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IRAN: More Failures of Iranian Justice

"The closed hearing of the human rights lawyers, Shirin Ebadi and Mohsen Rahami, along with several others, scheduled for tomorrow, Saturday 15 July in Branch 16 of the Public Court Dadgah-e 'Omomi, is another failure for an Iranian justice system which is losing the confidence of the Iranian people." Amnesty International said today.

"It is outrageous that Shirin Ebadi, a woman lawyer investigating the murders of writers and intellectuals in 1998 and 1999, and Hojjatoleslam Mohsen Rahami, the defence lawyer of students injured during the security forces' raid on student dormitories in July 1999, should be accused of breaking the law while carrying out their legitimate work," Amnesty International said "Urgent reform is needed to ensure the true independence of the judiciary, so that human rights defenders are protected while those who have enjoyed impunity are brought to justice."

The two lawyers were arrested separately on Tuesday 27 June. They are accused of producing and distributing a video cassette which allegedly "disturbs public opinion". In the video, a man reportedly speaks of his activities in the vigilante group, Ansar-e Hezbollah. He allegedly implicates senior establishment figures in allegations about the activities of the group, including a failed attempt to murder Hojjatoleslam Abdollah Nouri, former Vice President and Interior Minister. Mohsen

Rahami defended Hojjatoleslam Abdollah Nouri, who was imprisoned in November 1999 for five years following an unfair trial in the Special Court for the Clergy, in connection with articles that appeared in the now banned newspaper, Khordad, for which he was managing editor.

Shirin Ebadi, an advocate of women's and other human rights, has defended many victims of human rights violations. She is the lawyer for the family of Darioush and Parvaneh Foruhar, who were among those who were murdered in 1998 and 1999 as part of the "serial murders" of writers and intellectuals. In this connection, she is a member of Komite-ye Defa' az Hoquq-e Qorbanian-e Qatle-ha-ye Zanjire'i (Committee for the Defense of Rights of the Victims of the Serial Murders). She, along with Mohsen Rahami are the lawyers for the family of a man who was killed by the security forces' raid on the students' dormitory.

Mohsen Rahami, a former member of parliament and law professor at Tehran University, also defended the students who were injured during the security forces' July 1999 raid on the dormitory. Earlier this week the officials accused of causing the injuries and associated damages were acquitted. The court, however, recognised that the rights of the students were violated and they were awarded financial compensation. As a trained cleric Mohsen Rahami has been detained under provisions of the Special Court for the Clergy (SCC).

These arrests come on the first anniversary of student demonstrations which followed the closure of a newspaper, Salam. Those demonstrations were followed by widespread disturbances and many hundreds of arrests, along with violations of human rights. Many student groups and thousands of demonstrators reportedly marked the occasion by handing out flowers although disturbances and arrests were reported in Tehran and Tabriz.

"One year ago Amnesty International called for a full and impartial investigation into the killing and serious attacks that occurred during student demonstrations that commenced on 8 July 1999. A year later, freedom of expression remains under threat, leading journalists and intellectuals have been detained and now human rights defenders appear in court," Amnesty International said. "Ayatollah Hashemi Shahroudi, the Head of the Judiciary has called for reform in the judiciary, but when will he deliver it?"

Background

Shirin Ebadi was the lawyer for Mehrangiz Kar (f) and Shahla Lahiji (f) (see UA 103/00), two women detained in April on grounds of harming national interests in connection with statements they made at an academic and cultural conference in Berlin, held in early April.

Mehrangiz Kar and Shahla Lahiji were released on bail of approximately US\$60,000 in June, after Shirin Ebadi resigned as their lawyer, stating in an interview on 5 June that she was not permitted to be with the women when they were questioned and not permitted to meet with them.

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