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Iran: Student activists and demonstrators must be treated in accordance with international human rights standards

Amnesty International is concerned at yesterday's arrest of student leaders Reza Ameri Nassab, Ali Moghtadari and Arash Hashemi who may have been targeted solely for the peaceful expression of their political views. All three were arrested after they took part in an open press conference held at the offices of *Daftar-e Tahkim-e Vahdat* (Office for Strengthening Unity, or OCU) on the anniversary of the *18 Tir* (9 July 1999) student demonstrations. During the press conference they criticized restrictions on freedom of expression and association in Iran. They were said to have been forced to the ground and thrown into three separate vehicles and taken to an unknown destination. Ali Moghtadari was reportedly released the same evening.

Such arrests are part of a pattern of human rights violations targeting student protests and demonstrations since the *18 Tir* demonstrations.

Since 11 June 2003, up to 4000 demonstrators have been arrested of which approximately 2000 may remain in detention without charge or trial. At least 65 individuals are said to have been charged, although the charges have not been made public.

Many of these detainees appear to have been targeted for demonstrating peacefully. Amnesty International considers them prisoners of conscience and calls for their immediate and unconditional release. Amnesty International also calls for anyone charged with a recognisable criminal offence to be given prompt fair trial.

The authorities should take immediate measures to ensure that student activists and peaceful demonstrators are treated in accordance with international human rights standards.

Background

Following the July 1999 students' demonstrations in Tehran, Ahmad Batebi, Abbas Deldar, Javid Tehrani, Mehrdad Lohrasebi, Akbar and Manuchehr Mohammadi and scores of other student demonstrators were arbitrarily arrested. Dozens of them faced torture and ill treatment in incommunicado detention. They, like student leader Ali Afshari, were imprisoned following manifestly unfair trials. In the past few days, Ahmad Batebi and Manuchehr Mohammadi have been removed from Evin prison and taken to an unknown location.

Nearly 80 students living in student dormitories in the Amir Abad area of Tehran demonstrated 11 June against draft proposals to privatize universities in Iran, fearing that tuition fees would rise as a result. They were joined by local residents and the demonstration reportedly escalated and became increasingly politicized. Organized groups of non-uniformed, plainly clothed individuals widely called in

Iran the *lebas shakhsi-ha* (the plain-clothed) began to attack the demonstrators and police intervened to end the clashes. As the demonstrations grew over the following nights, units of the Special Forces (*Nirou-ye Vijeh*) were deployed to disperse demonstrators. However, there were reports that the Special Forces permitted some of the *lebas shakhsi-ha* to attack peaceful demonstrators and that in certain instances, excessive force was used to break up the demonstrations.

Amnesty International has repeatedly urged the authorities to address human rights violations committed against demonstrators but has not to date received any reply to date.

To view the 14 July 1999 press statement *IRAN: The Authorities must guarantee fundamental rights* (AI INDEX: MDE 13/18/99; News Service: 134/99), please see:
<http://web.amnesty.org/library/Index/ENGMDE130181999?open&of=ENG-IRN>

To view Amnesty International's appeal on behalf of Ahmad Batebi, please see:
http://web.amnesty.org/web/content.nsf/pages/gbr_iran

To view the report *Iran: a legal system that fails to protect freedom of expression and association a*(AI Index MDE 13/045/2001), please see:
http://web.amnesty.org/web/content.nsf/pages/gbr_iran_freedom

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