

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL PUBLIC STATEMENT

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Iran: Welcome releases must be followed by freedom for all prisoners of conscience

Amnesty International welcomes the reported release of around 70 prisoners of conscience and political prisoners, convicted of vaguely worded “security related” charges including involvement in the protests which followed the disputed presidential election of 2009. They were among 100 said to have been pardoned by Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei on 27 August 2011, ahead of the Eid al-Fitr celebrations at the end of the Islamic month of Ramadan.

Those freed included Dr Arash Alaei, Milad Asadi and Mohammad Pour Abdollah, whose release the organization had campaigned for. Most of those released had served over half their sentences and were eligible for parole. Official media also reported that 1,218 other prisoners had been pardoned in a separate decree.

However, many other prisoners of conscience remain held in poor conditions in Iran’s overcrowded prisons which often lead to them developing serious health problems. They include lawyers such as **Nasrin Sotoudeh, Mohammad Seyfzadeh, Javid Houtan Kiyani** and **Mostafa Daneshju**; journalists such as **Ahmad Zeidabadi, Abdollah Momeni, Isa Saharkhiz, Bahman Ahmadi Amou’i** and **Keyvan Samimi** (who has recently developed a liver tumour for which he may not be receiving necessary medical treatment); and student activists such as **Behareh Hedayat, Majid Tavakkoli, Zia Nabavi, Ashkan Zahabian** and **Mahdieh Golrou**.

Human rights and minority rights activists are also still imprisoned, such as **Abolfazl Abedini Nasr** (previously the spokesperson for Human Rights Activists in Iran, a human rights organization), **Mohammad Sadiq Kabudvand** (a member of the Kurdish minority who founded the Human Rights Organization of Kurdistan), **Ronak Safazadeh** (also a member of the Kurdish minority) and **Sa’id Metinpour** (a member of the Azerbaijani minority who called for greater cultural and linguistic rights for his community). They are held alongside women’s rights activists such as **Alieh Aghdam-Doust, Mahoubeh Karami, Maryam Bidgoli** and **Maryam Bahreman**. Political activists are also held, such as **Mohsen Mirdamadi, Behzad Nabavi, Abdollah Ramazanzadeh** and **Heshmatollah Tabarzadi**, as well as trade union activists such as teacher **Rasoul Bodaghi**, and bus workers **Ebrahim Madadi** and **Reza Shahabi**.

Members of some of Iran’s religious minorities also remain held as prisoners of conscience, such as **seven Baha’i leaders** serving 20-year prison sentences imposed for alleged “espionage”, which they deny, and **Pastor Yousef Naderkhani**, a Christian whose death sentence for “apostasy” was overturned, but who remains in prison awaiting a review of his case, which could see the death sentence re-imposed.

In addition, arrests are continuing of individuals who appear to have been targeted for their political or other beliefs or activities. **Shahrokh Zamani, Nima Pour Yaghoub, Sassan Vahebeivash, Mohammad Jarahi** and **Sayed Boyuk Sayedlar**, all labour rights activists, were all arrested in June 2011 and have been tried on various charges relating to their links to a workers’ group. Sassan Vahebeivash and Sayed Boyuk Sayedlar were reportedly released on bail on 20 August 2011. Some of those arrested are held in conditions amounting to enforced disappearance. For example, **Ali Reza Sepahi Laeen**, a poet and member of the Kurdish minority who works in the Public Relations office of Ferdowsi University in Mashhad, was arrested on 30 July 2011 from his home in the city. As of 27 August 2011, his family had been unable to discover any information as to his whereabouts and are extremely worried about his health as he suffers from diabetes.

Additionally, dozens of environmental protesters calling for immediate action to halt the desiccation of Lake Oroumieh in West Azerbaijan province are reported to have been arrested in various towns and cities in north-west Iran following demonstrations on 27 August, with at least three reported to have been killed by security forces.

Amnesty International is calling for the immediate and unconditional release of anyone held in Iran solely for the peaceful exercise of their rights to freedom of expression, association or assembly, or on account of their religious beliefs. All others held should be granted immediate access to their families and lawyers, and should be released unless they are brought to trial in accordance with international standards for fair trial.

Background

Dr Arash Alaei, an internationally renowned expert in the prevention and treatment of HIV and AIDS who was not politically active, had been held since his arrest in June 2008 was serving a six year prison term after conviction of “co-operating with an enemy government” after months in pre-trial detention without access to a lawyer and an unfair trial in which secret evidence was produced which he was not allowed to see or challenge. His brother Kamiar, arrested around the same time and sentenced to three years in prison, was released after serving two and a half years. Their arrest is believed to be related to their links with foreign academics and civil society organizations, including in the USA. Amnesty International regarded them as prisoners of conscience who should never have been imprisoned and campaigned for their release along with a wide range of health and human rights organizations.

Milad Asadi, aged about 24, was a student of electrical engineering at Khajeh Nasir University and also a leading member of the Office for the Consolidation of Unity, a national student body which has been prominent in demanding political reform and an end to human rights violations in recent years at the time of his arrest. He was arrested shortly before mass demonstrations against the government took place on university campuses on 7 December 2009 - Students' Day in Iran - marking the anniversary of the killing of three students in 1953 by police. He was held for weeks in solitary confinement in a tiny cell of two square metres. He was initially sentenced to seven years in prison.

Mohammad Pour Abdollah, a Tehran University student linked to the left-wing Iranian students' organization Students for Freedom and Equality, was arrested at his house on 12 February 2009. Held for over one month in solitary confinement at Evin Prison, he was transferred on 18 March 2009 to Ghezel Hesar Prison in Karaj, west of Tehran. His six-year prison term, imposed after conviction of “gathering and colluding with the aim of harming national security, and “propaganda against the system” and membership of groups opposed to the system” was reduced to three years on appeal.

Others who are reported to have been among those released are Ehsan Abdoh Tabrizi, Laleh Hassanpour, Zahra Jabbari, Kayvan Farzin, Amir Aslani, Sourena Hashemi, Mohsen Ghamin, Arsalan Abadi, Nazanin Hassan Nia, Soussan Tebyanian, Akram Heydarian, Sama Shamlou, Fatemeh Darvish, Ali Behzadian Nejad, Hamid Reza Nojumi, Abolfazl Ghassemi, Kourosh Ghassemi, Artin Ghazanfari, Gholamreza Azadi, Meysam Roudaki, Amir Hossein Ghanbari, Omid Sharifi Dana, Behnam Ansari, Rouhollah Mirzakhani, Massoud Yazdchi, Mohsen Mokhtari, Sajjad Moradi, Ali Malihi, Fatemeh Khorramjou, Kiarash Kamrani, Hamid Samiei, an Esfahan University professor identified as Mousavi, Omid Esmailzadeh, and Mojtaba Hashemi.

Public Document

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