



## PRESS RELEASE

For Immediate Release – June 14, 2007

### JOIN THE CAMPAIGN TO FREE DR. KIAN TAJBAKSH, HALEH ESFANDIARI, AND ALI SHAKERI

ARTICLE 19 calls for the immediate release of three U.S.-Iranian citizens charged by the Iranian authorities with “acting against national security by engaging in propaganda against the Islamic republic by the method of spying on behalf of foreigners”, and urges its partners, contacts and supporters to sign on to the petitions to free Dr. Kian Tajbakash, Haleh Esfandiari and Ali Shakeri at:

- Free Haleh Campaign: <http://www.freehaleh.org/category/petition/>

- Free Kian Campaign: <http://www.freekian.org/petition/>

Parnaz (Nazi) Azima, journalist for Radio Farda, the Persian-language service run jointly by Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty and Voice of America has also been charged by the Iranian authorities with the same charges. Mrs Azima has recently been released on bail, but is still facing prosecution and the prospect of lengthy incarceration and possibly the death sentence if convicted of the national security charges.

The other accused are *Kian Tajbakhsh*, a social scientist at the New School in New York who has worked as a consultant for the Open Society Institute and the World Bank; *Haleh Esfandiari*, director of the Middle East programme at the Washington-based Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars; and *Ali Shakeri*, a founding board member of the University of California, Irvine, Center for Citizen Peacebuilding.

ARTICLE 19 is alarmed by the deterioration of the protection of the right to freedom of expression in Iran, and in particular by the repeated attempts by the Iranian authorities to isolate the Iranian media and academic community from its global counterparts, and curtail cross-cultural dialogues and debates, with the view of maintaining tight control over information, ideas, and opinions. Dual nationals American-Iranians have been particularly targeted, and their basic right to a fair trial denied.

#### **Background:**

Dr Kian Tajbakhsh is an internationally-respected Iranian-American scholar, social scientist and urban planner. From 1994 until 2001, Dr. Tajbakhsh taught Urban Policy and Politics at the New School for Social Research in New York City. Dr. Tajbakhsh is also an international expert in the areas of local government reform, urban planning, public health, and social policy. He has acted as a consultant for several Iranian government organisations, including the Municipalities

Organisation, the Social Security Organisation, and the Ministry of the Interior, and with international nongovernmental organisations such as the World Bank, the Open Society Institute, and the Netherlands Association of Municipalities. His work in Iran has included evaluating humanitarian relief and rebuilding projects in the aftermath of the devastating 2003 earthquake in Bam. In 2006, he completed a three-year study of the local government sector in Iran. Dr Kian Tajbakhsh was arrested at his home in Tehran on May 11, 2007 and is being held at Evin Prison in Tehran.

Haleh Esfandiari was robbed at knifepoint on December 30 2006 by three men while on the way to the airport after visiting her ailing 93-year-old mother in Tehran, whom she had visited approximately twice per year over the past decade. During this incident, the men threatened to kill her; then they stole her baggage and both her U.S. and Iranian passports. Consequently, she was not permitted to leave the country. When she applied for new travel documents, she was instead barred from leaving Iran and interrogated for up to eight hours per day over a period of several weeks (until February 14) by authorities from the Iranian Ministry of Intelligence. On May 7, 2007, she was told to report to the Ministry of Intelligence. Upon her arrival there on the morning of May 8, she was taken into custody and driven to Tehran's Evin Prison where she has been held in custody ever since. She has since been released on bond.

Parnaz (Nazi) Azima has been prohibited from leaving Iran since her passport was seized in January 2007. On 21 May, following a large bail payment, the authorities refused to return her passport, citing the interest in her case by the Information Ministry. On 6 June, the Iranian authorities confirmed that Mrs Azima had been charged and was being detained in Evin Prison in Tehran.

Ali Shakeri is a businessman in Irvine, California with Global Estate Funding, having graduated from the University of Texas with a business administration degree. He is an Iranian-American peace activist who serves on the Community Advisory Board of the Center for Citizen Peacebuilding at the University of California, Irvine. He went to Iran to visit his mother, who was ill and died during his visit. He is believed to have been detained since May 8, 2007. After several weeks denying Shakeri's detention, the Iranian authorities have finally admitted that he was under their custody.

#### **NOTES TO EDITORS**

- For more information, please contact Sophie Redmond, Legal Officer, +44 20 7278 9292, [sophie@article19.org](mailto:sophie@article19.org)
- ARTICLE 19 is an independent human rights organisation that works around the world to protect and promote the right to freedom of expression. It takes its name from Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which guarantees freedom of expression.