

Amnesty International Report 2011: Iran entry

Head of state

Ayatollah Sayed 'Ali Khamenei (Leader of the Islamic Republic of Iran)

Head of government

Dr Mahmoud Ahmadinejad (President)

Death penalty

retentionist

Population

75.1 million

Life expectancy

71.9 years

Under-5 mortality (m/f)

33/35 per 1,000

Adult literacy

82.3 per cent

The authorities maintained severe restrictions on freedom of expression, association and assembly. Sweeping controls on domestic and international media aimed at reducing Iranians' contact with the outside world were imposed. Individuals and groups risked arrest, torture and imprisonment if perceived as co-operating with human rights and foreign-based Persian-language media organizations. Political dissidents, women's and minority rights activists and other human rights defenders, lawyers, journalists and students were rounded up in mass and other arrests and hundreds were imprisoned. Torture and other ill-treatment of detainees were routine and committed with impunity. Women continued to face discrimination under the law and in practice. The authorities acknowledged 252 executions, but there were credible reports of more than 300 other executions. The true total could be even higher. At least one juvenile offender was executed. Sentences of death by stoning continued to be passed, but no stonings were known to have been carried out. Floggings and an increased number of amputations were carried out.

Background

Iran's human rights record was assessed under the UN Universal Periodic Review in February; the government subsequently accepted all general recommendations but rejected those calling for specific reforms to end religious and gender discrimination and the application of the death penalty, especially against juvenile offenders. The government also rejected recommendations that it co-operate with certain UN human rights bodies.

In April, Iran was elected to the UN Commission on the Status of Women. In August, the CERD Committee expressed concern at the "limited enjoyment of political, economic, social and cultural rights" by various minority communities, in particular with regard to housing, education, freedom of expression and religion, health and employment. In September, the UN

Secretary-General highlighted “many areas of continuing concern with respect to human rights” in a report to the General Assembly. In December, the UN General Assembly passed a resolution expressing concern about human rights in Iran and called for government action to end violations.

Scores if not hundreds of Iranians continued to flee the country in fear for their safety because of the high levels of repression by the authorities.

International tension persisted over Iran’s nuclear enrichment programme. In June, the UN Security Council imposed further sanctions on Iran over concerns that it was developing nuclear weapons.

Armed groups killed civilians in bomb attacks. For example, an attack in July on a mosque at Zahedan killed 21 people, including worshippers, and injured hundreds of others. Another, near a mosque in Chabahar, killed at least 38 people and injured over 50. The People’s Resistance Movement of Iran (PRMI), an armed group also known as Jondallah, claimed responsibility for both. In September, a bomb attack in Mahabad killed at least 10 people and injured over 80, including children, following which Iranian security forces were reported to have crossed into Iraq and killed at least 30 people. Kurdish groups denied responsibility for the attack.

Freedom of expression, association and assembly

The government entrenched the severe curbs on freedom of expression, association and assembly it had imposed in 2009. The security forces were deployed in force to deter or disperse further public protests. Scores if not hundreds of people arrested in connection with the mass protests in 2009 continued to be held, most of them serving prison terms, although others were released. Scores more were arrested throughout 2010.

Mir Hossein Mousavi and Mehdi Karroubi, who had stood against President Ahmadinejad in the June 2009 presidential election, continued to face severe restrictions on their freedom of movement. Government supporters attacked them or their families, and newspapers were instructed not to report about them or about former president Mohammad Khatami. Two major political parties opposed to the government were banned while others remained prohibited.

The government purged universities of “secular” teaching staff and imposed education bans on students engaged in campus protests.

The authorities continued to restrict access to outside sources of information such as the internet. International radio and television broadcasts were jammed. In January, the authorities banned contact by Iranians with some 60 news outlets and foreign-based organizations. Those willing to speak to the few large Persian-language media outlets on human rights issues were threatened

or harassed by security officials. Many Iranians turned to social networking websites to express their views.

The authorities banned newspapers and student journals and prosecuted journalists whose reporting they deemed “against the system”. Wiretapping and intercepting of SMS and email communications were routine. A shadowy “cyber army”, reportedly linked to the Revolutionary Guards, organized attacks on domestic and foreign internet sites deemed to be anti-government, while other sites, including some associated with religious leaders, were filtered.

Arbitrary arrests and detentions

Security officials, generally in plain clothes and without showing identification or arrest warrants, continued to arrest arbitrarily government opponents and people seen to be dissenting from officially approved values on account of their views or lifestyle. Among those arrested were human rights activists, independent trade unionists, students and political dissidents.

Those arrested were often held for long periods during which they were denied contact with their lawyers or families, tortured or otherwise ill-treated, and denied access to medical care. Some were sentenced to prison terms after unfair trials. Others sentenced after unfair trials in previous years remained in jail.

- In February, the UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention declared that three US nationals detained in July 2009 while hiking near the Iraq-Iran border were held arbitrarily. In August, it concluded that Isa Saharkhiz, a journalist and member of Iran’s Committee to Protect Freedom of the Press, held since July 2009 and sentenced in September 2010 to three years’ imprisonment for “insulting the country’s leadership” and “propaganda against the system”, was also being arbitrarily detained and should be released.
- Human rights lawyer Nasrin Sotoudeh was arrested on 4 September. She remained held at the end of 2010, on trial on security charges relating to her peaceful human rights activities and defence of her clients.

Unfair trials

The year saw a further degradation of the criminal justice system, which offered little protection of human rights. Political suspects received grossly unfair trials in which they often faced vaguely worded charges that did not amount to recognizably criminal offences. Frequently, they were convicted in the absence of defence lawyers on the basis of “confessions” or other information allegedly obtained under torture in pre-trial detention. Courts accepted such “confessions” as evidence without investigating how they were obtained.

- Blogger Hossein Ronaghi-Maleki, arrested in December 2009, was sentenced to 15 years in prison on national security charges. When he complained that he had been tortured, the judge told him he “deserved it”.

Torture and other ill-treatment

Torture and other ill-treatment in pre-trial detention remained common, facilitated by the routine denial of access to lawyers and continuing impunity for perpetrators. Methods reported included severe beatings; forcing detainees' heads into toilets to make them ingest human excrement; mock executions; confinement in very small, cramped spaces; deprivation of light, food and water; and denial of medical treatment. In one case, a male detainee was reported to have been raped; others were threatened with rape.

- In August, Gholam-Reza Bayat, a Kurdish youth, was reported to have died from internal bleeding after he was beaten in custody in Kamyaran.

Details of torture in 2009 continued to emerge. In February, a former member of the volunteer paramilitary Basij force described how tens of boys had been rounded up in Shiraz, thrown into shipping containers and systematically raped. After expressing concerns to a Basij leader, he and others were detained for 100 days without access to their families and beaten. He also alleged that he faced a mock execution.

Impunity

Members of the security forces continued to violate human rights with near-total impunity.

The prosecution of 12 men, including 11 officials accused of committing serious abuses at Kahrizak prison before it was closed in July 2009, appeared to scapegoat low-ranking officials for only some of the serious abuses that took place after the June 2009 election, which in several cases had led to the death of detainees. Two of the 12 were sentenced to death but then pardoned by their victims' families, as permitted under Iranian law. Nine others received prison terms.

Judicial proceedings were initiated during 2010 against at least 50 individuals in relation to abuses at a Tehran University dormitory immediately after the 2009 election.

Human rights defenders

Human rights defenders were subject to serious human rights violations as they continued to press for greater respect for the rights of women and ethnic minorities and for an end to executions of juvenile offenders and stoning executions. Women's rights activists, lawyers, trade unionists, ethnic minority

rights activists, students and others campaigning for human rights, unfairly tried and imprisoned in previous years, continued to be held. Others faced arbitrary arrest, harassment, prosecution and unfair trials. Some were prisoners of conscience; others were banned from travelling abroad. The ban on independent trade unions was maintained.

- Emadeddin Baghi, a journalist, author and head of a banned NGO that advocated prisoners' rights who was detained between December 2009 and June 2010, began serving a seven-year prison sentence in December; he had been prosecuted for his peaceful human rights and journalistic activities.

The authorities harassed and, in some cases, arrested members of grassroots human rights organizations, including the Committee of Human Rights Reporters (CHRR) and Human Rights Activists of Iran (HRAI).

- Shiva Nazar Ahari, a CHRR member arrested in December 2009, was released on bail in September, just before receiving a six-year prison term. She remained free pending the outcome of her appeal against the sentence, more than half of which is to be served in "exile".

Discrimination against women

Women faced continuing discrimination in law and practice; those campaigning for women's rights were targeted for state repression. Parliament debated draft legislation on family protection whose controversial provisions, if enacted, would further erode women's rights. Women's rights activists, including those mounting the One Million Signatures Campaign to demand legal equality for women, continued to face pressure.

- Mahboubeh Karami, a member of the One Million Signatures Campaign, was detained for the fifth time in March and held until 18 August. In September, she was sentenced to four years' imprisonment for membership of the HRAI, "propaganda against the state" and "conspiring against the state". She remained free pending appeal.
- Two women, Fatemeh Masjedi and Maryam Bidgoli, who had been convicted on charges relating to their peaceful collection of signatures for the One Million Signatures Campaign, were facing six months' imprisonment at the end of the year after an appeal court upheld the convictions.

In April, the Supreme Leader called for renewed attention to enforcing the state-imposed obligatory dress code. In May, a "chastity and modesty" campaign based on a 2005 law was launched, targeting those who do not comply with the dress code in public, including on university campuses. In September, reports suggested that women's enrolment in universities had dropped substantially.

Discrimination – ethnic minorities

Iran's ethnic minority communities, including Ahwazi Arabs, Azerbaijanis, Baluch, Kurds and Turkmen, suffered ongoing systematic discrimination in law and practice. The use of minority languages in schools and government offices continued to be prohibited. Those who campaigned for greater political participation or recognition of minorities' economic, social and cultural rights faced systematic threats, arrest and imprisonment.

- In September, four Ahwazi Arabs held since June 2009 were reported to have been sentenced to death on charges including “enmity against God and corruption on earth”.
- Around 20 Azerbaijani activists arrested in May around the anniversary of mass demonstrations in 2006 against a cartoon in a state-run newspaper which many Azerbaijanis found insulting were released in November. Akbar Azad, a writer, remained held as his family could not meet the high bail set.
- Mohammad Saber Malek Raisi, a Baluch youth aged 15 from Sarbaz, was reported in July to have been held without charge or trial since September 2009, possibly to force his elder brother to surrender to the authorities. In December, 11 Baluch men convicted after unfair trials were executed in Zahedan, apparently in retaliation for the PRMI bomb attack five days earlier.
- Kaveh Ghasemi Kermanshahi, a Kurdish human rights activist and member of the One Million Signatures Campaign, was held between February and May, including 80 days in solitary confinement. His trial on national security charges began in October.
- In October, Arash Saghar, a Turkmen activist in the election campaign of Mir Hossein Mousavi, was sentenced to eight years in prison after being convicted of “spying for Turkmenistan”.

Freedom of religion

Members of religious minorities, including Christian converts, Sunni Muslims, dissident Shi'a clerics, and the Ahl-e Haq and Dervish communities, continued to suffer discrimination, harassment, arbitrary detention, and attacks on community property. Members of the Baha'i community, who remained unable to access higher education, faced increased persecution.

- Dissident Shi'a cleric Ayatollah Kazemeyni Boroujerdi remained imprisoned following an unfair trial in 2007. Seven of his followers were arrested in December.
- Seven Baha'i leaders arrested in 2008 were sentenced in August to 20 years' imprisonment following grossly unfair proceedings. They were convicted of espionage and engaging in propaganda against Islam. In September, the sentences were reportedly halved on appeal.

- In May, 24 Dervishes were sentenced to prison terms, internal exile and flogging for taking part in a 2009 demonstration in Gonabad, north-eastern Iran.
- Yousef Naderkhani, a Christian convert and member of the Church of Iran in Rasht, was sentenced to death in October after being convicted of apostasy.

Cruel, inhuman and degrading punishments

Sentences of flogging and amputation continued to be imposed and increasingly carried out, although it was not possible to ascertain the real total. Speaking before the UN Human Rights Council in April and June, Mohammad Javad Larijani, head of Iran's official human rights body, insisted that the government did not consider such punishments as forms of torture.

- In April, journalist and filmmaker Mohammad Nourizad was sentenced to three and a half years in prison and 50 lashes for "propaganda against the system" and "insulting officials". He said in November that he and others had been tortured. He began a hunger strike in December.

Death penalty

The authorities acknowledged 252 executions, including of five women and one juvenile offender. There were also credible reports of more than 300 other executions that were not officially acknowledged, mostly in Vakilabad Prison in Mashhad. At least 143 juvenile offenders remained on death row. The actual totals were likely to have been higher as the authorities restricted reporting on the death penalty.

Death sentences were imposed for drug smuggling, armed robbery, murder, espionage, political violence and sexual offences. The authorities imposed the death penalty and used execution as a political tool.

- In January, two men sentenced to death for their alleged membership in a monarchist organization in connection with the post-election unrest were hanged without warning.
- In May, four Kurds convicted for their alleged links with Kurdish opposition groups were executed.

No stonings were reported, but at least 15 prisoners, mostly women, remained at risk of stoning.

- Sakineh Mohammadi Ashtiani, a woman whose 2006 sentence of death by stoning was under review, attracted global attention when it appeared likely that she would be executed. Those campaigning on her behalf faced harassment or arrest.

In December, an amended anti-narcotics law was published, extending the death penalty to offences involving synthetic drugs. The same month, Iran was one of the minority of states that voted against a UN General Assembly resolution calling for a worldwide moratorium on executions.

Country Reports

- [Iran: Amnesty International's comments on the national report presented by the Islamic Republic of Iran for the Universal Periodic Review](#)
- [From protest to prison: Iran one year after the election](#)
- [Sakineh Mohammadi Ashtiani: A life in the balance](#)
- [Iran: Executions by stoning](#)

Country Visits

- The authorities did not reply to letters sent by Amnesty International and continued to deny the organization access to Iran, maintaining a block on the organization's ability to conduct in-country fact-finding on human rights that has been in force since 1979.