

His Excellency
Dr. Hassan Rouhani
President of the Islamic Republic of Iran
Pasteur Square, Pasteur Street
Tehran
Islamic Republic of Iran

1 June 2017

End yearlong imprisonment of artists

Your Excellency,

Congratulations on your re-election as President. Freemuse hopes to collaborate with you and your government in strengthening international cooperation on the protection of freedom of artistic expression.

Freemuse and the Center for Human Rights in Iran (CHRI), along with the undersigned artists and supporters of artistic freedom, call on the Iranian government to immediately and unconditionally release musician Mehdi Rajabian, 27, and filmmaker Hossein Rajabian, 32, from prison. On 5 June 2017, the two brothers will have spent one year out of a three-year prison sentence behind bars for engaging in peaceful artistic expression.

The brothers were managing partners of Barg Music, a now-banned popular digital music production and distribution service, when they were first arrested in October 2013 by the Revolutionary Guards' Intelligence Organization and held in solitary confinement for more than two months. They were put under intense pressure to make false, televised confessions and Mehdi was reportedly subjected to repeated torture while in detention.

In a trial that lasted only 15 minutes, Judge Mohammad Moghisseh of Branch 21 of the Revolutionary Court sentenced the two artists to six years in prison each in May 2015 for "insulting the sacred" and "propaganda against the state". Their sentence was reduced to three years in prison upon appeal. Mehdi and Hossein Rajabian started serving their sentences on 5 June 2016.

The United Nations Special Rapporteur on Cultural Rights, Karima Bennoune, and the UN Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Expression, David Kaye, called for the brothers' immediate release on 24 June 2016.

During the artists' imprisonment in Evin Prison, their medical conditions have significantly deteriorated; Mehdi Rajabian is also suffering from multiple sclerosis. According to a medical examiner,

he is not physically fit to be in prison and should, at a bare minimum, be allowed to receive treatment in a hospital outside the prison. Mehdi and Hossein Rajabian have twice been on hunger strike to protest the lack of medical attention and their ill treatment in prison.

Freemuse has documented how Iranian authorities continue to intimidate, persecute, imprison and ban artists, cultural producers and publishers. In 2016, Freemuse documented 39 violations of artistic freedom of expression in Iran, including the imprisonment of 19 artists and the prosecution of six artists.

The continued imprisonment of Mehdi and Hossein Rajabian is unacceptable and in complete violation of international human rights laws ratified by Iran. We call on the Iranian government to immediately and unconditionally release Mehdi and Hossein Rajabian and all other artists imprisoned for their creative expressions.

Thank you for your attention to this urgent matter. We look forward to your response.

Sincerely,

Dr Srirak Plipat, Executive Director, Freemuse
Hadi Ghaemi, Executive Director, Center for Human Rights in Iran

Nadia Afghani, social practice/public engagement artist
Shahidul Alam, photographer and writer, Drik Picture Library Ltd
Daniela Arriado, Director and curator, Screen City Biennial
Ade Bantu, musician
Budhaditya Chattopadhyay, media artist
Mbizo Chirasha, poet
Stephen Coates, musician, X-Ray Audio
Angie Cotte, cultural activist
Mary Ann DeVlieg, independent consultant, evaluator, trainer in arts and human rights
Killa Ace, raptivist
Lillian Fellmann, artists rights defender
Dr. Daniel Gad, Managing Director UNESCO Chair in Cultural Policy at University of Hildesheim
Ruth Jakobi, Secretary General, European Music Council
Sepideh Jodeyri, poet
Alfons Karabuda, President, European Composer and Songwriter Alliance
Deeyah Khan, filmmaker and founder of Fuuse
Patricia Kistenmacher, dialogue facilitator
Roger Lucey, musician
Daniel Maphosa, theatre producer
Yucef Merhi, artist and poet
Silvanos Mudzvova, actor, director and arts activists
Jody Elizabeth Nolan, filmmaker and creative researcher
Suzanne Nossel, Executive Director, PEN America
Jose Ernesto Bautista Siliezar, visual artist/filmmaker, The Fire Theory
Tanya Toft, curator and Ph.D. candidate, Copenhagen University
Sara Whyatt, independent expert, freedom of expression
Sampson Wong, artist (visual art)