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June 4, 2011

JOSH FATTAL SPENDS SECOND BIRTHDAY IN PRISON IN IRAN

American Hiker's Grandmother, 85, Leads Family, Friends, and Former Colleagues and Students in Solidarity Hunger Strike

American environmental advocate Josh Fattal spent his birthday in an Iranian jail for a second consecutive year today as his extended family, friends, and former colleagues and students joined a solidarity hunger strike.

Josh, now 29, and his close friend Shane Bauer, 28, were arrested on July 31, 2009 while hiking in the unmarked border region of Iraqi Kurdistan and are being held in a 10-foot by 14-foot cell in Evin Prison, Tehran, with no access to their lawyer, Masoud Shafii, and almost no contact at all with their families. More than 40,000 people around the world have signed a petition for their immediate release.

"Never in my entire life would I have imagined such madness; that I would have a grandson held for no reason in an Iranian prison, and our entire family fasting in protest," Fattal's grandmother Muriel Felleman, 85, said.

"My husband turned 85 the day Josh was captured and we've not seen him for almost two years. The people in Iran who are preventing Josh and Shane from coming home are depriving their grandparents of the joy of spending time with them in our twilight years. They're ruining all our lives and they need to stop," she said.

Mrs. Felleman, frail from a recent surgery, led members of Josh's family in Pennsylvania, Florida, Texas and Washington State, including his 15-year-old cousin Brandon, in a day-long fast that is part of a [rolling hunger strike](#) launched on May 19 by Josh's mother Laura and Shane's mother Cindy Hickey.

The protest began after the Iranian judiciary failed without explanation to bring Josh and Shane to a planned trial hearing on May 11. The two men and Shane's fiancée Sarah Shourd, who was released on humanitarian grounds last September, face fabricated charges of espionage.

Others joining the rolling hunger strike on Saturday included members of [Aprovecho](#), a sustainable living community in Cottage Grove, Oregon, where Josh worked from 2005 to 2008, and former students across the United States and as far afield as Cambodia, China, Haiti, Rwanda, Singapore and the United Arab Emirates.

Josh mentored 33 students as a Teaching Fellow on an [International Honors Program](#) “Health and Community” study tour to Switzerland, India, China and South Africa in 2009.

Rosemary Kirincic of the Aprovecho staff said, “Josh Fattal has been a crucial member of our community, contributing to groundbreaking work in environmental education by initiating the 100-mile diet and other programs. The world needs him to continue that good work. We at Aprovecho, as part of the environmental community, join Josh’s family today to decry the ongoing injustice that is Josh and Shane’s detention.”

Farah Mawani, a senior policy and research analyst at the Mental Health Commission of Canada, was a member of the traveling faculty on Josh’s 2009 IHP program. “For more than 22 months, Josh and Shane have suffered terrible isolation and injustice that threatens to leave lasting psychological scars. People all over the world have grown to know their selflessness and innocence through our hearts. The groundswell of desire to see Josh and Shane free is unstoppable and I appeal to Iran to show reason at last,” she said.

Josh and Shane, a freelance photojournalist who was living in Syria with Sarah at the time of their vacation in Kurdistan, have been allowed to make only three brief telephone calls to their families since their arrest. In their most recent call, on May 22, the families learned that Josh and Shane had been on hunger strike for 17 days earlier this year after their jailers withheld family letters.

Josh’s elder brother, Alex, who joined the hunger strike at Aprovecho, said, “Of the 673 days that Josh and Shane have needlessly spent imprisoned in Iran, today is certainly one of the worst. Josh and Shane should be out celebrating life, enjoying their freedom in the company of family and friends. Instead, they are locked up and cut off from the world and the people who love them only because they hold American passports.”

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