Free Kian Tajbakhsh. Rally Sept. 23 for democracy in Iran

written by Lois Weiner | September 22, 2009

My colleague, Niloofar Mina, has been working on a campaign to free Kian Tajbakhsh, a scholar imprisoned in Iran. Kian is an American citizen of Iranian heritage, a secular intellectual, a sociologist and an independent scholar. He is not attached to any political organization or movement, inside and outside the country. Niloofar closely follows events in Iran through Persian language media sources, official and unofficial. She has learned that Kian is in a show trial with a group of defendants associated with Iran's reformist movement. They are accused of conspiracy to foment a "velvet revolution" in Iran. Friends of Kian, a secular Iranian-American academic who has not been engaged in political activity, are alarmed that pictures and video broadcast in Iran show Kian seated directly behind Said Hajjarian, a leading reformist and principal defendant in the trials. Niloofar describes Kian's situation this way: "Dressed in blue prison pajamas and brown plastic slippers Kian looks thin and depressed. His vacant gaze and apparent disorientation captured in the video clippings broadcast by Iran's official news agency makes reading the trial transcripts devastatingly sad." Kian has not been allowed to consult with an attorney of his choice. The indictment against him is part of the collective charges against the entire group of defendants. Instead of evidence (of any sort), the government is using "confessions" of the defendants against themselves and their co-defendants. In contrast to the government's tale, the images broadcast to the Iranian public tell the real story: The defendants' tortured and terrorized faces leave no doubt about the horrific conditions under which the "confessions" have been obtained. Yet, news from the democracy movement in Iran indicates that the public presentations of the tortured confessions have provoked disgust and anger. Clearly, the "confessions" lack credibility, and even some of Iran's high-ranking clerics with close ties to the ruling circles have condemned these supposed confessions. So why does the government go forward with these show trials? Niloofar has analyzed the text of the collective indictment, which contains about six sentences directly related to Kian. In those statements he is accused of having been raised outside Iran and is blamed for his parentage, his limited knowledge of Iran's dominant religious practices, and for (an unsubstantiated report of) his having discussed a book with Hajjarian. The strongest accusations appear in a separate indictment directed at Kian alone,charging him with espionage. This personal indictment accuses Kian of membership in a listserv that is run by Gary Sick of Columbia University, who is identified as a CIA agent. Kian is also accused of being a consultant for the Soros Foundation in Iran, which is characterized as a satellite institution of CIA devoted to instigation of "velvet revolutions" globally, including in Iran. There is no credible evidence connecting Kian Tajbakhsh with the serious charges of espionage and conspiracy because Kian has never been involved in such activities. His accusers know this. Secretary of State Hilary Clinton has repeatedly demanded Kian's release and has publicly denounced the false accusations leveled against him. Yet as the post election crisis in Iran grows and the political rift within the Islamic Republic's leadership deepens, the dangers to Kian increase. Niloofar and Kian's other supporters, who include relatives, colleagues, and friends, are working for his immediate release from a power struggle with which he has no connection. I join them, as I hope readers of this blog do, in wanting Kian freed to leave Iran so that he can continue his life and academic career in safety. Supporters of the Iranian democracy movement, organized in the Solidarity Committee for Advancement of Democracy in Iran, are rallying on Wednesday, September 23, in Dag Hammarsskjold Plaza, 47th St., between 1 st and 2nd Ave [close to 1st Ave.] Kian's supporters will be there, with banners publicizing his plight. Join us!