

RAPID ACTION NETWORK

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IRAN: Serious concern for detained Iranian-Canadian journalist Hossein Derakhshan.

The Writers in Prison Committee of International PEN is seriously concerned about the detention of Iranian-Canadian journalist and weblogger Hossein Derakhshan, who has been held since 1 November 2008. The reason for his detention remains unclear, and he is not thought to have been formally charged. His whereabouts are unknown. International PEN fears that he may be held solely for the peaceful exercise of his right to free expression, and therefore in violation of Article 19 of the United Nations International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, to which Iran is a signatory. It calls for his immediate and unconditional release and also seeks assurances of his well-being as a matter of urgency.

According to PEN's information, Hossein Derakhshan was arrested from his family home in Tehran on 1 November 2008 shortly after returning to Iran from several years living in Canada and the United Kingdom. The authorities did not officially acknowledge his detention until 30 December 2008. Initial reports suggested that he was accused of 'spying for Israel', apparently for a highly publicised trip he made to Israel – with whom Iran has no diplomatic relations - in 2006, travelling on a Canadian passport. He declared that this trip was to show his "20,000 daily Iranian readers what Israel really looks like and how people live there". He also wanted to "humanise" Iranians for Israelis. However, it has also been suggested that he faces accusations of 'insulting religion' in his weblogs.

Nicknamed 'the Blogfather', thirty-three year-old Hossein Derakhshan is known for pioneering 'blogging' in Iran with his Internet diaries, in both English and Farsi, which have been critical of the Iranian authorities though more recently have been sympathetic to President Ahmadinejad. He is said to be a controversial figure with a turbulent career. The *Times Online* gives the following background:

Mr Derakhshan moved to Canada in 2000 with his Iranian-Canadian wife from whom he has since split, after reformist newspapers for which he wrote in Tehran were closed by hardline opponents of the moderate former Iranian president, Mohammad Khatami. From Toronto in 2001 he began blogging in Farsi and English and devised a simple but groundbreaking way to show Persian letters and characters on the Internet — a protocol that enabled Iran to become one of the world's most prolific blogging nations.

Until his recent move home, Mr Derakhshan had returned only once to Iran since emigrating. Visiting to cover presidential elections in 2005, he was prevented from leaving the country for a week and interrogated by police. They told him that his blog was addressing too many taboo subjects and chided him for helping Iranians to skirt Internet censorship. He was allowed to leave after being forced to sign an apology.

(For full article go to

http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/news/world/middle_east/article5190462.ece)

Hossein Derakhshan is held incommunicado at an unknown location, and there are mounting concerns for his well-being.

International PEN is alarmed about an apparent crackdown on dissent in recent weeks, including the harassment of writer, human rights defender and Nobel Laureate Shirin Ebadi, who in mid-December condemned Derakhshan's arrest.

Hossein Derakhshan's English-language weblog:

<http://www.hoder.com/weblog/>

PLEASE SEND APPEALS:

- Expressing serious concern about the detention of journalist and weblogger Hossein Derakhshan, and calling for his immediate and unconditional release if held in violation of Article 19 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, to which Iran is a signatory.
- Seeking assurances of his well-being as a matter of urgency.
- Urging that he is granted access to his family and legal representation immediately.

APPEALS TO:

Head of the Judiciary

His Excellency

Ayatollah Mahmoud Hashemi Shahroudi

Howzeh Riyasat-e Qoveh Qazaiyeh/Office of the Head of the Judiciary

Pasteur St., Vali Asr Ave., south of Serah-e Jomhuri, Tehran 1316814737

Islamic Republic of Iran.

Email: info@dadgostary-tehran.ir (in the subject line write: FAO Ayatollah Shahroudi)

Salutation: Your Excellency

Minister of Intelligence

Gholam Hossein Mohseni Ejeie

Ministry of Intelligence,

Second Negarestan Street,

Pasdaran Avenue,

Tehran,

Islamic Republic of Iran.

Salutation: Your Excellency

COPIES TO:

Supreme Leader of the Islamic Republic

His Excellency Ayatollah Sayed 'Ali Khamenei,

The Office of the Supreme Leader

Islamic Republic Street – Shahid Keshvar Doust Street

Tehran,

Islamic Republic of Iran

Email: info@leader.ir or istiftaa@wilayah.org

Salutation: Your Excellency

President:

His Excellency Mahmoud Ahmadinejad

The Presidency,

Palestine Avenue,
Azerbaijan Intersection,
Tehran, Islamic Republic of Iran
Fax: Via Foreign Ministry: +98 21 6 674 790
(mark: "Please forward to H.E. President Ahmadinejad")
Email: dr-ahmadinejad@president.ir
via website: www.president.ir/email

If possible please send a copy of your appeal to the diplomatic representative for Iran in your country.

Please check with this office if sending appeals after 4 February 2009

For further information please contact Cathy McCann at International PEN Writers in Prison Committee, Brownlow House, 50/51 High Holborn, London WC1V 6ER, Tel.+ 44 (0) 20 7405 0338, Fax: +44 (0) 20 7405 0339, email: cathy.mccann@internationalpen.org.uk