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Iran: Student protests in Iran; treatment by Iranian authorities of student protestors (December 2007 - December 2009)
Research Directorate, Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada, Ottawa

Sources indicate that universities are centres of political activity and dissent in Iran (RFE/RL 23 Sept. 2009; AP 7 Dec. 2009; *The New York Times* 3 Oct. 2009). Various reports and news articles note that student activists have come under increasing pressure from government authorities (RFE/RL 23 Sept. 2009; ICHRI 5 Dec. 2008; US 25 Feb. 2009, Sec. 2; *The New York Times* 6 Sept. 2009).

Student activities and treatment in 2007 - 2008

Human rights organizations report that in December 2007, there were widespread arrests of student activists in Iran, prior to and following demonstrations organized by student groups (ICHRI 5 Dec. 2008; AI 21 Oct. 2009). According to Amnesty International (AI), approximately 70 people were arrested and several were "tortured" while imprisoned (ibid.). The International Campaign for Human Rights in Iran (ICHRI), an organization based in New York and Hamburg which supports Iranian human rights activists (ICHRI 5 Jan. 2009), similarly reports that "[a]s many as 65 students were detained and subjected to torture and ill-treatment" (ICHRI 5 Dec. 2008). The ICHRI reports that after the students were released, many continued to face threats and intimidation by authorities and that several students were suspended from their studies (ibid.). One student detainee from Payam Noor University in Sanandaj, died in January 2008, nine days after being taken into custody; the authorities did not conduct an autopsy and buried him without the presence of his family (ibid.; HRW 17 Jan. 2008; US 25 Feb. 2009, Sec. 1). AI provides examples of "torture" in which one student sustained an injury of broken ribs and teeth and another student had a hard object inserted into his ear, causing him to lose his hearing in that ear (AI 21 Oct. 2009).

According to the ICHRI, at least 200 students in Iran were arrested between June 2007 and December 2008, and at least 160 students were suspended or expelled from universities in Iran between March 2007 and December 2008; many of those imprisoned were subject to "torture and ill-treatment" (5 Dec. 2008). The ICHRI provides names and details of the students who were arrested, suspended and expelled (6 Dec. 2008).

Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty (RFE/RL) reports that in December 2008, several hundred students protested against the government at Shiraz University

(9 Dec. 2008). RFE/RL notes that the protest, which marked National Students Day, was delayed two days in order to avoid confrontation with security forces (RFE/RL 9 Dec. 2008).

Student involvement in post-election protests, June 2009

Sources indicate that students were active in protests concerning the June 2009 election (RFE/RL 23 Sept. 2009; IHRDC Oct. 2009, 2; AI Dec. 2009, 26-27). AI reports that 133 students were arrested (ibid., 26), while the Iran Human Rights Documentation Center (IHRDC), an organization based in the United States (US) which aims to document the human rights situation in Iran since the 1979 revolution (IHRDC n.d.), reports that more than 80 students were arrested for participating in post-election protests (IHRDC Oct. 2009, 2). AI and RFE/RL report that student dormitories in some Iranian universities came under attack following the June election protests; at least five students died and several were injured (AI Dec. 2009, 17; RFE/RL 23 Sept. 2009). According to AI, plain-clothed forces, believed to be Basij militia and police special forces, attacked people in a dormitory at Tehran University on the night of 14 June 2009; similar attacks occurred in Esfahan [also known as Isfahan] the same night and in Shiraz on the following day (AI Dec. 2009, 17). AI notes that the Speaker of Parliament condemned the attacks and publicly blamed the Ministry of the Interior (ibid.).

RFE/RL and *The New York Times* report that in September 2009, students suspected of participating in post-election protests were summoned before disciplinary committees at a number of universities in Iran, including Tehran, Mashad, Tabriz and Shiraz (RFE/RL 4 Sept. 2009; *The New York Times* 6 Sept. 2009). Media sources report that some students were jailed, expelled, banned from dormitories or studies and suspended (ibid.; ibid. 30 Sept. 2009; RFE/RL 23 Sept. 2009).

Student protests at universities, Fall 2009

Student protests continued at university campuses in Iran in September and October of 2009 (IHRDC Oct. 2009, 2; RFE/RL 27 Oct. 2009; *The Guardian* 1 Nov. 2009). Media sources indicate that hundreds of students demonstrated in an anti-government protest at Tehran University on 28 September 2009, and hundreds more protested at Sharif University in Tehran on 29 September 2009 (RFE/RL 29 Sept. 2009; *The New York Times* 30 Sept. 2009; ibid. 3 Oct. 2009). *The New York Times* reports that 18 student leaders were subsequently arrested for their involvement with the demonstrations (ibid.). RFE/RL also reports that on 27 Oct. 2009, more than 1,000 students demonstrated at the Islamic Azad University in southern Tehran (27 Oct. 2009). News sources indicate that students held demonstrations in September and October of 2009 at universities in Tehran, Esfahan, Shiraz, Karaj, Qazvin (*The Guardian* 1 Nov. 2009), Ahwaz, Mazandaran, Rasht and other cities (RFE/RL 4 Nov. 2009). According to *The Guardian*, as a result of the demonstrations, hundreds of students were called before disciplinary boards, some were imprisoned and at least 20 were expelled (*The Guardian* 1 Nov. 2009). The IHRDC reports that government authorities also increased security presence at universities (Oct. 2009; see also *The Guardian* 1 Nov. 2009).

Sources report that on 4 November 2009, marking the 30th anniversary of the takeover of the American embassy in Tehran, student protests took place at universities in Tehran (AI Dec. 2009, 21; IWPR 4 Dec. 2009), Shiraz (AI Dec. 2009, 21; RFE/RL 4 Nov. 2009), Qazvin, Esfahan, Mashhad, Tabriz, Kerman,

Ahvaz (AI Dec. 2009, 21), Rasht, and other Iranian cities (RFE/RL 4 Nov. 2009). According to the Institute for War and Peace Reporting (IWPR), at Tehran University security forces used batons and tear gas to disperse protesters (IWPR 4 Nov. 2009). AI reports that one student was fatally shot by security forces in Esfahan (AI Dec. 2009, 21).

The ICHRI reports that in November 2009, several Iranian students were arrested, prosecuted and detained in cities throughout Iran, including in Esfahan, Babol, Chaharmahal-o-Bakhtiari, Shiraz, Ilam, Kermanshah, Ghazvin and Tehran (ICHRI 24 Nov. 2009). The ICHRI reports details on over 50 students who were arrested and over 120 students who were summoned before disciplinary committees between 16 November 2009 and 23 November 2009 (ibid.). According to the ICHRI, the arrests likely occurred in order to stifle protests expected on 7 December, National Students Day (ibid.). AI and media sources similarly note that many students were detained by authorities in the weeks prior to National Students Day (AI 7 Dec. 2009; *Newsday* 5 Dec. 2009; AP 7 Dec. 2009; *The New York Times* 7 Dec. 2009). By December 2009, sources estimate that between 90 students (ICHRI 2 Dec. 2009) and 100 students had been arrested (AP 7 Dec. 2009).

National Students Day protests, December 2009

Media sources and human rights organizations report that thousands of students protested at universities across Iran on 7 December 2009 (AP 7 Dec. 2009; AI 7 Dec. 2009; RFE/RL 7 Dec. 2009) and 8 December 2009 (Canadian Press 8 Dec. 2009; ICHRI 9 Dec. 2009). This day marks the anniversary of the killing of three students under the Shah in 1953 (*Irish Times* 8 Dec. 2009; Reuters 9 Dec. 2009; AI 7 Dec. 2009) and students have traditionally used the occasion to demonstrate for greater respect of human rights (ibid.). The Iranian government banned international journalists from observing these student protests in 2009, and shut down Internet and telecommunication services (ICHRI 7 Dec. 2009; AI 7 Dec. 2009; *Irish Times* 8 Dec. 2009). Footage posted on Internet sites showed students at Tehran University burning pictures of the Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei and chanting slogans against him and President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad (AP 7 Dec. 2009; Canadian Press 8 Dec. 2009; Reuters 9 Dec. 2009). Sources report that riot police surrounded Tehran University to prevent the protest from spreading (RFE/RL 7 Dec. 2009; *The Belfast Telegraph* 8 Dec. 2009). Security forces, including the Basij militia, reportedly used batons and tear gas (AI 7 Dec. 2009; AP 7 Dec. 2009; *Los Angeles Times* 8 Dec. 2009) and threw stones at demonstrators (AP 7 Dec. 2009; Canadian Press 8 Dec. 2009; *The Belfast Telegraph* 8 Dec. 2009). Human rights groups received reports that police used plastic bullets to deter protesters at Amir Kabir University in Tehran (AI 7 Dec. 2009; ICHRI 7 Dec. 2009). Tehran's police chief, General Azizullah Rajabzadeh, reportedly stated that 204 protesters, including 39 women, were arrested in Tehran (Canadian Press 8 Dec. 2009; *The Guardian* 9 Dec. 2009). Official Iranian news sources reported that 86 of those arrested in Tehran were released from custody after expressing regrets (Fars 8 Dec. 2009; ICHRI 9 Dec. 2009).

Sources report that student protests to mark National Students Day occurred in a number of other cities throughout Iran, including in Esfahan, Kermanshal, Shiraz, Mashhad, Tabriz (ICHRI 7 Dec. 2009; *The Los Angeles Times* 8 Dec. 2009), Kerman, Hamedan, Rasht, Ilam (ibid.), and Karaj (ICHRI 7 Dec. 2009). AI received reports that students from Shahid Behesti University protested outside Evin Prison against detaining political prisoners and that there were clashes between security forces and students in Esfahan, Mazandaran and

Sari universities (AI 7 Dec. 2009).

Student Groups targeted by authorities

Non-government organizations (NGOs) report that Iranian authorities have targeted members of Students for Freedom and Equality [also known as Students Seeking Freedom and Equality] (AI 21 Oct. 2009; HRW 9 Apr. 2008; Freedom House 2009), a student organization aiming to create a nationwide student network, to end the military presence on university campuses (AI 21 Oct. 2009) and to "peacefully resist various forms of inequality and exploitation" (HRW 9 Apr. 2008). Two sources indicate that more than 40 students affiliated with this organization were arrested in 2007 and 2008 (ibid.; Freedom House 2009). Some students reported that they were subject to "torture" and mistreatment (HRW 9 Apr. 2008; Freedom House 2009; AI 21 Oct. 2009). AI reports further arrests and trials of students affiliated with this group in 2009, including some who were arrested following the post-election protests in June 2009 (AI 21 Oct. 2009).

Media and human rights organizations report that members of the Office for Consolidating Unity [also known as *Daftar Tahkim Vahdat*, Office to Foster Unity, Student Union to Foster Unity, Iranian Student Union], have also been targeted by Iranian authorities (*The New York Times* 3 Oct. 2009; ibid. 30 Sept. 2009; ICHRI 5 Dec. 2008). Sources characterize the Office for Consolidating Unity as a "pro-democracy student group" (*The New York Times* 3 Oct. 2009; ibid. Sept. 30, 2009) and "Iran's largest reformist student group" (RFE/RL 23 Sept. 2009). According to *The New York Times*, this group has come under pressure since the 2005 election of President Mahmoud Ahmdeinejad (3 Oct. 2009). The US Department of State's *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2008* states that Ali Nikunesbati, the group's spokesman, was arrested on 8 November 2008 (US 25 Feb. 2009, Sec. 1d). *The New York Times* reports that the 18 students who were arrested in October 2009 following student demonstrations were members of the Office for Consolidating Unity (3 Oct. 2009). RFE/RL reports that one senior member was arrested in November 2009 (4 Nov. 2009). The ICHRI indicates that in November and December of 2009, two members of the Central Council of the Office for Consolidating Unity were arrested and three other members of the Central Council were called before the Revolutionary Court (ICHRI 19 Nov. 2009). Follow up information on these arrests could not be found in the sources consulted by the Research Directorate.

The ICHRI also reports that in November 2009, authorities arrested and detained several leaders of the leading student alumni group, ADVAR (ICHRI 19 Nov. 2009; see also AI Dec. 2009, 20). The ICHRI reports that ADVAR's spokesman, Abdollah Momeni, was sentenced to an eight-year prison term, six years for his involvement in the post-election protests in June 2009, and an additional two years for earlier activities (ICHRI 19 Nov. 2009). According to media sources, information about Momeni's eight-year sentence was posted on a reformist website (AFP 14 Nov. 2009; Reuters 14 Nov. 2009).

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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Internet sites, including: European Country of Origin Network (ecoi.net), Foundation for Democracy in Iran (FDI), International Crisis Group, Office of the United Nations (UN) High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) Refworld, U.S. Committee for Refugees and Immigrants (USCRI).

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