

RAPID ACTION NETWORK

08 September 2009

Update #4 to RAN 02/08

AFGHANISTAN: Journalist Sayed Parvez Kambakhsh released.

The Writers in Prison Committee of International PEN is delighted to learn that Afghan journalist Sayed Parvez Kambakhsh has been freed under a Presidential pardon. His release was confirmed by the Ministry of Justice on 7 September 2009, although he is reported to have been freed two weeks ago and has been granted asylum in an as yet unidentified European country. Kambakhsh had been detained since 27 October 2007 and was serving a twenty-year prison sentence for blasphemy. His release is believed to be the direct result of a sustained joint diplomatic effort by Afghan activists and international pressure.

According to PEN's information, twenty-three year-old Sayed Parvez Kambakhsh, a journalism student at Balkh university and reporter for the local daily *Jahan-e-Naw* (*The New World*), was arrested on 27 October 2007 in Mazar-i-Sharif, Balkh province, northern Afghanistan for distributing allegedly anti-Islamic literature. He was detained by National Directorate of Security (NDS) forces on blasphemy charges after allegedly downloading and distributing to friends an article that said the Prophet Mohammed ignored women's rights. Kambakhsh was not the author of the article. He was also reportedly accused of possessing allegedly anti-Islamic books and starting un-Islamic debates in his classes.

Sayed Parvez Kambakhsh was tried by an Islamic court in the northern city of Mazar-i-Sharif, Balkh Province, on 22 January 2008, and sentenced to death. The trial was reportedly held behind closed doors, and he had no legal representation. On 21 October 2008 a Kabul appeal court commuted the death sentence but upheld his conviction for "blasphemy". The sentence was upheld on appeal by the Supreme Court in a closed hearing in early February 2009. Sayed Parvez Kambakhsh is thought to have been targeted for association with his brother, prominent journalist Sayed Yaqub Ibrahim, who works for the Institute of War and Peace Reporting and has been under escalating pressure for his critical reporting on local officials and warlords.

For further information go to:

http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/south_asia/8242333.stm

<http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/asia/clerics-and-hardliners-vent-their-fury-at-pervez-release-1783406.html>

http://www.iwpr.net/?p=arr&s=f&o=355685&apc_state=henh

<http://www.independent.co.uk/opinion/leading-articles/leading-article-freedom-for-pervez-but-a-sobering-reminder-of-tyranny-1782939.html>

For further information please contact Cathy McCann at International PEN Writers in Prison Committee, Brownlow House, 50/51 High Holborn, London WC1V 6ER, Tel. + 44 (0) 20 7405 0338, Fax: +44 (0) 20 7405 0339, email: cathy.mccann@internationalpen.org.uk

