

Urgent Action Office 3-1992 Yonge Street Toronto ON M4S 1Z7 Phone: (416) 363-9933 Fax: (416) 363-3103 urgentaction@amnesty.ca

UA 7/22, **Update 2**, AI Index: MDE 13/5819/2022 of 6 July 2022
The original index number is MDE 13/5206/2022 of 2 February 2022

IRAN SICK POLITICAL ACTIVIST HELD INCOMMUNICADO

Iranian activist Abbas Vahedian has been detained incommunicado since 5 May 2022, when authorities in Vakilabad prison in Mashhad, Khorasan-e Razavi province, cut off his contact with the outside world. His incommunicado detention heightens longstanding concerns over his torture, including by denial of adequate medical care and enforced isolation. He is solely held for the peaceful exercise of his human rights and must be immediately and unconditionally released.

Unjustly imprisoned political activist Abbas Vahedian has been subjected to incommunicado detention since 5 May 2022, when prosecution and prison authorities in Vakilabad prison in Mashhad, Khorasan-e Razavi province, cut off all his contact with the outside world. Since then, his family and lawyer have approached various judicial, prosecution and prison authorities, expressing concern over his fate and whereabouts and requesting visits and phone calls. In response, the authorities have simply said he is banned from visits and phone calls and they will contact his family and lawyer whenever the ban is lifted. On 19 June 2022, the head of the Intelligence and Protection Unit of Vakilabad prison told his distressed family that he is being punished for “disrupting prison order” through chanting slogans such as “Down with the Dictator” and speaking out against his unjust imprisonment and ongoing torture in prison.

Before he was subjected to incommunicado detention, Abbas Vahedian was locked with another prisoner in a room in section 1(6) of Vakilabad prison in isolating conditions. He was banned from having contact with other prisoners and from family visits. He was only allowed to call his family daily for a few minutes in the presence of an official who prevented him from speaking freely. On 5 May 2021, the official terminated the call after about a minute when Abbas Vahedian began complaining about his torture in prison. His family has not heard from him since and have no confirmation about where he is being held, making his circumstances akin to enforced disappearance. The authorities have also tortured Abbas Vahedian by deliberately denying him adequate medical care since his arbitrary arrest on 1 September 2021, causing him severe pain and suffering. He has dental pain due to a worsening gum infection which has been left untreated. He developed chronic neck pain after Ministry of Intelligence agents held him in solitary confinement at an unmarked detention facility and forced him to sleep on the ground without a pillow and a mattress from 1 September 2021 to 6 March 2022. He has also been denied adequate treatment and medication for high blood pressure, high level of lipids in his blood, chest pain, and a skin condition which has resulted in cuts and abrasions on his knees. He was sentenced to 21 years in prison in late 2021 solely for his peaceful activism for a democratic secular Iran.

Write to the Head of the Judiciary urging him to:

- immediately end his incommunicado detention and grant him access to phone calls and visits with his family and lawyers
- release him immediately and unconditionally, as he is held solely for the peaceful exercise of his human rights to freedom of expression and association
- pending his release, provide him with any specialized medical care he requires outside prison, and protected from further enforced disappearance, incommunicado detention, torture and other ill-treatment, including through solitary confinement, enforced isolation, and denial of medical care

Write to:

Head of the Judiciary,
Gholamhossein Mohseni Ejei
c/o Embassy of Iran to the European Union
Avenue Franklin Roosevelt No. 15
1050 Bruxelles
Belgium

Email: secretariat@iranembassy.be

Salutation: Dear Mr Gholamhossein Mohseni Ejei:

Additional information

Following his arbitrary arrest on 1 September 2021, Abbas Vahedian was held for more than six months in solitary confinement nearly 24 hours a day in an informal, unmarked Ministry of Intelligence detention facility in Mashhad. During this period, he was denied access to fresh air and natural light and held in a windowless cell where bright lamps were kept on 24 hours a day, causing him sleep deprivation and distress. Every few days, he was taken to a hallway for a short walk while blindfolded. He was also denied adequate healthcare, bedding, warm clothing, and regular family visits. Ministry of Intelligence agents told him that for his detention conditions to improve, he must denounce his political activities in writing and reveal the password to his phone. On 6 March 2022, the authorities transferred him to Vakilabad prison in Mashhad and locked him there in a room where prisoners are held in isolation. For a month, the authorities forced him to share the room with five or six other prisoners who were charged with or convicted of robbery and murder and had records of assault and self-harm. For example, Abbas Vahedian reported that one of the prisoners had dozens of self-inflicted stab injuries on his body and regularly burned himself with a heated spoon in prison. These conditions caused Abbas Vahedian mental anguish and sparked fears about his safety. On 4 April 2022, after his family and lawyer publicly spoke out, the authorities removed the abovementioned prisoners from the room and placed a prisoner also held for politically motivated reasons next to him.

Throughout his imprisonment period, intelligence agents and prison officials have repeatedly withheld the medication that Abbas Vahedian needs for various health problems, including high blood pressure, high levels of lipid in his blood, lung complications and a skin condition, and on many occasions, when

he has complained of pain, they have simply given him painkillers. Abbas Vahedian's family understands that the authorities have also failed to vaccinate him against Covid-19. This is while he has a history of lung complications including breathing difficulties and a persistent cough and is at increased risk of severe illness if he contracts Covid-19 in prison. Abbas Vahedian also suffers from gum disease, which emerged during his previous 11-month imprisonment in 2019 and 2020 as a result of medical neglect of the open wounds he sustained in his mouth during arrest. In December 2021, after repeated follow-ups by his family, he was transferred to a dental clinic outside prison and two of his teeth were pulled out. No adequate pain relief or further care were provided, despite warnings by his dentist that he would risk worsening gum infections and tooth loss without long-term routine dental treatment.

On 26 February 2022, Abbas Vahedian was transferred, while semi-conscious, to a hospital in Mashhad and admitted to a department specializing in drug toxicity. The authorities refused to provide his family with any information about the causes and circumstances leading to his partial loss of consciousness and hospitalization. According to an informed source, he said at the hospital that his health deteriorated after the authorities put unknown drugs in his food. On 28 February 2022, his family learned from hospital staff that he had been forcibly discharged against medical advice and while still disoriented. The authorities held him incommunicado for 48 hours and refused to provide his family with any information about his fate or whereabouts until his relatives spoke out publicly. In a brief phone call granted on 2 March 2022, he told his family that he had been returned to the informal, unmarked Ministry of Intelligence detention facility in Mashhad where he had been held in solitary confinement since 1 September 2021. He confirmed to his family that he had fainted after eating tainted food. He also said that three nights before his latest hospitalization, that is, on 24 February 2022, he had also been brought to hospital with dangerously high blood pressure. The authorities interrupted his treatment on that occasion as well and returned him to prison against medical advice.

Abbas Vahedian has been sentenced to a total of 21 years in prison on spurious "national security" charges solely stemming from his peaceful political activism. This consists of an 11-year prison sentence imposed in December 2021 for his peaceful work with political groups, which call for the formation of a secular democratic system in Iran, and a 10-year prison sentence imposed in October 2021 for authoring and co-signing an open letter, published in June 2019, which called for the resignation of Iran's Supreme Leader and a fundamental change to the country's constitution. In both cases, he was suddenly taken, without prior notice and information about the nature of charges against him, from detention to the Revolutionary Court of Mashhad, and told by judges whom he has described as aggressive and biased that he was on trial for acting against "national security". In both instances, he responded that due to the serious legal breaches committed, he did not recognize the legitimacy of the court hearings and insisted that his lawyer be present. In both cases, the presiding judges ended the hearings within minutes and refused to reconvene. He was only allowed to meet his lawyer once in late December 2021 after his second verdict was issued.