



Amnesty International's submission to the Commission on the Status of Women regarding concerns about the harassment and imprisonment of women, including rights defenders and members of minorities, in Iran

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Introduction

Women in Iran face widespread discrimination under the law. They are excluded from key areas of the state – although they can be appointed as assistant judges, they cannot, for example, head a court, nor stand for the Presidency. They do not have equal rights with men in marriage, divorce, child custody and inheritance. Criminal harm suffered by a woman is less severely punished than the same harm suffered by a man. Evidence given by women in court is held under Iranian law to be worth half that given by a man. Although the legal age for marriage is 13, fathers can apply for permission to arrange that their daughters are married at a younger age – and to men much older than their daughters. Men are allowed to practice polygamy, women are not. Men have an incontestable right in law to divorce their spouse. Women do not.

However, the women's movement in its various strands is one of the most dynamic parts of civil society in Iran. Many Iranian women – who are often highly educated, as women make up over 60 per cent of university entrants - are no longer prepared to sit back and allow blatant discrimination against women to continue unchallenged.

In recent years, Iranian women's rights defenders – including those associated with the One Million Signatures Campaign (a grassroots network which aims to collect a million signatures of Iranians demanding an end to discrimination against women in Iranian law) and the Women's Field network - have courageously campaigned for an end to legal discrimination against women. Their efforts are viewed with suspicion by Iranian government authorities, who have launched a campaign of intimidation and repression against them, consisting of a wide range of violations from threats, travel bans and obstruction of their lawful work, to arbitrary arrest, torture or other ill-treatment, unfair trial (sometimes leading to harsh prison sentences) and denial of adequate medical treatment¹. For example, people participating in peaceful demonstrations in 2005 and 2006 against discriminatory legislation were forcibly dispersed. At the 2006 demonstration, at least 70 people were arrested, some of whom were beaten. In March 2007, 33 women were arrested following a peaceful gathering of women outside the courtroom where five women were on trial in connection with the 2006 demonstration. Many of the women arrested on these occasions have been tried. Some have been acquitted, but others have been sentenced to prison terms, and flogging. In recent years, and particularly after the disputed presidential election of 2009, the authorities have accused the women's movement of being part of a "soft revolution" aimed at overthrowing the state, which activists deny.

This catalogue of repressive measures is also used against other women, particularly those from ethnic or religious minorities, who appear to be targeted either on account of their ethnic origin or faith, or because they stand up for the rights of their communities to be treated equally and in line with Iran's international human rights obligations.

This submission to the Commission on the Status of Women is intended to draw the Commission's attention to the pattern of violations experienced by women in reprisal for their peaceful political or human rights activities, or on account of their ethnic origin, their faith, or their relationship to men who have expressed views dissenting from those considered acceptable by the Iranian authorities. It is accompanied by an appendix listing a number of reports, articles and action materials published by

Amnesty International in recent years to raise awareness of the plight of women's rights and of individual women activists and others in Iran. In this submission, we wish, in particular, to highlight the cases of nine women who are currently all detained or imprisoned in Iran, whose experiences illustrate the pattern of abuse. Those cases are outlined below. Amnesty International believes that all nine women are prisoners of conscience who should be released immediately and unconditionally.

1. Hengameh Shahidi

Hengameh Shahidi, aged about 35, is a journalist and political activist, who is currently serving a six-year sentence in Evin Prison, Tehran.

A PhD student at the School of Oriental and African Studies in the UK, she had returned to Iran for the 2009 presidential election. There, she acted as an advisor on women's rights issues to presidential candidate Mehdi Karroubi, leader of the National Trust party, of which she is a member. The party was banned by the Iranian government in August 2009, after mass protests erupted following the official announcement that incumbent President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad had been re-elected. Hengameh Shahidi was arrested on 30 June 2009 and held for over four months without charge.

She says she was tortured and otherwise ill-treated in detention, including with threats that she would be executed. On one occasion, she says, she was subjected to a mock execution. She also says that her interrogators threatened to arrest other members of her family in order to punish her or to force her to "confess".

Her trial began shortly after her release on bail on 1 November 2009 and she was sentenced the following month. The six-year prison term includes five years for "gathering and colluding with intent to harm state security" and one year for "propaganda against the system".

She appealed against the conviction and sentence, and remained at liberty until 25 February 2010 when she was rearrested after being summoned to the Ministry of Intelligence investigations' office "to answer a few questions". Two days later her lawyer, Mohammad Mostafaei, unaware of the reasons for her rearrest, went to Branch 54 of the Revolutionary Court. There, he was shown an appeal court ruling upholding her six-year prison sentence, issued the day before her re-arrest. The appeal court did, however, overturn her conviction for "insulting the president", for which she had been sentenced to 91 days' imprisonment.

Hengameh Shahidi suffers from a heart condition, for which she requires regular medication. Amnesty International is concerned that she may not be receiving adequate medical treatment while in detention.

2. Shiva Nazar Ahari

Shiva Nazar Ahari, a 26-year-old journalist, blogger and member of the Committee of Human Rights Reporters (CHRR), was arrested with two other CHRR members, Kouhyar Goudarzi and Saeed Haeri, on 20 December 2009. They were arrested while on their way to the funeral the following day of Grand Ayatollah Montazeri, a senior cleric critical of the authorities. Shiva Nazar Ahari's trial has not yet been concluded.

Shiva Nazar Ahari had previously been arrested on 14 June 2009 shortly after the disputed presidential election and held for three months before being released on bail on 23 September. She had also been detained in connection with her student and human rights activities in 2002 and 2004, receiving a one-year prison sentence in 2005, suspended for five years.

Since her most recent arrest Shiva Nazar Ahari has been held for long periods in solitary confinement. In February 2010, she told her family by phone that she had been transferred to a "cage-like" solitary confinement cell where she could not move her arms or legs. She has had limited access to her family, and no access to her lawyers.

According to her mother, in April 2010 Shiva Nazar Ahari was charged with "causing unease in the public mind through writing on the CHRR's website and other sites" and "acting against national security by participating in [anti-government] demonstrations on 4 November 2009 and 7 December 2009". Shiva Nazar Ahari denied attending the demonstrations, saying that she was at work on those days. Following a trial session on 23 May 2010, her lawyer confirmed that she had been charged with "acting against national

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security” and “enmity against God”, and that the judge was considering a request to combine the two pending cases against her. If convicted of these charges, she faces a lengthy prison term, or even possibly the death penalty, if the judge accepts the charge of “enmity against God”.

At least eight members of the CHRR have been arbitrarily arrested since the end of November 2009, of whom two – Shiva Nazar Ahari and Kouhyar Goudarzi – were still detained at the time of writing in July 2010. Others have fled the country for their own safety.

The CHRR was founded in 2006 and campaigns against a wide range of human rights violations, including those affecting women, children, prisoners and workers. It has come under particular attack since the June 2009 election. In January 2010, the Tehran Prosecutor accused the group of having links to the People's Mojahedin Organization of Iran (PMOI - a banned group), and said that “any collaboration with the [CHRR] is a crime”. The CHRR vehemently denies having such links.

3. Alieh Aghdam-Doust

Women's rights activist Alieh Aghdam-Doust was arrested in her home town of Fouman, northern Iran, and brought under guard to begin serving a three-year prison sentence at Evin Prison, Tehran, on 31 January 2009. Alieh Aghdam-Doust, aged 57, is a prisoner of conscience, who is detained solely for the peaceful exercise of her internationally recognized rights to freedom of expression and assembly.

On 12 June 2006, Alieh Aghdam-Doust, took part in a peaceful demonstration in Tehran against laws discriminating against women in Iran. The protest was forcibly broken up by police, who injured some of the demonstrators and arrested 70. She was charged before Branch 15 of the Revolutionary Court in Tehran in June 2007 and later sentenced to three years' imprisonment for “acting against national security by participating in an illegal gathering”, under Article 610 of the Penal Code, and to a four months' suspended prison sentence and 20 lashes for “disturbing public order”, under Article 618 of

“You should participate as well. Why didn't you defend your daughters' and wife's rights by attending the legal, peaceful gathering?”

Alieh Aghdam-Doust to the judge presiding at her trial, according to journalist Zhila Baniyaghoub

the Penal Code. A host of vaguely-worded provisions in the Penal Code are used to criminalize peaceful dissent in Iran, including “acting against state security”, most of which are tried before Revolutionary Courts.

Alieh Aghdam-Doust appealed against her conviction and sentence, but although the decision to uphold the three-year sentence was taken nearly a year before her arrest in January 2009, neither she nor her lawyers were informed about the results of her appeal before she was detained. Others who attended the demonstration have been acquitted, or have had their sentences overturned or suspended on appeal.

Nasim Ghovani, one of Alieh Aghdam-Doust's lawyers, told an international NGO, the *International Campaign for Human Rights in Iran (ICHR)*: “I received a call from Alieh in Fouman at 2pm on 31 January. She told me that agents from the Implementation of Sentences Department came to take her to Tehran to begin serving her prison term”. She and another lawyer also representing Alieh Aghdam-Doust later found that the appeals court had upheld her three-year sentence for “acting against national security” about one year before. On 2 March 2009 she told journalists in Tehran that she had made three requests to meet Alieh Aghdam-Doust in prison, but all had been turned down.

Alieh Aghdam-Doust was placed in solitary confinement in March 2010 after a speech she gave to other women prisoners on International Women's Day, 8 March 2010. She was later brought to court without the presence of her lawyer, and charged with new offences relating to the speech, including “propaganda against the system”, “insulting the Leader and the President” and “spreading socialism”. She is not known to have been tried on these charges.

Alieh Aghdam-Doust was a teacher at the time of the Islamic Revolution in 1979 and was later forced out of her job. She spent six years in prison between 1983 and 1989 in connection with her political

beliefs and activities. She underwent a painful divorce and has no surviving children. The youngest of 10 children, she has no close relatives in Tehran and is very isolated.

4. Ronak Safarzadeh

Ronak Safarzadeh, a member of Iran's Kurdish minority, is currently detained in the women's section of Sanandaj Prison, Kordestan Province, north-west Iran. She is a member of two non-governmental organizations that promote women's rights in Iran: the One Million Signatures Campaign (also known as the Campaign for Equality) and the Azar Mehr Women's Organization of Sanandaj (which is affiliated to the Campaign for Equality).

On 8 October 2007, Ronak Safarzadeh attended a meeting in Sanandaj to mark the International Day of the Child, where she collected signatures in support of the Campaign for Equality. The following day, on 9 October 2007, Ministry of Intelligence officials came to Ronak Safarzadeh's house, confiscated her computer, copies of the Campaign's petition and an education booklet it had produced, and arrested her. She was taken to a Ministry of Intelligence detention facility where she was denied access to her family and lawyer for three months, before being transferred to Sanandaj Prison.

While held by the Ministry of Intelligence, Ronak Safarzadeh was denied access to her family and to her lawyer, although she was allowed to make occasional brief telephone calls to family members. Her mother was beaten by officials in the local office of the Judiciary on 30 October 2007 when she went to try to find out about her daughter. Ronak Safarzadeh was transferred to Sanandaj prison in January 2008 after which her family and lawyer were allowed to visit her. All her meetings with her lawyer were in the presence of prison guards, in breach of lawyer-client confidentiality.

While held without access to her family or lawyer, Ronak Safarzadeh made an incriminating "confession". Her lawyer, Mohammad Sharif, said in February 2008, "Unfortunately [she was] interrogated while being held in solitary confinement using illegal methods and accused of very serious charges. According to the law, in my opinion, [this confession is] not valid and cannot be used in the court as credible evidence."

On 16 December 2007, the state-owned Islamic Republic News Agency (IRNA) quoted an unnamed judge as having said Ronak Safarzadeh and a colleague, Hana Abdi, had been "arrested for acting against national security by taking part in attacks in Sanandaj and for being members of PJAK". PJAK, The Party for a Free Life in Kurdistan, with links to the Turkish organization, the PKK, is an armed Kurdish opposition group which carries out attacks against Iranian security forces from bases inside northern Iraq. At the time of this report, neither woman had been formally charged with any offence.

Ronak Safarzadeh was later charged with "being at enmity with god" (*moharebeh*), a term in the Penal Code which is usually applied to those accused of waging armed rebellion against the state. Her trial, which began in mid-March 2008, ended in April 2009 with her being acquitted of *moharebeh*, but sentenced to six years' imprisonment. This consisted of five years' imprisonment for membership of PJAK and to one year in prison for "propaganda against the state". With regard to the charge of membership of PJAK, her lawyer stated that "the activities of my client were limited to activities within the Azar Mehr Women's NGO, and so her activities in PJAK were carried out toward this end as well. My client aimed to research 'the reasons for women's participation in PJAK under difficult conditions'." In a separate trial which had concluded earlier, she had been sentenced to nine months in prison and a fine for leaving the country illegally and possessing a satellite dish.

In February 2008, the Director of the the Azar Mehr Women's Organization of Sanandaj, Negin Sheikholeslam, spoke about her telephone contact with Hana and Ronak in prison. She said, "These women explained (to the authorities) that: 'We are not terrorists, and our activities were only intended to address and rectify gender and ethnic discrimination, and our aim is to bring peace and reconciliation to our country and between our people. Don't forget about us...'".

Ronak Safarzadeh has been suffering from dental problems in prison, for which she appears not to have

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had adequate medical treatment.

Amnesty International has seen no evidence that Ronak Safarzadeh has personally used or advocated violence and therefore considers her to be a prisoner of conscience who should be released immediately and unconditionally.

5. Zeynab Beyezidi

Women's rights activist **Zeynab Beyezidi**, also a member of the Kurdish minority, is serving a four and a half year prison sentence. She was arrested on 9 July 2008, after the police ordered her to present herself for interrogation at a police station in the city of Mahabad, in the western province of Kordestan. Zeynab Beyezidi is a member of the Human Rights Organization of Kurdistan (HROK) and the One Million Signatures Campaign.

The HROK was founded in 2005 by Kurdish journalist Mohammad Sedigh Kabudvand who was himself arrested on 1 July 2007 and is now a prisoner of conscience serving a 10 year prison sentence for "acting against state security by establishing the Human Rights Organization of Kurdistan (HROK)". The HROK, believed to have around 200 members, has never been granted official recognition as an NGO, despite repeated requests.

Zeynab Beyezidi's arrest amounted to an enforced disappearance, as her family only learned that she had been arrested some days later, when she was allowed to telephone them. She told them she had been summoned for several hours of interrogation on 5 July, in which she had been told, among other things, to change the Kurdish name of her health shop, which she refused to do. After this, she was told to return on 9 July. This time she was questioned for three hours and then kept in detention at a detention centre in Mahabad run by the Ministry of Intelligence. She was brought before a Revolutionary Court in Mahabad on 31 July, and charged with membership of unauthorised human rights associations, and on account of her activities in support of women's rights. She denied all the charges except her activities connected to the One Million Signature Campaign, as she believed these activities were lawful.

The court convicted her of the charges and sentenced her to four years' imprisonment, to be spent in internal exile in the mainly Azerbaijani Turkic-speaking city of Zanjan, about 250 km from her home. Her family learned of this on 10 August 2008, when they went to the court to find out what had happened at her trial. On 10 August she went on hunger strike to demand her release. Prison officials promised her that she would be released on bail during her appeal in order to persuade her to stop the hunger strike. On these assurances, she ended the hunger strike on 22 August 2008 after 12 days. However, the Mahabad Revolutionary Court failed to grant her bail and the following day, it was announced that her sentence had been upheld by an appeal court in West Azerbaijan.

Amnesty International is concerned that the procedure before the Appeal Court, particularly the speed with which the review appears to have taken place, may not have provided a genuine opportunity to appeal conviction and sentence, examining both facts and law in relation to Zeynab Beyezidi's case. According to Iranian law, a defendant must submit an appeal within 20 days of being sentenced. Within that period, a judgment cannot be issued until the appeal is submitted. Her lawyer reportedly went to the Appeal Court on behalf of Zeynab Beyezidi, but was told that she had already appeared in person and a decision had been reached.

In March 2009, the Supreme Court rejected a request by her lawyer for an extraordinary review of her case. At around the same time, a previously suspended six-month sentence for "spreading lies and propaganda against the system" was implemented.

6. Mahboubeh Karami

Women's rights activist **Mahboubeh Karami** has been detained without charge or trial in Evin Prison in Tehran, since 2 March 2010. She has been a member of the One Million Signature Campaign since its foundation in 2006. She is also a former director of the Women's Unit of the independent human rights

organization, Human Rights Activists in Iran (HRAI)ii.

Mahboubeh Karami's house in Tehran was raided by three security officials at 10pm on 2 March. Prior to her arrest, they searched the house and confiscated some of her personal belongings. Mohsen Karami, her brother, said afterwards that the warrant for her arrest listed accusations of rioting and "participation in gatherings". He said that these accusations were baseless, as "Mahboubeh has spent much of the last year caring for her ill father."

Her arrest was part of a wave of arrests of human rights defenders, journalists and political activists which took place after the anniversary of the Iranian Revolution on 11 February 2010. On 2 and 3 March 2010, at least 15 members and associates of the HRAI were arrested. The Tehran Prosecutor's Office said on 13 March 2010 that 30 people had been arrested in connection with alleged US Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) "cyber networks" that were aimed at destabilizing Iran, and said that HRAI was part of this. The statement alleged that the HRAI had links to the PMOI. On 26 March 2010, the HRAI published a list of 41 of its members and associates, including Mahboubeh Karami, who it said had been arrested in recent months. It said "the only crime of these activists is their philanthropy and their work toward helping humanity".

Mohsen Karami has also said that when he was first allowed to visit his sister in prison on 21 March 2010, she told him that she had been hit on the head with a water bottle and threatened with a lengthy detention. He said she had told him that her interrogators had threatened her, telling her: "We will not allow you to have quick fame and publicity like the other ones. We can do as we wish with you."

Mahboubeh Karami appeared in court on 28 June 2010, but the session was postponed until 9 August because the judge and the prosecutor's representative did not attend. Mahboubeh Karami is reported to have been suffering from depression at the time of her arrest which has worsened in detention. She is also said to suffer from insomnia and respiratory problems. She was in detention at the time of her mother's death in 2009 and she was not allowed prison leave to attend the one-year anniversary of her mother's death.

Mahboubeh Karami has been arrested four times before on similar charges. Each time, she was detained for several days before being released. She was later acquitted of all charges.

7. Behareh Hedayat

Behareh Hedayat, aged about 29, a member of the Central Committee of the Office for the Consolidation of Unity (OCU - a national student body which has been active in calling for political reform and opposing human rights violations in recent years) is serving a nine and a half year prison sentence in Evin prison. She is also the Chair of the Women's Committee of the OCU.

She was arrested on 31 December 2009, shortly after mass arrests following anti-government protests on the religious festival of Ashoura. Before this, in early December 2009, her recorded video speech for a conference in the Netherlands entitled "International solidarity with Iranian students' movement. On the occasion of Iran's National Student's Day" had been widely circulated on the internet.

She was charged with several "offences", including "interviews with foreign media", "insulting the leader", "insulting the president", "disrupting public order through participating in illegal gatherings", "illegal entrance and destruction of Amir Kabir University's main entrance during Mehdi Karroubi's [an unsuccessful candidate in the presidential election] visit to the university".

In May 2010 Behareh Hedayat was sentenced to six months in prison for "insulting the president", two years for "insulting the Leader" and five years for "acting against national security". A two year suspended prison term previously imposed for her participation in the June 2006 demonstration calling for an end to discrimination against women in law was also implemented. Her sentence was upheld in July 2010.

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Behareh Hedayat was previously arrested in July 2007 along with other OCU Central Committee members Mohammad Hashemi, Ali Nikou Nesbati, Mehdi Arabshahi, Hanif Yazdani and Ali Vafaqi at a demonstration opposite Amir Kabir University of Technology. They were protesting at the continued detention of eight students arrested in May and June 2007 over articles regarded as insulting to Islam which the students had denied any responsibility. Behareh Hedayat was released on bail on 9 August 2007.

8. Ma'soumeh Ka'bi

Ma'soumeh Ka'bi is a member of the Ahwazi Arab minority in Iran, and the wife of Habib Nabgan, a prominent member of the Lejnat al-Wefaq (Reconciliation Committee), a banned political party which promotes the rights of Iran's Arab minority. She is serving a four and a half year prison sentence in Sepidar Prison, in Ahvaz City, Khuzestan province. Habib Nabgan left the country in late 2005 or early 2006 and was later resettled as a refugee in Denmark. Following his departure, Ma'soumeh Ka'bi and her younger son Imad, then aged two, were arrested on 27 February 2006. They were released on bail on 28 April 2006. Her other four children, and Habib Nabgan's mother, were also arrested but were released the following day. Habib Nabgan received threats while abroad that his family would be tortured or killed if he did not return to Iran.

Ma'soumeh Ka'bi then fled Iran with her five children on 7 May 2008 and applied for refugee status with the UNHCR in Damascus. Following her departure, Habib Nabgan's sister, Jamila Nabgan, was arrested in May 2008 and held for two days at the Intelligence Ministry detention facility in Ahvaz and questioned about her sister-in-law's flight to Syria.

Ma'soumeh Ka'bi was granted permission to join her husband by the Danish authorities and was issued with a travel document. On 9 September 2008, she took her five children to the office of Syria's Immigration Department in order to obtain an exit visa, which would allow them to leave the country. The six were all detained that day, and despite interventions made by the UNHCR in Syria requesting the family's release, they were forcibly returned to Iran on 27 September 2008.

On arrival in Tehran, the family was held at a detention facility at the airport for one night then transferred to a detention facility in Tehran run by the Ministry of Intelligence. On or around 29 September, the children were separated from their mother. All the family members were again transferred and taken to another Ministry of Intelligence detention facility in Ahvaz. Security personnel then telephoned other family members in Iran, informing them of the place of detention of the children and warning them not to ask questions about Ma'soumeh Ka'bi. The children were released in late October 2008.

Ma'soumeh Ka'bi, who is reported to have been tortured in detention, was tried by a branch of the Revolutionary Court in Ahvaz, Khuzestan province. Her court-appointed lawyer was not allowed access to her file and therefore was not able to prepare her defence. She was sentenced on 1 January 2009 to four and a half years in prison. She may not even have been present when her lawyer was notified of her sentence and, therefore, may have been unaware of the precise allegations against her. Six months of her sentence are believed to have related to the charge of leaving the country using falsified travel documents. Amnesty International is not aware of the precise charge the other four years relates to, but believes that she has been targeted on account of the political activities of her husband, Habib Nabgan. After her conviction, Ma'soumeh Ka'bi was reportedly released on bail pending an appeal. Her sentence is believed to have been confirmed on appeal in or around February 2009. She was rearrested afterwards and her father was briefly detained after he complained that she had been tortured or otherwise ill-treated.

Ma'soumeh Ka'bi suffers from hardening of the arteries (atherosclerosis) and pain in her left foot, and has lost most of her teeth since her arrest. She is also reported to be suffering from severe depression. Amnesty International fears that Ma'soumeh Ka'bi is being denied adequate medical treatment while held, possibly to place further pressure on her, and possibly to try and induce her husband to return to Iran, where he would be at risk of serious human rights violations. Her children have now left Iran and

have been reunited with their father.

9. Rozita Vaseghi

Rozita Vaseghi, a member of the Baha'i religious community, was arrested on 15 March 2010 at her home in Mashhad, Razavi Khorasan province. She has since been held in solitary confinement in a Ministry of Intelligence detention centre in Mashhad, apparently without access to her lawyer. She has been allowed to meet her mother at least once since her arrest and has had limited telephone contact with her family.

During her arrest, Rozita Vaseghi told her mother that she would not utter a word and has reportedly kept silent throughout her interrogations. As a result, she has been kept in solitary confinement throughout her detention, in harsh conditions which have caused her to lose a great amount of weight. At the time of writing, she is said to be very weak, and is suffering from very low blood pressure and pain in her limbs, making her movements difficult. When Rozita Vaseghi's family enquired about her condition, the prison officials told them that her situation was unlikely to change unless she cooperated with them.

In October 2009, Rozita Vaseghi was among a group of nine Baha'is who went on trial. They were sentenced to five years' imprisonment after being convicted of "teaching against the regime", taking action against national security, illegal dissemination of CDs, teaching the Bahá'í faith, and "insulting religious sanctities".

The Appeal Court confirmed the original sentence for five of them, including that of Rozita Vaseghi. It is not clear if Rozita Vaseghi is being held to serve that sentence, or whether she is facing fresh charges.

Since the establishment of the Islamic Republic of Iran in 1979, the Baha'i community has been systematically harassed and persecuted. There are over 300,000 Baha'is in Iran, but their religion is not recognized under the Iranian Constitution, which recognizes only Islam, Christianity, Judaism and Zoroastrianism. Baha'is in Iran are subject to discriminatory laws and regulations which violate their right to practise their religion freely, as set out in Article 18(1) of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, to which Iran is a state party. The Iranian authorities also deny Baha'is equal rights to education, to work and to a decent standard of living by restricting their access to employment and benefits such as pensions. They are not permitted to meet, to hold religious ceremonies or to practise their religion communally. Scores of Baha'is, both men and women, have been arrested in recent years.

Amnesty International's recommendations and concluding observations

"As long as women are denied human rights, anywhere in the world, there can be no justice and no peace."

Nobel Peace Prize Laureate and Iranian lawyer Shirin Ebadi and Amnesty International Secretary General Irene Khan, March 2007

Amnesty International supports the courageous efforts of women in Iran who are standing up for their basic rights in a wide variety of fields.

As such, Amnesty International wishes to bring to the attention of the Commission on the Status of Women a number of recommendations it has made to the Iranian authorities in recent years. In these recommendations, Amnesty International calls on the Iranian authorities to:

- release immediately and unconditionally any woman who has not used or advocated violence or hatred who is detained, imprisoned or placed under other physical restriction (for example, house arrest) solely because of her political, religious or other conscientiously held beliefs, ethnic origin, sex, colour, language, national or social origin, economic status, birth, sexual orientation or other status;
- investigate promptly and impartially all reports of torture and ill-treatment of women and to bring to justice anyone found responsible for abuses;

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- ratify promptly and without reservation the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and its Optional Protocol;
- review as a matter of urgency all legislation in Iran in order to identify and remedy all laws that discriminate directly against women or have a discriminatory impact on women;
- review all legislation with a view to removing all provisions that discriminate against or have a discriminatory impact on ethnic, religious and other minority communities;
- issue directives and take effective measures to counter the discriminatory application of laws in order to ensure that all Iran's minority communities enjoy their full range of civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights;
- end all forms of intimidation and harassment of women's rights defenders such as dismissal from employment, threatening phone calls and raids on peaceful meetings in private houses.
- permit the holding of peaceful demonstrations calling for legislative change, as provided for under the Constitution of Iran;
- end the practice of arresting and detaining women in relation to the political or other activities of their husbands or other family members, as a means of putting pressure on them to surrender themselves to the authorities;
- ensure that everyone in Iran has the right to freely practise their religion in full conformity with Article 18 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, to which Iran is a state party.

Amnesty International hopes that the information contained in the present submission is considered by the Commission on the Status of Women's Working Group on Communications with a view to its inclusion in the Commission's report to the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), along with recommendations to the Iranian authorities and the international community that reflect the recommendations listed above.

END NOTES

ⁱ Further details of the flaws in the administration of justice in Iran can be found in the reports *Iran: Election Contested, Repression Compounded*, Index MDE 13/123/2009, December 2009 and *From Protest to Prison: Iran One Year after the Election*, Index MDE 13/064/2010, June 2010.

ⁱⁱ Human Rights Activists in Iran has described itself as:

“a human rights organization working within the legal framework in Iran. HRA is a non-political, non-religious organization focused on the protection, maintenance and promotion of human rights in Iranian society.

HRA was established on March 20, 2006. In the four years since its inception, the organization's activities have been primarily focused on five principles: “reporting human rights violations, legal actions, capacity building and education, organizing relevant protests and international affairs.”

The organization's activities include: the publication and presentation of thousands of reports and documentaries on human rights violations to public opinion and relevant domestic and international organizations, provision of free legal services, publication and distribution of thousands of books, brochures and other educational materials, targeted research on Iranian law and publication of research results, support of prisoners and victims of human rights violations, organization of numerous gatherings and programs in support of victims of human rights violations, production of audio visual pieces dealing with human rights and collaboration and presence in the most prestigious human rights institutions around the world.”