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## **Iran: Criminalising freedom of expression**

Amnesty International is calling on Ayatollah Ali Khamenei to immediately retract his statement on Wednesday that criticising the outcome of June's presidential election is a crime.

The Supreme Leader's remark was carried by state television in a report from Khamenei's meeting with scientists in Tehran.

"The Ayatollah's statement seeks to criminalise legitimate peaceful dissent and dissatisfaction with the political process," said Malcolm Smart, Director of Amnesty International's Middle East and North Africa Programme.

"In dealing with the aftermath of the elections, the Iranian authorities are continuing to commit violation after violation after violation of fundamental human rights. They are trying to muzzle their own people and cow them into silence,"

The official result of the 12 June election was widely disputed and was followed by mass demonstrations throughout the country. Dozens were killed by the notorious Basij militia and other government forces; thousands were detained, many of whom are alleged to have been tortured and ill-treated; and scores – if not hundreds - have been put on trial. Amnesty International has condemned such "show trials" as a "mockery of justice".

"Anyone held solely for the peaceful expression of their views concerning the election should be released immediately and unconditionally and all detainees should be protected from torture or other ill-treatment".

Amnesty International is urging the Iranian authorities to overturn the reported four-year prison sentence imposed on a British embassy worker.

Hossein Rassam, the chief political analyst at the UK embassy in Tehran, was arrested along with eight other local employees of the embassy, all of whom were later released, and was accused of "fomenting violence" after June's presidential election.

His lawyer has not yet been informed officially of the verdict, but if confirmed, he will have the right to appeal against the sentence.

The case of Hossein Rassam is one among many where human rights have been trampled – at least 20 and possibly as many as 60 sentences have been imposed in connection with the unrest, including at least four death sentences.

“The Iranian authorities must overturn all the sentences imposed after the grossly unfair ‘show trials’. If eventually imprisoned, Hossein Rassam will become yet another prisoner of conscience in Iran, joining others such as journalists Ali Reza Eshraghi and Masoud Bastani, recently sentenced to prison terms of five-and a-half years and six years respectively,” said Malcolm Smart.

In a related development, judiciary officials are also reportedly refusing to allow the lawyer of Iranian-American sociologist Kian Tajbakhsh, who was sentenced to 15 years in prison for allegedly trying to overthrow the Iranian government, to file an appeal.

Fariba Pajouh, a journalist, began a hunger strike about four days ago in protest at her continued detention. She has been held for the last two months without being charged or tried. She has been joined by fellow journalist Hengameh Shahidi, who began her hunger-strike on Tuesday.

Ahmad Zeidabadi, a reformist journalist and Head of Iran’s Graduates’ Association which actively campaigns for greater human rights in Iran, had been kept in solitary confinement for 45 days without any contact with his family. Only yesterday he was allowed a two-minute phone call with his wife. In August, Ahmed Zeidabadi's wife said the authorities were trying to break him by keeping him in tomb-like box.

The Iranian authorities should also guarantee fair trials for anyone held for recognizably criminal offences.