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Post-election Iran violations some of the worst in 20 years

Human rights violations in Iran are now as bad as at any time in the past 20 years, Amnesty International said today in a new report on the aftermath of last June's presidential election.

"The Iranian leadership must ensure that the many allegations of torture, including rape, unlawful killings and other abuses are fully and independently investigated," said Hassiba Hadj Sahraoui, Deputy Director of Amnesty International's Middle East and North Africa Programme.

"Members of militias and officials who have committed violations must also be promptly held to account and on no account should any one be executed".

Amnesty International is calling on Iran's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei to allow two key UN human rights experts to visit Iran to help conduct an investigation,

"The Supreme Leader should order the government to invite in UN Special Rapporteurs on torture and on summary and arbitrary executions to help ensure that investigations are both rigorous and independent," said Hassiba Hadj Sahraoui.

"To date, the investigations announced by various Iranian authorities seem to have been more concerned with covering up abuses than getting at the truth."

The report describes patterns of abuse before, during and, particularly, after the June election, when the authorities deployed the Basij militia and Revolutionary Guards to suppress mass protests against its disputed outcome.

It includes testimonies from individuals who were detained during the protests, some of whom have since been forced to flee the country.

One former detainee says he was held at the notorious Kahrizak detention centre for some 58 days, being held in a shipping container throughout, and only allowed to contact his family after 43 days.

During interrogation, he was told that his son had been detained and would be raped if he did not "confess" and he was then beaten with a baton until he lost consciousness. He said there were more than 70 other detainees held in the container with him.

Another former detainee, Ali Kheradnejad, says he saw Amir Javadifar, a student, with his clothes ripped and his forehead bloody and later learned that he had died in detention, apparently as a result of torture or other ill-treatment. He then decided to speak out, whatever the risks.

Hassiba Hadj Sahraoui said: “The authorities must show that they have turned the page on the abuses committed this summer. They must now ensure that the policing of protests conforms fully to international standards on law enforcement, and keep the Basij and other strong arm forces off the street.”

“Anyone who is arrested or detained must be protected from torture or other ill-treatment, prisoners of conscience must be released and those convicted after unfair trials – including the “show trials” which made a mockery of justice – must have their cases reviewed, or be released. All death sentences should be commuted, and others not yet tried must receive fair trials.”

The crackdown on protest has continued as dozens of student activists were detained and others banned from study in the three weeks leading to Iran's national student day on 7 December, when over 200 were arrested during demonstrations that were met with beatings and tear gas by security forces.

International investigation

The level of investigations that the government has held so far generally appear to have been intended more to conceal than to expose the truth.

Iranian authorities have established two bodies to investigate the post-election crisis, including the treatment of detainees - a parliamentary committee and a three-person judicial committee.

Full details of the mandate and powers of both bodies have not been disclosed, and the parliamentary committee's findings have not been made public.

Manfred Nowak, UN Special Rapporteur on Torture and Philip Alston, UN Special Rapporteur on Extrajudicial, Summary, or Arbitrary Executions have requested entry into Iran and are waiting to hear back from authorities.

"The onus is on the authorities to address the widespread human rights violations that occurred during the unrest in an open, transparent and accountable manner," said Hassiba Hadj Sahraoui.

Official figures say 36 people were killed in post-election violence. The opposition puts the figure at over 70.

At least 4,000 people were arrested across Iran after the elections. At the time of writing of the report, up to 200 remain in jail, some arrested after the initial unrest died down.

CASE STUDIES

Case study 1:

On 28 June, Taraneh Mousavi, 28, along with more than 2,000 other demonstrators, went to the Ghoba Mosque in north-central Tehran to commemorate those killed in the ongoing unrest.

Amnesty International received various reports on the day that the security forces had blocked specific roads around the mosque, and detained scores of people, interrogating them in situ and generally releasing them. Around 40 were said to have been taken to a detention centre in nearby Pasdaran Street, where they were put in a large room. Some were interrogated.

Like many others, Taraneh Mousavi was said to have been left distraught following questioning, although it is not known what was said to her. Some detainees were then taken away, possibly to Evin Prison and others to a police station. Taraneh Mousavi was said to have been left behind.

From information collected by Amnesty International, it appears that around five hours after her arrest she disappeared. An anonymous telephone call several days later informed her parents that she had been raped, had tried to commit suicide and had been taken to Imam Khomeini Hospital in Karaj.

On arrival at the hospital her parents found that she had not been registered at the hospital. They were told that someone fitting Taraneh Mousavi's description had been seen by a nurse, but that she had been taken away while unconscious.

In the following days, unconfirmed reports suggested that Taraneh Mousavi had been ill-treated at Evin Prison, but it was unclear when this may have been.

Eighteen days after her arrest, on around 16 July, unnamed officials reportedly informed her parents that a burned corpse resembling Taraneh Mousavi's description had been found in the scrubland between Karaj and Qazvin.

The family, who were threatened that they should not talk publicly about their daughter's fate went to Qazvin to collect her body. By this point her parents were very anxious and would say nothing, not even where they wanted to bury her.

On 17 July, bloggers took up the case of Taraneh Mousavi and raised it with the committee under the direction of Mehdi Karroubi and Mir Hossein Mousavi, following up violations in the post-election period. It is believed that material relating to her case was seized by the authorities when this committee body was forcibly closed by the authorities in September.

Case study 2:

Ebrahim Mehtari, 26, is a student of computing, previously banned from study He told Amnesty International in November about his ordeal.

He was arrested on 20 August 2009, outside the central Tehran offices of the Mojahedin of the Islamic Revolution Organization (MIRO). A gun was brandished at him, and he was subjected to an electric shock which knocked him out.

He said he was taken to a place in the east of Tehran resembling a military camp. He was held alone in a cell estimated to be 1.3m x 2m, with a lamp constantly ablaze during the hot summer. Writing on the cell walls made it clear that a great many people had been arrested recently.

He was regularly taken away – blindfolded – for interrogation. There he was accused of “working with Facebook networks” and on websites belonging to the opposition; of protesting against the result of the election; and of working with MIRO.

Interrogators repeatedly demanded, while filming, that he write his “confession” and at times turned off the camera and tortured him.

He said: “They frequently beat me on the face; I was burned with cigarettes under my eyes, on the neck, head. I was beaten all over the body including arms and legs. They threatened to execute me and they humiliated me...”

He also described how a punch in the mouth broke one of his teeth and that his torturers inserted a narrow object inside his nostrils and rectum. He eventually signed the “confession” he was told to. It was only on the last day of his detention that he was permitted to see a doctor, when barely conscious.

Five days after his arrest, Ebrahim Mehtari was released. He was driven to a street and dropped off, bleeding and semi-conscious. A forensic medical examination, carried out without knowing who he was, substantiated his torture claims. It found that he had bruises, abrasions and burns on various parts of his body, including around his anus.

However, once it became known that his injuries were not the result of a criminal abduction but of torture by state officials, all the documents and evidence disappeared, apart from the copy of the medical report Ebrahim Mehtari had managed to copy and keep, and which is appended to the report.

The authorities refused to investigate Ebrahim Mehtari's allegations and told him and his family that there would be severe consequences if they talked about the torture he had suffered.

Case study 3:

Amnesty International learned from Human Rights Activists in Iran (HRA), a group that reports on human rights violations in Iran, about another torture case:

An unnamed former detainee talks of his abuse in Kahrizak detention centre where he says he was held for around 58 days in a container. He was only told on the 43rd day where he was and allowed to call his family.

“We were handcuffed and blindfolded and moved by a van to an unknown location... They took us... to a basement. When my blindfold was taken off I realized that I was inside a container. There was one 100W light bulb and an air channel to let the air in. There were 75 of us inside the container...

“In one of the interrogation sessions they showed me footage of my son in one of the streets of Tehran. I was told by the interrogator that they had my son in custody and would rape him if I didn't confess. After seeing the footage I lost control and started screaming. I begged them not to harm my son. I was then beaten by baton until I fainted and was taken back to the container.”