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Reza Shahabi on three weeks of hunger strike

Shahabi still not released on bail despite promises

Letter to Shahabi by twenty two prominent Iranian labor activists

Reza Shahabi, the treasurer and executive board members of the Syndicate of workers of Tehran and Suburbs Bus Company, is now on hunger strike for three weeks in Evin prison. Despite his serious health problems, he has refused taking any medication. On December 31, 2012, the prison's authorities, during a conversation with Reza, and in their contacts with his family, stated that Reza could be temporarily released for medical treatment if a bail is secured and posted for his release. On January 1, 2013, Reza Shahabi's family put up bail to secure Shahabi's release from Evin prison. Since then, the process has been delayed due to the weekend (Thursdays and Fridays) as well as the closures of all government offices and institutions because of high air pollution in the country's capital. In addition, some bureaucratic explanations have been given to delay his release. Shahabi is now expected to be released on bail within the next two to three days.

Although this is an exciting development and great news; great caution is needed until Shahabi is released from prison. Urgent actions for his freedom need to continue by pressuring the Iranian government's authorities for Reza's immediate release. Shahabi has lost considerable weight; however, he has continued his hunger strike and refuses medication as well; he has announced he would only stop his hunger strike when he is indeed outside the prison.

Reza Shahabi Defence Committee in Iran has issued two statements respectively on December 31, 2012 and January 5th, 2013 according to which Reza Shahabi has sent his warm greetings and appreciation to all workers, labor organizations, individuals and international organizations that have disseminated information about his condition as well as organizing protest actions in his support. Reza Shahabi Defence Committee has expressed its great appreciation for support and solidarity demonstrated by labour organizations domestically and internationally (from France, UK, Denmark, US and Canada and many other parts of the world) who have been sending protests letters in support of Reza in recent days in spite of the New Year and holiday season.

As was previously reported, twenty two well-known labour and trade union activists in Iran, including Mansour Osanloo and Ali Nejati, in an open letter, supported Reza's demands and have asked Reza, to end his hunger strike. While greatly appreciating this request and all support and solidarity he has been receiving domestically and internationally, Reza is still determined to continue with his hunger strike until his basic demands are met (see the letter below).

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Twenty two prominent Iranian labor activists have sent an urgent letter to Reza Shahabi

While emphasizing on Mr. Shahabi's demand for immediate release and an investigation into treatment of prisoners by security forces, they have also urged him to end his hunger strike and take the meager medical treatment he was taking before. In this letter we read:

"News of your maltreatment by your guards, and threats of violence against you, has all of us greatly saddened and shocked as well. News about the death of a worker and blogger, Sattar Beheshti*, is still in the headlines, and some government officials have even urged transparency on this issue of prison violence and physical cruelty imposed upon all prisoners, and emphasized on holding prison officials responsible for a humane treatment of all prisoners.

Certainly, Sattar Beheshti's death had no other cause but the inhuman behaviors and actions of security forces and the fact that they have broad discretion in dealing with prisoners. Hence we were expecting a different attitude to be displayed by the prison and security officials, but your method of treatment at their hands, makes any expectation from those quarters futile and useless. Therefore we the signatories of this letter while defending the efforts and struggles for freedom of all imprisoned workers and other justice seeking individuals, incarcerated throughout the country in different jails, we seek an urgent investigation into prison conditions, and the treatment of inmates by guards. We also call for your immediate release and receiving of urgent medical care, outside of prison, a care you seriously need, and have been denied.

All of us writing this letter assure you, our beloved friend and fellow worker, that we will not stop for a moment for the achievement of your demands, which is a plea of all workers across Iran.

We wholeheartedly shake your hands, and highly value your courageous protest from a dungeon deep. However, your health still remains the highest priority for us. Most courteously and seriously we urge you to end your hunger strike, and restart your medical care.

We will enthusiastically celebrate your freedom, but it would be a pleasure for us to celebrate your warm presence among us with a healthy body."

The signatories of letter to Reza Shahabi are: Mansour Osanloo - Jafar Azimzadeh - Davood Razavi - Ali Nejati - Parvin Mohammadi - Shapour Ehsanirad - Sheis Amani - Sediq Karimi - Kourosh Bakhshandeh - Sharif Saed Panah - Jamil Mohammadi - Mozafar Saleh Nia - Nahid Khodajoo - Esmaeel Kazemi - Hossein Ghaderi - Mansour Karimi - Rafigh Karimi - Jian Sobhani - Kamal Namdari - Jabbar Ghaderi - Khalil Karimi - Yadullah Samadi.

Free Union of Workers in Iran reported that in solidarity with Shahabi the above individuals also gave one million toman of financial aid (about US \$285) for Shahabi and Behnam Ebrahimzadeh families. This letter and the donation were given to Mrs. Robabeh Rezaee, Reza Shahabi's wife.

*More info on Sattar Beheshti: <http://www.amnesty.org/en/news/iran-still-no-explanation-or-justice-blogger-who-died-custody-2012-12-13>

Translated by IASWI

Thank you very much for your support and solidarity. Please see protest letters by concerned trade unions, including CUPE, RMT, French unions' collective, USLAW, Danish unions..., on: <http://www.workers-iran.org>

**Sample Protest letter: (Updated January 7, 2013)
Reza Shahabi must be immediately released and promptly treated.**

I (we) are writing to protest the continued persecution of labour activist and the gross violation of workers' rights in Iran. We continue to witness many labour activists brutally persecuted and unjustly imprisoned in Iran. In particular, I am seriously concerned about the health and well being of Reza Shahabi. Reza Shahabi, the executive board member and treasurer of the Syndicate of Workers of Tehran Bus Workers' Company, has been incarcerated for more than two and half years. Shahabi was severely beaten during his interrogation in detention. He underwent cervical spine operation on July 24, 2012. Medical doctors have been recommending treatment of his back as well. Contrary to doctors' recommendations, Shahabi was sent back to Ward 350 of Evin prison on August 14, 2012. Since then, his health has been drastically deteriorated. On December 17th, 212, Reza Shahabi went on hunger strike to protest intimidating behaviour of his jail guard as well as the continued lack of proper medical treatment. He has also refused to take any medication. This is now more than three weeks since Shahabi started his hunger strike.

I (we) strongly condemn the unjust arrest and sentence against Reza Shahabi and other labour activists. I (we) also denounce ongoing persecution and arrests of labour activists in Iran. I (we) demand the immediate and unconditional freedom of Reza Shahabi and all detained labour activists in Iran., including Shahrokh Zamani, Mohammad Jarahi, Behnam Ebrahimzadeh, and Pedram Nasrolaahi.

Name:

Organization/Position:

Please send your protests letters to: info@leader.ir, info@judiciary.ir, dr-ahmadinejad@president.ir; iran@un.int; ijpr@iranjudiciary.org, info@dadiran.ir, office@justice.ir, support@irimlsa.ir; info@humanrights-iran.ir; avaei@Dadgostary-tehran.ir; bia.judi@yahoo.com; info@mlsa.ir;
CC: info@workers-iran.org

See below for more information on imprisoned labour activists (Updated on January 7, 2013):

- Reza Shahabi is the Treasurer and Executive Board member of the Syndicate of workers of Tehran and Suburbs Bus Company, which belongs to the Municipality of Tehran and has about seventeen thousand employees. He has been incarcerated since June 2010. All Executive board members of this union have been persecuted, dismissed and many were jailed since the formation of the Syndicate in 2005. Reza Shahabi was sentenced to six year imprisonment and five year ban on all union activities as well as 7 million Toman fine; the appeal court seems to have confirmed his sentence for four years imprisonment, five year ban on all union activities and 7 million toman penalty. Reza Shahabi's health deteriorated significantly after severe beatings and mistreatment following his arrest. As a result, he underwent cervical spine operation on July 24, 2012. Medical doctors are recommending operations on his back as well. Contrary to doctors' recommendations, Shahabi was sent back to Ward 350 of Evin prison on August 14, 2012. Since then, his health has been drastically deteriorated. On December 17th, 212, Reza Shahabi went on hunger strike to protest intimidating behaviour of his jail guards as well as the continued lack of proper medical treatment. He has also refused to take any medication.

- Shahrokh Zamani and Mohammad Jarahi, both from Tabriz and members of the Committee to Pursue the Establishment of Workers Organizations, an independent labour organization campaigning for the establishment of independent trade unions in Iran, are currently serving 11- and five-year prison sentences respectively in Tabriz prison, north-west Iran. Shahrokh Zamani, Mohammad Jarahi were all initially arrested in June 2011. Branch 1 of the Revolutionary Court in Tabriz later sentenced Shahrokh Zamani to 11 years and Mohammad Jarahi to five years imprisonment after conviction of charges including "acting against national security by establishing or membership of groups opposed to the system" and "spreading propaganda against the system". Shahrokh Zamani and Mohammad Jarahi were both arrested in mid-January 2012 to begin serving their sentences.

- Behnam Ebrahimzadeh, member of The Committee to Pursue the Establishment of Workers' Organizations, and a Children's Rights advocate has been incarcerated in Evin prison since June 2010. Behnam Ebrahimzadeh was initially sentenced to 20 years' imprisonment in December 2010 on national security charges. This was overturned by the Supreme Court, and after a retrial he was sentenced to five years in prison after conviction of "gathering and colluding with intent to harm state security", apparently in connection with his labour activities on behalf of The Committee to Pursue the Establishment of Workers' Organizations. This sentence was upheld on appeal in October 2011. Behnam was transferred to solitary confinement in December 2012 and after about 10 days was taken back to his ward 350 of Evin Prison. It is reported that Behnam was transferred to the solidarity confinement because of the statements he had signed, along with other labour and political prisoners, which had addressee workers' and other social justice issues.

Pedram Nasrollahi is a well-known labour activist in Iran's Kurdistan Province and an active member of the Coordinating Committee to Help Form workers' Organizations. He has been arrested and prosecuted many times in the past number of years. The General as well as Revolutionary Courts in Sanandaj city originally sentenced Pedram to three years imprisonment in July 2012. He was sentenced to one year imprisonment for "acting against the Islamic Republic by working with one of the opposition parties", which he absolutely denies, and in addition was sentenced to two years of imprisonment for being "a member of the Coordinating Committee to Help Form Workers' Organizations", which is not supposed to be a charge at all. The Coordinating Committee is not an underground labour organization; it is a well-recognized labour organizing group inside Iran and internationally which includes many veteran workers and labour activists like Mahmoud Salehi.

After appealing the original sentences, the appeal court reduced his sentence to 19 months. In relation to the latest charges against him in 2012, Pedram Nasrollahi was first arrested on March 8, 2012 for 48 days; he was eventually released on bail of 70 million toman. After his sentences had been reduced by the appeal court to 19 months, he went to the prosecutor's office to further pursue his case, on November 14, 2012, but he got arrested and sent to the prison. Since then, he has issued a couple of statements from the prison in support of workers' struggles, and this perhaps contributed to increased harassment and new charges against him. The authorities of the Sanandaj's Central Prison have recently come up with sham charges of "barratry" against Pedram. They also decided to cancel his visitation rights.

Many other labour activists across the country continue to be persecuted and arrested. Many cases go unreported. The latest confirmed reports indicate that on January 5, 2013, Ali Nejati, member of the board of directors of the Syndicate of Workers of Haft Tapeh Sugare Cane Company, was put on trial in branch four of Sanandaj Revolutionary Court. He was tried on charges of propaganda against the system. They based their charges against Ali Nejati because of singing a very famous and nationally renowned ethnic (Luri folklore) song called "Daya Daya vaghte Janga" (Mother, Mother, It's Time for War) at a party in the city of Sanandaj. This song is historical and epic and permissible in Iran. Nejati is also being persecuted for a picture taken from him by his wife, Shahnaz Sagvand, while he was being arrested for his prison sentence in 2011. This is, in total, the fourth time that Ali and his wife Shahnaz Sagvand are brought to trial for the same charges. The court in City of Sanandaj, required a hundred million rial (10 million toman) bail and the provision of work credentials for his release. Ali Nejati and Shahnaz Sagvand are required to return to court for the verdict.

In addition, as reported previously, on Wednesday, December 19, 2012, agents of the intelligence services of the City of Bukan as well as plain clothes officers arrested five members of the Coordinating Committee to Help Form Workers' Organizations, named Jamal Minashiri, Ebrahim Mostaphapour, Ghasem Mostaphapour, Mohammad Karimi and Hadi tanomand. They were released on bail on January 1, 2013.

After their arrest, these labour activists were transferred first to the intelligence bureau in Bukan and later to the general prison of Bukan on Dec 24, 2012. At the same time, the security forces had raided the homes of these labour activists and after searching their homes confiscated some of their personal belongings, i.e. computers, books, mobile phones, satellite receivers, etc. The judge responsible for their cases told their family members that these activists have security cases but the arrestees themselves informed their family members that they were arrested because of their participation in the Coordinating Committee's general membership meeting on June 15, 2012 in the City of Karaj, which faced a brutal raid by security forces and arrest of about 60 labour activists at the time.

About IASWI: The International Alliance in Support of Workers in Iran (IASWI) was formed in 1999 and formally launched in January 2000. The IASWI has been working in collaboration with many labour and progressive organizations and activists in Iran and around the world to strengthen worker-to-worker solidarity in defence of workers' rights, demands and struggles in Iran and against the repressive anti-worker policies and practices of Islamic Republic of Iran. IASWI is a fully independent organization and does not accept funding or resources from any governments or corporations and their affiliates.

IASWI recently created a twitter account. Our website and twitter account will be improved significantly in 2013.

Please follow us on twitter: <https://twitter.com/IASWIinfo>

Free all imprisoned labour activists in Iran



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