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Urgent Action: Let's save Reza Shahabi

Reza Shahabi on hunger strike since December 17, 2012

Free Reza Shahabi Now

(Use Sample Protest Letter below)

Reza Shahabi, an Iranian labour leader imprisoned since June 2010, went on hunger strike on Dec 17, 2012 to protest against mistreatment by jail guards as well as prevention of his medical treatment by the judicial authorities. He has announced that he will refuse taking his medication and eating food until he is allowed to be transferred to a hospital outside prison for complete treatment. The latest news about Reza Shahabi indicated that his physical health has deteriorated significantly. Reza was taken to the prison's medical clinic at the 6th day of his hunger medical strike. After taking blood pressure, medical staff intended to intervene by injecting serum and giving him medication; this was met with Reza's refusal and thus he was transferred back to his ward. Since the start of his hunger strike, Reza has lost about 7 kg.

Mr. Reza Shahabi, who had gone under major surgery of his neck in July 2012 and according to doctors' recommendations was in need of at least "two months rest at home", and "incapable of withstanding any further punishment," was sent back to Ward 350 of Evin prison on August 14, 2012. Since then, his health deteriorated significantly. In addition, his jail guards have been very insulting and he has been threatened recently by one of his guards. Reza was taken to hospital on December 15, 2012 but the jail guard accompanying him refused to allow him stay for proper examination and forced Reza, with threats of beating and assaulting him, to go back to prison.

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. All Executive board members of this union have been persecuted, dismissed and many were jailed since the formation of the Syndicate in 2005. He has recently been sentenced to 6 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. The authorities of the Islamic Republic of Iran are directly responsible for any consequence resulting from continued imprisonment and mistreatment of Reza Shahabi.

International Alliance in Support of Workers in Iran (IASWI)

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Reza Shahabi's open letter: I am only one manifestation of extortion on prisoners' health

What has happened to me, Reza Shahabi, the prisoner on ward 209 of Evin prison, and been imposed on my health, my treatment, and my medical care, has also been imposed on all other prisoners in here. I find myself forced to

speak out. Health care and attention in here is severely precarious and has caused grave concern for us, our families and friends. I would like to share this concern with our communities in Iran and around the world. I also would like to praise doctors and health professionals that perform their duties in prison, but remain confined within limitations of this dysfunctional inattentive order of things.

Any prescription from prison's physician can take ten to twenty four hours to be actually given to us, leaving the prisoner with only more pain and discomfort. Prison's medical facility is poorly staffed and equipped very inadequately; if a prisoner is injured and needs stitches, medical staff refuse to operate because of a lack of anesthesia, or stitching needles and threads, or an operating doctor.

Prisoners that have to be transferred to hospitals outside of prison face an even greater dilemma. They get caught up in a closed circuit of procedures and bureaucracy that leads to more pain, discomfort or even death. Even if coroner confirms recommendations by the prison's doctor, they all are placed at the disposal of the prosecution's office, but his office without any single medical qualification, determine whether there is a medical case or not, and decide, based on who the prisoner might be, whether the prisoner deserves to be hospitalized or not. Such conduct becomes status-quo when all matters are politicized and considered security concerns. Our families all go through incredible difficulties and hardship to pursue our cases through legal channels.

Each time our requests for medical care succeeds, it could take anywhere from two to six weeks, and even then it has yet to be approved by the prosecutor. Even when in hospital and receiving medical care, the treatment remains incomplete and we have to be returned to hospital before a certain deadline, and we are back to square one again. It is enough to make you wish you were dead....Often they accuse you of malingering or a desire to get to the hospital instead of prison. Is the detection of malingering the responsibility of doctors and the medical system or the prosecutor who is always suspicious of detainees and opposed to them.

Another affliction causing us pain is our teeth and the lack of treatment for them. Dental services in prison are inadequate, expensive, and cumbersome. We need to wait very long period for Dentists who mostly are not experts in all dental treatments.... Prisoners lacking funds are simply refused any care. The usual response is: Either cash or back in cell.

I Reza Shahabi, a sacked worker of Vahed Company and a prisoner with no source of income have been captured in this vicious circle. I have had a critical operation on my neck and spinal cord, and according to doctors' recommendation needed to rest at home with continued medical care; alas none has been provided. I have been suffering tooth ache for a long time; they broke my front tooth in detention number 209 and it is in constant pain.... To top off all these problems, we also have privatization becoming the operating principal in prisons as well, resulting in nothing but a continued silent death for prisoners.

This topic of privatization has also reached prisons, with the same usual results: benefits for the few well connected and semi-public organizations and mass poverty for legions of workers. In Rajaie Shahr prison even prisoners' cell spaces are traded. Here in Evin prison we buy all our daily needs, which are of very low-quality and very high prices from a store that belongs to prisons employers. One might be fortunate enough to have some aid and support, but such resources are not forever, neither provided for all.

Human dignity is imperative. Until when do we want to live in need and want, in a country so resourceful, with no regards for economic sanction....We have been imprisoned for merely asking for our rights, condemned to privation, gradual death, and general disregard for our health and well being....

I have for my part been left no choice but to go either on a Hunger Strike, or to refuse the inadequate medical care I receive at the moment. By doing this perhaps official in charge would take notice. I'm sharing my decision with my fellow union colleagues, workers' organization and labor and civic activists in hoping of receiving the original medical recommendations, which were opposed by the prosecutor's office.

Reza Shahabi,
A member of the board of directors of the Syndicate of Workers of Vahed Company
Ward 350 of Evin Prison, December 2012

A summary translation by IASWI. Link to the original letter:
http://www.etehadbinalmelali.com/html12/27_azar_91_shahabi_42.html

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

Sample Protest letter:

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.

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 above imprisoned labour activists (Updated on December 25, 2012):

- 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 Sha-

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, 2012, 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 addressed 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 according to the Coordinating Committee to Help Form Workers' Organizations, 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.

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 phone, satellite receivers, etc.

The judge responsible for their cases has 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 arrests of about 60 labour activists at the time. Further, the prosecutor office indicated that these five labour activists were temporarily arrested and detained. More updates about these detainees will be issued and posted on IASWI website.

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

