



sydney
PEN

freedom to write...
freedom to read

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Leader of the Islamic Republic
His Excellency Ayatollah Sayed 'Ali Khameni
The Presidency
Palestine Avenue
Azerbaijan Intersection
Tehran
Islamic Republic of Iran

Your Excellency,

Sydney PEN, part of International PEN, the association of writers with members in over 90 countries, wishes to express its serious concerns for the health of writers Hojjatoleslam Hasan Yousefi Eshkevari and Akbar Ganji who are both reported to be seriously ill in Evin prison. Eshkevari is an insulin-dependent diabetic, and has reportedly suffered an eye haemorrhage in prison as a result of the disease and is said to be at risk of losing the sight of his right eye. Akbar Ganji is said to have been ill-treated in prison and has been in poor health for some time.

It is our understanding that Hojjatoleslam Hasan Yousefi Eshkevari, director of the Ali Shariati Research Centre and contributing editor of the now-banned newspaper Iran-e Farda and writer and journalist Akbar Ganji were both arrested following their participation in an academic and cultural conference held in Berlin on 7-9 April 2000 entitled "Iran after the elections".

Eshkevari, aged fifty-four, is now serving a seven-year prison sentence for a speech he made at the conference (at which political and social reform in Iran were publicly debated) although he will be entitled to 'conditional release' in January 2005. Writer and journalist Akbar Ganji is serving a six-year sentence on charges of collecting confidential information harmful to national security and spreading propaganda against the Islamic system in connection with newspaper articles he had written. It is understood that he was originally sentenced to ten years' imprisonment plus five years' internal exile for his attendance at the Berlin conference, together with a series of articles he had written implicating leading figures in the murders of several dissidents and intellectuals in the mid-late 90's.

On 15 May 2001 an appeal court reduced his 10-year sentence to six months and overturned his additional sentence of five years internal exile. However, although he had served the entire sentence, the Tehran judiciary challenged the appeal court

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decision and brought new charges against him in connection with newspaper articles he wrote prior to April 2000. There are said to be several other cases pending against him for his writing. Ganji's publications include the best-selling book *Dungeon of Ghosts*, a collection of Ganji's newspaper articles published in early 2000, in which he implicated the former president, Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani, and other leading conservative figures in the "serial murders" of 1998.

Sydney PEN, which represents over 250 writers in Sydney, Australia and is part of International PEN, the world's largest association of writers and is strictly a non-political non-governmental organization in formal consultative relations with UNESCO, considers writers Hojjatoleslam Hasan Yousefi Eshkevari and Akbar Ganji to be detained in violation of their right to freedom of expression as guaranteed by Article 19 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, to which Iran is a signatory. We call for their immediate and unconditional release and on humanitarian grounds and seek immediate assurances that they are receiving all necessary medical treatment and are being treated humanely in detention.

We welcome your comments on this matter,

Yours faithfully,

Dr Denise Leith
Sydney PEN, Writers in Prison Committee

cc:
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Embassy of the Islamic Republic of Iran
25 Culgoa Circuit
O'Malley ACT 2606

President
His Excellency Hojjatoleslam Sayed Mohammad Khatami

Head of Judiciary
His Excellency Ayatollah Mahmoud Hashemi Shahrudi