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Iran: Amnesty International calls for an urgent investigation into the killing of demonstrators

Amnesty International today expressed alarm at the cycle of violence in the Iranian province of Kordestan and neighbouring Kurdish areas, which has reportedly left up to 20 people dead, hundreds wounded. Hundreds of others are believed to have been arrested, including prominent Kurdish human rights defenders and activists.

Amnesty International is urging the Iranian government to promptly initiate an urgent, impartial and independent investigation into these reports. The methods and findings of such an investigation must be made public. Officials suspected of responsibility for human rights violations such as unlawful killings/extrajudicial executions should be brought to justice in accordance with fair trial procedures.

Among those arrested during the disturbance are prominent Kurdish human rights defenders and activists. Dr Roya Toloui, a women's rights activist, was arrested at her home in Sanandaj on 2 August. According to her husband, who has not been allowed access to her, she is detained on charges of "disturbing the peace" and "acting against national security". Azad Zamani, a member of the Association for the Defence of Children's Rights (ADCR, or *Kanoun-e Defa' az Hoqouq-e Koudekan*), was also arrested in Sinne. Jalal Qavami, a journalist and a member of the editorial board of the journal *Payam-e Mardom*, was arrested at his workplace after agents of Iran's security forces initially raided his residence. Mahmoud Salehi, the spokesman for the Organisational Committee to Establish Trade Unions, was arrested in the early hours of 4 August, and the security forces have also closed down two Kurdish newspapers.

Amnesty International is calling on the Iranian authorities to urgently provide the names of all those detained, their current whereabouts, the reasons for their arrest, and details of any charges against them. All detainees must be treated humanely and given prompt access to their lawyer, family and any medical treatment necessary. Anyone who is not to be charged with a recognisably criminal offence must be released immediately and unconditionally.

Following reports that the Iranian government has today deployed large numbers of troops, backed up by helicopter gunships, into the region, Amnesty International calls on the Iranian authorities to ensure that their security forces abide by international standards of conduct of law enforcement. In particular, they must respect and protect the right to life, to freedom from torture and ill-treatment and to freedom from arbitrary arrest.

Background

The unrest began in the town of Mahabad, in early July, following the shooting of Shivan Qaderi, a

Kurdish opposition activist, also known as Sayed Kamal Astam, or Astom, and two other Kurdish men, by Iranian forces in the town of Mahabad on 9 July, in circumstances where they may not have posed an immediate threat. The security forces then reportedly tied Shivan Qaderi's body to a Toyota jeep and dragged him in the streets. The local Iranian authorities are reported to have confirmed that a person of this name, "who was on the run and wanted by the judiciary", was indeed shot and killed by security forces at this time, allegedly while trying to evade arrest.

During the days following Shivan Qaderi's death, several thousand Mahabad residents, mainly youths, took to the streets to protest the killings. Since then, demonstrations have erupted in the mainly Kurdish neighbouring towns of Sanandaj, Mahabad, Sardasht, Piranshahr, Oshnavieh, Baneh, Sinne, Bokerkan and Saqiz. The Iranian state-owned media has reported and confirmed the unrest of the past 3 weeks, but have described the situation as due to "hooligan and criminal elements".

In a letter dated 22 July 2005 the organization wrote to Iran's Interior Minister, Abdolvahed Mousavi-Lari, seeking clarification of the circumstances surrounding the killing of Sayed Kamal Astam, or Astom, also known as Shivan Qaderi, and the arrest of scores of people in Mahabad and the surrounding areas in the days following his death. The organization expressed concern that the killing may have been deliberate and that those detained may not have access to independent lawyers of their choice or their families and that they may be at risk of torture or ill-treatment

The Kurds are one of Iran's many ethnic minority groups, and number around 10% of the population. They mainly live in the province of Kordistan and neighbouring provinces bordering Turkey and Iraq. A UN report released last week said authorities were denying basic amenities to Iran's ethnic and religious minorities and in some cases seizing land.