

Network of Concerned Historians				NCH
Campaigns				
Year original	Year follow-up	Circular	Country	Names
2005		42	Iran	Yasub al-Din Rastgari, Shi'a scholar

*Announcement*

The Writers in Prison Committee of International PEN reported yesterday that Grand Ayatollah Yasub al-Din Rastgari (born [1927]), a leading Shi'a religious leader and scholar, is detained for publishing a book on Islamic history which is allegedly critical of the policies of some historic characters and "denigrates the sanctity" of some Wahhabi sect personalities. We hope that you can send the recommended urgent appeals immediately. Please remember to write in your professional capacity. Thank you.

PS: For previous items on the Iranian clergy, see NCH #10, 17, 23, 27, 32 (Annual Reports of 1998, 2000-2003).

**INTERNATIONAL PEN'S WRITERS IN PRISON COMMITTEE RAPID ACTION NETWORK**

19 October 2005

RAN 45/05

**IRAN**

Leading Shi'a religious leader and scholar detained for publishing a book on Islamic history.

Health concerns.

International PEN's Writers in Prison Committee is seriously concerned about the detention of leading Shi'a religious leader and scholar Grand Ayatollah Yasub al-Din Rastgari, who is believed to have been held since 27 April 2004 for publishing a book on Islamic religious history. PEN first learned of this case in June 2005, and exact details remain difficult to confirm. International PEN seeks confirmation of the charges and sentence against him, and calls for his immediate and

unconditional release if held in violation of Article 19 of the United Nations International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, to which Iran is a signatory. International PEN is seriously concerned at reports that Ayatollah Rastgari is in poor health and held incommunicado without access to his family. PEN seeks immediate assurances that he is being given any necessary medical treatment in prison, and demands that his basic rights in detention are respected.

According to PEN's information, Grand Ayatollah Yasub al-Din Rastgari was arrested in his home city of Qom on 27 April 2004 after the publication of his book, *The Reality of Religious Unity*. His two sons were also arrested with him and the book's publisher closed down. He is accused of "insulting Islam" and "causing schism" in the book, which is allegedly critical of the policies of some historic characters and "denigrates the sanctity" of some Wahhabi sect personalities. The book is reportedly addressing points raised in another published book. It is thought that Grand Ayatollah Rastgari has been secretly charged, convicted and sentenced to four years in prison by the Special Court for the Clergy, which is known to violate internationally recognised standards of fairness to which Iran is a state party. Further information on the Special Court for the Clergy in general and human rights violations against Shi'a religious leaders in particular have been documented in detail by Amnesty International ([www.amnesty.org](http://www.amnesty.org)).

Grand Ayatollah Rastgari is said to be a highly respected and renowned Muslim scholar who has written over 100 works. He is aged 78 and said to be in frail health, suffering from diabetes and heart disease. He is thought to be held by the secret service in the city of Qom although his exact whereabouts, charges against him or sentence have not been confirmed. He has reportedly been previously detained on several occasions, most recently in 1996, when he was sentenced to three years in prison and a period of internal exile for his activities against the regime.

**SEND APPEALS TO AUTHORITIES:**

expressing serious concern about the detention of leading Shi'a religious leader and scholar Ayatollah Rastgari, apparently for publishing a book on Islamic history;

seeking details of the charges and sentence against him, and urging that he is immediately and unconditionally released if held in violation of Article 19 of the United Nations International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, to which Iran is a signatory;

seeking assurances that he is receiving all necessary medical treatment and urging that his basic rights in detention are respected.

**APPEALS TO:**

Head of the Judiciary

His Excellency Ayatollah Mahmoud Hashemi Shahroudi

Ministry of Justice

Park-e Shahr

Tehran, Islamic Republic of Iran

E-mail: [irjpr@iranjudiciary.org](mailto:irjpr@iranjudiciary.org) (mark "Please forward to HE Ayatollah Shahroudi")

If possible please send a copy of your appeal to the diplomatic representative for Iran in your country.

For further information, contact Cathy McCann at the WiPC, International PEN, 9/10 Charterhouse Buildings, Goswell Road, London EC1M 7AT, U.K., tel: +44 207 253 3226, fax: +44 207 253 5711, e-mail: [cmccann@wipcpn.org](mailto:cmccann@wipcpn.org), Internet: <http://www.internationalpen.org.uk>.