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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	71.2 million
Life expectancy	70.2 years
Under-5 mortality (m/f)	32/31 per 1,000
Adult literacy	82.4 per cent

The authorities continued to suppress dissent. Journalists, writers, scholars, and women's rights and community activists were subject to arbitrary arrest, travel bans, closure of their NGOs and harassment. Armed opposition, mainly by Kurdish and Baluchi groups, continued, as did state repression of Iran's minority communities. Discrimination against women remained entrenched in law and practice. Torture and other ill-treatment were widespread in prisons and detention centres. A security clampdown announced in April was marked by a sharp rise in executions; at least 335 people were executed, among them seven child offenders. Sentences of stoning to death, amputation and flogging continued to be passed and carried out.

Background

Iran's uranium enrichment programme continued to be a focus of international tension. Israeli and US authorities refused to rule out the possibility of military action against Iran. In March, the UN Security Council imposed further sanctions. In September, the US government designated Iran's Revolutionary Guards a "terrorist organization" for allegedly supporting insurgents in Iraq and Afghanistan. In December, US intelligence agencies published a report stating that Iran had ended any nuclear weapons programme in 2003. The same month the UN General Assembly condemned the human rights situation in Iran.

Ayatollah Meshkini, Head of the Assembly of Experts that oversees the appointment of the Supreme Leader, died in July. He was replaced by former President Hashemi Rafsanjani.

Increasing numbers of Iranians faced poverty as the economic situation deteriorated. In June rioting followed the introduction of petrol rationing. A three-month strike by workers at the Haft Tapeh Sugar Plant in Khuzestan Province over unpaid wages and benefits was forcibly broken up by security forces in October. Haft Tapeh and other workers and teachers staged large demonstrations, and arrests were made.

Freedom of expression

Vaguely worded laws and harsh practices resulted in widespread repression of peaceful dissent. Demonstrations frequently led to mass arrests and unfair trials. The authorities maintained tight restrictions on internet access. Journalists, academics and webloggers, including some dual nationals, were detained and sentenced to prison or flogging and several publications were closed down. In April, the Minister of Intelligence, Gholam Hossein Eje'i, publicly accused students and the women's movement of being part of an attempt to bring about the "soft overthrow" of the Iranian government.

- Ali Farahbakhsh, a journalist, was granted an early conditional release in October after 11 months in detention. He was convicted of "espionage" and "receiving money from foreigners" in connection with his attendance at a media conference in Thailand.

Human rights defenders

Independent human rights groups and other NGOs continued to face long delays, often lasting years, in obtaining official registration, leaving them at risk of closure for carrying out illegal activities. Students campaigning for greater respect for human rights faced reprisals, including arbitrary arrest and torture. Individual human rights defenders were persecuted for their work; some were prisoners of conscience.

- Emadeddin Baghi, Head of the Association for the Defence of Prisoners and a leading campaigner against the death penalty, was detained in October following a summons relating to accusations of "endangering national security". While the family was posting bail, they were told that he now had to serve a suspended sentence imposed in 2003, including for "printing lies". Another three-year prison term imposed on him in July 2007 for "propaganda in favour of opponents", arising from his work on behalf of Iranian Ahwazi Arabs sentenced to death after unfair trials, was pending appeal. His wife, Fatemeh Kamali Ahmad Sarahi, and daughter, Maryam Baghi, were given three-year suspended prison sentences in October for "meeting and colluding with the aim of disrupting national security" after attending a human rights workshop in Dubai in 2004. In December he suffered a seizure while in custody.
- Mansour Ossanlu, head of the Union of Workers of the Tehran and Suburbs Bus Company, was detained in July after visiting Europe to gather support for the independent trade union movement in Iran. Following international protests he received medical treatment for an eye injury reportedly sustained during a dispute with prison officials during an earlier detention. In October an appeals court upheld a five-year prison sentence imposed in February.

Discrimination against women

Women continued to face widespread discrimination in law and practice. Thousands were arrested for non-compliance with the obligatory dress code.

Activists working with the Campaign for Equality, which aims to collect a million signatures in Iran calling for an end to legalized discrimination against women, faced harassment and arrest. In August, Nasim Sarabandi and Fatemeh Dehdashti were sentenced to six months' imprisonment, suspended for two years, for "acting against national security through the spread of propaganda against the system". They were the first people to be tried and sentenced for collecting signatures. At the end of the year, four campaign activists remained in detention without charge or trial – Ronak Safarzadeh and Hana Abdi, Kurdish women who were detained in Sanandaj in October and November respectively; and Maryam Hosseinkhah and Jelveh Javaheri, who were detained in Tehran in

connection with their work editing the campaign's website. The authorities persistently filtered the website, making access difficult.

Women's rights defender Delaram Ali, who had been arrested in June 2006 following a peaceful demonstration demanding greater respect for women's rights, had her 30-month prison sentence temporarily postponed following local and international campaigning. In March, 33 women activists were arrested outside Tehran's Revolutionary Court during a protest against the trial of five women charged in connection with the June 2006 demonstration. All were released, but some faced trial.

Repression of minorities

Repression continued of Iran's ethnic minorities, who maintained their campaigning for greater recognition of their cultural and political rights.

Arabs

At least eight Iranian Ahwazi Arabs were executed after being convicted in connection with bomb explosions in Khuzestan in 2005. At least 17 other Iranian Arabs were believed to be facing execution after unfair trials related to the bombings. Scores, possibly hundreds, of Ahwazi Arabs were reportedly arrested in April, in advance of the anniversary of riots in 2005 protesting against a letter allegedly written by a presidential adviser, who denied its authenticity, which set out policies for the reduction of the Arab population of Khuzestan.

- In April, journalist Mohammad Hassan Fallahiya was sentenced to three years in prison with hard labour for writing articles critical of the government and for allegedly contacting opposition groups based outside Iran. He was detained in November 2006 and denied access to a lawyer throughout the judicial process. His family said the Evin Prison authorities refused to allow them to take him medicines required to treat heart and blood disorders, endangering his life.

Azerbaijanis

Hundreds of Iranian Azerbaijani activists were arrested in connection with a peaceful demonstration on International Mother Language Day, 21 February. The demonstrators called for their own language to be used in schools and other education institutions in the areas of north-west Iran where most Iranian Azerbaijanis reside.

- Prisoner of conscience Saleh Kamrani, a lawyer and human rights defender, was detained in Evin Prison between August and December. In September 2006 he had been sentenced to a year in prison – suspended for five years – for “spreading propaganda against the system”. It was unclear whether his arrest was connected to this sentence.

Baluchis

Jondallah, a Baluchi armed group, carried out attacks on Iranian officials, including bombing a bus carrying Revolutionary Guards in February. It also took hostages, at least one of whom was killed.

- Nasrollah Shanbeh-zehi was arrested following the bus bombing. Five days later he was publicly executed following a summary trial.
- Ya'qub Mehrnehad, head of the Voice of Justice Young People's Society, a recognized NGO, was detained in April in Zahedan, initially by the Ministry of Intelligence, following a meeting in the Provincial Office of the Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance that the Governor of Zahedan reportedly attended. He remained in Zahedan Prison at the end of the year, without access to a lawyer. He may have been tortured.
- In May police shot dead Roya Sarani, an 11-year-old Baluchi girl, while she was being driven home from school by her father in Zahedan. The authorities reportedly put pressure on her family to hold a small funeral. No official investigation was believed to have been held into her killing.

Kurds

Members of the Party for a Free Life in Kurdistan (Partiya Jiyana Azadiya Kurdistanê, PJAK) attacked Iranian forces, who shelled parts of northern Iraq where they believed PJAK forces were hiding. Numerous Kurds were arrested, many accused of membership of, or contact with, proscribed groups. Kurdish journalists and human rights defenders were particularly at risk of harassment and detention.

- Mohammad Sadiq Kabudvand, head of the Human Rights Organization of Kurdistan (HROK) and editor of the banned weekly newspaper Payam-e Mardom, was detained in July apparently for "acting against national security", "propaganda against the system" and "co-operating with groups opposed to the system", although he was not formally charged. He complained of poor prison conditions and ill-treatment, including denial of access to the toilet, which was apparently intended to force other leading HROK members to turn themselves in to security officials for questioning.

Religious minorities

Baha'is throughout the country continued to face persecution on account of their religion. At least 13 Baha'is were arrested in at least 10 cities and were subject to harassment and discriminatory practices, such as denial of access to higher education, bank loans and pension payments. Nine Baha'i cemeteries were desecrated.

In August and November, clashes involving Sufis resulted in scores of injuries and, in November, more than 100 arrests. In September, a couple – a Christian convert who married a Christian woman in an Islamic ceremony – were reportedly flogged in Gohar Dasht in connection with their faith.

Torture and other ill-treatment

Torture and other ill-treatment were common in many prisons and detention centres, facilitated by prolonged pre-charge detention and denial of access to lawyers and family. At least two people died in custody, possibly as a result of torture. Torturers were rarely if ever held to account for their crimes.

- In May, four students and editors-in-chief of student publications arrested in May at Amir Kabir Polytechnic were tortured, according to their families. The abuse allegedly included 24-hour interrogation sessions, sleep deprivation, beatings with cables and fists, and threats to prisoners and their families. The detainees were arrested in connection with articles deemed by university officials to "insult Islamic sanctities". In July, the families of the detained students sent an open letter to Ayatollah Shahrudi, Head of the Judiciary, describing the alleged torture.
- Zahra Bani Yaghoub, a medical graduate, died in custody in Hamadan in October. She was arrested for walking in a park with her fiancé and died in detention the next day. The authorities said she had hanged

herself. Her family said that she was in good spirits when they spoke to her on the phone half an hour before she was found dead. A report in November indicated that the head of the detention centre had been detained, but was then released on bail and remained in office.

- In November, a retrial was ordered in the case of the 2003 death in custody of Zahra Kazemi, a Canadian-Iranian photojournalist. She was tortured to death, but the only person prosecuted was acquitted in 2004, a decision upheld in 2005. She had been arrested for taking photographs outside Evin Prison.

Death penalty

The number of executions rose sharply in 2007. Amnesty International received reports that at least 335 people were executed, although the true figure was almost certainly higher. Some people were executed in public, often in multiple hangings. Death sentences were imposed for a wide range of crimes, including drug smuggling, armed robbery, murder, espionage, political violence and sexual offences. A “special” court in eastern Iran established in May 2006 to reduce the time between the crime and the punishment led to a marked rise in the number of Baluchis executed.

Child offenders

At least seven people aged under 18 at the time of the crime were executed and at least 75 other child offenders remained on death row. Following domestic and international protests, the death sentences of at least two child offenders – Sina Paymard and Nazanin Fatehi – were commuted.

- Makwan Moloudzadeh, an Iranian Kurdish child offender, was executed in December following a grossly flawed trial for three rapes he allegedly committed at the age of 13, eight years earlier. In sentencing him to death, the judge relied on his “knowledge” that the offence had occurred and that Makwan Moloudzadeh had reached puberty at the time of the crime and so could be tried and sentenced as an adult.

Execution by stoning

Ja’far Kiani was stoned to death in Takestan in July, despite an order from the Head of the Judiciary granting a temporary stay of execution. The judge in the case was later said by officials to have been “mistaken”. At least nine women, including Ja’far Kiani’s co-defendant, and two men remained at risk of stoning. In November, judicial officials said that a new version of the Penal Code had been sent to the Majles for approval and that, if approved, it would provide for the possibility of commuting stoning sentences.

Cruel, inhuman and degrading punishments

Sentences of flogging and amputation continued to be passed and implemented.

- In November, Soghra Mola’i was flogged 80 times for “illicit relations” after her sentence of death by stoning was overturned following a retrial. She remained in prison to serve a sentence for involvement in the murder of her husband.
- At least eight people had their fingers or hand amputated after conviction of theft.

Amnesty International reports

- Iran: Human rights abuses against the Baluchi minority (MDE 13/104/2007)
- Iran: The last executioner of children (MDE 13/059/2007)