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Iran: Civil society activists and human rights defenders under attack

Efforts by Iran's judiciary to curtail freedom of expression and association are now increasingly encroaching on human rights defenders and civil society activists. Reports of around 25 internet journalists and civil society activists arbitrarily arrested in recent weeks mark an alarming rise in human rights violations in Iran.

"The judiciary has placed Iran's growing civil society under attack. The targeted arbitrary arrests and detention in secret places along with reports of ill treatment of activists like Omid Memariyan, Mahboubeh Abbasgholizadeh and journalist Hanifmazrou'i clearly expose the judiciary's intention to clamp down on Iran's burgeoning civil society", Amnesty International said today.

Family members of all three individuals, along with members of other families, have repeatedly expressed concern over the safety of their loved ones.

"The ban on foreign travel of human rights defenders Emadeddin Baqi, Mohammad Maleki, Azam Taleghani and Mohammad Maleki shows that Iran's judiciary is turning its back on the international human rights standards it has promised the international community that it will uphold. With the latest clampdown, the judiciary has betrayed the Iranian peoples' hopes for greater respect of their human rights," Amnesty International said..

In November 2003, Amnesty International expressed concern at the alarming spiral of human rights violations in Iran. One year later, a similar pattern of flagrant human rights abuses continues.

Iran has failed to adequately cooperate with visits made by United Nations human rights representatives, several of whom have visited the country in 2003 and early 2004. The recommendations made by, for example, the UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention (WGAD), following its February 2003 visit appear to have been ignored.

Appeals received by Amnesty International state that the Iranian people want Iran's judiciary - which has issued the arrest warrants - to uphold the law, not carry out politically motivated arrests. The Office of the Supreme Leader must intervene to stop the spiral of human rights violations.

Amnesty International is urging the United Nations General Assembly to carefully consider the draft resolution on the human rights situation in Iran which is scheduled to be presented in the forthcoming weeks, and to support civil society activists like Omid Memariyan who are now reportedly facing ill treatment, so that international human rights standards can become a reality in Iran.

Background

Mahboubeh Abbasgholizadeh is the editor of *Farzaneh*, a women's rights journal. She was arrested at her home on 2 November 2004. Omid Memariyan is a journalist who was arrested in his office on 10 October 2004. He is said to have refused his right to have a lawyer. Amnesty International fears that this is a reflection of the ill treatment he is currently facing. His arbitrary arrest is spreading fear throughout civil society, reducing the scope of other activists to be able to protect him, making his defence from outside - by the international community - even more important.

They are both civil society activists and have been working with a variety of non-governmental organisations (NGOs), supporting them with training and capacity building. They are reportedly facing vaguely worded charges - falling short of an internationally recognisable criminal charge - relating to 'acts against national security' and possibly "acts against morality" or defamation.

Scores of other internet journalists have reportedly been arrested during the last couple of months and are said to be facing charges relating to defamation and insult, similarly vaguely worded provisions which are inconsistent with international human rights standards. Among the arrested are Fereshteh Ghazi of the daily newspaper *Etemad*, arrested in her office on 28 October 2004, Javad Gholam Tamayomi, a writer with the daily newspaper *Mardomsalari*, arrested on 18 October 2004, Shahram Rafihzadeh, cultural editor of *Etemad*, arrested on 7 September 2004, Reza Mir Ebrahimi, former editor of foreign affairs section of *Etemad*, arrested on 27 October 2004, Hanif Mazrou'i, a former journalist, arrested on 8 September and Amir Mojiri, an internet journalist, arrested on 8 September 2004.

More Information

In October 2004, Amnesty International called for an end to the limitations on the work of human rights defenders, who seek the promotion and protection of civil and political and other rights. To read more Amnesty International's statements in respect to human rights defender, Emadaddin Baqi and the work of human rights defenders, please see *Iran: End limitations on the work of human rights defenders* (AI Index: MDE 13/039/2004; News Service No: 248, issued 6 October 2004), which is viewable at: <http://web.amnesty.org/library/Index/ENGMDE130392004?open&of=ENG-IRN> . To take part in Amnesty International's Campaign on behalf of Emadaddin Baqi, please see the report *Emadaddin Baqi: human rights defender at risk* (AI Index: MDE 13/044/2004, issued 4 November 2004), which is viewable at: <http://web.amnesty.org/library/Index/ENGMDE130442004?open&of=ENG-IRN> .

For more information about Emadaddin Baqi and the Society for the Defence of the Rights of Prisoners (SDRP), please see: <http://web.amnesty.org/wire/September2004/Iran> .

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