

INTERNATIONAL PEN

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RAPID ACTION NETWORK

12 March 2009

RAN 15/09

IRAN: American-Iranian journalist detained without charge.

The Writers in Prison Committee (WiPC) of International PEN is seriously concerned about the detention of Iranian-American journalist and writer Roxana Sabera, who has been held incommunicado without charge in Evin Prison, Tehran, since late January 2009. International PEN seeks assurances of her well-being, and details of any charges against her. PEN reminds the Iranian authorities of their obligations to Article 19 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, and demands that she is immediately and unconditionally released unless charged with a recognisable criminal offense.

According to PEN's information, television journalist and writer Roxana Sabera was arrested in late January 2009 for buying wine, which is prohibited in Iran. On 10 February 2009 she placed a two-minute phone-call to her father who lives in North Dakota, U.S.A., informing him of her detention and urging him not to publicise her arrest. On 5 March 2009 a spokesman for the judiciary confirmed that she was being held in Tehran's Evin prison. It has been reported that she could be held for her allegedly 'illegal' and 'unauthorised' activities as a journalist in Iran since 2006, when her press credentials were revoked. She remains detained incommunicado. The Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) give the following background information:

Saberi, 31, was detained in late January and has not been heard from since, except when she placed a two-minute call to her father from an unknown location on February 10 to tell him that she had been arrested for buying wine, her father, Reza Saberi, told CPJ from his home in North Dakota. Saberi called back 10 minutes later, urging her father not to contact the press, adding that she would be released within days, according to her father and numerous news reports. Her father did not contact the press until Saturday...[28 February]

Saberi's family and literary agent told CPJ that they believe that the wine merely provided a pretext for detaining the journalist. Press freedom advocates inside Iran echoed that sentiment. People found in possession of alcohol in Iran are usually released within a few days, they said. While the possession or consumption of alcohol is illegal in Iran, it remains widely available on the black market...

Saberi, who has been living in Iran for six years, filed reports for NPR, Fox News, the BBC, and other international news outlets before her press credentials were revoked in 2006 by the Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance, which accredits reporters working for foreign news

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organizations. According to NPR, Saberi continued to file short news items with government permission despite the revocation. Since 2006, Saberi had been primarily involved in writing a book and pursuing a graduate education in Iran, the journalist's literary agent, Diana Finch, told CPJ.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS:

- Expressing serious concern about the detention of American-Iranian journalist and writer Roxana Saberi, and seeking details of any charges against her;
- Calling for her 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 her well-being, and urging that she be granted access to legal representation.

APPEALS TO:

Supreme Leader of the Islamic Republic

His Excellency Ayatollah Sayed 'Ali Khamenei,
The Office of the Supreme Leader
Shoahada Street, Qom, Islamic Republic of Iran
Email: info@leader.ir or istiftaa@wilayah.org

Head of the Judiciary

His Excellency
Ayatollah Mahmoud Hashemi Shahroudi
Ministry of Justice, Park-e Shahr,
Tehran, Islamic Republic of Iran
Email: via Judiciary website: Iranjudiciary.org/feedback_en.html
Salutation: Your Excellency

COPIES TO:

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 1 April 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