

Teachers' Union leader imprisoned by Iran regime

Mohammad Habibi, the official spokesperson of the Iranian Teachers Trade Association (ITTA) in Tehran, was been arrested by agents of the [Islamic Republic] security forces at his workplace on **5 April 2023** and taken to Ward 209 of Evin Prison. [The notorious Ward 209 of Evin Prison is run by the Ministry of Intelligence and holds high-profile political prisoners, often under conditions of solitary confinement, constant interrogation, and routine torture.] Following Mr. Habibi's arrest, the agents proceeded to ransack his home.



According to the Coordinating Council of Iranian Teachers Trade Associations (CCITTA), Mr. Habibi was arrested where he teaches, in the Shahryar district of Tehran Province, on the charge of propagating against the regime and society as well as conspiring against national security.

The case against Mr. Habibi has been brought by the Ministry of Intelligence and Security of the Islamic Republic of Iran. This latest arrest of Mr. Habibi comes less than two months after his release from prison [following a previous sentence of incarceration on account of his trade union activities].

Ms. Khadijeh Pakzamid, Mr. Habibi's wife, said about his arrest: *"four agents of the Intelligence Department of West Tehran Province went to the school at which he was teaching and, holding an arrest warrant, arrested my husband, Mohammad Habibi, and brought him home to search the house while directing obscenities at both him and me throughout. He was then transferred to Ward 209 of Evin Prison."*

Ms. Pakzamid also said that her husband had told her, in a telephone call from Evin Prison, that he had been *"beaten in the car by the security forces"* while en route to the prison.

Mr. Habibi had previously been arrested by the security forces in Tehran on 30 April 2022 and transferred to Ward 209 of Evin Prison. His court hearing on the charges levelled against him, on account of his activities as the spokesperson of the ITTA, was held on 12 October 2022 in the Evin Prison courthouse. He was sentenced by Branch 26 of Tehran Revolutionary Court to three years and seven months' imprisonment on the charge of assembly and collusion, one year of imprisonment on the charge of propaganda against the regime, and a two-year ban from membership and activities in [political/trade union] groups, as well as a ban on leaving the country.

There are now growing fears for the safety and well being of Mr. Habibi as well as regarding the draconian punishment likely to be awaiting him – **merely for his legitimate activities as the official spokesperson and representative of the ITTA, the main teachers and education workers trade union in Iran.**

Teachers' prominent role in the struggle for change in Iran

This arrest is seen as the latest cynical act by the regime to move against and quell one of the current focal points of organised opposition in the country, following **continuous protests by teachers, education workers, and retirees from the sector**, over the recent Nowruz (Iranian New Year) holidays. (It is unusual for concerted trade union activity to continue without pause over Iran's main festive period.) The ITTA members gathered outside government education ministry buildings and loudly protested, attracting evident support from the wider public.

The CCITTA was also one of the chief initiators and signatories of the 12-point charter for reform jointly issued on 14 February by a coalition of independent trade unions and civil organisations inside Iran to huge popular acclaim. This development has been warmly welcomed by progressive currents in the country and publicly endorsed by the incarcerated former prime minister and leader of the opposition Green Movement, Mir-Hossein Mousavi, amongst several other high-profile public figures.



The charter includes provisions such as the immediate and unconditional release of political prisoners; the public trials of the perpetrators of suppression of the popular protests; freedom of opinion, expression (including the media), assembly, and industrial action; and immediate abolition of the death penalty as well as any type of torture. The recognition of women's rights as equal to those of men has also been emphasised in the charter.

The arrest of Mr. Habibi also took place on the same day as a resurgence in public anger and distressing scenes amidst **reports of yet more mysterious poison gas attacks on girls' school premises**, leading to the hospitalisation of several girl students, at the beginning of term following the New Year holidays.

Urgent solidarity

Raising this case within teaching unions in Britain like the **NEU, NASUWT and UCU**, and other trade unions can increase international pressure and show their principled support for, and solidarity with, their beleaguered counterparts in Iran.

More info at CODIR on Facebook or <http://codir.net/>

[Committee for Defence of the Iranian Peoples Right, **campaigns for Peace, Human Rights and Democracy in Iran**. CODIR was established in 1981 by a group of British labour and trade union activists in collaboration with Iranian democrats living in exile in the UK.]