

# URGENT ACTION

## JAILED IRANIAN ARTIST BROTHERS ON HUNGER STRIKE

**Iranian artists Mehdi Rajabian and Hossein Rajabian have started a second hunger strike on 28 October in protest at their continued detention. They have said that they will continue their hunger strike until they are released from prison.**

Musician **Mehdi Rajabian** and his brother **Hossein Rajabian**, a filmmaker, have been on hunger strike since 28 October in protest at their continued detention. This follows an earlier hunger strike by the prisoners of conscience in September in protest at the authorities' refusal to allow them adequate medical care or medical leave, as well as their decision to separate the brothers into different sections of Tehran's Evin Prison. In an open letter written on 26 October, the brothers said they had ended their previous hunger strike after receiving promises from the authorities that that they would be placed in the same section again and given adequate medical care. Despite these promises, however, the brothers said their conditions had become worse and that Mehdi Rajabian was now being denied access to his lawyer. They also made a plea in the letter, saying: "We call on all artists from around the world to condemn these abuses with a response worthy of an artist. Do not forget us in these suffocating times".

Since the start of his hunger strike, Mehdi Rajabian has twice coughed up blood. On the first occasion on 2 November, his cell mate carried him to the Evin Prison clinic where Mehdi Rajabian has said the prison doctor became increasingly rude, especially after Mehdi Rajabian was unable to answer his questions and refused intravenous fluids. This resulted in an altercation, during which Mehdi Rajabian says the doctor punched him in the stomach. Both brothers have pre-existing medical conditions and need adequate medical care, which they have been denied in prison. They have said they will continue their hunger strike, also refusing to be administered intravenous drips, until they are released from prison. The authorities are now refusing to allow the brothers any contact with each other in prison, including through telephone calls which they had previously been allowed.

Following a grossly unfair trial before a Revolutionary Court in April 2015, Mehdi Rajabian and Hossein Rajabian were sentenced to six years' imprisonment on charges related to their artistic work, including "insulting Islamic sanctities" and "illegal audio-visual activities". A court of appeal later ruled that they must serve three years of their six-year prison sentences. The court suspended the rest of the sentence for a period of five years, conditional on their "good behaviour". They began serving their prison sentences on 4 June 2016.

### **Please write immediately in Persian, English, Arabic, French, Spanish, or your own language:**

- Calling on the Iranian authorities to immediately and unconditionally release Mehdi Rajabian and Hossein Rajabian, as they are prisoners of conscience, held solely for exercising their right to freedom of expression;
- Urging them to ensure that they have 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;
- Urging them to order a prompt, independent, impartial investigation into their allegations of torture and other ill-treatment, bringing to justice anyone suspected of responsibility in a fair trial without recourse to the death penalty.

### **PLEASE SEND APPEALS BEFORE 20 DECEMBER 2016 TO:**

Office of the Supreme Leader  
Ayatollah Sayed 'Ali Khamenei  
Salutation: Your Excellency

Head of the Judiciary  
Ayatollah Sadegh Larijani  
Salutation: Your Excellency

**And copies to:**  
President  
Hassan Rouhani

**PLEASE SEND YOUR APPEALS FOR THE ATTENTION OF THE AUTHORITIES IN IRAN VIA THE EMBASSY** E. Mohammad Hassan Habibollahzadeh, Embassy of the Islamic Republic of Iran, 16 PRINCES GATE LONDON SW7 1PT, Tel: 02072254208 or 02072254209 Email: [iranemb.lon@mfa.gov.ir](mailto:iranemb.lon@mfa.gov.ir)

Please check with your section office if sending appeals after the above date. This is the fifth update of UA 41/16. Further information: <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/MDE13/4874/2016/en/>

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### ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Both Mehdi Rajabian and Hossein Rajabian are in poor health. Following a magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) scan prior to his imprisonment, a neurology specialist told Mehdi Rajabian that he is suspected of having multiple sclerosis (MS) and needs ongoing care, including diagnostic tests. For the first two months after his arrest, he was denied medication that his doctor had told him is essential to delay the onset of MS symptoms. He also suffers from seizures, which began following beatings by security officials after his arrest in October 2013. He suffered another seizure on 10 September 2016 and was taken to the prison clinic. Hossein Rajabian was suffering with kidney problems prior to going into prison and has experienced severe fever-like symptoms while in prison. Several hours after going on the first hunger strike on 8 September 2016, he was taken to the prison clinic for a blood test that revealed a high white blood cell count and was then taken, with his hands and feet shackled, to a hospital outside prison, but was not given adequate medical treatment before being returned.

During their arrest by Revolutionary Guards officials on 5 October 2013, which took place at their office in the northern city of Sari, Mazandaran Province, Mehdi Rajabian and Hossein Rajabian were incapacitated with a stun gun, and blindfolded. For the next 18 days, they were held in an unknown location where they say they were tortured, including by electric shocks. They were then held for two months in solitary confinement in Section 2A of Evin Prison. Their interrogators apparently pressured them into making video “confessions”, threatening them with life in jail if they failed to do so. They were released on bail in December 2013. For most of the time they were detained, they were held incommunicado. Ten days after their trial in April 2015, they were told the verdict had been issued and they should go to the courthouse to read it. They were each sentenced to five years’ imprisonment for “insulting Islamic sanctities”, one year for “spreading propaganda against the system”, and a fine of 200 million rials (about US\$ 6,625) each for “illegal audio-visual activities”. They represented themselves during their appeal hearing, as they were told by the judge that they were not entitled to have a lawyer. At both trial and appeal, the men told the presiding judges that their “confessions” had been taken under torture while they were held incommunicado. The presiding judge at their appeal hearing warned them against talking about their alleged torture and threatened to give them harsher sentences if they did so. They had no access to a lawyer at any stage of their arrest, detention, trial or appeal.

Mehdi Rajabian is the founder of the Iranian website Barg Music, which was launched in 2009 and distributed unlicensed music. In Iran, only music that passes official censors receives licences, and musicians without licences operate underground. Barg Music distributed Persian-language music by Iranian singers from outside the country, some of whose lyrics and messages are political or cover taboo subjects. Mehdi Rajabian had been recording the history of an Iranian musical instrument called the *setar* when he was arrested. The arresting officers confiscated his recordings and other materials related to this project. Mehdi Rajabian has been accused of broadcasting the voices of female singers, as well as those of “anti-Islamic Revolution” singers. The Iranian authorities place restrictions on female singers, with a ban on women singing solo in front of men. Conservative clerics say that women’s voices have the potential to trigger immoral sensual arousal. In February 2015, conservative cleric Grand Ayatollah Hassan Nouri Hamedani said: “We will stop any film, book, or music that is anti-Islamic and anti-revolutionary... No action can normalize women’s singing, and we will stop it.” Hossein Rajabian was arrested after making his first feature film, called *The Upside Down Triangle*, about women’s right to divorce in Iran. The arresting officials confiscated all the materials related to the film. The film has not been allowed to be broadcast in Iran.

The charges against Mehdi Rajabian and Hossein Rajabian arise from their artistic work, including Hossein Rajabian’s feature film dealing with women’s right to divorce in Iran and Mehdi Rajabian’s distribution of unlicensed music by Iranian singers from outside the country. Article 19 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, to which Iran is a state party, protects the right to freedom of expression, including in the form of art.

Further information on UA: 41/16 Index: MDE 13/5106/2016 Issue Date: 8 November 2016