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PUBLIC STATEMENT

Iran: The Authorities must guarantee fundamental rights

Amnesty International remains gravely concerned by recent events in the Islamic Republic of Iran. Widespread demonstrations in the capital, Tehran, and in provincial centres since 8 July 1999, were followed by serious clashes between student demonstrators, security forces and unofficial vigilante groups. According to reports received by the human rights organization, dozens of persons have been injured, some seriously, hundreds arrested, some of whom may be prisoners of conscience, and at least five killed.

“As a first step, the Iranian authorities should fulfil their commitments to investigate fully and impartially the killings and serious attacks and bring to justice all those found to be responsible”, said Amnesty International.

The violence began on 8 July, when a small number of students, who had gathered in a peaceful demonstration outside their university hostels in northern Tehran to protest against the closure of the daily newspaper *Salam*, were attacked by armed members of *Ansar-e Hezbollah*, a vigilante student group which opposes current political developments in Iran. Security forces posted at the scene reportedly failed to intervene to protect the students. Some hours later, members of *Ansar-e Hezbollah*, together with members of the security forces, stormed the student residences using teargas, as a result of which at least one person was killed. According to reports, as a result of this attack, which was strongly condemned by both the President, Hojjatoleslam Sayed Mohammad Khatami, and the Supreme Leader, Ayatollah ‘Ali Khamenei, two senior police officers were arrested, and a special committee was appointed to investigate the causes of the violence.

In the following days the size and nature of the demonstrations changed dramatically, leading to an escalation in violence. Despite calls for calm from some student leaders and an official ban on demonstrations in Tehran, demonstrations continued and spread to other towns such as Shiraz, Rasht, Esfahan, Mashhad and Tabriz.

The human rights organization is also alarmed by the scale of arbitrary arrests, including those of possible prisoners of conscience. Among those known to have been arrested on 13 July is Maryam Shansi, a student leader who was attacked and beaten in her home by unidentified assailants on 12 June 1999. Her current legal status and whereabouts are unknown. Other well known student activists, fearing for their safety, have reportedly gone into hiding. According to other unconfirmed reports, two members of the Iran Nation Party (*Hezb-e Mellat-e Iran*), an unauthorized but tolerated opposition group have also been arrested. They have been named as Khosrow Sayf and Ahmad Namazi.

Amnesty International recognizes the right and responsibility of all governments to maintain law and order but this should never be at the expense of fundamental human rights. The

organization calls on the authorities in the Islamic Republic of Iran to take without further delay the following measures to protect fundamental human rights, including the right to life and freedom of expression, as guaranteed by the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), to which Iran is a state party:

- to initiate a thorough and independent investigation into the killings and serious attacks and to bring to justice all those responsible;
- to ensure that any such investigation is carried out promptly and impartially, and that its methods and findings are made public;
- to release immediately and unconditionally all persons detained solely on account of peacefully expressing their conscientiously held beliefs;
- to make public the names of all those arrested in connection with the recent disturbances;
- ensure that all those arrested are humanely treated and given immediate access to legal representation and family members, and that they be guaranteed a fair trial within a reasonable time or be released.
- to instruct its law enforcement authorities to adhere to agreed international human rights standards including those governing the use of lethal force.

Background

In recent months there have been several clashes between student organizations supporting different political tendencies in the Islamic Republic of Iran.

- On 6 July 1999 student activists Mohammad Masud Salamati, Sayed Javad Emami and Parviz Safari were arrested and detained overnight after a demonstration outside the United Nations office in Tehran, demanding the release of two journalists, Heshmatollah Tabarzadi and Hossein Kashani, who were arrested in mid-June 1999.
- *Salam*, a newspaper supporting reformist trends in the Iranian administration, was banned indefinitely on 7 July 1999 by order of the Special Court for the Clergy (*Dadgah-e Vizhe-ye Ruhaniyat*), following a complaint by the Ministry of Information (*Vezerat-e Ettela'at*) that it had published "top secret" information. The official complaint was withdrawn the following day; however, it is not clear whether this will lead to the banning order being lifted.
- On 7 July 1999 the *Majles* (Parliament) voted to allow debate on a bill amending the current press law, aimed at severely curtailing the freedom of the press.
- On 9 July 1999 Amnesty International issued an Urgent Action (AI INDEX: MDE 13/15/99, UA 160/99) urging the authorities, among other things, to guarantee the safety and security of all students on university campuses, and reminding the government of Iran of its commitment to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, in particular Article 3: "Everyone has the right to life, liberty and security of person".

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