

Urgent call to free an imprisoned expert in disaster medicine, threatened with a death sentence in Iran

We are appealing to the international scientific community on behalf of our colleague Dr. Ahmadreza Djalali who has been detained in Tehran's Evin prison since April 2016 and was recently threatened with the death penalty by a court in Tehran.

As members of the medical profession and as humanitarian colleagues, we have grave concerns about Dr. Djalali's arrest, solitary confinement, and health which is reported to have seriously deteriorated since a hunger strike he began in December 2016 to protest his detention. While he may have stopped his hunger strike earlier this year, he has reportedly resumed it again, **this time since February 24th, he has also refused liquids.**

We understand that Dr. Djalali, an Iranian national and resident of Sweden, was arrested without a warrant by Iranian Ministry of Intelligence officials while traveling to Iran to attend workshops in disaster medicine at universities in Tehran and Shiraz. He has been detained in Tehran's Evin prison for approximately ten months for alleged "collaboration with hostile governments" and "acting against national security." During the first seven months of captivity he was denied a lawyer. Now, prosecution authorities refuse to allow his attorney to take up Ahmadreza Djalali's defense. According to Amnesty International: *"In December 2016, the authorities put Ahmadreza Djalali under intense pressure to sign a statement, 'confessing' to being a spy for a 'hostile government'. When he refused, they said they would charge him with 'enmity against God' (moharebeh), which carries the death penalty.*¹

Dr. Djalali is a highly respected scientist who is well known and admired within the international community for his high quality research and teaching. A physician and expert in disaster medicine, Dr. Djalali completed his PhD studies at the Karolinska Institute (Sweden) and obtained a masters degree in Disaster Medicine (EMDM) jointly organized by the Research Center in Emergency and Disaster Medicine of the Università del Piemonte Orientale (CRIMEDIM, Italy) and the Vrije Universiteit Brussel (ReGEDiM, Belgium). He subsequently completed a postdoctoral research fellowship at the CRIMEDIM. Dr. Djalali has worked alongside researchers from all over the world to improve the operational capacity of hospitals in countries suffering from extreme poverty and affected by disasters and armed conflicts. He has authored more than 45 publications.²

Dr. Djalali is known by his colleagues and students to be very respectful of his native home, the Islamic Republic of Iran, and one of his aims was to increase the understanding and shared relationship between

¹ <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/mde13/5632/2017/en/>

² Publications include: Djalali, Ahmadreza, et al. "Hospital disaster preparedness as measured by functional capacity: a comparison between Iran and Sweden." *Prehospital and disaster medicine* 28.05 (2013): 454-461; Djalali, Ahmadreza, et al. "Hospital incident command system (HICS) performance in Iran; decision making during disasters." *Scandinavian journal of trauma, resuscitation and emergency medicine* 20.1 (2012): 14; Djalali, Ahmadreza, et al. "The hospital incident command system: modified model for hospitals in Iran." *PLoS currents* 7 (2015); Ardalan, Ali, et al. "Virtual disaster simulation: lesson learned from an international collaboration that can be leveraged for disaster education in Iran." *PLoS currents* 7 (2015). See complete CV attached.

the country where he lived and worked and other countries in the region in fostering excellence in the development of Emergency and Disaster Medicine and research applied to humanitarian assistance. Colleagues indicate that he always spoke of his Iranian heritage with great respect and pride.

The Islamic Republic of Iran must respect the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights and immediately stop threatening Dr. Djalali, allow him to be defended by and given regular access to an attorney of his choice, and refrain from any torture or ill treatment.

We welcome any additional information that may clarify our understanding of these events. Absent this, the facts suggest that Dr. Djalali has been arrested for peacefully exercising his right to academic freedom, freedom of expression, freedom of association, and freedom of assembly, and has been denied proper access to legal counsel and due process. We, his friends and colleagues, together with other organizations including Physicians for Human Rights, the Committee of Concerned Scientists, and Scholars at Risk, are calling for Djalali's immediate release and speedy return to his family and employment unless he is charged with a recognizable criminal offence, in line with international law and standards. We are concerned that he has been targeted for peacefully exercising his rights to freedom of expression, association and assembly.

We are also demanding that prosecution authorities ensure that Dr. Djalali has immediate access to a qualified health professional who can provide health care in compliance with medical ethics, including the principles of confidentiality, autonomy and informed consent.

We urge colleagues including medical, scientific and humanitarian organizations worldwide to join, support, and spread this appeal to ensure that Dr. Djalali's case is properly adjudicated and that he is released to his wife and children in Sweden.

We believe it is vital that the international medical and scientific communities and their academic institutions defend the fundamental freedoms of researchers, especially Dr. Djalali, who has been imprisoned in apparent retaliation for international scholarly collaboration within field of study. This is critical to preserve the rights and freedoms of future generations of researchers and humanitarians in Iran and worldwide.

Thank you for your attention and response.

Sincerely,

Professor Francesco della Corte, MD

Affiliation: CRIMEDIM

Position: director



Luca Ragazzoni, MD, PhD

Affiliation: CRIMEDIM

Position: Research scientist in humanitarian Health.



Alba Ripoll Gallardo, MD, PhD

Affiliation: CRIMEDIM

Position: Research scientist in humanitarian Health



What you can do:

1. **Please send politely worded letters, if possible on institutional letterhead to the following Iranian authorities. A sample letter is attached.**

Head of the Judiciary Ayatollah Sadegh Larijani: info@dadiran.ir (Subject line: FAO Ayatollah Sadegh Larijani, Salutation: Your Excellency)

c/o Public Relations Office Number 4, Deadend of 1 Azizi Vali Asr Street, Tehran, Iran (Salutation: Your Excellency)

Office of the Supreme Leader Ayatollah Sayed 'Ali Khamenei: info_leader@leader.ir (Salutation: Your Excellency)

Islamic Republic Street- End of Shahid Keshvar Doust Street, Tehran, Iran;

And copies to:

President Hassan Rouhani, media@rouhani.ir (Salutation: Your Excellency). The Presidency, Pasteur Street, Pasteur Square Tehran, Iran

The Iranian Ambassador in your country

Italian, Belgian and Swedish academic institutions have already taken action through their national authorities and local Iranian Embassies to put in place all needed diplomatic efforts to obtain Dr Djalali release. **We encourage colleagues from other countries to establish contacts with their local Iranian Embassy and /or with their national authorities** to strengthen our appeal.

2. **Friends and colleagues have also launched a petition on Change.org** . So far, more than 200,000 people have signed it. Please sign, share and encourage others to sign.
https://www.change.org/p/hassan-rouhani-urgent-justice-and-freedom-for-ahmadreza-djalali-md-emdm-phd?recruiter=394647108&utm_source=share_petition&utm_medium=copylink

3. **Share information and stay connected: On this Facebook page and on Twitter**
https://www.facebook.com/freeahmadreza/?ref=aymt_homepage_panel You can follow updates about the case: #SaveAhmad

FYI, in addition to medical and scientific organizations, Amnesty International has launched an urgent action <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/mde13/5632/2017/en/> to advocate for Dr Djalali's release.