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Iran: Human rights defender Esmail Abdi on hunger strike

13 May 2022 marks the 13th day of the hunger strike of human rights defender Esmail Abdi, in protest against the detention and long prison sentences for teachers rights defenders, attacks against members of Iran's Teachers' Trade Association (ITTA) and their families, and irregularities in the judicial procedure of his case.

[Esmail Abdi](#) is a high school teacher and former Secretary General of Iran's Teachers' Trade Association (ITTA). As part of his trade union activities, he has been campaigning for labour rights through organizing peaceful demonstrations and participation in representing ITTA in international conferences.

On 9 May 2022, the human rights defender was reportedly transferred to Kachuie prison's clinic after displaying very low blood sugar levels and high blood pressure. The human rights defender has been on hunger strike since the 1 May 2022. On 4 May 2022, Esmail Abdi was transferred to the quarantine ward of Kachuie prison, where he is currently being held, from the Alborz Central Prison without being given any explanation. The human rights defender was banned from making telephone calls for five days from 5 May to 10 May 2022, after the transfer and his family were threatened to keep silent and not to talk to the media about the situation of the human rights defender while on hunger strike.

Esmail Abdi was serving a five year sentence on the charges of "gathering information with the intention to disrupt national security" and "propaganda against the state" when he was handed a new ten year sentence in mid May 2020. With only a few months remaining on his previous five year sentence, Esmail Abdi was handed an additional 10 year sentence based on an old file. The human rights defender's lawyer had appealed with a retrial request in March 2021 and his request was accepted in April 2021. However, after more than one year, Esmail Abdi's case has not been assigned to a competent court for the retrial process, while under Article 477 of the Iranian Criminal Procedure Code there are provisions by which a defendant could be released on bail once the review process commences.

The human rights defender has developed pulmonary deficiencies after contracting COVID-19 twice while in detention in Evin prison, the last time of which was in March 2021 and is dependant on an inhaler to aid his breathing. Esmail Abdi is also suffering from high blood pressure, and most recently had high blood pressure readings on 9 May 2022.

Front Line Defenders is seriously concerned about the grave deterioration of the health of human rights defender Esmail Abdi while on hunger strike in Kachuie prison. The organisation is particularly concerned, given the vulnerable health condition of the human rights defender, about his pre-existing pulmonary problems and the living conditions for detainees in the prison. Front Line Defenders believes that the treatment of Esmail Abdi in Kachuie prison, and the denial of access to necessary medication, is solely due to his peaceful and legitimate work in defense of human rights, namely the rights to freedom of association and assembly in Iran.

Front Line Defenders urges the authorities in Iran to:

1. Immediately and unconditionally release Esmail Abdi and quash his convictions, as Front Line Defenders believes that he has targeted solely as a result of his legitimate human rights work;
2. Ensure that the treatment of Esmail Abdi, while in detention, adheres to the conditions set out in the 'Body of Principles for the Protection of All Persons under Any Form of Detention or Imprisonment', adopted by UN General Assembly resolution 43/173 of 9 December 1988;
3. Adhere to the principles of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), where as a party to the ICCPR, Iran is "obliged to respect, protect and fulfil the right of everyone to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health," especially Articles 21 and 22 of the ICCPR, which provide for the obligations to respect the rights to peaceful assembly and association;
4. Ensure protection and hygienic provisions for all detained human rights defenders, and grant non-discriminatory access to temporary release and furlough;
5. Cease targeting all human rights defenders in Iran and guarantee in all circumstances that they are able to carry out their legitimate human rights activities without fear of reprisals and free of all restrictions including judicial harassment.