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## **Iran: End discrimination against the Kurdish minority**

Iran's government is failing in its duty to prevent discrimination and human rights abuses against its Kurdish citizens, particularly women, said Amnesty International in a new report published today. The organization expressed fears that the repression of Kurdish Iranians, particularly human rights defenders, is intensifying.

The report cites examples of religious and cultural discrimination against the estimated 12 million Kurds who live in Iran and form around 15 per cent of the population.

It focuses on issues related to housing, education and employment. Human rights defenders and media workers are also being targeted for speaking out.

"Iran's constitution provides for equality of all Iranians before the law. But, as our report shows, this is not the reality for Kurds in Iran. The Iranian government has not taken sufficient steps to eliminate discrimination, or to end the cycle of violence against women and punish those responsible," said Amnesty International.

The report says that Kurdish women face a double challenge to have their rights recognized -- as members of a marginalised ethnic minority, and as women in a predominantly patriarchal society.

Although women and girls form the backbone of economic activity in the Kurdish areas, strict social codes are used to justify denial of their human rights. Such codes mean that it can be very difficult for government officials to investigate inequalities in girls' education, early and forced marriages, and domestic violence against Kurdish girls and women -- and the severe consequences of some of these abuses, including "honour killings" and suicide.

"Kurdish women are victims of violence on a daily basis and face discrimination from state officials, groups or individuals, including family members. Iranian authorities are obliged to exercise due diligence in eradicating violence against women in the home and in the community but this just isn't happening," Amnesty International said.

The report [\*Iran: Human rights abuses against the Kurdish minority\*](#) recognizes that while expression of Kurdish culture, such as dress and music, is generally respected and that the Kurdish language is used in some broadcasts and publications, the Kurdish minority continues to suffer deep-rooted discrimination.

Recent cases have highlighted particular human rights violations involving Kurds:

- Farzad Kamangar, Ali Heydariyan and Farhad Vakili, all ethnic Kurds, were sentenced to death in February 2008 after conviction of "moharebeh", (enmity against God), following a grossly flawed process that fell far short of international standards for a fair trial. This is a charge levelled against those accused of taking up arms against the state, apparently in connection with their alleged membership of the armed group, the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK), which carries out attacks in

Turkey. Ali Heydariyan and Farhad Vakili were also sentenced to 10 years' imprisonment, apparently for forging documents. Under Iranian law, they must serve their prison sentences before being executed. Human Rights Activists in Iran reported that when prison authorities at Raja'i Shahr prison in Tehran province told Farzad Kamangar, a 32 year old teacher, of the Supreme Court's decision, they asked him to write a letter seeking clemency. He refused to do this, as it would have been an acknowledgement of guilt, and he has always denied committing any crime. On 11 July his death sentence was upheld by the Supreme Court and could be carried out at any time.

- In May this year Mohammad Sadiq Kabudvand was sentenced to 11 years' imprisonment by Branch 15 of the Revolutionary Court in Tehran. The sentence apparently comprises 10 years' imprisonment for "acting against state security by establishing the Human Rights Organization of Kurdistan (HROK)" and one year's imprisonment for "propaganda against the system". The verdict followed a closed trial session. Amnesty International considers Mohammad Sadiq Kabudvand to be a prisoner of conscience, held solely on account of his peaceful exercise of his rights to freedom of expression and association during his work as chair of the HROK and his activities as a journalist. Such rights are expressly recognized in the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), to which Iran is a state party.
- Psychology student Hana Abdi was arrested on 4 November 2007 at her grandfather's home in Sanandaj. She was held incommunicado for three months. In June this year she was sentenced to five years' imprisonment, to be served in exile in Eastern Azerbaijan province, in the small town of Germe, on the border with the Republic of Azerbaijan. According to her lawyer, Branch 2 of the Revolutionary Court in Sanandaj convicted her of "gathering and colluding to commit a crime against national security." She is a member of the Campaign for Equality, an Iranian women's rights initiative that is seeking an end to legalized discrimination against women in Iran. Amnesty International considers Hana Abdi to be a prisoner of conscience, detained solely for the peaceful exercise of her right to freedom of expression and association, and that the charge brought against her is politically motivated.

"We urge the Iranian authorities to take concrete measures to end any discrimination and associated human rights violations that Kurds, indeed all minorities in Iran, face," said Amnesty International.

"Kurds and all other members of minority communities in Iran, men, women and children, are entitled to enjoy their full range of human rights. The Iranian authorities should promote and protect the rights of human rights defenders, including women's rights activists, and abide by their obligations under international human rights law."

### **Background**

The 57 page report [\*Iran: Human rights abuses against the Kurdish minority\*](#) (AI Index: MDE 13/088/2008) is the latest in a series of Amnesty International reports on human rights abuses against ethnic and cultural minorities in Iran. Previous reports have described abuses against Ahwazi Arabs and the Baluchi minority.

Amnesty International has previously raised many of the concerns and cases in this report with the Iranian authorities but without adequate response. They rarely respond to the organization and have not permitted Amnesty International access to Iran to investigate human rights for more than 28 years.