

AI Index: PRE 01/240/2009  
26 June 2009

## **Iran: Journalists detained as news restrictions tighten**

The Iranian authorities must immediately release dozens of journalists arrested since 12 June and who are at risk of torture in detention, Amnesty International said today as it adopted all of them as prisoners of conscience.

“It is shocking that journalists – whose job it is to provide information to others - are being detained, on top of all the other draconian measures the authorities have taken to restrict the free flow of information about what is really happening in Iran. Rather than trying to investigate alleged abuses, the only message the authorities are sending is that they are seeking to hide the truth, both from their own citizens and the rest of the world.”

Dozens of journalists – some who also campaigned for either Mir Hossein Mousavi or Mehdi Karroubi, both candidates in the presidential election, have been detained in the past fortnight with their whereabouts mostly unknown.

For example, around 20 of 25 employees of the newspaper Kalameh Sabz arrested at their office in Haft Tir Square on 22 June are still detained and their whereabouts remain unknown. Kalameh Sabz is a newspaper established by presidential candidate Mir Hossein Mousavi in 2009, and which has not been published since 14 June.

Since the announcement on 13 June that President Ahmadinejad had won the election, the Iranian authorities have imposed severe restrictions on freedom of expression. Access to the internet has been blocked or significantly interrupted. Iranian publications have been banned from publishing information about the unrest. Foreign news journalists have been banned from the streets, and some foreign reporters have been expelled from the country.

“If nothing else, the authorities must immediately disclose the whereabouts of these journalists, ensure that they are not tortured or otherwise ill-treated and allow their families and lawyers access to them,” said Hassiba Hadj Sahraoui. “Unless the authorities lift all unlawful restrictions on freedom of expression – which includes the right of journalists to report on events – and release all the journalists arrested, we can only assume they are trying to hide evidence of abuse and further silence any critical voice”.

Background:

Hundreds of politicians, journalists, academics, students and human rights defenders, have been detained, some briefly, across Iran since the election. Most are either supporters of Mir Hossein Mousavi or Mehdi

Karroubi, or are close to ex-President Khatami who supported Mir Hossein Mousavi's campaign. Others have been critical of incumbent President Ahmadinejad's policies. On 24 June, 70 academics who had met Mir Hossein Mousavi that day were arrested as they left his office. All but four were released later. Those still detained include Dr Ghorban Behzadian, the head of Mir Hossein Mousavi's election campaign. According to official statements, well over a thousand others have been arrested during demonstrations against the outcome of the election which have been met with excessive use of force by security forces. Many were beaten, and according to the authorities, up to 21 people have been killed, although the true number is likely to be higher.

Among journalists detained in the past fortnight are:

Mahsa Amrabad, a journalist for the Etemad-e Melli newspaper founded by presidential candidate Mehdi Karroubi, who was arrested from her home on 14 June.

Abdolreza Tajik, editor of the weekly magazine Farhikhtegan, who was arrested from the magazine's offices on 14 June.

Keyvan Samimi Behbehani, editor of the banned Nameh magazine, who was also arrested at home on 14 June. He is also a member of the Centre for Human Rights Defenders' Arbitrary Arrests Committee.

Mojtaba Pourmohsen, editor of the newspaper Gilan-e Emrooz, from the northern city of Rasht from where he hosted a programme for the Netherlands-based Radio Zamaneh, who was arrested on 15 June.

Fariborz Sorous, a freelance journalist who has given interviews to the Prague-based Radio Farda, who was reported to have been arrested on 16 June.

Saeed Laylaz, a prominent economic journalist who writes for Sarmayeh and who had been very critical of incumbent President Ahmadinejad's economic policies was arrested on 17 June.

Mohammad Ghochani, the editor of Etemad-e Melli was arrested on 18 June at his home. According to information received by Amnesty International, he is believed to be held in Section 209 of Evin Prison in Tehran, which is controlled by the Ministry of Intelligence.

Karim Arghandehpour, a freelance journalist and blogger who used to write for various now-banned reformist newspapers, who was arrested on 14 June.

Journalists reporting for foreign news outlets have also been arrested: Maziar Bahari, who has dual Canadian and Iranian nationality who reported for Newsweek from Iran, was arrested on 21 June. Iason Athanasiadis-Fowden, a Greek national who was covering the election for the Washington Times, was arrested when trying to leave Iran on or around 19 June.