

Front Line Briefing on the situation of Iranian Human Rights Defenders

Iranian human rights defenders (HRDs) continue to be victims of arbitrary arrest, incommunicado detention, and victims of ill-treatment and torture while in detention. HRDs who are members of ethnic minorities, such as Azerbaijani and Kurdish HRDs are at high risk of being tortured while in prison. Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) continue to have difficulties registering and receiving licences to operate, and a number of human rights organisations have been shut down by the Iranian authorities.

HRDs continue to be detained without being charged for longer periods than legally allowed. They are often detained in Sector 209 of Evin prison, and held in solitary confinement for long periods. HRDs who are sick are not given adequate medical care and do not have access to their lawyers/family members. There continues to be reports of disappearances of HRDs. HRDs who are brought to court face unfair trials and unfair legal proceedings. In 2007, women HRDs, Azerbaijani HRDs, and student HRDs, were all particularly targeted by the authorities.

1. Women human rights defenders

Women human rights defenders (WHRDs), including those who are members of the **Campaign for Equality – One Million Signature Campaign** demanding an end to legalised discrimination against women in Iran, have been facing heightened harassment and mass arrests. Many face unfounded criminal charges. Some were ill-treated while in detention and did not have access to lawyers or adequate medical attention. Over 40 WHRDs involved in the Campaign for Equality have been arrested as a result of their peaceful activities within the Campaign, such as collecting signatures intended for the Parliament of the Islamic Republic of Iran and for writing articles on the website of the Campaign. Some WHRDs have been targeted and arrested on charges not directly related to the Campaign, but their interrogation largely focused on their activities in relation to the Campaign.

Currently four members of the **Campaign for Equality – One Million Signature Campaign** are in prison related to their activities with the Campaign. **Maryam Hosseinkhah** and **Jelveh Javaheri** are currently being detained in Evin's public ward, Section 3. Maryam Hosseinkhah was arrested on 18 November 2007, when she reported to a branch of the Revolutionary Court in Tehran for questioning. According to information received, she has been accused of "*disturbing public opinion*", "*propaganda against the system*" and "*publication of lies*" in connection with articles posted on websites she edits. Jelveh Javaheri was arrested on 1 December 2007. She had been summoned to report to the Revolutionary Court for questioning and has also been accused of "*disturbing public opinion*", "*propaganda against the system*" and "*publication of lies*" in connection with articles posted on the Internet. Neither of the women have had access to lawyers, and their lawyers were not allowed to be present during their interrogation in the Revolutionary Courts.

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Two members of the Campaign, based in Kurdistan remain in detention. On 8 October 2007, **Ronah Safazadeh** attended an event to commemorate the International Day of the Child. At this event she participated in discussions regarding the One Million Signature Campaign and had collected signatures for the Campaign. The following day, nine security agents arrived at her home in three cars to arrest her. The security agents searched Ronah Safazadeh's home and seized a number of items, including a computer, information pertaining to the Campaign and copies of the petition. The search and subsequent arrest of Ronah Safazadeh were allegedly carried in a violent manner. Her current whereabouts are unknown to her family and no information regarding the charges against her has been made available by the authorities. **Hana Abdi** was arrested on 4 November 2007, in the home of her grandfather. She had been collecting signatures for the Campaign with Ronah Safazadeh on 8 October 2007. Both WHRDS are being held in the security prison operated by security forces in Kurdistan Province. According to reports received, Ronah Safazadeh is no longer being interrogated, and both WHRDS do not have access to her family or lawyers. Ronah Safazadeh has been allowed a number of phone calls.

Furthermore, thirty-three WHRDs and journalists were arrested by members of the security police during a peaceful protest in Tehran on 4 March 2007. All the women arrested were placed in detention in Sector 209 of the Evin Prison, Tehran. Some women were placed in solitary confinement, none of the women had access to lawyers while in detention. The thirty-three women were charged with "*acting against national security by participating in an illegal gathering*", "*propaganda against the state*" and "*refusing to obey the orders of police [to disperse]*." The legal proceedings for these WHRDs are taking place and all have gone through their initial trial. Some of the WHRDs, who have either been tried or are awaiting trial in the coming months, include: Mahboubeh Abbas-Gholizadeh, Noushin Ahmadi Khorasani, Zara Amjadian, Elnaz Ansari, Parvin Ardalan, Shahla Entesari, Nahid Entesari, Somaiyeh Farid, Niloofer Golkar, Maryam Hosseinkhah, Mahbobeh Hosseinzadeh, Sarah Imanian, Nahid Jafari, Jelve Javaheri, Nahid Keshavarz, Sarah Laghaie, Sarah Loghmanian, Maryam Mirza, Rezvan Moghadam, Shadi Sadr, Ehteram Shadfar and Sussan Tahmasebi.

A number of the WHRDs were ill-treated while either being arrested or while in detention. **Nahid Jafari** was beaten on her head, and received injuries to her teeth and mouth as a result. She was refused immediate access to medical care, and was finally allowed to visit the infirmary in Evin prison upon her transfer, which was over 24 hours after receiving the injury.

Mahboubeh Abbas-Gholizadeh and **Shadi Sadr** were detained in solitary confinement in Sector 209 of Evin prison, under temporary detention orders based on Article 33 of the Iranian Penal Code. They were not granted access to a lawyer, and were ill-treated while in detention. They were interrogated on a number of occasions without a lawyer being present. Like the other 31 women arrested, they were interrogated while blindfolded and at times at night, so suffered from sleep deprivation - both of these practices are in direct contradiction to civil rights of Iranians guaranteed under the law. Mahboubeh Abbas-Gholizadeh was initially denied telephone contact with her family at the early stages of arrest. Both women have been denied access to medical care and the conditions of their detention are worsening their medical conditions. Shadi Sadr suffers from a chronic stomach ulcer and Mahboubeh Abbas-Gholizadeh suffers from arthritis and migraine headaches. They were both forced to sleep on the floor, with only one blanket, so were deprived of warmth. Previously, Mahboubeh Abbas-Gholizadeh was detained for a month in November 2004. Shadi Sadr, who was her lawyer at the time, was harassed and threatened by the District Attorney's Office in Tehran a number of times. Upon their arrest in March 2007, their organisations were shut down by order of the Judiciary and Security forces and they are currently facing charges in relation to their activities in support of women within their organisations.

The March 2007 arrests followed the arrest of a number of WHRDs on 12 June 2006, when approximately 70 women, the majority of them being WHRDs, were arrested while they were peacefully protesting for women's rights. The protest was disrupted by female police officers, who used pepper gas and beat a number of the protesters.

A number of WHRDs who took part in the demonstration on 12 June 2006 have been tried and convicted of “*Acting against national security*”, “*propaganda against the state*”, and “*disruption of public order*”. A number have received particularly harsh sentences.

For example, **Delaram Ali** has been convicted after an unfair trial as a result of her peaceful activities in defence of human rights. She was originally sentenced by the District of the Revolutionary Courts in Tehran to two years, ten months jail term and ten lashes, on 2 July 2007, for her participation in a peaceful gathering on 12 June 2006. The Court of Appeals sentenced Delaram Ali to thirty months in prison and ten lashes. The implementation of Delaram Ali's sentence was subsequently suspended, allowing for a two-week period of investigation. While the two weeks have since passed, Delaram Ali's sentence has yet to be implemented. No information has been received by Front Line about the status of this case, but the officials should take steps to suspend the sentence permanently.

A number of other WHRDs who took part in the same demonstration in June 2006 have also received sentences. Two other WHRDs have received similar harsh sentences: **Aliyeh Eghdam Dust** was sentenced to three years and four months and twenty lashes, and **Maryam Zia** was sentenced to six-month imprisonment and ten lashes, which was suspended for the period of two years. Aliyeh Eghdam and Maryam Zia have appealed their sentences, but they have not as yet received a date for the appeal. **Noushin Ahmadi Khorasani** received a three-year prison sentence; **Parvin Ardalan** received a three-year prison sentence; **Shahla Entezari** received a three-year prison sentence; **Sussan Tahmasebi** received a two-year prison sentence. These four women are being charged with organising the protest in June 2006 and their cases are currently in appeals courts. **Azadeh Forghani** received a two-year prison sentence for her participation in the June 2006 protest, which was reduced in appeals court to a suspended sentence of four months and a fine; **Bahareh Hedayad** received a two-year prison sentence, which was suspended for a period of five years. She was arrested along with five student leaders on 9 July 2007, once again during a peaceful demonstration in support of students in detention. She spent nearly one month in solitary confinement and is waiting for trial for these charges.

Sepideh Pouraghayee, a member of a group that reports on human rights abuses, was arrested on 9 September 2007. She was transferred to Evin Prison, Section 209, where she spent 60 days in solitary confinement before being transferred to a cell with two other inmates. She has remained in prison since, without formal charges or access to her lawyers and family.

2. Azerbaijani human rights defenders

Azerbaijani HRDs are often arrested, detained, tortured and sentenced for reporting on human rights violations. On some occasions Azerbaijani HRDs have received sentences with clear specification in their court orders that they are being sentenced for reporting on human rights violations. On other occasions HRDs have been charged with “*propaganda against the regime*” and/or “*creating commotion in public's mind*”.

HRDs and their families have been placed under financial difficulties in order to try and coerce them to stop their human rights activities. Azerbaijani HRDs can lose their businesses if the Iranian government becomes aware of their human rights activities. HRDs are often forced to pay disproportionately large fines. They can be sentenced if fines are not paid.

Azerbaijani HRDs often face incommunicado detention with long solitary confinement. They are often detained in the intelligence services, *Etefaat*, for long periods of time and are often accused of spying and reporting to foreign governments. On 18 August 2007, **Saleh Kamrani**, a lawyer who has represented Iranian Azerbaijanis, was arrested by four plainclothes individuals at a family wedding in the city of Karaj, near Tehran. His computer, personal documents, family photographs and his wife's camera, as well as documents and photographs belonging to the owner of the house in which he was staying, were confiscated by the arresting officers. His whereabouts were not

disclosed until 21 August 2007, when he was permitted to make a brief phone call to his family. According to reports, he was not allowed to speak in his native tongue thus preventing him from speaking to his mother who does not understand Persian. He confirmed that he was being held at section 209 of Evin prison. Saleh Kamrani has reportedly been subjected to torture and ill-treatment and requires regular medical attention for a heart complaint.

On 14 June 2006, Saleh Kamrani had already been arrested by the authorities on his way home from work. He was detained for a period of three months in Section 209 of Evin Prison, 97 days of which were spent in solitary confinement. He was reportedly interrogated at length about his work and threatened. He was also subjected to psychological torture including threats that his wife would also be arrested. Mina Kamrani (wife of Saleh Kamrani) and wives of other HRDs have been threatened with arrest, followed by Iranian authorities and insulted. It is believed that this is done in order to put pressure on their husbands.

On 25 May 2007, **Sa'id Metinpour**, a journalist who has been active in promoting the rights of the Iranian Azerbaijani community in Iran, was arrested in the north-western city of Zenjan. He is currently being detained in Section 209 of Evin prison and has not been allowed to meet his family or his lawyer. According to reports, he has been subjected to torture and ill-treatment and is suffering from poor health as a result. He has also spent much of his time in detention in solitary confinement in an attempt to force him into making a videotaped confession. Prior his arrest, Sa'id Metinpour had been detained in February 2007 and held for 10 days in connection with his participation in peaceful demonstrations marking International Mother Language Day, an annual event initiated by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) on 21 February 2007. Alireza Metinpour, the brother of Sa'id Metinpour was arrested in September 2007.

Front Line also remains concerned for the safety of Azerbaijani journalist and HRD **Yaghoub Saleki Niya**, following his arrest at his home in Tehran on 31 October 2007. Yaghoub Saleki Niya (also known as Ilqar Merendli) is one of the founders of the Committee for the Defence of Azerbaijani Political Prisoners (ASMEK). He writes for a number of banned blogs. On 31 October 2007, at approximately 7.00pm, officials from the Etelaat security service arrived at Yaghoub Saleki Niya's home and proceeded to search it for two hours. The officials arrested him and removed his books, camera and papers. He was taken to Evin prison in Tehran, where his wife was allowed to visit him on 5 November, on condition that his arrest and detention were not spoken about. On 10 November 2007, Yaghoub Saleki Niya's home was searched by security services for a second time and personal items were taken. Yaghoub Saleki Niya is currently detained without access to legal representation. Yaghoub Saleki Niya has not been formally charged with any offence and the reason for his arrest remains unknown, yet Front Line believes that it is directly related to his contributions to media sites and activities in defence of human rights. He had been previously arrested on 22 April 2004, when he enquired after a detained female Azerbaijani human rights defender, and was detained and interrogated for six days, after which he was released but called in for questioning. Since that time, he has been threatened by authorities and warned not to participate in any activities related to non-governmental organisations. Since 2004, Yaghoub Saleki Niya has been questioned at regular intervals. Front Line fears for the safety of Yaghoub Saleki Niya and believes that his arrest may form part of an ongoing campaign against journalists and human rights defenders in Iran.

The Authorisation and Surveillance Commission has shut down a number of Azerbaijani independent publications including *Dilmanj*, a monthly newsletter that Yaghoub Saleki Niya wrote for. The focus of its next edition was to be Democracy and Azerbaijan but its publication was halted by the authorities on 25 September 2007.

3. Student human rights defenders

Front Line is concerned for the safety of the student activist and human rights defender **Ali Akbar Mousavi-Kho'ini**. He is a former member of the Iranian Parliament and is currently the president of the Alumni Association of Iran, a leading organisation working for democratic change and reform and in support of human rights.

Ali Akbar Mousavi-Kho'ini was arrested in Tehran on 12 June 2006, while participating in a peaceful protest advocating for an end to legal discrimination against women in Iran, along with 69 other demonstrators, who were all released. Ali Akbar Mousavi-Kho'ini was released on bail on 21 October 2006 and was required to make a bail payment of 150 million *Toumans* (approximately US\$163,000), which has since been reduced. However, he still faces charges of "*acting against state security by participating in the demonstration for women's rights*"; "*disturbing public order*" and "*propaganda against the system*"; and "*insulting the Leadership*". A date for his trial, which is expected to take place before Branch 14 of the Revolutionary Court in Tehran, has not yet been set. Ali Akbar Mousavi-Kho'ini was held in solitary confinement, psychologically and physically tortured and refused access to a lawyer while he remained in detention for 130 days. He was repeatedly interrogated in relation to his human rights activities. Ali Akbar Mousavi-Kho'ini faces charges with respect to his human rights activities in four cases. Two of these cases have to do with his speeches and activities in defence of human rights while an MP, while one is in relation to his arrest in the June 2006 protest and the last one is in relation to his defence of students who were arrested in July 2007.

The Alumni Association of Iran, a leading student, political and human rights organisation, which had a permit for legal operation, was illegally shut down on 9 July 2007, when 17 student and human rights activists were arrested.

Front Line also remains concerned for the safety of the student activist and HRD **Ahmad Batebi**. On 27 July 2006, Ahmad Batebi was arrested and detained by plainclothes officers from the Ministry for Intelligence. At the time of his arrest, Ahmad Batebi was suffering from a number of severe health problems.

Ahmad Batebi was originally detained in 1999, and charged with "*endangering national security*" following his participation in peaceful demonstrations that were organised to protest against the closure of a newspaper. He was sentenced to 15-year imprisonment, in a trial that reportedly violated international legal standards. This sentence was later reduced to ten years in 2000. While Ahmed Batebi was detained, he suffered from continued deteriorating health, and was not given access to adequate medical attention despite the fact that he was suffering from a serious medical condition. His doctor recommended that he was given treatment outside the prison. He was charged with two new charges: "*allegedly conspired against the state security*" and "*being illegally absent from prison*". He faces being summoned to appear in court.

During the period of his detention, Ahmad Batebi managed to send a letter to the outside world in which he detailed torture that was being used against him and other prisoners in Evin prison in Tehran. Between 1999 and 2005, Ahmad Batebi was temporarily released on a number of occasions. On 8 November 2003, Ahmad Batebi was reportedly rearrested while on a temporary period of release shortly after he had met with Ambeyi Ligabo, the United Nations Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Expression and Opinion, who was visiting Iran on a fact-finding mission. Ahmad Batebi was released in March 2005 and while on release, he gave a number of interviews to the international press in which he criticised the Iranian authorities for human rights violations and denounced conditions of torture in Iranian detention centres.

In February 2007, Ahmad Batebi suffered from two strokes and was hospitalised at Evin Prison hospital. He was conditionally and temporarily released following his hospitalisation but still faces charges and could be re-arrested.

On 9 July 2007, 11 student activists and six human rights defenders - **Bahareh Hedayat, Mohammad Hashemi, Ali Niko-Nesbati, Mehdi Arabshahi, Hanif Yazdani** and **Ali Veghfi** - were arrested following a peaceful protest outside Amir Kabir University in support of three detained students, **Ahmad Ghassaban, Majid Tavakoli, and Ehsan Mansoori**, who had been arrested in May 2007 in relation to their student and human rights activities. The HRDs have since been tried, despite their lack of access to lawyers, and been transferred out of Section 209 of Evin prison, to serve their prison sentences. They have been reportedly ill-treated and tortured since their arrest.

Front Line is asking the European Parliament's Delegation to call on the Iranian authorities to:

1. Immediately and unconditionally release the above-mentioned HRDs who remain in detention, as it is believed they have been detained solely on account of their peaceful and legitimate work in defence of human rights;
2. Ensure the physical and psychological integrity of all those HRDs who remain in detention, providing them with adequate medical attention where necessary and access to lawyers, as is their right under Article 5 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights;
3. Take measures to ensure that all HRDs in Iran, carrying out their legitimate work in human rights, are able to operate without fear of reprisals and free of all restrictions and harassment;
4. Drop all charges against all those HRDs who face unfounded criminal charges as they relate solely to his peaceful human rights activities;
5. Carry out an immediate, independent investigation into the allegations of torture suffered by Ali Akbar Mousavi-Kho'ini while in detention, as well as other student and human rights activists, including student leaders Ahmad Ghassaban, Majid Tavakoli, and Ehsan Mansoori, with the results made public and those found responsible brought to justice.

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