

# AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL

## PUBLIC STATEMENT

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### **Iran: Students languish in jail as academic year starts**

As the new academic year begins on 23 September 2010, many students are languishing in jail in Iran. Amnesty International is calling on the Iranian authorities to immediately and unconditionally release all student prisoners of conscience targeted for their political or human rights activism. Other students have been subjected to arbitrary measures and have been banned from university studies.

In particular the organization is calling on the authorities to release immediately and unconditionally imprisoned student leader Majid Tavakkoli and members of the central committee of the Office for the Consolidation of Unity (OCU - Daftar-e Tahkim-e Vahdat), a student organization. Other members of the OCU's central committee are free on bail but face the possibility of imprisonment in the future.

The OCU is a nationwide student organization that has been at the forefront of demanding political reform and greater respect for human rights in recent years. Since the disputed presidential election of 2009 which triggered a period of intense repression by the Iranian authorities, many of the OCU's members around the country – including members of its central committee - have been banned from study, either temporarily or permanently; arrested; and some imprisoned. Some have been tortured or otherwise ill-treated.

Students banned from study because of their peaceful exercise of their rights to freedom of expression, association and assembly are deprived of their right to education as guaranteed by Article 13 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) to which Iran is a state party.

The OCU was declared illegal by the Ministry of Science, Research and Technology in early 2009. Amnesty International is also urging the Iranian authorities to allow the OCU to continue its peaceful activities and to uphold fully the rights to freedom of expression, association and assembly.

Since the election, the authorities have also interfered with university teaching, launching a purge aimed particularly of social sciences, and have dismissed or forcibly retired university staff in universities across the country, apparently on account of their political or other conscientiously held beliefs. Some have even been arrested. Such interference with university teaching and harassment of professors also constitutes a breach of Iran's obligations under Article 13 of the ICESCR.

The Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights has clarified in its General Comment on Article 13 that the right to education can only be enjoyed if accompanied by the academic freedom of staff, which in turn requires the autonomy of institutions of higher education. In particular, the committee found that:

“Members of the academic community, individually or collectively, are free to pursue, develop and transmit knowledge and ideas, through research, teaching, study, discussion, documentation, production, creation or writing. Academic freedom includes the liberty of individuals to express freely opinions about the institution or system in which they work, to

fulfil their functions without discrimination or fear of repression by the State or any other actor, to participate in professional or representative academic bodies, and to enjoy all the internationally recognized human rights applicable to other individuals in the same jurisdiction.”

Currently imprisoned members of the central committee of the OCU include:

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 nine-and-a-half year sentence was upheld in July 2010. In early September 2010 she was brought to Branch 1053 of the General Court to face a fresh charge of “disturbing public order” relating to a peaceful gathering of families and supporters of political prisoners outside Evin Prison to celebrate the Iranian New Year in March 2009. If convicted, she could face up to one year’s imprisonment and 74 lashes.

23-year-old Milad Asadi is a student of electrical engineering at Khajeh Nasir University and is also a leading member of the Office for the Consolidation of Unity (OCU), a national student body which has been prominent in demanding political reform and an end to human rights violations in recent years. He was arrested shortly before mass demonstrations against the government took place on university campuses on 7 December, which is Students’ Day in Iran, marking the anniversary of the killing of three students in 1953 by police. In May 2010, he was sentenced to seven years in prison, which was upheld on appeal in July 2010. Like Bahareh Hedayat, in early September 2010, he was brought to Branch 1053 of the General Court to face a fresh charge of “disturbing public order” relating to a peaceful gathering of families and supporters of detained student activists outside Evin Prison to celebrate the Iranian New Year in March 2009.

Other members of the OCU targeted for repression include Mehdi Arabshahi, who is the Secretary of the OCU and who was arrested on 27 December 2009 - the religious festival of Ashoura - when mass demonstrations against the government took place. He suffered a heart attack while detained, possibly as a result of torture or other ill-treatment, and was released on bail on 11 March, but has yet to be tried. He has required hospital treatment for heart problems since his release.

24-year-old Morteza Samyari, another central committee member arrested on 4 January 2010, is also currently free on bail pending his appeal against his conviction and sentence following a mass “show trial” of 16 persons on 30 January 2010. All were accused of involvement in

orchestrating the Ashoura protests. He was sentenced on 18 February 2010 to one year in prison on the charge of propaganda against the system and a five-year prison sentence on the charge of “gathering and colluding with the intent to act against national security”, apparently in connection with a proposed meeting with EU representatives which never took place. He was released on bail of 500 million rials (approx US\$500,000) in February 2010, and a guarantee of a further 100 millions rials (approx US\$100,000).

Amnesty International is also calling for the immediate and unconditional release of student leader Majid Tavakkoli a member of the Islamic Students’ Association at Amir Kabir University in Tehran, where he studied ship-building. He was arrested outside Amir Kabir University, on 7 December 2010 after making a speech at one of the nationwide student demonstrations that day. His lawyer was not permitted to attend his trial, which took place in January 2010, after which he was sentenced to eight-and-a-half years in prison. He was also issued a five-year ban on any involvement in political activities and on leaving the country. His conviction and sentence were upheld on appeal in September 2010.

Public Document

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