



Brussels, January 24, 2023

Subject: Letter concerning the aid worker Olivier Vandecasteele held hostage by the Islamic Republic of Iran

To the attention of

Ms von der Leyen, President of the European Commission

Mr Michel, President of the European Council

Mr Borrell i Fontelles, High Representative for Foreign Affairs

The Iran Division of the European External Action Service (EEAS)

Copy to

Ms Metsola, President of the European Parliament,

On 24 February 2022, the Belgian aid worker, Olivier Vandecasteele, was arrested by the Iranian Islamic Revolution Guards Corps. Mr Vandecasteele, who has worked and lived in the Islamic Republic of Iran, and was due to visit in February, has since been arbitrarily detained in totally inhumane and degrading conditions.

Last August, after being detained and tortured in Tehran's Evin prison, Mr Vandecasteele was transferred to a place still unknown to his lawyers and relatives. Little information about his conditions of detention is provided by the Iranian authorities. Brief telephone contacts and supervised meetings with Belgian officials have established that he is being held in isolation in a cell without windows, without access to natural light and fresh air. In addition, Mr Vandecasteele started a hunger strike on November 15, 2022 and may have recently ended it. His health has deteriorated rapidly due to his detention and is undoubtedly worrying at the time of writing. An assessment of his medical state has therefore become imperative to ensure his security.

On November 28, 2022, during a consular meeting, Mr. Vandecasteele revealed to the Belgian authorities that he had been brought before the Court without an independent lawyer of his choice and that he had subsequently been "convicted". This court sentenced Mr Vandecasteele to 40 years in prison and 74 lashes. The official charges for his conviction are espionage, cooperation with the US against Iran, currency smuggling and money laundering.

Mr. Vandecasteele's right to a fair trial, his right to have access to a lawyer of his choice, his right to be protected from torture and his right to be tried by an independent Court have been violated.

In addition to Mr. Vandecasteele's status as a European citizen, which must see the European Union and Belgium deploy the necessary means to obtain his release, it is also fundamental that the European Union protects humanitarian workers whose valuable work is increasingly threatened by undemocratic regimes. Since 2015, Mr Vandecasteele has been working as a humanitarian aid worker to help Afghan refugees arriving in Iran. Amnesty International calls for his immediate release: <https://www.amnesty.be/veux-agir/agir-ligne/petitions/olivier-vandecasteele>



In view of this situation, and having regard to the resolution of 19 January 2023 on Iran, we call on the European Commission, the European Council and the High Representative for Foreign Affairs:

- to show their support for Mr Vandecasteele and raise his case publicly as well as privately in any interaction with Iranian officials, including the Iranian ambassador to the EU ;
- to use all diplomatic and political means to obtain the release of Mr Vandecasteele and better conditions of detention in the meantime;
- to put Olivier Vandecasteele's case on the agenda of the next European Foreign Affairs Council meeting so that all EU Member States, particularly those with embassies in Iran, activate the levers for his release;
- to obtain an agreement with the Iranian authorities to send a European medical team to Mr. Vandecasteele to objectively assess his physical and psychological health. It should also analyze the therapeutic measures taken to deal with the deterioration of Mr. Vandecasteele's health following his recent hunger strike.

We look forward to hearing from you.

Please accept the assurances of our highest consideration.

Saskia Bricmont, Greens/EFA Member of the European Parliament,
Ernest Urtasun, Greens/EFA Member of the European Parliament,
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