

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL PUBLIC STATEMENT

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Iran: Prisoners of conscience and death row prisoners on hunger strike

Amnesty International is concerned about more than 50 imprisoned members of Iran's Kurdish minority who are currently on hunger strike in prison in protest against continuing torture, executions and other gross abuses of human rights. There are growing concerns for their safety as a result of their hunger strike.

The hunger strike was launched by a number of prisoners on 25 August 2008. Reliable sources indicate that those protesting now include 15 prisoners who are being held in Sanandaj, 33 at Oroumiye, three at Saqqez and four who are being held in Tehran. The hunger strikers include three women's rights activists - Zeynab Beyezidi, Hana Abdi and Ronak Saffarzadeh, all prisoners of conscience who should be released immediately and unconditionally – and at least eight prisoners who were sentenced to death after unfair trials.

The hunger strikers are calling for an end to the use of torture and other ill-treatment of prisoners and for an immediate end to executions and the use of the death penalty. They are also calling for better prison conditions and independent inspection of Iranian prisons by national and international human rights bodies, for an end to the use of internal exile as a method of punishing dissent and for an end to official discrimination against the Kurdish minority, including prisoners.

There is little to indicate that the Iranian authorities will accede to the hunger strikers' demands even though the prisoners have termed their hunger strike 'unlimited'. To date, the authorities have not expressed any reaction to the demands or to the hunger strikers themselves.

The prisoners' demands reflect longstanding problems in Iran which affect the Kurdish minority and many others who oppose or criticise the authorities (see, for example, Amnesty International's report, Iran: Human rights abuses against the Kurdish minority, published July 2008, <http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/asset/MDE13/088/2008/en/d140767b-5e45-11dd-a592-c739f9b70de8/mde130882008eng.pdf>)

Amnesty International continues to call for an end to torture, executions and other human rights violations in Iran, including discrimination against Kurds and members of other ethnic and religious minorities. The organisation also continues to call for the immediate, unconditional release of all prisoners of conscience, including the three women's rights activists who are among the hunger-striking prisoners, and for the suspension of all death sentences, including those against hunger strikers Arslan Oliya'i, Anvar Hossein Panahi, Habib Latifi, Farhad Kamangar, Farhad Vakili and Ali Haydariyan.

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