. Mohammad Mehdi Alasfi called on the Iranian judiciary “to confront these cases firmly and strongly, lest [they create] discord in our Islamic surroundings.”

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

- Calling on the authorities to immediately disclose to his family the whereabouts of Ahmed al-Qubbanji, urging them to ensure that he is given, without delay, regular access to his family, lawyers of his own choosing, consular assistance and any adequate medical treatment he may require;
- Urging them to protect him from torture or other cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment, such as being forced to give a televised “confession”;
- Seeking the reason for his arrest and expressing concern that he may have been arrested in connection with the peaceful expression of his views, in which case he should be released immediately and unconditionally.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS BEFORE 10 APRIL 2013 TO:

Leader of the Islamic Republic

Ayatollah Sayed 'Ali Khamenei
The Office of the Supreme Leader
Islamic Republic Street – End of Shahid
Keshvar Doust Street,
Tehran, Islamic Republic of Iran
Email: info_leader@leader.ir
Twitter: "Call on #Iran leader
@khamenei_ir to release Ahmed al-
Qubbanji

Salutation: Your Excellency

Head of the Judiciary

Ayatollah Sadegh Larijani
c/o Public Relations Office
Number 4, 2 Azizi Street intersection
Tehran
Islamic Republic of Iran
Email: info@dadiran.ir (Subject
Line: FAO Ayatollah Sadegh Larijani)

Salutation: Your Excellency

And copies to:

Secretary General High Council for
Human Rights
Mohammed Javad Larijani
c/o Office of the Head of the Judiciary
Pasteur St, Vali Asr Ave
South of Serah-e Jomhouri
Tehran, Islamic Republic of Iran
Email: larijani@ipm.ir

Also send copies to diplomatic representatives accredited to your country.

Please check with your section office if sending appeals after the above date.

**AMNESTY
INTERNATIONAL**



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ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Ahmed al-Qubbanji hails from a prominent Najafi clerical family. In the 1970s; he studied jurisprudence and moved to Iran in the 1980s. On his return to Iraq in 2008 he founded the Liberal Islamic Movement and has reportedly advocated interpretations of Islamic teaching that are in accordance with reason and rationality. A series of his lectures is available on YouTube.

In October 2012, his elder brother Sadruddin al-Qubbanji, the Friday prayer Leader of Najaf and a leader of the Islamic Supreme Council of Iraq, issued a *fatwā* which asserted that "the ideas promoted by [his brother] Sayyed Ahmed al-Qubbanji are distorted and un-Islamic... these ideas are part of the war waged by the enemies of Islam, in order to cast doubt on the Islamic religion and its principles." As a result, Ahmed al-Qubbanji moved from Najaf to Baghdad.

According to a 26 February 2013 report in the Iraqi Arabic-language newspaper, *al-Aalem*, the Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Walid Abawi, stated that the government of Iraq had no information about Ahmed al-Qubbanji's arrest.

Media reports state that the National Union of Iraqi Journalists has issued a statement calling on the Iranian authorities to "provide reasons for his arrest and the charges against him".

Name: Ahmed al-Qubbanji

Gender m/f: m

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