

Network of Concerned Historians				NCH
Campaigns				
Year original	Year follow-up	Circular	Country	Names
2002		28	Iran	Hashem Aghajari, historian
	2002			<i>follow-up 1</i>

#### *Announcement*

On 7 November 2002, Amnesty International issued an urgent appeal for Iranian historian Hashem Aghajari who was sentenced to death. Many of you have participated in this campaign. Several other international human rights organizations issued similar appeals. Please find below an update written by International PEN Writers in Prison Committee. This update also includes part of a press release from Human Rights Watch. We hope that once again you can send the recommended urgent appeals immediately. Please remember to write in your professional capacity.

#### **RAPID ACTION NETWORK—27 November 2002—Update #1 to RAN 55/02**

#### **IRAN: Ayatollah orders reconsideration of death sentence handed down to academic Hashem Aghajari**

On 17 November 2002 Hashem Aghajari's lawyer Saleh Nikbakht announced that Ayatollah Ali Khameni had ordered Iran's chief judge to review the death sentence handed down to the academic. The order was reportedly issued following protests by hundreds of university teachers and students, and is thought to be likely to lead to the sentence being overturned. However, Professor Aghajari may still be required to face the remaining sentence of 74 lashes of the whip, eight years' imprisonment and internal exile, and a 10-year prohibition from teaching. International PEN welcomes the decision taken by Ayatollah Ali Khameni to order the reconsideration of the death sentence handed down to Professor Hashem Aghajari for apostasy on 9 November 2002, and urges the Iranian authorities to overturn the whole sentence and thus permit his immediate and unconditional release.

#### **BACKGROUND**

The following is taken from a 9 November 2002 Human Rights Watch press release, as is the sole responsibility of Human Rights Watch:

Professor Hashem Aghajari was charged with apostasy in August after a philosophical speech in which he rejected demands to “blindly follow” clerical rule. This speech prompted an outcry from some hard-line clerics in the religious establishment, who claimed that the speech was an attack on the Prophet of Islam and on fundamental Shiite Islamic doctrines. Many Shiite religious authorities contested these charges and Prof. Aghajari himself has repeatedly denied criticizing the Prophet in any way, and apologized for any inadvertent offense his remarks may have caused.

“Prof. Aghajari’s criticisms were of hard-line clerical leaders who demand blind obedience from the people. Instead of protecting Aghajari in conducting a crucial philosophical debate about Iranian and Islamic politics, the judiciary will resort to the death sentence to gag him,” said Joe Stork, Washington director for the Middle East and North Africa Division at Human Rights Watch. “In bringing these charges against Prof. Aghajari, his accusers have affirmed his arguments. By charging that his criticism of them constituted apostasy, they are hiding their political interests behind religious doctrine.”

Despite the disagreement among religious experts, his speech led to Aghajari’s arrest on charges of apostasy and subsequent sentencing by Judge Ramazani of the Fourteenth District Court in the western city of Hamadan, the site of Aghajari’s speech. The trial was unfair and fell far short of international standards of due process. It was conducted behind closed doors, and the defendant was given only limited access to his lawyer. In addition to the death sentence, Aghajari received a sentence of 74 lashes of the whip, eight years’ imprisonment and internal exile, and a 10-year prohibition from teaching. Aghajari has 20 days to lodge an appeal once he officially receives the text of his sentence. His lawyer has said that there will be an appeal, although he has not yet been given the text of the judgement of the reasoning behind it.

Aghajari’s family has expressed concern about his health in prison. He lost his right leg in the Iran-Iraq war, and it is known that he had to undergo surgery on his leg while in prison. The 45-year old Aghajari heads the history department at the Tarbiat Modarress University in Tehran. He is a member of the reformist Organization of Mojahedin of the Islamic Revolution and is a close ally of reformist Iranian President Mohammad Khatami.

**PLEASE SEND APPEALS:**

Welcoming the Ayatollah’s decision to order the reconsideration of the death sentence recently handed down to Professor Hashem Aghajari;

Expressing grave concern that Aghajari’s health is rapidly deteriorating and that he may not be receiving the correct medical attention in detention;

Urging the Iranian authorities to overturn the whole sentence handed down to Professor Aghajari and thus permit his unconditional release in accordance with their obligation to protect the right to freedom of expression as guaranteed by the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

**PLEASE SEND APPEALS TO:**

His Excellency Ayatollah Sayed 'Ali Khameni

The Presidency

Palestine Avenue

Azerbaijan Intersection

Tehran

Islamic Republic of Iran

His Excellency Hojjatoleslam Sayed Mohammad Khatami

The Presidency

Palestine Avenue

Azerbaijan Intersection

Tehran

Islamic Republic of Iran

Please note that there are no fax numbers available for the Iranian authorities, so you may wish to ask the diplomatic representative for Iran in your country to forward your appeals. It would also be advantageous to ask your country's diplomatic representatives in Iran to intervene in the case.