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Iran: Fears for demonstrators as authorities warn of zero tolerance amid ongoing arrests and trials

Amnesty International is calling on the Iranian authorities to allow peaceful demonstrations, including by those opposed to the current government, on 11 February, the 31st anniversary of the Islamic Revolution in Iran. Various officials from the police and the judiciary have warned in recent days that anti-government demonstrations will be not be tolerated.

Amnesty International fears that the comments made by officials, and the wave of arrests, unfair trials and executions illustrated below presage renewed violence on the part of the state, should people heed the calls made by unsuccessful presidential candidates Mir Hossein Mousavi and Mehdi Karroubi to take to the streets to peacefully voice their opinions.

Amnesty International fully recognizes the Iranian authorities' duty and responsibility to safeguard the public and maintain order but this does not justify the suppression of peaceful protests, as has happened repeatedly over recent months, nor violence by state forces against peaceful demonstrators. All policing must be conducted in accordance with internationally recognized standards relating to policing and the use of force, and should be conducted by appropriately-trained law enforcement personnel – not the politically-partisan volunteer Basij militia, which has a record of committing serious human rights violations and is neither trained nor equipped for proper police work. No one should be subjected to assault and strong-arm treatment by the security forces and any persons accused of violent acts, such as stone-throwing or criminal damage, should be charged and tried fairly in full conformity with Iran's obligations under international law.

Mass demonstrations against the government are expected to go ahead on 11 February despite recent "show trials" of people accused of links to various opposition groups and orchestrating protests which have resulted in the imposition of long prison sentences and two executions. Those targeted have included alleged members of: a monarchist group, the Anjoman-e Padshahi Iran (API - Kingdom Assembly of Iran); the People's Mojahedin Organization of Iran (PMOI); a "Communist grouplet"; and members of the Baha'i faith.

Amnesty International is concerned that the Iranian authorities appear to be coercing detainees to falsely "confess" to links with particular political groups or organizations alleged to be fomenting the demonstrations in order to scapegoat them for the continuing protests against the government and ongoing human rights violations. The targeting of these groups and the severity of the government's actions appear to be intended, at least in part, to deter further protests, including those planned for 11 February.

The two men who were executed in January - Arash Rahmanipour and Mohammad Reza Ali-Zamani - were arrested before last June's disputed presidential election. At their trials, in which they were represented by court appointed lawyers and to which their own lawyers were denied access, they made coerced "confessions" and were convicted of having links to the API and attempting to make explosives. Arash Rahmanipour was allowed one 15-minute meeting with his lawyer after his trial. He said he had been forced to "confess" to the allegations presented by his interrogators, who had brought his pregnant sister before him and threatened that she would be harmed if he refused to do so.

These trials and executions have been used by Iranian authorities to support their contention that the mass popular protests of recent months have not been an expression of popular discontent about the disputed outcome of the presidential election and the authorities' brutal repression of protests but, rather, were fomented by foreign powers and exiled opposition groups intent on achieving regime change in Iran.

Background and recent cases documented by Amnesty International

Demonstrations against the government since the disputed presidential election of June 2009 have been met with harsh repression. The authorities have acknowledged over 40 deaths; Amnesty International believes the true number is at least 80, and possibly many more. Thousands have been arrested, many tortured or otherwise ill-treated and scores have been charged with vaguely-worded offences relating to national security, and convicted after "show trials" which have made a mockery of justice. More than 100 are believed to have been sentenced to prison terms, flogging or to be executed. At least nine people are believed to be at risk of execution. Several others among a group of 16 defendants whose "show trial" is currently underway and who face the charge of *moharebeh* (enmity against God), which can carry the death penalty, may also be at risk. Amnesty International, which opposes the death penalty in all cases, is urging the Iranian authorities to commute all death sentences.

The most recent mass protests took place at the time of the Tasoa and Ashoura religious festivals on 26 and 27 December 2009, when more than a thousand people were detained. Since then more than 200 others are said to have been arrested at their homes or workplaces and detained. Those held include: Mahin Fahimi, Ardavan Tarakameh and three others, detained at the former's home early on 28 December, and Omid Montazeri, Mahin Fahimi's son, who was arrested the next day.

Mahin Fahimi is a historian and a member of the group Mothers for Peace, which campaigns against possible military intervention in Iran over its nuclear programme, seeks "viable solutions" to the region's instability and campaigns against the arrest, detention and harassment of ordinary Iranians. She is also the aunt of Sohrab Arabi, one of the victims of the excessive use of force during the summer demonstrations (see <http://www.amnesty.org/en/news-and-updates/news/arrests-deaths-continue-iran-authorities-tighten-grip-20090722>). Her husband, Hamid Montazeri, was executed for political reasons during the infamous "prison massacre" of 1988, when thousands of political prisoners were executed.

Zohreh Tonekaboni, aged 62, a friend of Mahin Fahimi and co-member of Mothers for Peace, has been detained since 28 December 2009. A former prisoner of conscience for whom Amnesty International campaigned when she was imprisoned in the 1980s (see Iran: Women Prisoners of Conscience AI Index MDE 13/05/90, May 1990), she is also the widow of a prisoner killed during the 1988 "prison massacre".

On 27 January 2010, a Deputy Minister of Intelligence alleged that about 30 people detained in connection with the Ashoura demonstrations have links to left-wing groups, naming the People's Fedaiyan Organization of Iran, both its Majority and Minority factions, or have neo-communist sympathies, in relation to which he named Mothers for Peace. The families of Zohreh Tonekaboni and Mahin Fahimi both strongly deny that they currently have any such links or that Mothers for Peace has any political affiliations.

Since his arrest, Omid Montazeri, a 24-year-old law student and journalist, has been shown in televised excerpts of a "show trial" of 16 people accused of fomenting the Ashoura demonstrations. He was shown "confessing" to the charges against him, which include "gathering and conspiring to commit crimes against national security" and "propaganda against the system by participating in protests on Ashoura and giving interviews to foreign media". Another student, 20-year-old Mohammad Amin Valian appeared in the same trial, accused of *moharebeh* for participating in the demonstrations and throwing stones. Arrested

on 12 January 2009, his family has received no information as to his whereabouts other than that he is being held in a “special location” - possibly a detention centre run by the Revolutionary Guards. He has not been allowed any family visits nor has he been allowed access to a lawyer of his choice despite the serious charges brought against him.

Omid Montazeri said during his trials that he had written for the on-line cultural magazine *Sarpich*. Only six issues of *Sarpich* ever appeared, the last in May 2009, but other contributors included Ardavan Tarakmeh, detained since 27 December 2009, and students Yashar Darolshafa and Maziar Samiee, who were arrested during the night of 3-4 February. Yashar Darolshafa's mother and brother were also arrested as was Ardavan Tarakmeh's 25-year-old sister Bahar, but they were released two days later. Yashar Darolshafa's two cousins, Banafsheh Darolshafayi, a music instructor, and her sister Jamileh, a script-writer and journalist, are both believed to be detained since their arrest on 5 February.

At least 10 members of the Baha'i faith have also been arrested since the Ashoura demonstrations, of whom at least one – identified by the initials P.F – was among the 16 included in the “show trial” which began in January. The Baha'i International Community has strenuously denied any connection with the demonstrations. Others among the 16 defendants on trial in Tehran include individuals who the authorities allege are linked to the PMOI, which is banned in Iran.

Others detained since Ashoura include Mehraneh Atashi, an internationally-renowned photographer and her husband Majid Ghaffari. They were arrested from home on 12 January and are believed to be held in solitary confinement in Section 209 of Evin Prison, without access to family visits or lawyers of their choice. The precise reason for their arrest remains unclear.

Ali Reza Firouzi and Sorna Hashemi, both students expelled from Zanjan University for their role in exposing the sexual abuse of a female student in 2008, are also believed to have been detained after leaving Tehran on 2 January 2010 to visit Tabriz in north-western Iran, though this has not been acknowledged by the authorities. They appear to be victims of enforced disappearances. Their families have been unable to obtain information about them but believe they have been arrested as their internet accounts have been used by others, possibly Ministry of Intelligence officials. According to the website Reporters and Human Rights Activists in Iran, detainees recently released from Evin Prison who were shown a photograph of Sorna Hashemi say he was held there until late January but then moved to some other place.

Family members of perceived opponents of the government have also been detained, including the relatives of Ardavan Tarakmeh and Yashar Darolshafa mentioned above, and Noushin Ebadi, the sister of Nobel Peace prize Laureate Shirin Ebadi. Noushin Ebadi was detained from 28 December for almost three weeks, apparently to put pressure on Shirin Ebadi, who is currently abroad, to cease speaking out about human rights violations in Iran.

Relatives of prominent political figures who are reported to be still detained include Leila Tavassoli, who was arrested on 28 December. Her father, Mohammed Tavassoli, who is also being detained, is active in the Freedom Movement, and her uncle, Ebrahim Yazdi, is the leader of the Freedom Movement. He too has been held since 28 December. Leila Tavassoli's sister, Sara, has been detained since 3 January and her husband, Mohammad (Farid) Taheri, is also being held.

Amnesty International is calling for the immediate and unconditional release of all prisoners of conscience – those held for the peaceful exercise of their rights to freedom of expression, assembly and association, or on account of their family relationships to perceived opposition figures. Others detained should be released if not to be charged with recognizably criminal offences and brought to trial promptly and fairly, without recourse to the death penalty. Anyone detained should be protected from torture or other ill-treatment and, if charged, should

be tried in full conformity with international fair trial standards or released. Defendants should not be forced to incriminate themselves.

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