

# AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL

## Public Statement

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### Iran: Concern for journalist Elham Afroutan

Amnesty International is seeking urging clarification from the Iranian government regarding Iranian journalist Elham Afroutan who has been held incommunicado since 29 January 2006, amid unconfirmed reports that she may be in a coma or has died in custody. The organization said it was extremely concerned for her safety.

Elham Afroutan was arrested on 29 January together with several other journalists working for the provincial weekly newspaper *Tammadon-e Hormozgan* (Hormozgan's Civilization) apparently in connection with the publication of a satirical article. In all, seven journalists are believed to have been detained and since their arrest to have been incommunicado, raising fears that they could be at risk of torture and ill-treatment.

On 16 February, reports appeared in the Iranian media suggesting that Elham Afroutan was either in a coma after attempting suicide or had died in detention but, as yet, the Iranian authorities are not known to have commented officially on these reports. Amnesty International said it was vital that they did so immediately, and clarified the circumstances of Elham Afroutan's arrest and detention and her conditions and treatment in detention.

The satirical article published by *Tammadon-e Hormozgan* reportedly drew a comparison between the advent of the late Ayatollah Khomeini and Iran's Islamic Revolution in 1979 and the problem of AIDS, and suggested, scurrilously, that President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad could be considered the current physical embodiment of the disease. It is said to have appeared in the newspaper's health section under the title: "Open fight against AIDS". Its publication provoked demonstrations in which the newspaper's offices were ransacked and torched. As well, the Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance suspended publication of the newspaper, accused those responsible for the article of violating Iran's press law and referred the case to the relevant judicial bodies for prosecution.

Amnesty International is also calling on the Iranian authorities to clarify the legal status and health of the other journalists detained along with Elham Afroutan, and to ensure that they are released immediately and unconditionally unless they are to face recognizably criminal charges and be brought to trial promptly and fairly in accordance with international fair trial standards. They should be granted immediate access to their families, to legal counsel and to any medical treatment that they require.

