



International Organizations & Human Rights Reports

❖ Amnesty International: Iran -Worsening repression of dissent as election approaches

February 2009

In the last three months, Amnesty International has received reports of waves of arbitrary arrests and harassment, directed particularly against members of Iran's religious and ethnic minority communities, students, trade unionists and women's rights activists. Amnesty International is aware of the apparent arbitrary arrest of, or other repressive measures taken against, over 220 individuals. Many of those arrested, if not all, are at risk of torture or other ill treatment. Other individuals arrested before this period have been sentenced to death. In addition, several newspapers have been closed down, and access to internet sites has been restricted, including some relating to human rights or which are operated by international broadcasters. These measures may in part be intended to stifle debate and to silence critics of the authorities in advance of the forthcoming presidential election in June 2009. All individuals and groups should be allowed to peacefully exercise their rights to freedom of expression, association and assembly, including in ways which dissent from state policies and practices, in the run-up to the presidential election.

Amnesty International has documented repeatedly how vaguely worded legislation is being used to silence the most active sectors of the Iranian population. Charges such as "acting against state security", "spreading lies", "propaganda against the system", "creating unease in the public mind", "insulting the holy sanctities" and "defamation of state officials" are used to target members of Iran's religious and ethnic minorities as well as human rights and other civil society activists. Such laws and practices violate Iran's obligations under Articles 18, 21, 19, and 22 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights regarding freedom of belief, expression, assembly and association.

Amnesty International is calling on the Iranian authorities to end such repressive measures and to uphold the rights to freedom of belief, expression, assembly and association. Vaguely-worded provisions in the legislation of Iran which are being used to restrict these essential freedoms should be repealed or reviewed to bring them in line with Iran's obligations under international human rights law.

Anyone held as a prisoner of conscience, solely on account of their peaceful exercise of their rights to freedom of expression, association, or on account of their religious belief, should be released immediately and unconditionally. Others detained should be released unless they are to be promptly charged with a recognizably criminal offence and tried fairly. All detainees and prisoners should be protected from torture or other ill-treatment.



Amnesty International has not been permitted to visit Iran for first-hand investigation of the human rights situation there since shortly after the Islamic Revolution which took place 30 years ago. While Amnesty International was not always able to speak directly to, and collect testimonies from, the people subjected to human rights violations, whose cases are mentioned in this report, the details are consistent with known patterns of human rights violations in the country.

Restrictions on Freedom of Belief

Only three religious minorities – Christians, Jews and Zoroastrians – are allowed under Article 13 of Iran’s Constitution to practise their religious faith. By contrast, adherents of unrecognized religious groups such as Baha’is, the Ahl-e Haq and Mandaeans (Sabians), are not permitted freedom to practise their beliefs and are particularly at risk of discrimination or other violations of their internationally recognized human rights. Converts from Islam and evangelical Christians who proselytize are also subject to repression. In addition, Sunni Muslims, who are mostly members of ethnic minorities, also face repression in connection with their religious beliefs. Shi’a Muslims who do not subscribe to the principle of Velayat-e Faqih,¹ the founding principle of the Islamic Republic of Iran, or who engage in religious practices frowned upon by the authorities, are also at risk of arbitrary arrest and other human rights violations in connection with their beliefs.

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Al-e Yassin

Payman Fattahi, the leader of a group known as the Al-e Yassin³ was arrested on 14 January 2009 after being summoned to an interrogation session at the Department for Dealing with Religions in the Ministry of Intelligence. Five of his followers –Nazi Hesami(f), Morteza Rasoulia, Sa’id Sourati, Hamid Sourati and Farhad Moradi - are said to have been arrested the following day. Three are known to have been taken to Section 209 of Evin Prison, which is under the control of the Ministry of Intelligence, but the whereabouts of Payman Fattahi, Farhad Moradi and Morteza Rasoulia remain unknown. Payman Fattahi had previously spent about five months in detention after his arrest in May, during which he was reportedly tortured and interrogated about a variety of alleged offences, including “acting against state security”, “establishing a sect”, and “promoting Christianity and atheism”⁴. The group has also been vilified in state-owned press.

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¹ The political concept of the absolute authority of Velayat-e Faqih (leadership of the learned man) was developed by Ayatollah Khomeini, the founder of the Islamic Republic of Iran. It was enshrined as part of the Iranian Constitution adopted in 1979, which stated that overall political authority lies with the



Leader, who must not only possess the requisite political capability to lead, but must also be a holy and pious man ,as well as an expert in Islamic Law and a marja-ye taqlid - a religious source of emulation for his followers. A 1989 amendment to the Constitution dropped the requirement for the leader to be a marja ,but greatly enhanced the political powers of the Leader.

2 Gonabadi Dervishes in Iran consider themselves to be Shi'a Muslims. This Sufi order describes Sufism as neither a religion nor a sect, but rather a way of life by which individuals – from any religion - may find God. See, for example ,<http://www.sufism.ir/sufischool.php> .This is a website belonging to the Gonabadi Dervish order in Europe, which is headed by Dr Sayed Mostafa Azmayesh. In Iran, the Head of the Order is Dr Nour Ali Tabandeh, who was forced to leave his home in Bidokht, the main centre of the order in Iran, in May 2007 and take up residency in Tehran. Several prominent clerics in Iran have issued fatwas attacking Sufis. For example Ayatollah Lankarani said in 2006 that Sufis were “misleading Iranian youth” and that “any contact with them was forbidden.”

3 Al-e Yassin members describe the group as “an academic organization, formed from many different groups such as The Society of Professional Thinkers and Probers, the Al-e-Yassin Association of Interpreters ,Writers and Instructors and the (Iranian) Nature Front Association”. They claim to publish various publications including: The Divine Cognition, The Motivators ,The Arts of living, The Science of Success, The Journal of Esoteric Science, and The Art of Divine Living, among others. They claim some of these publications have been forcibly closed, that books by the group’s leader have been banned and that websites are filtered and the members of society are called to the Ministry of Security and Intelligence of Iran, on a regular basis. From communication to Amnesty International by email. Similar information can be seen at <http://aleyassin.blogspot.com/>

4 The group has claimed that the accusations levelled against Payman Fattahi during his arrest included “religious heresy”, “Christian orientation”, “Spiritual Pluralism”, “Striving to unify Islam, Christianity, and Judaism”, “Propaganda”, “Conspiracy against the Islamic System”, “Religious Degeneration”, and “spreading spiritual liberalism and American Islamism.”

5 The Iranian authorities stated that four people had been killed (Press TV, 29 December 2008). Pakistani sources, when commenting on the subsequent closure of the international border between Saravan and Panjgur ,stated that around 45 people had been killed ,

http://www.dailytimes.com.pk/default.asp?page=2008%5C12%5C30%5Cstory_30-12-2008_pg7_12 including 15 to 20 foreign nationals, including Afghans and Uzbeks, who were detained nearby after having entered the country illegally

http://www.dailytimes.com.pk/default.asp?page=2008%5C12%5C31%5Cstory_31-12-2008_pg7_37 .The PRMI claimed that 150 people had perished in the attack (PRMI statement published on various websites.(



6 <http://www.autnews.us/archives/1387,10,00015696>

7 The PMOI is an Iranian opposition group which participated in the Revolution of 1979 but was subsequently attacked by the Iranian authorities. Thousands of PMOI members were arrested, tortured and executed in the following years. In 1986, during the Iran-Iraq war, the PMOI based itself in Iraq and allied itself with the government of Saddam Hussein. Following the US-led military intervention in Iraq in 2003 about 3,400 members of the PMOI were disarmed by the US-led forces at Camp Ashraf in Iraq's northern governorate of Diyala, where its members still reside. The current Iraqi administration has pledged to remove the PMOI from its territory.

8 Please see Urgent Actions AI Index: MDE 13/023/2003 10 July 2003; AI Index: MDE 13/024/2003, 31 July 2003; and AI Index: MDE 15 ,2003/030/13 August 2003.

Amnesty International February 2009 AI Index: MDE

<http://www.amnesty.org>

Reference:

<http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/asset/MDE13/012/2009/en/6355979b-f779-11dd-8fd7-f57af21896e1/mde130122009en.htm>