

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL

Public Statement

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Iran: Abdollah Nouri's release welcomed, but all prisoners of conscience must also be released

Amnesty International welcomes the release on 5 November 2002 of Abdollah Nouri, a former Minister of the Interior and publisher of the banned newspaper *Khordad* but is calling for all prisoners of conscience to also be released. Abdollah Nouri was imprisoned in November 1997.

Following the closure of *Khordad* newspaper on 26 November 1999, Hojjatoleslam Abdollah Nouri of *Khordad* was tried on 20 vaguely worded charges that did not amount to internationally recognizable criminal offences. They related to defamation and insult and included accusations of publishing "anti-Islamic" articles, insulting government officials, promoting friendly relations with the United States of America and giving publicity to Ayatollah Hossein Ali Montazeri, a senior religious figure under house arrest since 1997.

Abdollah Nouri was tried and sentenced to five years' imprisonment by a special court, the Special Court for The Clergy (SCC), in which procedures fell far short of international standards for fair trial.

On 30 November 1999, Amnesty International said that the sentencing of Hojjatoleslam Abdollah Nouri on 27 November 1999 reflected "the increasing use of special courts to imprison individuals involved in journalism."

"Amnesty International welcomes Abdollah Nouri's release, but he and a catalogue of other prisoners of conscience" including writers, journalists and lawyers such as Hojjatoleslam Yousefi Eshkevari, Akbar Ganji, Emadaddin Baqi, Nasser Zarafshan and those still in prison in connection with their involvement with the 'Berlin conference' - were sent to prison only on account of their conscientiously held beliefs. We hope that releases of other prisoners of conscience will follow very soon," Amnesty International said.

A spokesperson for Amnesty International added that "Iran must reform the vague provisions it uses to try journalists and thinkers; free its judiciary from all political interference and ensure that the powers of investigator, prosecutor and judge are not vested in one person."

"The structure of the judiciary, especially concerning how judges are appointed and removed, is in need of urgent reform and lawyers and the Bar Association need to be accorded protection in line with their duties and not face legal proceedings in connection with the defence of clients," Amnesty International concluded.

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