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## Responses to Information Requests

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21 March 2013

### IRN104338.E

Iran: The Green Movement, including its mandate, structure, leadership, activities and treatment of members by authorities; The Green Party (2009-March 2013)

Research Directorate, Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada, Ottawa

#### 1. Background

According to the US Congressional Research Service (CRS), which provides policy and legal analysis to the US Congress (US 7 Feb. 2013), between 1982 and 2009, the Iranian regime "faced only episodic, relatively low-level unrest from minorities, intellectuals, students, labor groups, and women" (ibid. 5 Sept. 2012, 2). However, the CRS goes on to say that the regime has "struggled to contain popular dissatisfaction" since the June 2009 presidential election (ibid.).

#### 2. Development and Activities of the Green Movement

Sources report that Iranian opposition leaders called the 2009 presidential elections fraudulent (*Political Handbook of the World* 2012, 662; RFE/RL 11 Feb. 2013). NGO sources say that millions of people protested after the presidential election in 2009, which marked the beginning of the Green Movement [also called Rah-e-Sabz, the Green Path of Hope, the Green Movement of Hope and Change, and the Green Struggle] (IWPR 13 Nov. 2009; Freedom House 2012). The CRS corroborates the view that the Green Movement arose out of the 2009 protests, and calls it a "significant popular opposition," but notes that not all opposition to the Iranian regime is part of the Green Movement (US 5 Sept. 2012, 14).

Sources indicate that, although the Green Movement started as a movement against election results, it transformed over time (IWPR 13 Nov. 2009; US 5 Sept. 2012, 10, 11; Jahanbegloo 5 Sept. 2012). The CRS says that, "as 2009 progressed, the opposition congealed into the 'Green Movement of Hope and Change,' which later moved well beyond the election issue into a challenge to the regime ..." (US 5 Sept. 2012, 10-11). The CRS also says that, according to "several Iran experts," in late 2009, the Green Movement posed a "serious challenge" to the regime (ibid., 2). The Institute for War and Peace Reporting (IWPR) similarly says that, less than five months after the Green Movement arose, the movement began "openly questioning the cornerstone of the Islamic Republic, the absolute power of the supreme religious leader," noting that the movement moved beyond the political demands of reformist leaders (13 Nov. 2009). Ramin Jahanbegloo, a political science professor at York University and former researcher at the French Institute for Iranian Studies (York University n.d.), writes in a 2012 article in *Eurozine* that the Green Movement turned into a "mass struggle for civil liberties and the removal of the theocratic regime in Iran" (5 Sept. 2012).

In its November 2009 report, the IWPR said that the Green Movement had spread to middle and high schools, providing the example of Tehran middle school students refusing to "chant against America" and instead chanting "[d]eath to the dictator" (13 Nov. 2009).

*Foreign Policy* magazine describes the Green Movement as a "grass roots, mass movement that is peacefully demanding democracy, human rights, the rule of law, and reconciliation with the outside world" (13 Jan. 2010). Other sources also similarly describe the Green Movement as a non-violent movement (Jahanbegloo 5 Sept. 2012; IWPR 13 Nov. 2009).

The Green Movement is reported to have held protests in 2009 (ibid.; US 5 Sept. 2012, 15), 2010 (ibid.), 2011 (ibid.; IWPR 17 Feb. 2011) and 2012 (US 5 Sept. 2012, 15; Deutsche Welle 17 Feb. 2012), including protests on major holidays (US 5 Sept. 2012, 14, 15).

A November 2012 Al Jazeera Center for Studies report written by Abdul Qader Tafesh, a researcher specializing in Iranian affairs, indicates that the "political, media and official presence of the Green Movement has been shrinking gradually since 2009" (AJCS 5 Nov. 2012, 2). Jahanbegloo noted in September 2012 that the Green Movement was not as strong as it had been and had less mobilizing ability in Iran (5 Sept. 2012), although the CRS said that, according to observers in Iran, "the Green Movement remains highly active underground and is likely to reemerge" (5 Sept. 2012, 15).

Al Jazeera reports that, according to a Cambridge University political analyst specializing in Iranian geo-strategic affairs, the Green Movement has made "major compromises with those who have survived, and that has fundamentally changed the focus of the movement and even some of its ideological orientations," and has had to shift allegiances and form alliances that do not reflect the Green Movement as it was previously known (1 Aug. 2012). Further information could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response. Ilan Berman, vice president of the American Foreign Policy Council, in an 8 March 2013 commentary in the *Washington Times*, wrote that the Green Movement was in "disarray."

### 3. Structure and Leadership

Some sources describe the Green Movement as "horizontal" (Al Jazeera 1 Aug. 2012; IWPR 13 Nov. 2009). The editor-in-chief of *Rahe Sabz*, an "online reformist publication," says that "'everyone in the movement is leading the movement'" (qtd. by Al Jazeera 1 Aug. 2012). Sources indicate that the Green Movement is composed of several sectors of society, including both the religious and secular, old and young (Jahanbegloo 5 Sept. 2012; IWPR 13 Nov. 2009), modern and traditional (ibid.), poor and rich (Jahanbegloo 5 Sept. 2012). Jahanbegloo writes that the Green Movement consists of several different groups, including student movements, women's rights movements, and intellectuals (ibid.).

The CRS states that the Green Movement

includes various social groups, although it is centered around educated, urban youth, intellectuals, and former regime officials. Perhaps accounting for its failure to challenge the regime over the past two years, it has not to date incorporated many traditionally conservative groups such as older Iranians and Iranians who live in rural areas. It furthermore is divided between those who believe the regime can be reformed and moderated, and those who believe it must be replaced outright by a more secular, or at least less Islamic, system of government. (US 5 Sept. 2012, 14)

According to CRS, "the overall leadership of the movement and decision-making on protest activities is unclear, with several components competing for preeminence" (ibid., 5). However, sources indicate that the following people and blocs are, "to varying degrees" (ibid.), part of the Green Movement:

- titular Green Movement leader Mir Hossein Musavi [also Mousavi], a non-cleric who is a former prime minister (ibid.; *The Telegraph* 23 Aug. 2012; AI et al. 13 Feb. 2013) and was a reformist candidate in the 2009 presidential election (Al Jazeera 1 Aug. 2012; Jahanbegloo 5 Sept. 2012; *The Telegraph* 23 Aug. 2012);
- titular Green Movement leader Mehdi Karrubi [also Karoubi], who was speaker of the *Majles* [parliament] between 1989 and 1992, and again between 2000 and 2004 (US 5 Sept. 2012, 5), and was a reformist candidate in the 2009 presidential election (Al Jazeera 1 Aug. 2012; Tehran Bureau 30 Jan. 2013);
- titular Green Movement leader Mohammad Khatami [also Khatami], who was a reformist president from 1997 to 2005 (US 5 Sept. 2012, 5), did not run in the 2009 elections (Al Jazeera 1 Aug. 2012), reportedly later quit the Green Movement and accepted the 2009 election results (AJCS 5 Nov. 2012), and urged reformists to abandon the Green Movement (*Political Handbook of the World* 2012, 666);
- student opposition leaders (US 5 Sept. 2012, 6);
- Islamic Iran Participation Front, which is described by CRS as "the most prominent and best organized pro-reform grouping, [which] has lost political ground to Green Movement groups advocating outright overthrow of the regime" (ibid.);

- Mojahedin of the Islamic Revolution Organization (MIR), which, according to the CRS, consists of "left-leaning Iranian figures" and is a "major constituency of the reformist camp" (ibid.);
- Combatant Clerics Association [different from the Association of Combatant Clerics (ibid., 5,6)], which is led by "reformist, not hardline, clerics and officials," who include Mohammad Khatemi, as well as a former minister of interior and a former prosecutor general (ibid., 6);
- labour unions, which, according to the CRS, are "not a core constituency of the Green Movement, but laborers [are] viewed as increasingly sympathetic to political change" (ibid.). The CRS also indicates that, some "experts" speculated that, due to labour protests in Tehran on "May Day" 2010 and small strikes that took place in 2010, the labour movement was gravitating toward the Green Movement (ibid.);
- other prominent dissidents, some of whom are in Iran, and others who are in exile (ibid.).

Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty (11 Feb. 2013) and the *Political Handbook of the World* (2012, 666) both say that Musavi and Karrubi were recognized as leaders of the Green Movement.

The CRS states that some supporters of the Green Movement have left Iran for Europe, Asia or the US (US 5 Sept. 2012, 5). Jahanbegloo, in his 5 September 2012 article, indicates that the Green Movement leadership used to be centralized but has become multi-centred and the movement is represented by dissidents living in exile.

#### 4. Treatment by Authorities

Sources report the violent suppression of protests (Freedom House 2012; AI et al. 13 Feb. 2013; MIT 17 June 2011). According to the *Telegraph*, the "clampdown" on the 2009 protests led to the "deaths of scores of demonstrators" (23 Aug. 2012). The CRS reports that, during protests between 13 June and 19 June 2009, authorities used force "causing 27 protester deaths (official tally) during that period, with figures from opposition groups running over 100," and adds that, on 20 June 2009, "at least 10 protestors" were killed (US 5 Sept. 2012, 10-11). The *Political Handbook of the World* states that approximately 250 demonstrators were killed during the 2009 protests (2012, 662). Jahanbegloo indicates that, in the months after the protest, the regime used "brutal repression" against protestors, including "Stalinist-style show trials, torture, rape and murder" (5 Sept. 2012). According to Ardeshtir Amirarjmand, Musavi's representative living in exile who was speaking at a June 2011 panel discussion sponsored by the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) Center for International Studies and the Nonviolent Initiative for Democracy, authorities used "very violent methods of oppression" including rape (MIT 17 June 2011). The *Political Handbook of the World* indicates that Musavi and Khatami claimed that the authorities were conducting show trials, forced confessions, and "torture (which the police chief confirmed)" (2012, 662). Sources state that, in January 2010, authorities executed some oppositionists (US 5 Sept. 2012, 15; *Political Handbook of the World* 2012, 662). The *Political Handbook of the World* says that, in February 2011, "222 members of parliament issued a statement condemning the leaders of the Green Movement, calling for their trial and execution" (2012, 663). The IWPR reports the death of two students at a 14 February 2011 protest (17 Feb. 2011).

Sources report the arrests of Green Movement leaders (Deutsche Welle 17 Feb. 2012; US 5 Sept. 2012, 2), activists (ibid.; *The Telegraph* 23 Aug. 2012), and supporters (US 24 May 2012, 26; *Foreign Policy* 12 January 2010). The CRS indicates that the Iranian regime has "pushed the Green Movement underground through imprisonment or house arrests of its leaders or main activists" (US 5 Sept. 2012, 2). The *Telegraph* reports the arrests of thousands of opposition activists resulting from 2009 protests (23 Aug. 2012). A 13 January 2010 article in *Foreign Policy* indicates that "hundreds, if not thousands" of people had been detained. The *Political Handbook of the World* indicates that the first 2009 protests resulted in the arrest of more than 100 reformist group members, and 500 protestors, journalists and government officials (2012, 662). The *Political Handbook of the World* also indicates that, in December 2009, 1,500 demonstrators were arrested (2012, 662). The CRS states that, during the planning of an 11 February 2010 demonstration, the regime "made several hundred preemptive arrests" (US 5 Sept. 2012, 15). *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2011* states that, according to the International Campaign for Human Rights in Iran (ICHR), there were more than 200 political prisoners in Ward 350 of Evin Prison of which at least 120 "were imprisoned in the aftermath of the 2009 elections or as Green Movement supporters" (24 May 2012, 21). Sources indicate that Musavi, Karubbi, and their wives were placed under house arrest in February 2011 (Freedom House 2012; AI et al. 13 Feb. 2013). Freedom House states that they have not faced any official charges or trial (2012). On 11 February 2013, the Associated Press reported that Mousavi, his wife, and Karubbi had been under house arrest for "nearly two years."

Sources report the occurrence of deaths in custody (*Political Handbook of the World* 2012, 662; IHRDC 9 Nov. 2012). According to the Iran Human Rights Documentation Center (IHRDC), a Green Movement blogger, Sattar Beheshti, was tortured to death in custody in 2012 (ibid.).

Sources report the arrest of journalists (Tehran Bureau 30 Jan. 2013; US 5 Sept. 2012, 7; AI et al. 13 Feb. 2013). Al Jazeera reports that, following the 2009 protests, there were "severe crackdowns ... with many reporters, bloggers and lawyers working on rights issues being convicted of crimes against the government (or God)" (1 Aug. 2012). The Tehran Bureau, an independent network of correspondents in Iran that is hosted by the *Guardian* (*The Guardian*, n.d.), reports that, after the 2009 protests, 100 journalists who supported the Green Movement were detained (Tehran Bureau 30 Jan. 2013). The Tehran Bureau also reports that, in three days at the end of January 2013, 15 journalists, most of whom work for "pro-reform publications," had been arrested in Tehran in the lead-up to the June presidential election (30 January 2013).

*Country Reports 2011* says that, according to the ICHRI, in 2010, 50 university faculty members who support or are affiliated with the Green Movement were dismissed or forced to retire (24 May 2012, 45).

Deutsche Welle, a German international broadcasting company (n.d.), indicates that, since the 2009 protests, the majority of the opposition is "in exile, imprisoned or dead" (17 Feb. 2012). Al Jazeera reports similarly that, according to Hasan Al-Omari, an expert on Iran and researcher for several think-tanks, Green Movement leaders are "either in prison, under house arrest or in exile" (1 Aug. 2012).

## 5. The Green Party

The UK Border Agency's 6 August 2009 country of origin report on Iran lists the Green Party of Iran as a political party. According to a working paper of the German Institute for International and Security Affairs (Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik, SWP), the Green Party of Iran [Hezb-e-sabz Hayeh Iran] is different from the Green Movement (SWP June 2010). The working paper says that the Green Party of Iran was founded in California in 2000 and is "the professional Iranian expatriate opposition" (ibid.), although an 18 October 1999 Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty article said that the Green Party of Iran was based in Canada. Further information could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

According to the Green Party of Iran website,

The Green Party of Iran is a political party founded to defend Iran's environment, particularly its forests, soil, air and water resources. We believe that the Iranian population has the right to a safe and clean environment, and to political, economical, social and cultural freedom. Furthermore, the Green Party of Iran intends to expose and oppose the current Iranian regime's nuclear, chemical, and biological mass production of weapons.

In view of the increasing environmental destruction in Iran, we believe that a Green Party is required on the Iranian political stage. In addition to proposing environmental policies, the Green Party of Iran advocates a democratic political and economic system for Iran. (Green Party of Iran n.d.a)

The Green Party of Iran also states that the "root causes of Iran's state of ecological deterioration lies with the destructive policies adopted by the Islamic Republic" (ibid. 15 Mar. 2009).

Beyond ecological and environmental issues, the Green Party of Iran's platform covers topics including foreign policy, democracy and social-political freedom, women's rights, and the "greening" of the economy (ibid. n.d.b). The Green Party of Iran states that "the removal of the present regime of the Islamic Republic of Iran is necessary and inevitable" and believes that Iranians should democratically select their leaders (n.d.b).

This Response was prepared after researching publicly accessible information currently available to the Research Directorate within time constraints. This Response is not, and does not purport to be, conclusive as to the merit of any particular claim for refugee protection. Please find below the list of sources consulted in researching this Information Request.

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Date modified: 2016-01-05