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Iran: Amnesty International renews calls for release of three Iranian detainees at a meeting with Akbar Ganji

At a meeting today with Akbar Ganji, Iran's most prominent ex-prisoner of conscience and advocate of freedom of expression, Amnesty International's Secretary General Irene Khan renewed the organization's calls for the release of three detainees in Iran whom it believes are, or are very likely to be, prisoners of conscience, held solely on account of their peaceful opinions or activities. All three are believed to be held in Section 209 of Evin Prison in Tehran, which is under the control of the Ministry of Intelligence. They are:

Mansour Ossanlu, the head of the unrecognized Union of Workers of the Tehran and Suburbs Bus Company (Sharekat-e Vahed), who has been detained since 22 December 2005 apparently in connection with his peaceful trade union activities. He is reported to suffer from eye and stomach problems for which he may not be receiving adequate medical attention. In June his case was reportedly sent to Branch 14 of the Revolutionary Court, but he has not yet been brought to trial.

Ramin Jahanbegloo, a prominent intellectual and writer on democracy and non-violence who holds joint Iranian and Canadian citizenship. He has been held without charge or trial since 27 April 2006. Some Iranian media believed to have close links to the authorities have reported that he is being held for allegedly co-operating with "counter-revolutionary" groups and US and Israeli intelligence services. The Minister of Intelligence stated on 7 May that he was in the custody of his ministry for "having contacts with foreigners".

Sayed Ali Akbar Mousavi-Kho'ini a former student leader and former member of the Islamic Consultative Assembly, the Majles (Iran's parliament), is also the head of the Alumni Association of Iran (*Sazman-e Danesh Amukhtegan-e Iran-e Eslami [Advar-e Tahkim-e Vahdat]*), which he helped found in 2000. This organization, whose membership is open to graduates of Iranian universities, has been active in promoting democracy and human rights in Iran. During his term in parliament he was an active advocate of human rights, and highlighted the cases of imprisoned students and political prisoners, including by inspecting prisons and illegal detention centres. He was detained during a peaceful demonstration on 12 June 2006, which was being held by women and men advocating an end to legal discrimination against women in Iran. He was reportedly beaten during his arrest and in prison after his detention.

At her meeting with Akbar Ganji, Ms Khan said, "It is outrageous that these three men should be held without charge or trial -- one for over six months -- apparently for peacefully expressing their opinions, or for defending human rights."

She added, "The Iranian authorities should release them, and any other prisoner of conscience in Iran, without delay or, at the very least, allow them the opportunity to answer any charges against them in fair and prompt trials, to which international observers are permitted access."

An international protest to be held in cities across the world has been initiated by Akbar Ganji, who was himself released from six years' imprisonment in March 2006. In Tehran, this will take the form of a three-day hunger strike by individuals in protest at the continuing detention of these three detainees.

"At a time when the world is paying attention to Iran's nuclear programme, it should also pay attention to the human rights situation in that country. The hunger strike is another desperate attempt to draw attention to the plight of prisoners of conscience in Iran," said Ms Khan.

Irene Khan urged people to take action on these cases by visiting the following links on the Amnesty International website:

Mansour Ossanlu:

<http://web.amnesty.org/library/Index/ENGMDE130022006?open&of=ENG-IRN>

Ramin Jahanbegloo:

<http://web.amnesty.org/appeals/index/irn-010706-wwa-eng>

<http://web.amnesty.org/library/Index/ENGMDE130482006?open&of=ENG-IRN>

Ali Akbar Mousavi-Kho'ini:

<http://web.amnesty.org/library/Index/ENGMDE130752006?open&of=ENG-IRN>

Background

Akbar Ganji will be launching the hunger strike in London at 10 am on 14 July 2006 outside the BBC's Bush House in London before speaking at an event entitled "Human Rights First", co-hosted by Amnesty International UK, the London University School of Oriental and African Studies, and Forum Iran at the Brunei Gallery, SOAS, at 6.30pm the same day.

Under Iranian legislation, there is no limit to how long detainees may be held in the investigation stage before formal charges are brought. Detainees are also routinely denied access to their lawyer during this period.

Iran is a state party to both the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, which guarantee the rights to freedom of expression and association and to form and join a trade union of one's choice.