

Letters page

Human Rights in Iran

Editors: I'm writing to ask Democratiya readers to sign a letter (see below) on behalf of the Iranian philosopher Ramin Jahanbegloo, one of the pre-eminent intellectual figures in Iran today, who was arrested in Tehran in April 27 and has been held without charges since.

One of the founders of the journal *Goft-o-gu* (Dialogue), Ramin's many books include, in English, a collection of conversations with Isaiah Berlin and one with Ashis Nandy, as well as the edited volume *Iran – Between Tradition and Modernity*; in French, a study of Gandhi's political thought and a book of interviews with George Steiner; and, in Persian, studies of Machiavelli, Kant, Hegel, Schopenhauer and Tagore.

Ramin has brought an endless stream of Indian, European, and North American intellectuals to lecture in Iran – among them Richard Rorty, Antonio Negri, Timothy Garton Ash, Fred Dallmayr, Agnes Heller, Adam Michnik, and the late Paul Ricoeur – effectively acting as a kind of philosophical ambassador between Iran and the outside world.

Among the myriad international organizations that have expressed outrage at Ramin's arrest and called for his immediate release so far are Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, international PEN, Reporters Without Borders, the International Society for Iranian Studies, the Middle East Studies Association (of North America), and International Freedom of Expression Exchange. Among those who have signed the letter are Jürgen Habermas, Leszek Kolakowski, Umberto Eco, Charles Taylor, Tzvetan Todorov, Orhan Pamuk, and Zygmunt Bauman.

More information about Ramin's case can be found at these sites:

<http://raminj.iranianstudies.ca>

<http://chronicle.com/temp/email2.php?id=XYzwy9FTyqpHsggrdkXzGVzyTsrzgMY3>

www.opendemocracy.net/democracy-irandemocracy/jahanbegloo_3545.jsp

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The aim of the letter is to get as many signatures from around the world as possible in support of Ramin's immediate and unconditional release. If you would like to add your name to it, kindly send an e-mail to me (danny@postelservice.com) with a cc. to Dr. Victoria Tahmasbi at York University (tahmaseb@yorku.ca).

Time is of the essence.

Most gratefully,

Danny Postel, Senior Editor, openDemocracy, Member, Committee for Academic and Intellectual Freedom International Society for Iranian Studies

Open Letter to President of the Islamic Republic of Iran,

Dr. Mahmoud Ahmadinejad

CC: Chief Justice, Ayatollah Mahmoud Hashemi Shahroudi

Mr. President,

We the undersigned write to appeal for the immediate and unconditional release of the prominent Iranian scholar and public intellectual, Dr. Ramin Jahanbegloo. It has been close to three weeks that Dr. Jahanbegloo has been arrested without a proper court order, official charges, legal representation, and the right of visitation for his family. On Saturday, 6 May 2006, Minister of Intelligence, Hojatoleslam Gholam-Hossein Mohseni-Ejei, confirmed his arrest and implied that Dr. Jahanbegloo is being held for 'having contacts with foreigners.' However, as of now, no official charges have been announced and many inside Iran and throughout the world who are familiar with Dr. Jahanbegloo's writing are surprised as to why such an internationally prominent scholar is being held without due process.

The arbitrary arrest and detention of Dr. Jahanbegloo are in clear violation both of the laws of the Islamic Republic of Iran and the country's obligations under international human rights law. As you are well aware, Iran is a signatory to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the detainment of a scholar for his global outreach is in violation of that covenant as well as all other international conventions.

Mr. President, Dr. Jahanbegloo is a distinguished scholar, philosopher and humanist who is committed to the principle of non-violence, cares deeply about the fate of his fellow Iranians and has worked tirelessly to build bridges of understanding between

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Iran and the world. As the Director of the Cultural Research Bureau in Tehran and a leading global thinker, he has brought the richness and complexity of Iranian civilization to hundreds of thousands of his readers, students, and colleagues around the world. As a result, Dr. Jahanbegloo has won admirers around the world, from Italy to India to Indonesia, many of whom also share our deep concern with his fate. He is an outstanding cultural ambassador for the Iranian people and should be celebrated for his enduring devotion to scholarship and dialogue across civilizations rather than being imprisoned. Dr. Jahanbegloo's arrest has already sent shockwave across the international academic communities and has become a source of serious concerns for scholars travelling to and out of Iran.

We believe that the unlawful and inhuman detention of Dr. Jahanbegloo demands your intervention for his immediate and unconditional release.