

Head of judiciary, Gholamhossein Mohseni Ejei
c/o Embassy of Iran to the European Union
Avenue Franklin Roosevelt No. 15, 1050 Bruxelles, Belgium

Dear Mr Gholamhossein Mohseni Ejei,

Iranian authorities are subjecting Belgian aid worker Olivier Vandecasteele, 42, to an enforced disappearance, a crime under international law, as his whereabouts are unknown to his family, lawyer and Belgian consular authorities. He is also being subjected to torture and other ill-treatment. There is mounting evidence, including public statements by Belgium officials and private comments made by Iranian officials to Olivier Vandecasteele, heightening concerns that the Iranian authorities are holding him hostage to compel the Belgium authorities to handover a former Iranian official, Asadollah Asadi, who is serving a 20-year sentence in Belgium.

On 24 February 2022, Revolutionary Guards agents arbitrarily arrested Olivier Vandecasteele during a trip to Iran. He was initially detained in Tehran's Evin prison where he was subjected to torture and other ill-treatment, including through prolonged solitary confinement in a room with bright lights on 24 hours a day, which caused him deep distress. In August 2022, authorities transferred him to an unknown location, where he remains. During brief, infrequent phone calls, his family learned that authorities are holding him in solitary confinement in a windowless basement cell with bright lights turned on 24 hours a day, without access to natural light and fresh air and are denying him meaningful contact with other people. Olivier Vandecasteele is suffering from dental and gastric problems, for which he is denied adequate healthcare.

On 10 January 2023, Iranian state media announced that a Revolutionary Court in Tehran sentenced him to 40 years in prison, 74 lashes and a fine after convicting him of multiple charges including "espionage for foreign intelligence services", "collaborating with a hostile government [USA]", "money laundering", and "professional currency smuggling in the amount of US\$500,000". Under Iran's sentencing guidelines he would serve 12 and a half years in prison. His trial, which took place in mid-November 2022, was grossly unfair; it lasted only 30 minutes. His right to a fair trial was flagrantly violated, including to access a lawyer of his choosing, to adequate defence, to meaningfully challenge the legality of his detention, and to be tried by an independent, competent and impartial tribunal. No appeal is known to have been filed.

I urge you to immediately reveal Olivier Vandecasteele's whereabouts and, in light of his arbitrary detention, release him immediately. Pending this, he must be protected from further torture and other ill-treatment, provided access to regular phone calls to family, adequate healthcare, a lawyer of his own choosing and unhindered consular assistance from Belgium. A prompt, independent, effective, and impartial investigation into those suspected of ordering, committing, aiding or abetting unlawful acts against Olivier Vandecasteele, including hostage-taking, torture and enforced disappearance, must be conducted and all those suspected of such offences brought to justice in fair trials before ordinary civilian courts.

Yours sincerely,