

**Press release Vrije Universiteit Brussel**  
**Dr Ahmadreza Djalali has spent five years in Iranian prison**  
**Leading universities and Scholars at Risk call for urgent action**  
**“Dr Djalali must be released now”**

Five years after Dr Ahmadreza Djalali’s arrest, VUB is still deeply concerned about his continued incarceration in prison in Iran, where he is being denied medical care. Dr Djalali is a leading scientist in disaster medicine who has taught at the Karolinska Institute in Sweden, the Università degli Studi del Piemonte Orientale in Italy and the Vrije Universiteit Brussel. “Dr Djalali should be released now. His health is deteriorating rapidly,” the three universities said in a joint statement signed by Prof Ole Petter Ottersen, vice-rector of the Karolinska Institute, Prof Gian Carlo Avanzi, rector of the Università del Piemonte Orientale, and Prof Caroline Pauwels, rector of the Vrije Universiteit Brussel.

The three universities are calling on the academic community to work for Dr Djalali’s release. “Dr Djalali’s situation concerns scientists and society worldwide. He has been sentenced to death as an indisputable retribution for international scientific cooperation within his field of study. His wrongful prosecution and imprisonment, like the wrongful prosecution and imprisonment of other scientists and researchers, serve to undermine academic work and deprive everyone of the benefits of scientific research and exchange,” said Caroline Pauwels.

You can find the joint statement at the end of this press release.

The Scholars at Risk network (SAR) has also called on the Iranian authorities to lift the death penalty imposed on Dr Djalali and to ensure his immediate release so he can receive the urgent medical care he needs. The organisation is calling for action against the human rights violations associated with his arrest, detention and death sentence. They have launched a campaign that can be supported [here](#). Clare Robinson, advocacy director at SAR: “We have been informed that Dr Djalali’s health has seriously deteriorated since the authorities transferred him to solitary confinement in November 2020. His family fears that Dr Djalali will die in prison if he continues to be denied the urgent medical care he needs.”

**Timeline of Dr Djalali’s imprisonment**

When he visited Iran in April 2016 to participate in a series of workshops organised by universities in Tehran and Shiraz, Dr Djalali was arrested for “collaborating with hostile governments” and “endangering national security”. He was subsequently detained in Evin Prison and intermittently held in isolation.

On 21 October 2017, Dr Djalali was sentenced to death for “corruption on earth” (ifsad fil-arz), based on unsubstantiated allegations that he provided intelligence to the Israeli government. Dr Djalali contested the charges, arguing that his links with the international academic community were at the root of his prosecution. Dr Djalali has been denied the right to appeal the conviction and sentence. He has been tortured and ill-treated and suffers from increasing medical complications.

On 24 November 2020, the Iranian authorities transferred Dr Djalali to solitary confinement and began preparations to carry out his death sentence. Since then, the authorities have delayed the execution, but kept Dr Djalali in solitary confinement for more than 20 weeks. Dr Djalali’s health deteriorated drastically as he was held in isolation and in difficult conditions, with the lights on 24/7. Dr Djalali is

reportedly suffering from stomach pains and breathing difficulties and has lost at least 11kg. On 14 April 2021, the authorities transferred Dr Djalali from the isolation cell to a multi-person cell.

The authorities continue to deny him access to his lawyer, family and essential emergency medical assistance. These combined, deliberate actions are causing Dr Djalali and his family immense fear and pain.