

XIX

ARTICLE 19

For immediate release – 19 March 2009

Iran: ARTICLE 19 Calls for an Urgent Investigation into the Death of Blogger Omid Reza Mirsayafi

On 18 March 2009, Omid Reza Mirsayafi, a 29-year-old Iranian blogger died in prison in Tehran after he failed to receive medical assistance. According to Dr Hessam Firouzi, a human rights activist and fellow prisoner, prison officials ignored requests for urgent medical attention for Mirsayafi and made little attempt to save his life.

Mirsayafi was described as a cultural blogger who wrote primarily about traditional Persian music and culture. He was first arrested on 22 April 2008 and released after 41 days on bail of 100 million Tumans (approximately GBP 70,000). He was subsequently tried on 2 November and convicted under Articles 500 and 514 of the criminal code which states that “anyone who insults the Supreme Guide Khomeini, founder of the Islamic Republic of Iran, or the country’s leaders, is liable for six months to two years in prison” (Article 514) and “anyone making propaganda against the state is liable to three months to one year in prison” (Article 500).

Since his imprisonment Mirsayafi had reportedly become increasingly distressed and unable to cope with harsh prison conditions. Unconfirmed reports coming out of the Evin prison seem to indicate that Mirsayafi’s death may have been caused by an incorrect dose of the prescribed medications he had been taking. Dr Firouzi alleges that prison doctors ignored pleas to give him proper treatment when he was clearly in distress.

Mirsayafi’s sentence of two-and-a-half years in prison was the one of the longest handed down to a blogger in Iran.

“ARTICLE 19 is shocked at the news of Omid Reza Mirsayafi’s death in prison, especially on the eve of Norouz [Iranian New Year],” says ARTICLE 19 Executive Director, Dr Agnès Callamard. “We call on the Iranian authorities to launch a thorough and urgent investigation into the circumstances surrounding his death.”

Mirsayafi’s treatment is not an isolated case in Iran. Indeed it is another example of the ongoing persecution and repression of dissident voices by Iranian authorities. For example, Hossein Derakhshan, the most prominent blogger imprisoned in Iran, has been incarcerated without trial since November 2008.

Shahnaz Gholami a women rights activist and editor of a blog called *A Woman’s Rights are Human Rights* was arrested in November 2008 for posting articles deemed to be damaging to national security on her blog. Gholami, who also experienced harsh

prison conditions in jail, was released on bail of 200 million Tumans (approximately GBP 140,000) on 17 January 2009 after going on a hunger strike.

ARTICLE 19 calls for an urgent and impartial inquiry into the circumstances surrounding Mirsayafi's death and urges the Iranian authorities to immediately halt its persecution of bloggers, activists and dissenting voices.

NOTES TO EDITORS:

- For more information: please contact Khashayar Karimi, ARTICLE 19 Iran Programme Officer at Khashayar@article19.org +44 20 7278 9292.
- 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 free speech.