

**PUBLIC**

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**03 January 2008**

**UA 03/08**      **Arbitrary arrests/ fear of torture or ill-treatment/ possible prisoners of conscience**

**IRAN**            **At least 50 and possibly hundreds of Ahwazi Arabs**

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On 30 December, at least 50 and possibly hundreds of men from Iran's Ahwazi Arab minority were arrested as they attended a memorial at the Hamzeh mosque in Ahvaz City, the capital of the south-western Khuzestan province. They were reportedly detained following an attack by members of the police and Bassij forces. Some or all may be prisoners of conscience, detained solely for exercising their right to freedom of expression and association.

Those arrested, whose numbers have been reported by Ahwazi groups to be between 200 and 300, have been taken to an unknown location, and their family members have as yet received no information as to their whereabouts or wellbeing. It is feared that they could be tortured or otherwise ill-treated in detention.

Amnesty International has received the names of 53 people said to have been arrested at the time. The organisation has also been informed that a number of people were injured when security forces opened fire on the crowd. These included 18-year-old Amir Heydari, who was injured in the leg.

The memorial was being held on the seventh day after the death of Mehdi Heydari at the hands of security forces. An Ahwazi Arab in his twenties, his political affiliation is unknown to Amnesty International, but he had apparently been wanted by security forces for some time and had gone into hiding. He had returned home for a short visit, and was shot dead while trying to escape after officials from the Ministry of Intelligence surrounded his house.

## **BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

Much of Iran's Arab community lives in the province of Khuzestan, which borders Iraq. It is strategically important because it is the site of much of Iran's oil reserves, but the Arab population does not feel it has benefited as much from the oil revenue as the Persian population. Historically, the Arab community has been marginalised and discriminated against. There were mass demonstrations in April 2005, after it was alleged that the government planned to disperse the country's Arab population or to force them to relinquish their Arab identity and tension has remained high since. Following bomb explosions in Ahvaz City in June and October 2005, which killed at least 14 people, and explosions at oil installations in September and October 2005, the cycle of violence intensified, with hundreds of people reportedly arrested. There have been reports of torture. Further bombings on 24 January 2006, in which at least six people were killed, were followed by further mass arrests. At least 15 men have now been executed as a result of their alleged involvement in the bombings. It is not clear if another man was executed or died in custody.

Iran is a state party to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), of which Article 7 states that "No one shall be subjected to cruel, inhuman or degrading punishment."

**RECOMMENDED ACTION:** Please send appeals to arrive as quickly as possible, in Persian, English, Arabic, French or your own language:

- seeking details of all those arrested on 30 December 2007 in Ahvaz City, including their names, the reasons for their arrest and any charges which may have been brought against them;
- calling on the authorities to release any held solely on account of the peaceful exercise of their right to freedom of expression and association while attending a memorial;

- calling for any others to be tried promptly and fairly, in accordance with international fair trial standards, on recognisably criminal charges or else released;
- seeking assurances that none of those arrested is subject to torture or other ill treatment.

**APPEALS TO:**

Leader of the Islamic Republic

His Excellency Ayatollah Sayed 'Ali Khamenei

The Office of the Supreme Leader, Islamic Republic Street - Shahid Keshvar Doust Street

Tehran, Islamic Republic of Iran

**Email:** [info@leader.ir](mailto:info@leader.ir)

**Salutation:** **Your Excellency**

Head of the Judiciary

Ayatollah Mahmoud Hashemi Shahroudi

Howzeh Riyasat-e Qoveh Qazaiyeh / Office of the Head of the Judiciary

Pasteur St., Vali Asr Ave., south of Serah-e Jomhuri, Tehran 1316814737, Islamic Republic of Iran

**Email:** [info@dadgostary-tehran.ir](mailto:info@dadgostary-tehran.ir) (In the subject line write: **FAO Ayatollah Shahroudi**)

**Salutation:** **Your Excellency**

Minister of Intelligence

Gholam Hossein Mohseni Ejeie

Ministry of Intelligence, Second Negarestan Street, Pasdaran Avenue, Tehran, Islamic Republic of Iran

**Salutation:** **Your Excellency**

**COPIES TO:**

President

His Excellency Mahmoud Ahmadinejad

The Presidency, Palestine Avenue, Azerbaijan Intersection, Tehran, Islamic Republic of Iran

**Email:** [dr-ahmadinejad@president.ir](mailto:dr-ahmadinejad@president.ir)

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Speaker of Parliament

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**Email:** [hadadadel@majlis.ir](mailto:hadadadel@majlis.ir) (Please ask that your message be brought to the attention of the **Article 90 Commission**)

and to diplomatic representatives of Iran accredited to your country.

**PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY.** Check with the International Secretariat, or your section office, if sending appeals after. 14 March 2008.