

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL PUBLIC STATEMENT



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IRAN: ARBITRARY ARRESTS, TORTURE AND EXECUTIONS CONTINUE

Amnesty International is concerned by the Iranian government's continuing clampdown on dissent, including arbitrary arrests and the torture or other ill-treatment of people who express views opposed to those of the government. Some of those arrested have even been executed, after apparently unfair trials, including at least one minor. Amnesty International wrote to the Head of the Judiciary to express concern about these developments on 13 May 2011, but without response; the Iranian authorities rarely reply to communications from Amnesty International.

The cases described below represent a small number of those known to Amnesty International involving similar violations of human rights.

Amnesty International continues to call on the Iranian government to end the continuing cycle of repression and fully respect Iran's obligations under international human rights law.

In particular, Amnesty International urges the government to:

- release immediately and unconditionally anyone held solely for the peaceful exercise of their rights to freedom of expression, assembly and association, or solely on account of their family links to individuals who oppose the Iranian authorities;
- release all other detainees unless they are to be tried on internationally recognizable criminal charges in proceedings which meet international standards for fair trial, without recourse to the death penalty;
- allow all detainees prompt and regular access to their families and to lawyers of their choice, and to any necessary medical assistance;
- protect all detainees and other prisoners from torture or other ill-treatment, ensure that all allegations of torture or other ill-treatment are immediately and impartially investigated, and bring to justice anyone responsible for torture or other ill-treatment;
- cease immediately all executions, including executions of juvenile offenders – those convicted of crimes committed while under the age of 18 – which is strictly prohibited under international law – and declare and institute a moratorium on executions as a first step towards abolition of the death penalty.

Arbitrary arrests

Ashkan Zahabian, a student activist who had been a member of Mehdi Karroubi's election campaign in the 2009 presidential election and was subsequently expelled from university, was arrested on 2 May 2011 after he answered a summons to go to the Office of the Ministry of Intelligence in Sari, northern Iran. Although facing a six-month prison term for disturbing public order and inciting people to protest, he had never received a written summons to begin serving this sentence. He is believed to remain detained in the Shahid Kachoui detention facility which is run by the Ministry of Intelligence (it is not a prison run by the prison service where sentenced prisoners usually serve their sentences). He has been allowed to contact his family by phone on at least three occasions, but according to Amnesty International's most recent information, he has not been granted a family visit, or access to his lawyer.

Ashkan Zahabian was first arrested on 16 June 2009 and held for more than a month. He was subsequently tried and convicted in his absence by Branch 101 of the Revolutionary Court of Babol and sentenced to six months' imprisonment, upheld on appeal. He was arrested for a second time on 4 November 2009, accused of "acting against state security by forming Islamic Associations in the north of the country", shortly before Students' Day in December 2009. He was again released on bail of 300 million rials which was met by pledging the deeds to his father's house. His family were repeatedly harassed and threatened since December 2010 to force him to surrender himself to the Ministry of Intelligence, including by death threats and threats to put the family house up for sale. Finally, after his mother had been hospitalized as a result of the stress, Ashkan Zahabian went to the Ministry of Intelligence office as requested and surrendered himself. Amnesty International believes he is a prisoner of conscience, held solely for the peaceful exercise of his rights to freedom of expression, assembly and association.

Arrest of relatives of residents of Camp Ashraf, Iraq

According to information received by Amnesty International, the following individuals were arrested on 1 May 2011. The individuals concerned all have relatives residing in Camp Ashraf, Iraq, where members of the People's Mojahedin Organization of Iran (PMOI), an Iranian opposition group, reside and which was attacked by Iraqi forces on 8 April 2011. Amnesty International fears they may be held solely on account of their family links to members of the PMOI or for their own imputed political opinions, in which case, they are prisoners of conscience.

Mahmoud Azimi, a former political prisoner imprisoned in the 1980s for his membership of the PMOI. He has two children who live in Camp Ashraf and his niece, Nastaran Azimi, was among those killed in the 8 April attack on Camp Ashraf. He was reportedly arrested after he and other members of his family sought to hold a memorial ceremony for his niece.

Aria Haeri, whose son and brother in law live in Camp Ashraf **and her daughter, Negar Haeri**. Aria Haeri's husband **Mashallah (known as Hamid) Haeri** is also a political prisoner in poor health who was arrested on 6 December 2009 while ill at home recuperating from a car accident and later sentenced to 15 years' imprisonment in exile in June 2010 after being convicted of "enmity against God", apparently in connection with his links to the PMOI. Prior to this, he is believed to have visited his son in Camp Ashraf. He previously spent three years in prison in the 1980s.

Hossein Haj Aghaei, the son of Mohammad Ali Haj Aghaei who was executed in January 2011 after being convicted of "enmity against God" for links with the PMOI, and "propaganda against the system".

Nasser Sodagari, a former political prisoner in the 1980s, and his wife **Tahereh Pour-Rostam**. Both were previously arrested in September 2007 along with several other individuals. Tahereh Pour-Rostam was later released on bail but Nasser Sodagari was sentenced to one year's imprisonment for having taken part in a ceremony at the Khavaran cemetery marking the 19th anniversary of the 1988 "prison massacres" in which thousands of political prisoners were executed. Their daughter **Pouyan Sodagari** was also arrested on 1 May 2011.

Sedigheh Moradi, in her 50s, who previously spent four years in prison for her links to the PMOI.

Arrest, torture and executions of members of the Ahwazi Arab minority

The Ahwazi Arab minority is one of many minorities in Iran. Much of Iran's Arab community lives in the south-western province of Khuzestan, which borders Iraq. Most are Shi'a Muslims but some are reported to have converted to Sunni Islam, heightening government suspicion about Ahwazi

Arabs. They often complain that they are marginalized and subject to discrimination in access to education, employment, adequate housing, political participation and cultural rights.

In 2005, dozens were killed and scores, if not hundreds, arrested during and following the demonstrations. The event sparked off a cycle of violence in the province, with fatal bomb attacks, followed by further arrests, unfair trials and at least 15 executions¹.

Scores, if not hundreds of members of the Ahwazi Arab minority were reportedly arrested before, during and after demonstrations on 15 April 2011. The demonstrations had been called a “Day of Rage” to protest at the sixth anniversary of the 2005 mass demonstrations. At least three and possibly many more people were killed in the April 2011 demonstrations during clashes with the security forces, including some in the Malashiya neighbourhood in Ahvaz². Amnesty International has received the names of 27 individuals allegedly killed. Ahwazi Arab sources have claimed the casualty figures were even higher. Amnesty International has been unable to confirm the reports as the Iranian authorities do not allow the organization to visit the country. The authorities maintain a tight control on the flow of information in and out of the province, including by preventing foreign journalists from visiting Khuzestan.

At least four Ahwazi Arab men are said to have died in custody since 23 March 2011, possibly as a result of torture or other ill-treatment; others have been hospitalized, apparently as a result of injuries sustained from torture or other ill-treatment.

Those reported to have died in custody are **Reza Maghamesi** (said to have died on 23 March 2011), **Abdol Karim Fahd Abiat** (said to have died on 5 May 2011 in Sepidar Prison, Ahvaz), **Ahmad Riassan** (identified by some sources as Ja’far) Salami (said to have died between 5-6 May 2011 in Sepidar Prison) and **Ejbareh Tamimi**, who was reportedly arrested from his home in the days after 15 April, apparently on suspicion of having been in contact with, and having provided information to, al-Arabiya TV. He was reportedly tortured in order to force him to make a recorded “confession” which he refused to do, and died in Sepidar Prison as a result.

Akbar Nahayrat (or Nehirat) (aged 36), a political activist from Ahvaz, who was arrested on 20 April 2011 at his home in the Hay al-Nahda district of Ahvaz city, was reportedly tortured or otherwise ill-treated in an undisclosed place of detention. He was subsequently transferred to Razi Hospital in Ahvaz after his health deteriorated, where he is held under guard. His wife has been allowed to visit him very briefly but was unable to ascertain the extent of his injuries. Earlier, **Hadi Rashidi** was reported to have been arrested in March 2011, and was also later hospitalized, apparently as a result of torture or other ill-treatment.

At least eight Ahwazi Arabs in Iran, including one minor, were executed between 5 and 7 May 2011. The eight men executed included at least three brothers: **Ali Heydari (known as Taha)** aged 25, **Jasem Heydari (known as Abbas)** aged 23, and **Naser Heydari (known as Abd al-Rahman)** aged 21. The five others were named as **Hashem Hamidi**, aged 16, **Ahmad Nawaseri (or al-Nasiri)**, aged 22, **Amir Ma’avi (Ma’awi) Amir Badavi (Badawi) and Ali Na’ami**. One source suggests that Ali Na’ami was executed separately on 4 May 2011 in a different case and that the individual concerned was a fourth brother named **Mansour Heydari**. A ninth man, whose name is unknown to

¹ For further information see *Khuzestan, Iran: Amnesty International calls for an end to the cycle of violence in Khuzestan and an investigation into the root causes of recent unrest*, Index: MDE 13/017/2005, 20 April 2005, <http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/info/MDE13/017/2005/en>

² For further information, see: *Iran Arab minority protest deaths must be investigated*, 19 April 2011, <http://www.amnesty.org/en/news-and-updates/iran-arab-minority-protest-deaths-must-be-investigated-2011-04-19>

Amnesty International, was also reportedly executed at the same time, but it is unclear whether he was convicted in the same case, or on separate charges.

Three of these eight, of whom one was Ali Heydari, were reportedly been executed in public at a crossroads near Hamidiyeh in Khuzestan province. The others were reportedly executed in Karoun Prison, Ahvaz. The only body said to have been returned to family members is that of the minor, Hashem Hamidi, which may have been decapitated during the hanging.

The Iranian authorities have not acknowledged these executions, although a police colonel said on 21 April 2011 that eight members of a group he described as “the Khalq-e Arab terrorist group” had been arrested by security forces, accused of the killing of three individuals, including an LEF official on 15 April 2011. Ahwazi Arab sources have claimed that the eight were arrested in connection with demonstrations which took place on 15 April 2011 in Khuzestan province. If so, they were tried, convicted and executed within three weeks. Amnesty International does not have information concerning most of their trials, although Hashem Hamidi is reported to have been tried without the presence of a lawyer in a proceeding which lasted about ten minutes. The organization has long expressed concern over the fairness of trials in Iran, including in Revolutionary Courts. The precise charges of which those reportedly executed were convicted of are unknown, but may have been “enmity against God”, a charge frequently levelled against those alleged to have been involved in armed opposition to the state.

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For more information please call Amnesty International's press office in London, UK, on +44 20 7413 5566 or email: press@amnesty.org

International Secretariat, Amnesty International, 1 Easton St., London WC1X 0DW, UK
www.amnesty.org