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IRAN: REPRESSION OF DISSENT INTENSIFIES IN RUN-UP TO PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION

Amnesty International is concerned by evidence that the Iranian authorities are intensifying their clampdown on dissent in the run-up to the country's next presidential election, due to be held on 14 June 2013.

Those targeted include political activists, journalists and other media workers, trade unionists, advocates of greater rights for Iran's religious and ethnic minorities, students and others. In many cases, the full reasons for arrest and detention are not known; in others, those arrested have been brought before the courts on sweeping but vaguely worded charges, convicted and sentenced to prison terms. In yet other cases, individuals who were sentenced in previous years but not made to serve them immediately or else released provisionally for medical reasons have been summoned to prison to serve what remains of their sentences as the authorities seek to pre-empt protests at the time of the presidential election.

The Iranian authorities have long sought to suppress and punish dissent and the advocacy of views or policies with which they disagree, and the authorities' current crackdown is only the most recent of many similar bouts of repression. One of the most severe occurred following the last presidential election in 2009 when nationwide mass protests broke out after the authorities announced that the incumbent, President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, had secured victory by a large margin, prompting allegations of electoral fraud.

Today, dozens of political prisoners, including prisoners of conscience, sentenced to long prison terms after unfair trials connected to the 2009 protests, remain in prison. Mehdi Karroubi and Mir Hossein Mousavi, who emerged as main opposition leaders when they contested the 2009 presidential election against President Ahmadinejad, along with latter's wife, Zahra Rahnava, continue to be confined under indefinite house arrest orders that the authorities have enforced since February 2011. This is despite repeated calls for their release by the UN, including a joint call in February 2013 by three leading human rights experts, the Special Rapporteurs on the situation of human rights in Iran and on the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and of association and the Chair-Rapporteur of the Working Group on Arbitrary Detention. On 29 August 2012, the UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention ruled that the detention under house arrest of Mir Hossein Mousavi, Zahra Rahnava and Mehdi Karroubi amounted to arbitrary detention, so contravening both Iranian national law and international law; nevertheless, their detention under indefinite house arrest continues.

The post-2009 government crackdown saw the security forces commit gross human rights violations, including unlawful killings and torture. To date, however, the authorities have generally failed to bring those responsible for these violations to justice while at the same time taking action

against victims and relatives who dare to call for justice and reparation. Amnesty International welcomed the Judiciary's recent launch of an investigation into the deaths of at least four individuals in custody while detained in Tehran's Kahrizak detention centre following the 2009 presidential election. The trials, however, have been held behind closed doors, raising questions as to their fairness.

Since late last year, Amnesty International has recorded a new surge in repression, reflected in new cases of arbitrary arrest and detention, unfair trials of political suspects and the imprisonment of prisoners of conscience – individuals imprisoned solely on account of their political opinions or beliefs who have not used or advocated violence.

This latest crackdown appears intended, at least in part, to stifle debate and deter criticism of the authorities in the lead-up to the election, which will see one of currently only six permitted candidates replace President Ahmadinejad for a term of four years.

Amnesty International is calling on the Iranian authorities to halt the implementation of repressive measures which conflict with Iran's obligations under international human rights law and treaties to which it is a party, and to respect and protect the human rights to freedom of opinion, expression, assembly and association.

Amnesty International has compiled this briefing on the basis of information obtained from a wide range of sources, including sources inside Iran, although the Iranian authorities have not permitted the organization to visit Iran and assess human rights at first hand for more than three decades. Despite this, Amnesty International has regularly published reports and documented rights abuses in Iran.

Recent emblematic cases that highlight the clampdown on human rights include those detailed here.

JOURNALISTS AND ONLINE PUBLISHERS

Security forces in Kordestan arrested **Khosro Kordpour**, the manager of the Mukrian News Agency, on 9 March 2013 and searched his home, removing some of his possessions. Two days later, they arrested his brother, **Masoud Kordpour**, when he visited the Mahabad office of the Ministry of Intelligence to seek information about the arrest and detention of Khosro Kordpour. Both brothers were taken to a Revolutionary Guards detention centre in Orumiye on 16 March 2013, where they were reportedly held in solitary confinement. Despite repeated inquiries, the families of both men were unable to obtain information about their whereabouts until 2 May 2013, when they were permitted to visit them. The brothers told relatives that those who arrested them had not given them any reasons. On 19 April 2013, Khosro Kordpour started a hunger strike to protest his lack of access to his lawyer. He ended it on 13 May 2013 at the request of his family and friends and after he was transferred from solitary confinement to a cell with other detainees. The reasons for the arrests of the Kordpour brothers remain unclear but they are believed to have been detained on suspicion of offences against national security. It is not known whether the authorities have formally brought any charges against them to date. The brothers' lawyer was reportedly informed on 14 May 2013 that their detention order had been extended for a further two months.

Mohammad Reza Pourshajari, who is also known by his pen name, Siamak Mehr, is currently held in Karaj Central Prison, where he is serving a four-year prison term, despite serious concerns for his health. Security forces arrested him at his home in Karaj on 12 September 2010 because of a blog that he ran and, he alleges, held him in solitary confinement for eight months and tortured and otherwise ill-treated him, including by subjecting him to a mock execution to make him "confess". Following a trial which concluded on 21 December 2011, Branch 109 of the

Revolutionary Court in Karaj convicted him on the vaguely worded charge of “insulting Islamic sanctities” and sentenced him to one year’s imprisonment. Mohammad Reza Pourshajari had previously been sentenced to three years’ imprisonment on charges of “insulting the Leader” and “acting against national security”. According to a member of his family who spoke to Amnesty International, he suffered a heart attack on 16 February 2013, following which the authorities moved him to a hospital outside the prison for only five days and continue to deny him leave from prison to receive adequate medical treatment, reportedly against the advice of prison doctors.

Hossein Ronaghi Maleki, a blogger and prisoner of conscience, returned to Evin Prison in Tehran on 21 May 2013 to serve the remainder of a 15-year prison sentence that he incurred in 2010 after a Revolutionary Court convicted him on charges that included “membership of the [illegal] internet group ‘Iran Proxy’”, “spreading propaganda against the system” and “insulting the Leader and the President”, apparently in connection with his peaceful activities including writing articles he had published on his blog. In May 2012, he went on hunger strike because the authorities refused to allow him leave from prison to receive medical treatment for a kidney ailment, before the authorities conceded and freed him upon payment of bail of 10 billion rials (approximately US\$815,000). However, he was rearrested in August 2012 while still on temporary leave from prison, together with human rights activists who were assisting people at a relief camp for earthquake victims in East Azerbaijan province. He was taken first to Section 1 of Tabriz Prison, then to Evin Prison in Tehran and charged with “distributing unclean and non-hygienic goods” but again allowed medical release on 6 November 2012 after payment of bail. He has had several kidney operations and needs to take regular medication. His father says that since his recall to Evin Prison, the authorities there have not allowed him to take his prescribed medicine, prompting renewed concern for his health and wellbeing.

The authorities have detained at least five journalists since the beginning of March and have closed down three publications. The journalists are: **Mohammad Mehdi Emam Naseri** and **Alireza Aghaee Rad**, respectively the manager and political editor of *Maghreb* newspaper; **Ali Ghazali** and **Foad Sadeghi**, respectively the manager and an editor of the Baztab Emrooz news website; and **Mohammad Javad Rouh**, an editor at *Mehrnameh*, one of the three publications closed by the authorities. The others were *Aseman* and *Tajrobeh*. All five journalists are reported to be facing prosecution in connection with their journalistic activities although no details of the charges have yet emerged.

POLITICAL ACTIVISTS

Jamileh Karimi, a member of an association known as the Central Council of the Reformists Coalition in Fars Province, is reported to have been arrested by security forces in April 2013 and to be detained in solitary confinement at a Ministry of Intelligence detention centre in Shiraz that is known simply as “No. 100”. Jamileh Karimi, who formerly worked for the Fars provincial governor as an advisor on women and youth affairs during the presidency of Mohammad Khatami (1997-2005), was arrested at her home on 10 April 2013, according to the opposition Kaleme news website. Before her arrest, she was one of around 90 signatories to a letter urging Mohammad Khatami to again stand for the presidency in 2013. No charges are known to have been brought against her as yet.

On 4 June 2013, the National Religious Alliance reported on its website that security forces had arrested four individuals associated with the organization, which is banned but generally tolerated, naming them as **Reza Agha Khani**, **Nasrollah Lashani**, **Alireza Akbar Zadeh** and **Hossein Bahiraee**. Currently, the reasons for their arrest are unclear but may be connected to the forthcoming election given the occurrence of detentions of National Religious Alliance members prior to previous Iranian elections. The authorities have not disclosed their places of detention and it is not known whether charges have been brought against any of the four. The families of the arrested

men have asserted that they had not been involved in any illegal activities and that some of them are not even political activists.

Security forces are reported to have detained a number of members of the campaign team of presidential candidate Hassan Rouhani on 1 June after a rally in Tehran at which supporters chanted slogans demanding the release from house arrest of opposition leaders Mir Hossein Mousavi and Mehdi Karroubi. They reportedly included **Nafiseh Nikbakht, Milad Panahi Pour, Mohsen Rahmani, Mohammad Parsi, Mohammad Ehtesham, Shirin Mir Karimi, Saeedollah Bedashti, Mojtaba Hashemi** and **Farzad Eslami**. According to information released on the Kaleme website on 3 June, one of the detainees had told their relatives in a phone conversation that 13 individuals were arrested. The website has also reported that all 13 were being held in solitary confinement in Section 240 of Evin Prison and had been informed that they would face charges. Some individuals have been released but others are believed to remain in detention.

TRADE UNIONISTS

On 28 May 2013, trade unionist **Mahmoud Beheshti Langroudi** received a four-year prison sentence after Branch 15 of the Revolutionary Court in Tehran convicted him of “gathering and colluding against the national security” and a further one year in prison for “spreading propaganda against the system”. Neither charges amount to an internationally recognizable criminal offence. At present, Mahmoud Beheshti Langroudi remains at liberty awaiting the outcome of an appeal, but if this is rejected he may also be required to serve a previous four-year sentence that was imposed in connection with his trade union activities but suspended. A former speaker of the Iran Teachers’ Trade Associations (ITTA), an affiliate of Education International, an international body that represents educational workers, Mahmoud Beheshti Langroudi was arrested in April 2010 just before Iran’s Teachers’ Day on 2 May and held incommunicado for 16 days. He has been free on bail since 4 July 2010.

Security forces arrested at least 10 trade unionists and labour rights activists in connection with their trade union activities including peaceful gatherings planned to mark International Labour Day on 1 May 2013. Those held included **Mohammad Ehyai, Mohammad Ghasem-Khani, Bahram Saeedi, Aram Zandi, Fardin Ghaderi, Shahpour Hosseini, Jalil Mohammadi, Hamed Mahmoudi Nejad, Nastaran Mohammadi** and **Bakhtiar Chatani**. Some have been released, but others are still believed to be detained although it is not known whether any of them are facing charges.

MEMBERS OF ETHNIC AND RELIGIOUS MINORITIES

Five members of Yeni Gamoh, an Iran-based, Azerbaijani (Turkic) cultural and political rights advocacy organization, were sentenced to eight-year prison terms by Branch Three of the Revolutionary Court in Tabriz on 29 April 2013 after it convicted them of “forming an illegal group with the intention to harm national security”. In addition, the court sentenced each of them to one year’s imprisonment for “spreading propaganda against the system”. The five – **Latif Hasani, Mahmoud Fazli, Ayat Mehr-Ali Beyglou, Shahram Radmehr** and **Behboud Gholizadeh**, all members of Yeni Gamoh’s Central Council – were arrested by Ministry of Intelligence officials between January and March 2013 and detained incommunicado, then moved to Tabriz Central Prison. They were not permitted access to lawyers until one week before their trial. A family member of one of the five told Amnesty International that they were tortured or otherwise ill-treated while detained by the Ministry of Intelligence. Shahram Radmehr and Behboud Gholizadeh both suffer from health problems that require medical treatment unavailable in prison, but authorities told Shahram Radmehr that he would be allowed to access such treatment only if he agreed to attend in his prison garb and with his wrists and ankles cuffed.

Saeed Abedini, an Iranian-American Christian pastor and USA resident, has been imprisoned since 26 September 2012 when he was detained, apparently by Revolutionary Guards, while in Iran to visit relatives. On 20 January, 2013, Branch 26 of the Revolutionary Court of Tehran sentenced him to eight years' imprisonment, which he is serving in Section 350 of Evin Prison, after convicting him of "forming house churches with intent to harm national security". Following his sentencing, he told his family in a letter of March 2013 that he had been tortured or otherwise ill-treated while held in detention, and that medical staff in Evin Prison refused to treat him because they considered him to be "unclean" or an "unbeliever". He is said to be in need of medical treatment after suffering intestinal bleeding.

On 4 June 2013, the Majzooban-e Noor website, which acts as a Sufi news agency and reports on human rights violations against dervishes, reported that one of its managers, **Saleh Moradi**, a Nematollahi Dervish¹ journalist, had received a one-year prison sentence from the General Court of Kavar in Fars province after it convicted him of "disturbing public opinion" and "disturbing public order". In addition, the court sentenced him to one year in internal exile. By the time of his sentencing, Saleh Moradi had already been in detention for more than one year, and so he was released from custody. According to Majzooban-e Noor, however, he still has a case pending against him in the Revolutionary Court of Shiraz on charges of "spreading propaganda against the system", "acting against national security" and "membership of Majzooban-e Noor group".

In April 2013, Branch 3 of the Revolutionary Court of Shiraz sentenced **Kasra Nouri**, another Nematollahi Dervish, to imprisonment for four years and four months after convicting him on charges of "spreading propaganda against the system", "acting against national security, "insulting the Leader" and "membership of Majzooban-e Noor group". Both he and Saleh Moradi were arrested in around September 2011 when the authorities also arrested seven other Nematollahi Dervishes who remain in detention, apparently without charge or trial – **Afshin Karampour**, **Amir Eslami**, **Farshid Yadollahi**, **Mostafa Daneshjoo**, **Hamid-Reza Moradi Sarvestani**, **Omid Behrooz** and **Reza Entesari**. These seven were held initially at Adel Abad Prison in Shiraz, then moved to Section 350 of Evin Prison, where they remained until they were placed in solitary confinement in the prison's Section 209, controlled by the Ministry of Intelligence, in January 2013. They were only returned to Section 350, the prison's general ward, three months later after Saleh Moradi and Kasra Nouri had gone on hunger strike in protest at their plight. They and Kasra Nouri are all believed to suffer from health problems exacerbated by the conditions of their imprisonment. Gonabadi Dervishes of the Nematollahi order have faced continuing repression by the Iranian authorities over the last four years.

Five members of Iran's Ahwazi Arab minority currently remain on death row at Karoun Prison in Khuzestan, where they are at serious risk of execution. All five – **Mohammad Ali Amouri**, brothers **Sayed Jaber Alboshoka** and **Sayed Mokhtar Alboshoka**, and two teachers, **Hashem Sha'bani Amouri** and **Hadi Rashidi** (or **Rashedi**) – were arrested in early 2011. They were reportedly tortured and forced to make televised "confessions". On 7 July 2012, they were sentenced to death after they were convicted of "enmity against God and corruption on earth", "gathering and colluding against national security" and "spreading propaganda against the system". Branch 32 of the Supreme Court upheld their death sentences on 9 January 2013. In early June 2013 it was reported that they are currently not permitted visits, prompting fears that their executions may be imminent, since death row prisoners are often held in solitary confinement before execution.

STUDENT ACTIVISTS

Ashkan Zahabian, a student activist, was detained by armed Intelligence Ministry officials who went to his home on 27 May 2013 and took him to Babol Prison in Mazandaran province to begin serving an eight-month prison term, imposed on him in 2011 when a court convicted him of "acting against national security" and "spreading propaganda against the system". At the time of

arrest, he had not received a written summons requiring him to commence serving his sentence. Amnesty International believes that the manner and timing of the arrest may be intended to deter other students from involvement in political activities. Ashkan Zahabian was previously imprisoned for political reasons: arrested in June 2009 for supporting Mehdi Karroubi's presidential election campaign, he spent about three months in detention before obtaining release on bail but he was then arrested in November 2009 and accused of "acting against state security by forming Islamic [student] Associations in the north of the country". Again released on bail, he was later sentenced in his absence to six months in prison by Branch 101 of the Revolutionary Court of Babol. He was arrested when he answered a summons to appear before Ministry of Intelligence officials in Sari, northern Iran, and then served his six-month prison term.

Afshin Keshtkari, a student activist and founder member of the Islamic Student Association at the University of Technology in Shiraz, was summoned to appear before the Revolutionary Court of Shiraz on 18 May 2013 and then committed to Adel Abad Prison to begin serving six months of a three-year prison sentence (the majority of the sentence was suspended on appeal) imposed after a court convicted him of "forming an illegal group with intent to harm national security". He was arrested on 7 December 2010 after a protest by students at the University of Technology in Shiraz. He was held incommunicado at the detention centre known as "No. 100" in Shiraz until 1 January 2011, when he was released on bail. While in detention, the university's Disciplinary Committee banned him from continuing his studies for one semester.

ABUSES IN THE CRIMINAL JUSTICE SYSTEM

Mazyar Ebrahimi, an Iranian businessman who founded his own production company in the Kurdistan region of Iraq, was detained by Intelligence Ministry officials in June 2012 and held incommunicado. On 6 August 2012, the official IRTV1 television channel aired an almost 40-minute long documentary entitled "Terror Club" in which Mazyar Ebrahimi was one of 12 detainees, including both men and women, who were shown "confessing" to involvement in the murder of Iranian nuclear scientists and academics, five of whom have been killed since 2010. Apart from the "confessions", which may have been obtained through torture or coercion, the documentary contained no other evidence of the detainees' involvement in the deaths. In May 2013, Gholamhossein Mohseni Eje'i, Iran's Prosecutor General and Judiciary spokesperson, was reported to have announced that a closed trial of 44 individuals accused in connection with the scientists' killings had commenced, but without disclosing the identities of the defendants. They may include Mazyar Ebrahimi and others among the detainees shown "confessing" in the Terror Club TV documentary, but this has yet to be confirmed.

Seven months after the death in custody of blogger **Sattar Beheshti**, the Iranian authorities have yet to hold anyone to account for his death. Following his arrest at his home by Cyber Police on 30 October 2012, his family were unable to find out where he was being held or gain access to him until, on 6 November 2012, they received a telephone call advising them to collect his body from Tehran's Kahrizak detention centre. After his arrest, he had spent one night in Section 350 of Evin Prison and had lodged a formal complaint, alleging that his interrogators had tortured him in pre-trial detention. His death in custody has been the subject of several investigations by bodies such as the National Security and Foreign Policy Commission of the Iranian parliament and the Judiciary's High Commission for Human Rights but, as yet, despite a number of arrests, no one has been convicted in connection with his death. Some of his family members say they have been warned that they face arrest if they speak to the media about his death.

RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE IRANIAN AUTHORITIES

- Immediately and unconditionally release all prisoners of conscience and drop all charges against anyone who is facing trial solely for the peaceful exercise of their right to freedom of expression or related rights to freedom of association or assembly;
- Release all other detainees unless they are charged with a recognizably criminal offence and tried in full conformity with international standards of fair trial and without resort to the death penalty;
- Ensure that detainees and prisoners, from the moment of arrest, are granted access to relatives, lawyers of their own choosing and all necessary medical care, and are fully protected at all times against torture or other ill-treatment in custody;
- Urgently review and amend or repeal all Iranian laws that impinge on the rights to freedom of expression, association, and assembly as these are set and defined in the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and other relevant international treaties to which Iran is a state party;
- Permit all individuals and groups to peacefully exercise their rights to freedom of expression, association and assembly, including in ways which dissent from state policies and practices; the free exercise of these rights may take on special importance during election campaigning periods;
- Immediately cease all executions, declare an immediate and comprehensive moratorium on executions, commute death sentences, and begin steps to abolish the death penalty for all crimes;
- Allow international scrutiny of the human rights situation in Iran, including by allowing visits to Iran by the UN Special Rapporteur on Iran and other UN human rights experts and mechanisms that have requested visits, and by Amnesty International and other independent human rights organizations.

¹ 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”.