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Iran: Release all individuals arrested solely for demonstrating peacefully and investigate killing of protester

Following a wave of mass arrests in response to largely peaceful protests across Iran over the past week, Amnesty International is calling on the Iranian authorities to release any individual held solely for peacefully taking part in them. The authorities must also conduct a prompt, impartial and independent investigation into the killing of a protester in Karaj, north-west of the capital, Tehran, on 3 August 2018.

Amnesty International is also urging the authorities to protect all detainees from torture and other ill-treatment and to reveal the fate and whereabouts of dozens of detainees whose families have not heard from them since their arrests. Among those detained and at risk of torture and other ill-treatment is human rights defender Nader Afshari, who was arrested by Ministry of Intelligence officials on 1 August 2018 in the city of Karaj, north-west of Tehran, and whose whereabouts are unknown as he is being held in a secret detention facility.

FRESH WAVE OF PROTESTS

The ongoing widespread demonstrations across Iran have intensified over the past week, with a fresh wave of protests beginning in the city of Esfahan, central Iran, on 31 July 2018. The protests quickly spread to other cities across much of the country, including Karaj, Rasht and Tehran in the north; Mashhad in the north-east; Arak, Ahvaz and Kermanshah in the west; and Shiraz and Kazeroun in the south.

Since 31 July 2018, thousands of people have taken to the streets to voice their grievances over increasing economic hardship in Iran caused in part by high inflation and the steep devaluation of the rial currency. However, in now familiar scenes, dozens of videos that have been shared on social media also show protesters chanting slogans opposing authoritarianism, the political establishment and, specifically, Iran's Supreme Leader.

Most of the demonstrations appear to have been peaceful, but in some instances protesters have engaged in acts of violence, including stone-throwing, arson and other damage to vehicles and buildings. According to [Tasnim News Agency](#), which is affiliated with the Revolutionary Guards, on 3 August 2018, a group of individuals attacked a religious school in the district of Eshtehard in Alborz province, breaking some of its windows with stones and bricks. Reports and videos on social media have also shown the use of unnecessary and excessive force by security forces to disperse demonstrations.

ARBITRARY ARRESTS AND DETENTIONS

The authorities have responded to the protests with a wave of mass arrests since 31 July 2018. According to reports from journalists and human rights activists inside Iran, as well as independent news groups outside the country, security forces have detained scores of people in jails and secret detention facilities notorious for torture and other ill-treatment over the past week, denying many of them access to their families and lawyers.

In Tehran, dozens of people who were arrested have been taken to Evin prison. Following his temporary release from there on 4 August 2018, human rights lawyer Abdolfattah Soltani is reported to have said that he believes between 50 and 60 protesters who were arrested in Tehran had been taken to Evin prison since the start of the protests.

According to reports on social media, 50 women who were protesting have been taken to Shahr-e Rey prison in Varamin, outside Tehran. Shahr-e Rey prison (also known as Gharchak) is a disused chicken farm that holds several hundred women convicted of violent offences in overcrowded and unhygienic conditions, without access to safe drinking water, decent food, medicine or fresh air. Reports from the facility indicate the proliferation of infectious diseases, rampant drug use and high levels of violence by prison staff on detainees and between inmates.

There are also reports that many of the male protesters have been taken to Fashafouyeh prison in the south of Tehran following their arrests.

Among those detained is human rights defender Nader Afshari, who was arrested by Ministry of Intelligence officials on 1 August 2018 in the city of Karaj. Following his arrest, his mother tried in vain for days to locate him, enquiring about him at the offices of the Ministry of Intelligence, police stations, the headquarters of the Sarollah Unit of the Revolutionary Guards, and the headquarters of the paramilitary Basij force. They all denied knowledge of his fate and whereabouts. Finally, on 7 August 2018, during a visit to Branch 1 of the Revolutionary Court in Karaj, Nader Afshari's mother was told by the judge that his case was still under investigation and that he was being held in a "safe house". So-called "safe houses" are secret detention centres run by the security and intelligence forces. There is no oversight of these detention centres by the official Prisons Organization and they violate Iran's own Prisons Regulations, which state that "judicial, executive, intelligence, police, or military organs are prohibited from having their own prisons and detention houses." Also on 7 August 2018, Nader Afshari's mother received a very short telephone call – less than five seconds long – in which Nader Afshari said he had been arrested by Ministry of Intelligence and was OK. The call ended abruptly. Nader Afshari was arrested previously on 1 February 2018 during the protests that erupted across the country earlier this year and detained in Section 209 of Evin prison, run by the Ministry of Intelligence, before being released on bail on 19 March 2018. He is facing several charges including "insulting the Supreme leader" and "gathering and colluding to commit crimes against national security".

In another incident, on a post that went viral on social media on 5 August 2018, a group of seven young women and men who had been arrested and put in the back of a police van filmed themselves before the phone they were using was taken away. They said they were under arrest and introduced themselves as Yasamin Arayi, Niloufar Houmanfar, Seyed Mohammad Falah Chay, Saba Kordafashari, Saman Zandiyan, Azar Heydari and Farshid Rostami. At the end of the video, one of the young women is heard saying "his head is bleeding" to the group, although it is not clear to which of her companions she is referring. Amnesty International has no information about the fate or whereabouts of these individuals.

According to information available to Amnesty International, the detainees who have been taken to Evin prison, Shahr-e Rey prison, and Fashafouyeh prison have been given little or no access to their families or lawyers.

Amnesty International fears for the wellbeing of Nader Afshari and other detainees, especially in light of the authorities' track record in recent months of torturing and otherwise ill-treating detainees, as well as reports of deaths in custody.

The Iranian authorities must ensure that anyone held solely for peacefully taking part in demonstrations, expressing support for them or criticizing the authorities is released immediately and unconditionally. All detainees should be protected from torture and other ill-treatment and given prompt access to their families and lawyers of their choosing. The authorities must also immediately inform family members of the whereabouts of the detainees, including if they are transferred to another place of detention.

PROTESTER DEATH AND INJURIES

Dozens of people are reported to have been injured as the security forces have violently dispersed protests with unnecessary and excessive force in cities including Tehran and Karaj, north-west of the capital. Videos of the protests shared on social media show security forces using tear gas to disperse some demonstrations. Other videos show crowds running from what sounds like gunfire. One video shared on social media includes the voice of a bystander recording a protest in the city of Shiraz and saying: "Plain-clothed security forces are beating the people."

One protester, 26-year-old Reza Outadi, was killed in Karaj, north-west of Tehran, on 3 August 2018. Two days later, the [Prosecutor General](#) of Karaj announced that he had been "killed by gunfire that came from protesters amidst the rioting that took place" in Karaj. He said that Reza Outadi was "shot in the back and killed". He went on to say that a number of security forces personnel in Alborz province had also been injured after being shot, stabbed, and hit with stones. Some reports and videos shared on social media from Karaj suggest that the security forces were either firing shots into the air to disperse protesters or were firing directly at them.

According to a report from [Fars News](#) on 7 August 2018, the Prosecutor General of Karaj has since announced that a special unit has been set up to investigate Reza Outadi's death. It includes a special group of weapons experts, the investigative arm of the police force, intelligence units of both the police and the Revolutionary Guards, and the Legal Medicine Organization of Iran (a state forensic institute).

According to initial reports, the authorities only allowed Reza Outadi's sister to view his body in order to confirm his identity. They told the family that they considered him to be a "rioter" (*shooreshi*) and consequently would not be releasing his body to them. The authorities have since released his body to his family, who were able to hold his funeral on 6 August 2018 under heavy security presence.

Amnesty International notes with concern that the special unit that has been established to investigate the death of Reza Outadi does not meet the requirements of impartiality and independence under international law and standards. The organization calls on the Iranian authorities to ensure that the investigation into the death of Reza Outadi is fully impartial and independent, in order to bring to justice in fair trials and without recourse to the death penalty anyone reasonably suspected of criminal responsibility.

According to the UN Principles on the Effective Prevention and Investigation of Extra-legal, Arbitrary and Summary Executions, members of a commission of inquiry "shall be chosen for their recognized impartiality, competence and independence as individuals. In particular, they shall be independent of any institution, agency or person that may be the subject of the inquiry" (Principle 11).

Public Document

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