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Iran: Arrests and deaths continue as authorities tighten grip

Amnesty International is concerned about further arrests of politicians, journalists, lawyers and others in connection with the recent disputed presidential election in Iran. Hundreds of people are believed to be detained – many held in undisclosed locations – across Iran. Scores more – possibly as many as 197 - are reported to have been arrested on 9 July 2009 at a demonstration marking the tenth anniversary of 18 Tir, the suppression of student-led protests in 1999 in which at least one student was killed and many others were tortured or otherwise ill-treated. The families of those detained for commemorating the victims of the 1999 crackdown are said to have learnt only from posters pasted up by the authorities in public places that they can find out about the detainees' cases at court on 19 July 2009. Those detained are believed to be held in Evin Prison and at a detention facility in Kahrizak in Karaj, near Tehran.

Amnesty International is calling for anyone held solely for peacefully exercising their rights to freedom of expression, assembly and association to be released immediately and unconditionally, and for all others to be promptly charged and tried in proceedings which meet international standards for fair trial or released. In any event, the authorities should immediately clarify the fate of all those detained in connection with recent events.

Amnesty International is also calling for a full and impartial investigation into the death of Sohrab Arabi, a 19-year-old student, who died from a bullet wound to the heart. He disappeared during a demonstration on 15 June 2009. His family was then unable to find out any information about him until 11 July when they were summoned to court where they recognized him from photographs of dead individuals. His body had apparently been at the Coroner's Office since 19 June. There is, as yet, no information as to what happened to him between 15 and 19 June, including either the exact date, or the circumstances, of his death.

Among those reported to have been arrested in recent days are political activists, journalists, academics and lawyers. Amnesty International fears for their safety in detention, as torture or other ill-treatment of detainees is common in Iran. They include:

- Journalist Massoud Bastani, who was arrested on 5 July when he went to the Revolutionary Court in Tehran to enquire about his pregnant wife Mahsa Amr-Abadi, also a journalist, who was arrested on 14 June.
- Human rights lawyer Mohammad Ali Dadkhah, who was arrested on 8 July 2009 and taken from his office in Tehran, along with several colleagues. Some of his colleagues were released shortly afterwards, but Mohammad Ali Dadkhah's whereabouts remain unknown.
- Bijan Khajepour Khoei, a business and economic consultant, who was arrested on 27 June 2009 at Tehran airport when he arrived back from a trip to Vienna and London. During his brief trip abroad, he spoke to trade officials in Vienna and met the Iran British Business Chamber in London as part of his work to support Iranian business and encourage foreign investment in Iran. His whereabouts are unknown, and his family fear for his health as he is diabetic.
- Feyzollah Arabsorkhi, a former deputy trade minister and a senior member of the Islamic Revolution Mujahidin Organisation, a reformist political party, was arrested on 7 July.
- Journalist Kaveh Mozaffari, who was only released from Evin Prison on 15 June following his arrest on 1 May 2009 while covering a peaceful demonstration by labour

activists on International Labour Day, was arrested in the street on 9 July by security forces.

- Mohammad Reza Yazdanpanah, a member of the Islamic Participation Front, was arrested in Tehran on 7 July.
- Joint US-Iranian national Kian Tajbaksh, a social scientist and urban planner who has taught at universities in Iran and the USA, was arrested at 9:00pm on 9 July 2009, at his home in Tehran. Two people who identified themselves as Iranian security officials, arrived at his residence, questioned him and his wife and searched the residence for three hours, before taking him away along with two computers and other items.
- Mehdi Mahdavi Azad, the director of the Shahab News site, was arrested on or around 23 June, but news of his arrest has only just been released.
- Towhid Beigi, a photographer associated with the campaign of presidential candidate Mehdi Karroubi, was arrested in Enqelab Square, Tehran, during the demonstrations of 9 July.
- Journalist Hengameh Shahidi, a member of the National Trust Party's Tehran branch, is reported to have been arrested on 30 June.
- Majid Sa'idi, a well-known photographer for domestic and international media, was arrested on 10 July from his home.

Background information

In the month since the announcement on 13 June that the incumbent President Ahmadinejad had won the previous day's presidential election, which hundreds of thousands of Iranians dispute, the Iranian authorities have imposed draconian restrictions on freedom of expression, association and assembly. Security forces, including the paramilitary Basij, have been widely deployed in the streets to prevent and disperse peaceful and other demonstrations. Communications have been significantly disrupted and Iranian publications have been banned from publishing information about the nationwide unrest since the result was declared. Foreign journalists have been banned from the streets, their visas not renewed and some foreign reporters have been arrested or expelled from the country.

According to statements by officials recorded by Amnesty International, over 2,000 people have been arrested since 12 June by the police and Basij forces across the country during demonstrations or in their aftermath. These include prominent political figures close to two of the presidential candidates, Mir Hossein Mousavi and Mehdi Karroubi, and to former President Khatami, who supported Mir Hossein Mousavi's presidential election campaign. Some human rights defenders, as well as journalists have also been detained.

The authorities have acknowledged that up to 21 people were killed during demonstrations, but in at least some cases – such as that of Neda Agha-Soltan – whose death was filmed and circulated widely on the internet – they have denied that state officials were responsible, although her death does not appear to have been properly investigated. Unofficial Iranian sources say that many more protestors were killed, but it remains difficult to obtain accurate information about the total number of deaths as the whereabouts of many demonstrators remain unknown and the authorities have placed restrictions on bereaved families from holding memorial services. In the past, according to information received by Amnesty International, the Iranian authorities have under-reported deaths at the hands of security forces during demonstrations.

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