

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL

Public Statement

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Iran: Amnesty International condemns violence against women demonstrators in Iran

Amnesty International condemns the violent action taken by Iranian police, Revolutionary Guards and others on 8 March to forcibly disperse about 1,000 women who had gathered peacefully in Tehran to commemorate International Women's Day. Scores of women are reported to have been beaten by the police and those assisting them.

The women had gathered in Daneshjoo (Students) park, where they began a peaceful sit-in and displayed banners with slogans such as 'discrimination against women is an abuse of human rights', 'women demand their human rights', and 'Iranian women demand peace'. Initially, there were about 100 police present but as the protest continued busloads more police and also members of the plain clothes Basij militia, and special anti-riot forces belonging to the Revolutionary Guards, arrived at the park. They filmed and photographed the women protestors and then ordered them to disperse, on the grounds that the gathering had not been officially authorized.

However, the protestors did not do so and at 4.20pm, after one of them read out a statement calling for greater rights for women, the security forces charged them and began assaulting them. Many were beaten with batons, some by teams of security men. For example, Simin Behbehani, an elderly feminist poet with poor sight, was beaten with a baton and kicked repeatedly by security forces. Journalists present at the protest who had filmed the event were reportedly arrested, only released from custody after their film and photographs were confiscated.

Amnesty International is calling on the Iranian government to undertake an immediate investigation into this excessive use of force by police and other security forces and to ensure that those responsible for the assaults and violence against demonstrators are brought to justice promptly and fairly. The organization is also calling on the Iranian authorities to respect the right to freedom of assembly and expression, in accordance with Iran's obligations under international law.

The organization reminds the Iranian authorities of Article 12 of the United Nations Declaration on Human Rights Defenders. This states that "Everyone has the right...to participate in peaceful activities against violations of human rights and fundamental freedoms." The Declaration requires states to "take all necessary measures to ensure the protection...against any violence, threats, retaliation, *de facto* or *de jure* adverse discrimination, pressure or any other arbitrary action as a consequence of his or her legitimate exercise of the rights referred to in the present Declaration."

Background information

As reflected in the recent report of the United Nations Special Rapporteur on violence against women Yakin Ertuk, women in Iran are discriminated against in law; by discriminatory provisions in the Civil and Penal Code; and by flaws in the administration of justice. Women are currently barred from running for Presidential office, they do not have equal rights to divorce, after divorce they can have custody of their children only up until the age of seven years, and blood money for a murdered woman is half that of a man. Under the previous parliament, women parliamentarians pushed for reform of discriminatory law, and introduced 33 bills, many of which were rejected by the Council of Guardians on the grounds that they were incompatible with Shari'a law, including a proposal to ratify the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW).

Human rights defenders in Iran face severe limitations on their work. Iranian legislation severely restricts freedom of expression and association and human rights defenders often face reprisals for their work in the form of harassment, intimidation, attacks, detention, imprisonment and torture. Many are subject to travel bans that prevent them from leaving the country. The registration process for independent non-governmental organizations (NGOs), including human rights organizations such as the Centre for the Defence of Human Rights run by Nobel Peace Prize Laureate Shirin Ebadi, is complex and registration is frequently denied, leaving NGOs at risk of enforced closure.

For further information please see *Iran: New government fails to address dire human rights situation* (AI Index MDE 13/010/2006, February 2006)