

Iranian scientist to go on trial for espionage

Academics call for release of Ahmadreza Djalali, a disaster-medicine researcher who has been held in a Tehran prison for more than a year.

Michele Catanzaro

02 August 2017



Courtesy of Vida Mehrannia

Disaster medicine researcher Ahmadreza Djalali goes to trial in Iran on espionage charges.

An Iranian disaster-medicine researcher who was sent to prison in April 2016 is due to go to trial on 2 August, on charges of “collaboration with a hostile government”. Ahmadreza Djalali has been warned by the Iranian court that he may be facing a death sentence, according to his wife, Vida Mehrannia.

Djalali, who is 45, is affiliated with Sweden’s Karolinska Institute in Stockholm and Italy’s University of Eastern Piedmont in Novara, where he carried out research on improving hospitals’ emergency responses to armed terrorism and radiological, chemical and biological threats.

On 25 April 2016, Djalali was arrested during a visit to Iran and accused of spying. Djalali denies the charge, according to Mehrannia. She says that he was kept in solitary confinement for three months in Tehran’s Evin prison and forced to sign a confession under threats to his wife and two children, who live in Sweden.

On 31 January during a pre-trial meeting, Abolqasem Salavati, a judge with Iran’s revolutionary court, told Djalali that he could face a death sentence. The judge later vetoed Djalali’s first choice of lawyer and forced him to select another.

Outside support

Djalali went on hunger and thirst strikes in early 2017, which left him in dire health. And in early July, He was placed into solitary confinement for several hours during a prison visit by representatives from 45 foreign diplomatic missions, according to Mehrannia.

Related stories

- Jailed Iranian researcher’s health worsening rapidly
- Iran releases physicist after five years in jail
- Iran needs to present a united front on science

More related stories

Related stories

- Jailed Iranian researcher’s health worsening rapidly
- Iran releases physicist after five years in jail
- Iran needs to present a united front on science

More related stories

Several scientific organizations have expressed support for Djalali. On 21 July, the academic-freedom network Scholars at Risk urged supporters to petition Iranian officials, including Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, for Djalali’s release, describing his continued imprisonment as “retaliation for peacefully exercising his right to academic freedom”.

Update (2 August): Djalali’s trial has been postponed owing to the judge’s illness, according to Mehrannia, who says that a new trial date has not been set.

Nature [doi:10.1038/nature.2017.22384](https://doi.org/10.1038/nature.2017.22384)