

URGENT ACTION

HUNGER-STRIKING DERVISHES CRITICALLY ILL

Nine jailed members of Iran's Gonabadi dervish religious minority began a hunger strike on 31 August, in protest at the authorities' harassment and persecution of Gonabadi dervishes across the country and are now critically ill. They are prisoners of conscience.

Nine imprisoned followers of one of Iran's largest Sufi orders, the Nemattolah Gonabadi order, began a hunger strike on 31 August, and are now critically ill. Mostafa Abdi, Reza Entesari, Hamidreza Moradi and Kasra Nouri, and their lawyers, also imprisoned, Amir Eslami, Farshid Yadollahi, Mostafa Daneshjoo, Afshin Karampour and Omid Behrouzi, have announced that they have written their wills and are prepared to die unless the authorities stop harassing, persecuting and imprisoning Gonabadi dervishes and their lawyers, and cease the destruction of their worship houses (*hosseinieh*). Mostafa Daneshjoo, Reza Entesari and Afshin Karampour intensified their protest on 5 September, by refusing medicine. Mostafa Daneshjoo is believed to suffer from chronic asthma, exacerbated by lack of access to adequate medical care and his three-month confinement in a basement cell without a window or ventilation in Evin Prison between February and May 2013. Afshin Karampour and Reza Entesari are believed to suffer from severe spinal problems and an irregular heartbeat, respectively. The other hunger strikers are also believed to be in poor health, caused by prison conditions.

The men were mostly detained in September 2011, during a wave of arrests of Gonabadi dervishes. They were all held in prolonged solitary confinement, without access to their lawyers and families, and were sentenced, after two years and following grossly unfair trials, to jail on various trumped-up charges, including "colluding against national security through membership in a deviant sect", "disseminating propaganda against the state", "disturbing public opinion" and "disturbing public order". The men are prisoners of conscience, imprisoned solely for practicing their faith and defending the human rights of dervishes through their legitimate activities as journalists and lawyers.

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

- Calling on the Iranian authorities to release Mostafa Abdi, Reza Entesari, Hamidreza Moradi, Kasra Nouri, Amir Eslami, Farshid Yadollahi, Mostafa Daneshjoo, Afshin Karampour and Omid Behrouzi, immediately and unconditionally, and all other Gonabadi dervishes arrested solely for peacefully exercising their rights to freedom of religion and freedoms of expression, association and assembly;
- Urging them to ensure that the men receive any medical attention they may require;
- Urging them to put an end to discrimination and violence against Gonabadi dervishes, in both law and practice.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS BEFORE 6 NOVEMBER 2014 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: @khamenei_ir
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
Salutation: Your Excellency

And copies to:

President of the Islamic Republic of Iran
Hassan Rouhani
The Presidency
Pasteur Street, Pasteur Square
Tehran, Islamic Republic of Iran
Twitter: @HassanRouhani (English) and
@Rouhani_ir (Persian)

Also send copies to diplomatic representatives accredited to your country. Please insert local diplomatic addresses below:

Name Address 1 Address 2 Address 3 Fax Fax number Email Email address Salutation Salutation

**AMNESTY
INTERNATIONAL**



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

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ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Hundreds of supporters of the nine hunger strikers gathered outside the Office of Tehran's Prosecutor in Arq Square, Tehran, on 21 and 22 September, to support their demands that the authorities respect the "civil rights" of Gonabadi dervishes as "equal members of society". Those present at the protest reported that riot police were deployed to disperse the crowd, arresting over 800 people, and injuring at least 60, including several children, using batons, electric cables, buckshot and tear gas. Amnesty International understands that most of those detained were released after spending up to 48 hours in the basements of various police stations in southern Tehran.

Gonabadi dervishes in Iran consider themselves Shi'a Muslims. They are Sufis who describe Sufism as neither a religion nor a sect, but rather a way of life by which people – from any religion – may find God. Gonabadi dervishes, and members of Iran's other religious minorities, suffer discrimination, harassment, arbitrary detention and attacks on their prayer houses. President Rouhani's Special Advisor on Ethnic and Religious Minority Affairs, Ali Younesi, stated in February 2014 that "Muslim sects like dervishes" must not experience arbitrary restrictions and abuses in practicing their faith and must receive protection from the police. The persecution of dervishes, which increased after a speech by the Supreme Leader in the religious city of Qom in October 2010 denouncing "newly created circles of false mysticism", has, however, continued unabated.

The wave of arrests of Gonabadi dervishes, including the men on hunger strike, followed a confrontation with state-affiliated paramilitary *basij* forces in the town of Kavar in Fars Province on 3 September 2011 when members of the *basij* armed with batons gathered in the town square chanting anti-dervish slogans and setting fire to stores displaying photos of dervish leaders in the windows. This confrontation led to the security forces using excessive force, shooting one person dead and wounding at least five others, and was the subject of UA 280/11 (<http://amnesty.org/en/library/info/MDE13/080/2011/en>). Amir Eslami and Afshin Karampour were arrested on 4 September 2011, after they were invited by the Governor of Kavar to negotiate for the release of approximately 60 dervishes who had been arrested. They were arrested upon arrival at the Governor's office. Hamidreza Moradi, Reza Entesari and Mostafa Abdi were arrested the next day by plainclothes agents during a raid on the house of one of the administrators of the website *Majzooban-e Noor*, which is dedicated to reporting human rights violations against dervishes. Lawyers Omid Behrouzi and Farshid Yadollahi were arrested on 7 and 11 September respectively, suggesting a plot to target journalists and lawyers working to defend the human rights of dervishes. Mostafa Daneshjoo, who was a few days from completing a six-month sentence for "spreading lies" in defending his dervish client, was transferred from the Sari Prison in the north of the country to Evin Prison in Tehran on 29 October 2011, and accused of fresh charges.

In June 2013, Branch 15 of the Revolutionary Court in Tehran sentenced Hamidreza Moradi to 10-and-a-half years' imprisonment, Reza Entesari to eight-and-a-half years, and Mostafa Abdi to three years, and lawyers Amir Eslami, Afshin Karampour, Farshid Yadollahi, Omid Behrouzi, Mostafa Daneshjoo to seven-and-a-half years each. Kasra Nouri was sentenced to four-and-a-half years' imprisonment in a separate case, by Branch 3 of the Revolutionary Court in Shiraz in April 2013. Amnesty International understands that in the months leading to their decision to go on hunger strike, the dervish prisoners had been subjected to increased hardship by the prison authorities, getting shuffled between numerous sections shared with prisoners convicted of serious crimes, refused access to the prison library and prevented from going outside for fresh air and communicating with one another. Kasra Nouri is held in Nezam Prison in Fars Province and the rest in Tehran's Evin Prison.

Names: Mostafa Abdi, Reza Entesari, Hamidreza Moradi, Kasra Nouri, Amir Eslami, Farshid Yadollahi, Mostafa Daneshjoo, Afshin Karampour, Omid Behrouzi

Gender m/f: m

