



*Mission Permanente
de la République Islamique d'Iran
auprès des Nations Unies
et des autres Organisations Internationales à Genève*

In the Name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful

Ref. 2050/1560441

The Permanent Mission of the Islamic Republic of Iran to the United Nations Office and other international organizations in Geneva presents its compliments to the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights and with reference to the latter's Communication No. UA IRN 29/2022 dated 20 December 2022 concerning Mr. **Olivier VANDECASTEELE**, has the honor to transmit, herewith, the comment of the High Council for Human Rights of the Islamic Republic of Iran in that regard.

The Permanent Mission of the Islamic Republic of Iran avails itself of this opportunity to renew to the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights the assurances of its highest consideration.

Geneva, 14 April 2023



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Palais des Nations
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تاریخ:
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The Comments of the Islamic Republic of Iran on the 20 December 2022 Joint Urgent Appeal from the Special Procedures Mandate-Holders Regarding Olivier Vandecasteele

The points enumerated hereinunder are provided with regards to allegations made in the joint appeal dated 20 December 2022 from the special procedures mandate-holders concerning Olivier Vandecasteele, of Belgian nationality:

1. Olivier Vandecasteele, son of Bernard, a citizen of Belgium, has been residing in the Islamic Republic of Iran from 2015 to the end of 2019 as the director of the Norwegian Refugee Council's Iran Operations and the country manager of Relief International until May 2021. The foregoing person was arrested on 24 February 2022 by order of the judicial authority due to security violations, including collecting important and vital information about the Country under the guise of humanitarian activities;
2. According to the merits of the case, he was shown the arrest warrant issued by the judicial authority at the time of the arrest. He has been informed of the charges brought thereagainst and the right to have a lawyer according to the provisions of the Code of Criminal Procedure. During the first 48 hours of the arrest, the abovenamed contacted his Iranian wife and declared that he was safe and sound. His court-appointed lawyer was present during the investigations. However, while denying the accusations and not accepting his lawyer, he demanded the presence of representatives of the Belgian embassy and refused to introduce an attorney. When hearing the case, the judge had made the presence of the embassy's representatives conditional upon their introduction to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and its approval. Subsequently, the accused was able to benefit from the possibility of consular visits from time to time. Be advised that during and after the investigations, the foregoing person endured no psychological pressure whatsoever, and all the

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- investigation steps were carried out in accordance with humane and Islamic principles;
3. He has been sentenced to a total of 40 years in prison on charges of espionage against the Islamic Republic of Iran for the benefit of a foreign spy agency, cooperation with the hostile government of the United States, and money laundering, of which the aforementioned has to endure only 12.5 years on the strength of the Islamic Penal Code;
 4. Following the false claims made regarding the condition of the prisoner in question, the Secretary-General of the High Council for Human Rights of the Islamic Republic of Iran, Dr. Kazem Gharibabadi, personally paid a visit to his place of detention on 25 June 2022, met the inmate, and talked thereto. During the meeting, while expressing his satisfaction with the facilities provided thereto, the prisoner stated that he was satisfied with the correctional officers' behavior, adding that there had been no maltreatment. The abovenamed also said that he enjoys one session of yard time per day for one hour, which has been increased to three times a day (at the time of the prisoner's choice) owing to the recommendation and follow-up of the Secretary-General of the High Council for Human Rights;
 5. During the visit, the prisoner talked about the food he was served and said that his diet consisted of vegetables and fish, but the current food menu included chicken, meat, rice, etc., to which he was not used. Because of this, he had trouble digesting food and therefore had to use the necessary medicine. Immediately, thanks to the follow-ups, the essential facilities were provided thereto according to the requested food menu, and he started receiving food from a restaurant. The foregoing person currently has no problem in terms of food preferences;
 6. According to the relevant authority, considering that the prisoner is a vegetarian, during his detention, he had three meals from among the best quality vegetarian and seafood dishes, and as per his request, from the menu of one of the best restaurants with more than 30 items. His food is prepared

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- and served daily with the best quality. This is in addition to more than dozens of items he receives as snacks upon request, some of which are: coffee, dark chocolate, sugar-free Nescafe, sugar-free gum, biscuits and cereal products, breakfast cereals, wholemeal bread, olive oil, roasted sesame seeds, roasted flax seeds, chia seeds, rolled oats, low-fat milk and cheese, mineral water, all kinds of fresh and dry nuts and dried fruits including almonds, pistachios, walnuts, dates, etc., a variety of fruit juices, vegetables and fresh summer herbs, seasonal fruits such as mangos, apples, orange, bananas, pineapples, grapes, strawberries, nectarines, peaches, sour and sweet lemons. (Appendix No. 1);
7. According to his needs and at his own request, the foregoing person enjoyed access to a dentist, a general practitioner, and a specialist. He received the required medical prescription drugs, supplements and vitamins in full. (Appendix No. 2);
 8. During detention, the prisoner had frequent (more than 100 times) phone calls and 12 face-to-face meetings with his Iranian wife (except for special occasions). (Appendix No. 3);
 9. He has had at least nine audio and video calls (on average more than 35 minutes to an hour each time) with his Belgium-based family members (father, mother, and sister). (Appendix No. 4);
 10. So far, the abovenamed has had nine face-to-face consular meetings with the political representatives of Belgium without hindrance. (Appendix No. 5);
 11. Since the beginning of the arrest, he has had a large number of books (more than 100 books and magazines) at his disposal for reading. (Appendix No. 6);
 12. He is kept in a newly built suite (not solitary confinement) with enough lighting, space, and suitable facilities. The suite has a comfortable medical bed, a plush sofa, a toilet, and an independent bathroom. The prisoner also enjoys access to sanitary products (toilet paper, soap, shampoo, toothpaste, toothbrush, etc.). (Appendix No. 7). Contrary to the allegations, the foregoing person's place of detention has adequate lighting and windows with the

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- possibility of using an air-conditioner. While the suit is immaculate and disinfected, the prisoner can adjust the heat and cold through the window;
13. During detention, head, face, and body shaving services are at his disposal, and a personal hairdresser visits the suite for this purpose;
 14. There is no disturbance for the prisoner during the rest period, and he can decide his sleep and wake-up time based upon his liking;
 15. The prisoner has an unlimited amount of pen and paper for writing;
 16. Upon request, the foregoing person has been provided with suitable sports shoes to exercise in prison;
 17. The abovenamed could receive the pictures and paintings his family members sent him and install them in his suite. (Appendix No. 8);
 18. The prisoner prepared gifts for his family members using the origami tools provided thereto by the Belgian ambassador and sent them to his loved ones in Belgium through the embassy. (Appendix No. 9);
 19. The prisoner was also given the opportunity to attend and shop with his wife in one of the main shopping centers in Tehran. (Appendix No. 10);
 20. According to a report presented by the judicial officer of the prison supervisor who met and talked with the prisoner on 22 February 2023:
“A meeting was held with Olivier Vandecasteele in person on 22 February 2023, and the allegations were discussed in detail in an entirely free atmosphere without any restrictions. The foregoing person was brought in a suit and shoes without any handcuffs or ties. Not blindfolded, he sat on a chair before me, and we talked to each other. At first, he admitted that he knew a little Persian. After a few minutes and the exchange of questions and answers, an order was issued for the presence of a translator fluent in English so that conversations with the foregoing person could be conducted more efficiently. He is in perfect health condition and has no complaints about anything. He was in good physical condition. He was sent to medical centers outside the detention center several times. After our meeting, he had an appointment to visit a

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dentist. The abovenamed confirmed that he has access to suitable and healthy food. He stated that he is a vegetarian and needed some time to adapt to the existing conditions. But now, he is in good condition and eats various fruits and vegetables. He has never gone on a hunger strike, and his weight loss is because of being away from his family. He openly admitted that no one has ever treated him badly or inappropriately. He has been sent to medical centers outside the prison several times, and his dental problem has been resolved. He again requested to be sent to the dentist. It was decided that he would be sent to the dentist after meeting with the assistant prison supervisor. He met with his wife about 12 times and nine times with members of the Belgian embassy. However, he requested more meetings and phone calls with his family members. He enjoys access to the English newspaper. All the required books have been provided to him, and he has no complaints. He has received several magazines from his wife. He requested more physical space considering that he is into sports and physical activity. He also asked for access to music and television and, if possible, to be transferred to the prison's general ward. The prison condition is good. He has his own bed and enjoys daily yard time. In the end, he wrote and signed the summary of the negotiations between himself and me in English in a completely comfortable environment and in the absence of any stress whatsoever.”

21. The investigations into the process of handling the case, the consideration of other available documents and evidence, and the report of the supervising judge of the prison about the meeting with the prisoner prove that the allegations and claims made in the correspondence are untrue and have been originated from the news and information published by anti-Iran news outlets to paint a black picture of the Islamic Republic of Iran and for the purpose of political exploitation.