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## **Iran: Female detainees begin hunger strike after degrading treatment**

The Iranian authorities must protect all detainees and prisoners from harassment and degrading treatment, Amnesty International said today, after nine female political prisoners, including prisoners of conscience, started a hunger strike in response to alleged abuse by prison guards.

The women, who are all held in Tehran's Evin Prison include activists and journalists. They say they were subjected to humiliating and degrading body searches by female guards from the Prison Security Section who subsequently confiscated some of their personal belongings on Tuesday

The women plan to continue their hunger strike until they receive a formal apology from the prison authorities and guarantees that such incidents will not happen in future. They have also demanded that their personal belongings be returned.

"The prison authorities must investigate the women's allegations that they were subjected to degrading treatment and hold anyone found responsible to account. International human rights standards require that all prisoners are protected from torture or other ill-treatment," said Ann Harrison, Deputy Middle East and North Africa Programme Director at Amnesty International.

In a separate incident, human rights lawyer Nasrin Sotoudeh – who is also detained at Evin Prison – has been on hunger strike since 17 October 2012. She is protesting at the authorities' harassment of her family and restrictions on her visitation rights. The Evin Prison Disciplinary Council has apparently placed a three-week ban on her receiving family visits.

Since her arrest in 2010, Sotoudeh was held for a lengthy period in solitary confinement and has been regularly prevented from face-to-face meetings with her family, including her two children or making phone calls to other family members.

"The authorities must refrain from barring prison visits and taking any other punitive measures against those on hunger strike," said Harrison.

"The women hunger strikers should have adequate access to qualified health professionals providing health care in compliance with medical ethics, including the principles of confidentiality, autonomy, and informed consent. A person's hunger strike must not prejudice any other aspect of their health care."

Among the nine women on hunger strike are Bahareh Hedayat, Zhila Bani Ya'ghoub, Shiva Nazar Ahari, Mahsa Amrabadi, and Zhila Karamzadeh-Makvandi.

"These women are being held solely for peacefully exercising their rights to freedom of expression, assembly and association. They should not be in prison at all and on no account should they be subjected to degrading treatment. They must be released immediately and unconditionally," said Harrison.

Bahareh Hedayat is a student activist and a member of the One Million Signature Campaign which is committed to ending discrimination against women in Iranian law. She is serving a 10-year prison sentence for “insulting the president”, “insulting the Leader” and “gathering and colluding to commit crimes against national security”.

Zhila Bani Ya’ghoub, an award-winning journalist and women’s rights activist, was summoned to Evin Prison on 2 September 2012 to serve a one-year prison sentence. In addition to her imprisonment, she has been banned from media and journalistic activities for 30 years after conviction of "spreading propaganda against the system" and “insulting the president”.

Shiva Nazar Ahari is a journalist, human rights activist and a member of the Committee of Human Rights Reporters. She is currently serving a four-year prison sentence for her peaceful human rights activities.

Journalist Mahsa Amrabadi, detained for two months after the disputed 2009 presidential election, is currently serving a one-year prison sentence for “spreading propaganda against the system through interviews and reports”.

Zhila Karamzadeh-Makvandi is a member of the Mothers of Laleh Park (formerly known as the "Mourning Mothers"), which campaigns against human rights violations such as unlawful killings, arbitrary arrests, torture and enforced disappearance. Many of its members are women whose children were killed, detained or who disappeared in the unrest which followed the June 2009 election.

She was arrested at the Passport Department in Tehran on 27 December 2011 and taken to Evin Prison to serve a two-year sentence imposed after conviction of “founding an illegal organization whose object is to harm state security” in relation to her peaceful activities in the group.