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Iran: Amnesty International urges new President to make human rights a top priority

Iran's new President, Dr Mahmoud Ahmadinezhad, should make human rights a top priority after he takes up office, Amnesty International said today, warning that recent weeks have seen renewed violations of human rights in the country.

The human rights organisation said it was worried by a number of recent developments, including the public execution of people who were children at the time of their alleged crimes.

Amnesty International has written to the new President and two other key figures, Iran's Supreme Leader and the Head of the Judiciary, urging them to seize the moment of Dr Ahmadinezhad's inauguration to launch a programme of human rights reform.

The organisation said it had been encouraged by Ahmadinezhad's pre-election pledges to apply justice and to combat poverty, corruption and discrimination. If implemented, these could benefit many Iranians. But advances on these issues needed to be accompanied by rapid and far-reaching human rights reform. Iranians must be allowed to enjoy the fundamental human rights that have been denied to them for so long – freedom of speech, access to justice, and security from torture and the death penalty – or else any progress on these other questions will be undermined, said Amnesty International.

Amnesty International was also encouraged by a recent report ordered by the Head of the Judiciary, Ayatollah Shahroudi, which detailed human rights violations in Iran's detention centres. The organisation is seeking information on measures that may be taken to redress these violations and to implement a law banning torture passed following a directive issued by Ayatollah Shahroudi. The true test will be whether officials who have ordered or administered torture will be brought to justice, said Amnesty International.

As a first step, the human rights organisation urged the new President and Head of the Judiciary to order the immediate and unconditional release of all prisoners of conscience, including journalist Akbar Ganji and human rights defender Nasser Zarafshan, both currently on conditional release in Tehran hospitals. Akbar Ganji has been on hunger strike since 11 June, demanding medical treatment, unfettered access to his family and lawyer and to be freed.

These men should not have been imprisoned in the first place but now they are ill and must be released unconditionally, said Amnesty International. It also called for the rapid but thorough review of all political prisoners' cases to ensure that prisoners of conscience are released and others receive fair trials, including Manuchehr Mohammadi imprisoned after the 1999 "18 Tir" student demonstrations, who is currently on hunger strike in Evin Prison, demanding access to adequate medical

treatment.

Amnesty International is also calling for:

Safeguards against torture, including prompt, independent investigation of all torture allegations and prosecution and imprisonment of any officials who use, order or condone torture.

The repeal of all laws allowing the imprisonment of prisoners of conscience and discrimination on grounds of race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality or language.

Abolition of special courts such as the Revolutionary and Press Courts, and the Special Court for the Clergy, whose procedures fall short of international fair trial standards.

Respect of the right freely to practise one's faith, or no faith, without fear of persecution

A moratorium on the death penalty and immediate action to prevent further executions of prisoners who are children or who were children at the time of the alleged crime.

Urgent and impartial investigation of all enforced disappearances and extrajudicial executions, and an end to impunity for the perpetrators.

The repeal of legal provisions which facilitate "honour" crimes and the introduction of new laws and other measures to ensure full and equal respect for women's human rights.