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Iran: Allow peaceful rally to support Egypt and Tunisia protests

Amnesty International today urged the Iranian authorities to ensure that those wishing to show their solidarity with protesters in Egypt and Tunisia be allowed to do so peacefully on 14 February 2011 and to release all those arrested in connection with the planned rally, including opposition leader Mehdi Karroubi, currently under house arrest.

On 5 February 2011, Mehdi Karroubi and another opposition leader, Mir Hossein Mousavi, addressed an open letter to Iran's Interior Ministry, requesting permission to hold a rally on 14 February "[i]n order to declare support for the popular movements in the region, in particular, the freedom-seeking movements of the people of Egypt and Tunisia..."

Despite official statements of support for the popular protests in Egypt, the authorities rejected their request. On 9 February 2011, a Judiciary spokesman said that Iranians should show their solidarity by taking part in official rallies on 11 February, held to commemorate the 32nd anniversary of the Islamic Revolution in Iran.

The authorities have carried out a wave of arrests of journalists and political activists in recent days. Amnesty International fears that they have been arrested to prevent them from attending the rally.

Mehdi Karroubi, who was a candidate in the disputed 2009 presidential election, was put under house arrest on 10 February. Police officers surrounded his home and his sons said that they each tried to enter the house to see their father, but were stopped from doing so. One of them was told that the new restrictions imposed on his father would stay in place until 14 February. Telephone lines to the house are reported to have been cut.

Taghi Rahmani, an advisor to Mehdi Karroubi during the presidential election, was arrested at his home by plain-clothed police officers on 9 February, who also confiscated his documents. His current whereabouts are unknown. Taghi Rahmani is also a writer and a journalist and a member of the Melli Mazhabi (Nationalist-Religious Alliance), close to the Iran Freedom Movement (IFM), a banned political party which advocates social and political reform.

Mohammad-Hossein Sharif-Zadegan, a close aide to Mir Hossein Mousavi during the presidential election, was arrested on 10 February. He is a university lecturer and formerly minister of welfare between 2000 and 2004.

Saleh Noghrekar, nephew of Mir Hossein Mousavi's wife and Secretary of the Legal Committee at Mousavi's 2009 presidential election headquarters, along with two other members of Mousavi's election campaign team, were arrested on 9 February 2011

Kourosh Zaim, a member of the National Front of Iran, was arrested on 10 February and transferred to an undisclosed location. His home was raided and searched by members of the security forces, who confiscated some of his belongings. Two journalists, **Nezhat Amirabadian**, who writes for the newspapers *Fararu*, *Aftab* and *Hammihan News*, and **Maziar Khosravi** of *Shargh*, have also been arrested. The reason for their arrests is unclear, but may also be connected with the planned rally on 14 February.

Amnesty International calls on the Iranian government to allow people to peacefully exercise their rights to freedom of expression and assembly and to end the practice of pre-emptive arbitrary arrests of individuals exercising peaceful political activities.

Background

Many members of political opposition parties have been arrested, tried and sentenced since the disputed presidential election in 2009. There have been developments in the cases of some of them in recent weeks, including those of members of the IFM, who have received prison sentences in connection with their peaceful political activities.

Emad Bahavar, head of the Youth Wing of the IFM, which was active during the presidential election campaign, is currently serving a 10-year sentence in Section 350 of Evin Prison. He was also banned from media and political activities for 10 years. Emad Bahavar has been arrested four times since the start of 2009 apparently in connection with the election. He was mentioned in the second mass “show trial” of August 2009, during which the IFM was accused of being part of a “soft revolution” which the authorities claimed was aimed at overthrowing the Islamic Republic. He was arrested once more on 7 March 2010 and sentenced on 1 December 2010 by Branch 15 of the Revolutionary Court in Tehran on charges of “colluding to act against national security”, “propaganda against the system” and “membership of the IFM”. His sentence was upheld in January 2011.

Mehdi Mo’tamedi Mehr, head of both the IFM’s Education and Research Committee and the Committee to Defend Free, Healthy and Fair Elections, was arrested at the Intelligence Ministry after being summoned for interrogation on 4 January 2010. He was released in March 2010. On 8 February 2011 less than an hour after the start of a trial session before Branch 28 of the Revolutionary Court in Tehran, his lawyer was informed that her client had been sentenced to five years’ imprisonment, on charges of “membership of the IFM”, “propaganda against the system” and “gathering and colluding to act against national security”.

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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