

STATEMENT

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CONTACT: (202) 661-4675

USADI Urges Inquiry on the Safety of Imprisoned Ahmad Batebi and Protection of Rights of All Iranian Dissidents

According to reports by Iranian and international human rights organizations, the health of a prominent Iranian student prisoner is severely deteriorating. The request by his family to provide him with urgent and proper medical treatment has gone unheeded by the Iranian authorities. Ahmad Batebi was arrested following the student uprising in July 1999 and charges of "counter-revolutionary activity" were brought against him after his picture (holding a bloody shirt of another student demonstrator) appeared on the cover of *The Economist*.

Ahmad Batebi was sentenced to death after a secret trial but his sentence was later reportedly commuted to 15 years' imprisonment. According to human rights watchdog groups, since his imprisonment Batebi has been badly tortured.

Ambeyi Ligabo, the UN Special Rapporteur on freedom of opinion and expression, visited Iran late last year and interviewed Batebi and few other prisoners. There are many reports of increased abuse of Batebi by his captors who were angered by his talk with the UN representative authorities. In his report to the UN Human Rights Commission, Mr. Ligabo has warned that there is a "climate of fear induced by the systematic repression of people expressing critical views against the authorized political and religious doctrine and the functioning of institutions".

The 2003 State Department Human Rights report states that in Iran "The Government's poor human rights record worsened, and it continued to commit numerous, serious abuses. The right of citizens to change their government was restricted significantly. Continuing serious abuses included: summary executions; disappearances; torture and other degrading treatment, reportedly including severe punishments such as beheading and flogging; poor prison conditions; arbitrary arrest and detention... Citizens often did not receive due process or fair trials."

The State Department report adds that "There were reports of political killings... The law criminalized dissent and applied the death penalty to offenses such as "attempts against the security of the State."

The USADI urgently calls on the United States, the United Nations Human Rights Commission and international human rights organizations to immediately inquire with the Iranian government about the safety of Ahmad Batebi. The USADI also calls for safety and protection of human rights of Iranian dissidents and political activists regardless of their political affiliation.

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