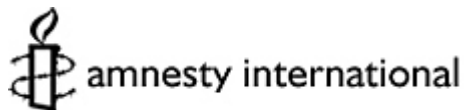


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Amnesty International Report 2010 - Iran

ISLAMIC REPUBLIC OF IRAN

Head of state: Leader of the Islamic Republic of Iran: Ayatollah Sayed 'Ali Khamenei

Head of government: President: Dr Mahmoud Ahmadinejad

Death penalty: retentionist

Population: 74.2 million

Life expectancy: 71.2 years

Under-5 mortality (m/f): 33/35 per 1,000

Adult literacy: 82.3 per cent

An intensified clampdown on political protest preceded and, particularly, followed the presidential election in June, whose outcome was widely disputed, deepening the long-standing patterns of repression. The security forces, notably the paramilitary Basij, used excessive force against demonstrators; dozens of people were killed or fatally injured. The authorities suppressed freedom of expression to an unprecedented level, blocking mobile and terrestrial phone networks and internet communications. Well over 5,000 people had been detained by the end of the year. Many were tortured, including some who were alleged to have been raped in detention, or otherwise ill-treated. Some died from their injuries. Dozens were then prosecuted in grossly unfair mass "show trials". Most were sentenced to prison terms but at least six were sentenced to death.

The election-related violations occurred against a background of severe repression, which persisted throughout 2009 and whose victims included members of ethnic and religious minorities, students, human rights defenders and advocates of political reform. Women continued to face severe discrimination under the law and in practice, and women's rights campaigners were harassed, arrested and imprisoned. Torture and other ill-treatment of detainees remained rife and at least 12 people died in custody. Detainees were systematically denied access to lawyers, medical care and their families, and many faced unfair trials. Iran remained one of the states with the highest rates of execution and one of very few still to execute juvenile offenders: at least 388 people were executed, including one by stoning and at least five juveniles.

Background

International tension persisted over Iran's nuclear enrichment programme. In March the UN Security Council voted to extend economic and political sanctions. In September, the government revealed the existence of a hitherto unknown enrichment facility.

Iran continued to host almost 1 million refugees, mostly from Afghanistan. They had limited access to social services and education.

Presidential election – widespread abuses

The authorities intensified their crackdown on critics and opponents of the government in the months preceding the 12 June presidential election, in which the incumbent, President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, was officially declared the winner. Only three of the 474 other applicants were permitted to stand. Mass protests broke out in response to the official result, declared on 13 June, with hundreds of thousands of people taking to the streets. Security forces, notably the paramilitary Basij, were deployed to suppress the protests by force, particularly after the Supreme Leader ordered an end to demonstrations on 19 June. However, protests continued to the end of the year on significant days such as the religious festival of Ashoura on 27 December. The authorities disrupted mobile phone and internet communications, including social networking sites, to prevent information circulating. They prevented foreign journalists from covering demonstrations, expelling some, and security officials controlled the content of newspapers. Security forces raided university campuses, injuring students. The authorities accused the US and UK governments of organizing the unrest, which those governments denied.

All three defeated candidates alleged election fraud and complained to the body responsible for administering the election. It carried out a partial re-count but largely rejected the candidates' complaints. Mahmoud Ahmadinejad was sworn in for a second term on 5 August.

Unlawful killings

The Basij and other security forces used excessive force against demonstrators, beating them with batons and riding motorcycles into them to cause injury. The authorities said 43 died in the protests but opposition sources said the true total was likely to be over 100. Hundreds were injured.

- Neda Agha Soltan, aged 27, was shot dead in a Tehran street on 20 June during a demonstration. Her dying moments were filmed. The perpetrator was identified as a member of the Basij but the authorities claimed that British and US news media had caused her death. Neda Agha Soltan's family and other mourners were harassed and intimidated by security officials when commemorating her life.

Arrests and detentions

Well over 5,000 people were detained after the election by the end of the year, including opposition politicians, journalists, academics, students, lawyers, human rights activists and army officers. Those with dual nationality or links to the USA or UK were also targeted. Some were arrested at demonstrations; others at their home or workplace; and some, who were injured, from hospital. Most, if not all, were denied access to legal representation. Many were denied access to their families and to medical care.

Hundreds of those arrested were freed within days or weeks, but scores were charged with vaguely worded offences, such as fomenting a "velvet revolution" or committing "acts against national security", and prosecuted in "show trials".

- Mohammad Ali Abtahi, Mohsen Aminzadeh, Said Hajjarian and at least four other

political leaders were detained days after the election. All were prisoners of conscience. Said Hajjarian was released on bail in October and Mohammad Ali Abtahi in November. Mohsen Aminzadeh remained in custody at the end of the year.

Rape and other torture

Some detainees were taken to the Kahrizak detention centre, south of Tehran, where they were tortured and otherwise ill-treated. Kahrizak quickly became so notorious for abuse that the Supreme Leader ordered its closure in July. By the end of the year, 12 officials were facing trial before a military court for abuses, including three for murder.

Compelling evidence emerged that a number of detainees, both women and men, had been raped and otherwise tortured in detention, but instead of investigating allegations thoroughly, the authorities were quick to deny them and then harassed the victims and closed the offices of a committee collecting victims' testimonies.

- Ebrahim Sharifi, a student aged 24, testified that security officials raped him, beat him severely and subjected him to mock execution in the week following his arrest on 22 June. He tried to file a judicial complaint but went into hiding after he and his family were threatened by security officials. On 13 September a judicial panel dismissed his allegation of rape and accused him of fabricating it for political reasons and he fled Iran.
- Mohsen Ruholamini, the son of an aide to presidential candidate Mohsen Rezaei, died on 23 July after about two weeks in Kahrizak. A coroner's report found he had suffered a heart attack and internal bleeding and had been hit repeatedly with a hard object.

Unfair trials

Mass "show trials" involving scores of detainees were staged in successive sessions beginning in August. The trials were grossly unfair. Most, if not all, defendants were denied access to lawyers. Most had been detained incommunicado for several weeks and many were reported to have been tortured or otherwise ill-treated before being brought to court. The trials were closed but excerpts broadcast on state television showed defendants making what appeared to be coerced "confessions". More than 80 were convicted and sentenced to prison terms of up to 15 years; at least six others were sentenced to death.

Human rights defenders

Human rights defenders, including minority and women's rights activists, lawyers and trade unionists, continued to face arbitrary arrest, harassment, prosecution and unfair trials throughout the year. Some were banned from travelling abroad.

- In April, five leaders of the Haft Tapeh Sugar Cane Company Trade Union were sentenced to up to six months' imprisonment for "propaganda against the system" for criticizing conditions at their workplace when they were interviewed by foreign journalists in 2008. They began serving their sentences in November after they were upheld on appeal.
- Five members of the Committee of Human Rights Reporters were arrested in December and others were sought by intelligence officials.

Discrimination against women

Women continued to face discrimination in law, despite some minor improvements. Women's rights campaigners, including those active in the "One Million Signatures" campaign to end legal discrimination, were harassed, detained, prosecuted and banned

from travelling for collecting signatures in support of their petition.

- On 1 February, Alieh Eghdam-Doust, a member of the Campaign for Equality, began a three-year prison sentence imposed for participating in a peaceful demonstration. She was among many women arrested during a protest in June 2006 against discriminatory laws, and the first to begin serving a prison sentence.

Freedom of expression and association

The authorities blocked websites voicing criticism, notably those of Iranian bloggers, and periodically blocked those of foreign news media reporting on Iran. In April, they warned SMS users that messages were "controlled" by a new "internet crimes" law introduced in January. They also shut down or maintained bans on tens of journals, magazines and other print media, targeted critical journalists and infiltrated and undermined independent civil society groups, such as the Society of Esfahan Human Rights Supporters. Hundreds of students faced education bans for campus activism.

- Four students at Tehran's Amir Kabir University were arrested at their homes on 24 February for participating in a peaceful demonstration the previous day against the government's decision to bury soldiers' remains on the campus, and so facilitate unrestricted access to the campus by the Basij and other security forces. Other students were also arrested; all had been released uncharged by July.
- Roxana Saberi, a journalist with joint US-Iranian nationality, was convicted of "collaborating with a hostile state" in a closed trial before Tehran's Revolutionary Court on 18 April following her arrest on 31 January. She was sentenced to eight years in prison, but this was reduced to a suspended two-year term following local and international criticism. She was released on 12 May and allowed to leave the country.
- Two brothers, Arash and Kamiar Alaei, both medical doctors active in the field of HIV/AIDS treatment and prevention, were sentenced in January to six and three years' imprisonment respectively for "co-operating with an enemy government". They had been tried before a closed court on 31 December 2008. They were neither told the charges or evidence against them nor permitted by the court to call or examine witnesses. Both men were prisoners of conscience, imprisoned on account of their medical work with US and other international medical institutions.

Discrimination

Ethnic minorities

Members of Iran's ethnic minorities continued to face discrimination along with harassment and imprisonment for advocating greater respect for social and cultural rights, including the right to mother tongue education. In June, the government announced that it would allow some higher education in regional languages.

Members of the Ahwazi Arab and Azerbaijani minorities were subject to continuing repression. Members of the small Sunni Azerbaijani minority were arrested in February when they protested against cuts in water supplies. Members of the Kurdish minority suspected of belonging to banned armed opposition groups were arrested and imprisoned. Some were sentenced to death and at least one was executed, possibly in reprisal for a spate of attacks on officials in Kordestan province in September. In Sistan-Baluchistan province, home to the mostly Sunni Muslim Baluch minority, violence intensified amid increasing clashes between the security forces and members of the People's Resistance Movement of Iran (PRMI), an armed political group also known as Jondallah. On 18 October, at least 42 people, including senior Revolutionary Guards officers and civilians, were killed in an attack claimed by the PRMI.

- On 30 May, two days after a PRMI bomb attack on a mosque in Zahedan killed at least 25 people, three men were publicly executed near the mosque for allegedly smuggling the explosives into Iran; all three had been in prison accused of other bombings when the attack happened.

Religious minorities

Members of religious minorities, including some not recognized by the government, continued to suffer discrimination, harassment, arbitrary arrest and damage to community property. Among those targeted were Sunni Muslim clerics; Shi'a clerics advocating the separation of the state from religion; members of the Dervish and Ahl-e Haqq communities; members of a philosophical association called Al-e Yasin; Christians; and members of the Baha'i community, who remained unable to access higher education. Converts from Islam were at risk of attack as well as prosecution for "apostasy", which is punishable by death.

- Maryam Rostampour and Marzieh Amirzadeh Esmaeilabad, both Christian converts, were arrested on 5 March in Tehran for handing out Bibles and participating in religious gatherings. Both were prisoners of conscience. Released in November after acquittal in October of "acting against state security" by a Revolutionary Court, they continued to face charges of "apostasy" and "proselytizing" in a General Court.
- Seven Baha'is, two women and five men, who were arrested in March and May 2008, remained held without trial in Evin Prison in Tehran. All faced charges of spying for Israel and "insulting religious sanctities and propaganda against the system". In May their families were told that they had also been charged with "corruption on earth", which can be punished by death.

Torture and other ill-treatment

Torture and other ill-treatment in pre-trial detention remained common, facilitated by the routine denial of access to lawyers by detainees and impunity for officials who perpetrate violations. Methods reported included severe beatings; confinement in tiny spaces; deprivation of light, food and water; and systematic denial of medical treatment. At least 12 people were believed to have died in custody in 2009 apparently as a result of ill-treatment or lack of adequate medical care. No investigations into any torture allegations were reported, except at Kahrizak.

Cruel, inhuman and degrading punishments

Sentences of flogging and judicial amputation were imposed and carried out. In February, the Supreme Court upheld a sentence in which acid would be dropped into the eyes of a man who had blinded a woman with the same liquid.

Death penalty

Iran maintained one of the highest rates of execution globally. At least 388 people were executed, including one man who was stoned to death and at least five juvenile offenders sentenced for crimes committed when they were aged under 18. At least 14 were executed in public. The actual totals were believed to be higher.

The rate of reported executions rose sharply during the unrest between the presidential election on 12 June and the inauguration on 5 August – 112 executions were recorded, an average of more than two a day.

The authorities carried out mass executions in January, March, July and August, during which a total of 77 people were executed.

At least 11 people sentenced to die by stoning and at least 136 juvenile offenders

remained on death row at the end of the year.

- Delara Darabi, a 22-year-old woman convicted of a crime she allegedly committed when aged 17, was executed on 1 May despite a two-month stay ordered by the Head of the Judiciary.

Amnesty International visits/reports

- The authorities continued to deny access to Amnesty International. The organization has not been permitted to visit the country to research human rights since shortly after the Iranian Revolution in 1979.
- Iran: Submission to the UN Universal Periodic Review (MDE 13/009/2009)
- Human rights in the spotlight on the 30th anniversary of the Islamic revolution (MDE 13/010/2009)
- Iran: Election amid repression of dissent and unrest (MDE 13/053/2009)
- Iran: Election contested, repression compounded (MDE 13/123/2009)

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