29 July 2020

Iran: Jafar Azimzadeh subjected to two attacks in prison

On 26 July 2020, imprisoned labour rights defender **Jafar Azimzadeh** was assaulted on two separate occasions by two separate individuals, neither of whom he is acquainted with. In neither instance did the prison authorities intervene to stop the assault, nor did they inquire with the defender as to the details of the assault, or show much interest or concern when he attempted to report the attacks.

Jafar Azimzadeh is the Secretary of the Board of Directors of the Free Union of Iranian Workers. Free Union of Iranian Workers (FUIW) is a group dedicated to defending labour rights and improving working conditions. The group has not been officially recognised by the Iranian authorities, and many of its leading members are frequently subject to harassment. Jafar Azimzadeh is currently serving a five year sentence for 'crimes of assembly and collusion against national security through organizing and operating an illegal group'.

On the morning of 26 July 2020, Jafar Azimzadeh was attacked by a prisoner in the 8th Ward of Evin Prison. The defender has had no previous encounters with this person. The prison authorities did not intervene in the attack or do anything to restrain the attacker, nor did they enforce any punitive measures, as is usually done when fights or assaults occur. Following the attack, the authorities made no attempt to report the incident or question Jafar Azimzadeh as to what happened. Whilst the defender was making a complaint to the authorities, the prisoner who had attacked him appeared outside the room they were in and swore at him, threatening to kill him, to which the authorities did not respond.

Later that afternoon, another prisoner from a different ward, who Jafar Azimzadeh does not know either, approached him in the prison yard and slapped him in the face, despite not having displayed any animosity towards him prior to this. The defender was fearful for his life, as the prisoner was visibly high on drugs, and so he could not predict what he would do. Jafar Azimzadeh believes that this incident was related to the attack that morning, and that the prisoner who had first assaulted him had hired him to attack the defender.

Jafar Azimzadeh holds the authorities in Evin Prison responsible for both incidents as it was due to their negligence that they were able to occur, particularly with regard to the second attack, as no punitive measures had been enforced following the first, signaling that the attackers would enjoy impunity. Furthermore, the lack or reaction or response by the authorities to two attacks against the same prisoner in one day, has led Jafar Azimzadeh to believe that the security agencies may be behind the attacks, in an attempt to seriously harm him, or incite him to retaliate, so that they can file a new case against him and pressure him further. On 15 June 2020, he was sentenced to an additional 13 months' imprisonment on charges of 'propaganda against state' from Branch 26 of the Revolutionary Court as a result of his human rights activities from within the prison.

On 20 May 2020, Akram Rahimpour, Jafar Azimzadeh's wife was summoned to the Second Branch of the Tehran Revolutionary Court, where she was [questioned](#) regarding interviews she had given to the media regarding her husband's case. The charges being brought against her are not known. This can be viewed as a further attempt to silence and place pressure on Jafar Azimzadeh and his family.

Front Line Defenders is seriously concerned by the two attacks against Jafar Azimzadeh in the same day, and more broadly, the holding of imprisoned human rights defenders alongside dangerous prisoners convicted of serious crimes, putting their lives and well being at risk.

Front Line Defenders further expresses deep concern regarding the increased harassment of Jafar Azimzadeh and his family members, through the use of new charges, an additional prison sentence of 13 months, judicial harassment of his wife and denial of temporary release in the context of COVID-19. Front Line Defenders believes that the targeting of Jafar Azimzadeh is in reprisal for his criticism of the Government and prison authorities, and his peaceful advocacy for other human rights defenders in prison, and an attempt to silence him.

Front Line Defenders urges the authorities in Iran to:

1. Carry out an immediate, thorough and impartial investigation into the two attacks against Jafar Azimzadeh on 26 July 2020, with a view to publishing the results and bringing those responsible to justice in accordance with international standards;

2. Immediately and unconditionally release Jafar Azimzadeh and drop all charges against him, as Front Line Defenders believes that he is being held solely as a result of his legitimate and peaceful work in the defence of human rights;

3. Take all necessary measures to guarantee the physical and psychological integrity and security of the defender, as well as of the members of his family;

4. Ensure that the treatment of Jafar Azimzadeh, 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;

5. Guarantee in all circumstances that all human rights defenders in [country] are able to carry out their legitimate human rights activities without fear of reprisals and free of all restrictions.