

**Refugee Review Tribunal
AUSTRALIA**

RRT RESEARCH RESPONSE

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Questions

- 1. Please provide information on the presence of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) in Iran and the government's attitude to the UNHCR and persons working for it.**
- 2. Please provide information on Azad University and any incidences of dissidence at the University.**
- 3. Please provide information on the "Human Law Firm" website.**
- 4. Please advise if there are human rights advocacy groups in Iran? Is there information to indicate the extent of solitary as opposed to network activism?**
- 5. Please provide information on Iranian dissident or human rights groups operating in Australia.**
- 6. Please provide background information on political and human rights issues over the past five years in Iran and, in particular, the context of speaking out on human rights issues in 2006?**

RESPONSE

- 1. Please provide information on the presence of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) in Iran and the government's attitude to the UNHCR and persons working for it.**

Iran and UNHCR

The US Committee for Refugees and Immigrants provides an overview of the manner in which the Iranian government allows but also restricts the activities of the activities of the Office of UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) in Iran:

Iran agreed to allow the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) to screen deportees for registered refugees at one border crossing, Dogharun, but hindered its access. Iran also continued to resist setting up a second monitoring station in Milak that its 2003 repatriation agreement with UNHCR and Afghanistan required. Iranian security forces had the full refugee registration database available to them at detention centers to prescreen deportees.

...Iran honored UNHCR's return advisory, which held that conditions in Iraq were not conducive to mass returns, for its 54,400 Iraqi refugees. The Government also reported hosting some 30,000 refugees of various nationalities (including Tajiks, Bosnians, Azeris, Eritreans, Somalis, Bangladeshis, and Pakistanis) but did not allow UNHCR access to them or to any information about them and turned away asylum seekers who sought interviews with BAFIA. During 2005 and 2006, Iran reregistered 940,000 Afghan refugees who had initially registered in 2001 or earlier, but did not reregister more recent arrivals. In March, Iran agreed to extend its agreement with UNHCR and Afghanistan for the repatriation of Afghan refugees for another year. Iran was party to the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees (1951 Convention) and its 1967 Protocol but maintained reservations on many of its rights. The 1979 Constitution allowed the Government to grant asylum to applicants "unless they are regarded as traitors and saboteurs." Iran's 1963 Regulations Relating to Refugees (1963 Regulations) provided that "Refugees should not be forcibly returned to the country where their life or freedom is endangered for political, racial or religious reasons or for their membership in a particular social group."

...UNHCR offered refugees free legal advice. In 2004, BAFIA and UNHCR established Dispute Settlement Committees (DSCs) in seven provinces with significant Afghan communities to mediate legal disputes that might have hindered repatriation. They added five more Committees in 2005. Each DSC consisted of a judge, one representative each from BAFIA and the Afghan community, and a lawyer contracted by UNHCR. Iran did not allow UNHCR or any other humanitarian agencies to monitor its detention facilities. However, deportees UNHCR interviewed in Afghanistan reported physical and verbal abuse while detained.

...Few international humanitarian agencies operated in the country as the Government restricted their operations and did not allow UNHCR to fund them. The Government did not allow UNHCR or nongovernmental organizations access to the 30,000 Tajik, Bosnian, Azeri, Eritrean, Somali, Bangladeshi, and Pakistani refugees it reported hosting (US Committee for Refugees and Immigrants 2007, 'Iran' in *World Refugee Survey 2007*, July <http://www.refugees.org/countryreports.aspx?id=2001> – Accessed 7 May 2008 – Attachment 1).

The Iranian government and UNHCR would appear to have been cooperating quite smoothly in recent years and, where disagreements between the Iranian government and UNHCR have occurred, it would appear that the relationship has nevertheless remained cordial. UNHCR's expression of its concerns in regard to certain aspects of Iran's planned repatriation of persons displaced from Afghanistan is a case in point:

All Afghan citizens in Iran without valid refugee documents will be deported, Seyyed Taghi Ghaemi, director of the Iranian bureau for aliens and foreign immigrants, told reporters at the end of a two-day meeting with Afghan and UN officials in Kabul on 3 March.

The Iranian authorities had announced a temporary suspension of the deportation process in early January due to extremely cold weather in Afghanistan. Now, Iranian officials say the deportation will resume in the near future.

The UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR) says it does not know exactly how many unregistered Afghans are living in Iran, but Iranian officials estimate there are over one million.

There are over 900,000 registered Afghan refugees in Iran, the UNHCR says, and they are legally entitled to stay.

Ghaemi did not specify whether all unregistered Afghans would be expelled from Iran in 2008, but said there would be consultations with the Afghan authorities, adding: “We will deport them from Iran as we encounter them.”

The UN and the Afghan government acknowledge Iran’s right to deport aliens who enter its territory or stay illegally. However, aid agencies and Afghan officials have repeatedly called on Iran to deport Afghans in a humane and gradual way (‘Afghanistan-Iran: Iran says it will deport over one million Afghans’ 2008, *IRIN News*, 4 March <http://www.irinnews.org/Report.aspx?ReportId=77107> – Accessed 7 May 2008 – Attachment 2).

In February 2008 Iran has reportedly “called for enhanced cooperation from the UNHCR in view of Iran’s concerns about the prevailing Afghan refugee conditions”.

Taqi Qaemi, director general of the Interior Ministry’s Bureau for Aliens and Foreign Immigrants Affairs (BAFIA), says that the UN has only paid Iran a sum of \$1,033,035 out of the \$12,800,000 planned fund for Afghan refugees.

“We have exercised much restraint, but as more people are pouring into Iran, we will have to fix our regulations very strongly in the future,” he added.

Meanwhile, visiting UN Assistant High Commissioner for Refugees Erika Feller has said: “What have struck me during this visit are the different situations Afghan refugees are living in, but the fact is that the insecurity in Afghanistan is greatly influencing their decision to return home.

“Iran has been hosting Afghan refugees for over two decades and has a very solid track record in providing assistance. The refugees generally have access to basic health care and education and have not been under threat of forced return,” said Feller (‘Iran calls for increased UNHCR aid’ 2008, *Press TV*, 28 February <http://www.presstv.ir/detail.aspx?id=45105§ionid=3510212> – Accessed 7 May 2008 – Attachment 3).

Iranian nationals working for UNHCR

According to the Iran component of *UNHCR Global Appeal 2008-2009* UNHCR plans to employ 17 international staff in Iran in 2008-2009 and 109 national staff. It lists its operational partner in the Iranian government as: “Ministry of Education and Training, Ministry of Health, Ministry of the Interior – Bureau for Aliens and Foreign Immigrant Affairs (BAFIA)”. The Iran component of *UNHCR Global Appeal 2007* listed 123 national staff for that year. And the Iran component of *UNHCR Global Report 2006* listed “a total of 170 staff members, of whom 22 were international and 148 national” (see page 266-267 UN High Commissioner for Refugees 2007, ‘UNHCR Global Appeal 2008-2009 – Islamic Republic of Iran’, 1 December <http://www.unhcr.org/home/PUBL/474ac8e011.pdf> – Accessed 7 May 2008 – Attachment 4; UN High Commissioner for Refugees 2006, *UNHCR Global Appeal 2007 – Islamic Republic of Iran*, 1 December – Attachment 5; UN High Commissioner for Refugees 2007, *UNHCR Global Report 2006– Islamic Republic of Iran*, 1

June <http://www.unhcr.org/home/PUBL/4666d2420.pdf> – Accessed 7 May 2008 – Attachment 6).

Searches were conducted for information on the attitude of the Iranian authorities towards UNHCR's Iranian personnel and towards Iranian citizens who choose to work for Iran while abroad. Unfortunately no information addressing these issues could be located in the time available to complete this response. A cursory search of the Factiva news database was conducted looking for incidents in which UNHCR personnel had been *arrested, detained* or *expelled*, no such reports could be located.

2. Please provide information on Azad University and any incidences of dissidence at the University.

The Islamic Azad University (or simply Azad University) maintains a website but this is entirely in Farsi (for the Islamic Azad University website, see: <http://www.azad.ac.ir/> – Accessed 6 May 2008)

Islamic Azad University – background

A 1999 paper produced by the Danish Refugee Council, *The System of Education in Iran*, provides the following information on the Islamic Azad University, noting that while Azad University is the largest of Iran's fee paying institutions, and outside the government system, it remains nonetheless under the informal authority of the theocratic regime.

Following the Islamic revolution, all kinds of private schools were nationalised. The inability to accommodate the need for education as well as the hope to decrease expenses for the public school sector forced the government to allow nonprofit private education in 1988. At this time, the fee-based Free Islamic University (that is, Azad University) had already existed for four years, thereby being an important factor in the 1988 approval of nonprofit private institutions. Today most private institutions are subject to the same kind of curriculum control as the public institutions, meaning that they work under the supervision of the Undersecretary of Public Participation in the Ministry of Education. (p.21)

...Within the last few years, opposition to private education has grown. With more hard-liners gaining influence in the cabinet, it is being discussed whether schools and institutions of higher education should be renationalised. As it is, it seems almost impossible for the state to once more take on the burden of financing all education. For instance, the Free Islamic University (Azad University) has an annual intake that surpasses the total intake in all public institutions. One must conclude, however, that private education faces political resistance. (p.19)

...In general, the following categorisation of [Iran's] institutions of higher education can be made.

1. Public universities/colleges. These institutions are controlled by either the Ministry of Culture and Higher Education or the Ministry of Health (medical fields). Degrees offered are associate's degree, B.A., M.A., M.D., and Ph.D. Entrance is by the national entrance exam. The National Distance Learning University, Payam-e Nur University, is also considered a public university, though tuition fees are required.

2. Private nonprofit universities/colleges. These are nonprofit, private, and subsequently fee-based institutions. The curriculum is approved by the Ministry of Culture and Higher

Education, and the degrees (same as above) are recognised by the ministry. Entrance is through the national entrance exam.

3. Private universities/colleges. Only one institution dominates this category; it is Azad University. This is a private institution with its own entrance exam. It has the same curriculum as the above-mentioned institutions and offers the same degrees, even though these are not recognised by the ministry.

4. Technical institutes/colleges and teacher training colleges/centres. These institutions offer associate's degrees. The teacher training centres are attached to the Ministry of Education. Entrance to those institutions is not through the national entrance exam.

...In the academic year 1994-95, there were 478,455 students in public higher education including both public and private nonprofit institutions; 327,129 were university students or students attending equivalent institutions (Ministry of Education, 1996). About 30 percent of the students were female. Additionally, there were 593,752 students in the nongovernmental sector. This number is very high as it includes Azad University. By 1994-95, Azad University had 480,000 students located in more than 50 national branches (Ministry of Education, 1996). This led to a total of 1,072,207 students in higher education. The enrolment of Azad University has not decreased since 1994-95. (p.61)

...The rate of students gaining access is normally as low as 10 percent (not published information). Students who fail can retake the test. However, many who fail will apply to Azad University.

...There are no tuition fees at public institutions. Azad University and the Distance Learning University Payam-e Nur charge substantial fees. (p.62)

Regarding more autonomous institutions, Azad University remains the biggest university and is still private. This means that the university gives entrance exams itself. However, the curriculum is identical to that of other universities. The degrees obtained from Azad University are not recognised by the Ministry of Education. Azad University has a good reputation of a high academic level. It is especially noted that Azad University has the financial means to hire qualified staff. (p.63)

Higher education is the sector of the education system that has enjoyed the highest degree of autonomy. However, it is very clear that higher education, having been totally transformed by and under continuous observation of the Higher Council of the Cultural Revolution, does not have many influences from outside the social spheres dominated by the theocratic regime. This also applies to the one main private institution in Iran, namely, Azad University. It is no secret that this institution is tolerated by the government, thanks to the close, but informal, connections between leaders of the university and members of the cabinet and ministry officials, as well as the university's eagerness to live up to the ideological demands of the authorities. This example is only mentioned because it gives a good description of the both formal and informal ties between government and the education system. (p.63) (Arnold, J. Plum, M. & Chor, H. 1999, *The System of Education in Iran*, Dansk Flygtningehjælp website <http://flygtning.dk/fileadmin/uploads/pdf/Materialer/iran.pdf> – Accessed 26 March 2008 – Attachment 8).

Islamic Azad University and student dissidence

Frequent reports have appeared in recent years of students from Islamic Azad University coming to the attention of the Iranian authorities.

December 2007 reportedly saw a number of student arrests and subsequent protests. Those arrested were attending a range of universities and a student from Azad University is among

those listed. Details of the demonstrations, arrests and photographs of protest activity can be viewed in Attachment 9 sourced from the activist World War 4 Report ('Iran: dissident students arrested' 2007, World War 4 Report website, 7 December <http://ww4report.com/node/4765> – Accessed 7 May 2008 – Attachment 9; see also the report on the website of the International Federation of Iranian Refugees: 'To all freedom-loving people, and to labour, student, and human rights organizations across the world' 2007, International Federation of Iranian Refugees website, 17 December <http://www.hambastegi.org/farsi/et2007/December/english.htm> – Accessed 7 May 2008 – Attachment 10; for an update on the situation from Human Rights Watch, see: Human Rights Watch 2008, 'Iran: Detained Students May Face Torture', 10 April http://hrw.org/english/docs/2008/04/10/iran18501_txt.htm – Accessed 7 May 2008 – Attachment 11).

A blog entry of January 2008 lists the following Azad University students as being behind imprisoned:

- Elinaz Jamshidi (f), Azad University of central Tehran student of communication
- ...- Ali Kolaei (m), Azad University of Shahriar City
- ...- Bahram Shojaee (m), Tehran-south Azad University, Student of Chemistry engineer (Kamangir 2008, 'January 30th, Solidarity of Bloggers with the Imprisoned Iranian Students', MideastYouth website, 30 January <http://www.mideastyouth.com/2008/01/21/january-30th-solidarity-of-bloggers-with-the-imprisoned-iranian-students/> – Accessed 7 May 2008 – Attachment 12).

A March 2007 Amnesty International bulletin reports on the case of an Azad University student who was arrested and tried but subsequently released (Amnesty International 2007, 'Iran: Further information on arbitrary arrest/ prisoners of conscience/ fear of torture and ill-treatment', AI Index: MDE 13/037/2007, 26 March <http://asiapacific.amnesty.org/library/Index/ENGMDE130372007?open&of=ENG-IRN> – Accessed 7 May 2008 – Attachment 13).

In January 2007 it was reported that: "Several students from Azad University of Sanandaj, in western Iran, were suspended for one or two terms, or admonished in writing, after participating in protests on December 13" ('Iran: Ahmadinejad's Government Pressuring Activist Students, Universities' 2007, *Payvand Iran News*, 17 January – Attachment 14)

A June 2006 article reported on a crackdown on student activism at that time and related an episode in which: "student Salman Sima at Tehran Azad University was disbarred from continuing her schooling for one term by the university's disciplinary board and was exiled to the Karaj campus of the university for another term" ('Iran: Mass arrest of student activists' 2006, *Rooz*, 6 June – Attachment 15).

On 24 January 2006 it was reported that: "Blogger Mojtaba Saminejad, who has been in prison since February last year was taken in handcuffs (photo) to sit his exams at Tehran's Azad University on 21 January 2006" (Reporters sans Frontieres 2006, 'Iran: Jailed blogger taken to sit university exams in handcuffs', 24 January – Attachment 16).

A 2005 report on the website of the Committee of Defence of Human Rights in Iran-Sweden (Komitdefa) lists a number of Azad University students under the heading: "The summoning, arrest, interrogation, detained, charges and.... against students":

- 26) Safarali Koini, “Azad Eslami University”, Zanjan
- 27) Mehdi Karboni, “Azad Eslami University”, Zanjan
- 28) Meysam Jamali, “Azad Eslami University”, Zanjan
- 29) Mohamed Rahimi, “Azad Eslami University”, Zanjan
- 30) Jaifar Kalilian, “Azad University”, immolated himself after a dispute with the University authorities, Salmas (‘The summoning, arrest, interrogation, detained, charges and.... against students’ 2005, The committee of defence of human Rights in Iran-Sweden website, no.9, July <http://www.komitedefa.org/sidor/rep24E.htm> – Accessed 7 May 2008 – Attachment 17).

Comments of Academics at Azad University

The liberal comments of some Azad University academics have been reported in the English language press.

In May 2006:

The new President, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, a former Revolutionary Guard and populist hardliner, seems bent on returning Iran to the early days of the Islamic revolution, cracking down on dissent and picking fights with the West.

“If you believe that the elections were not rigged, then those who voted for Ahmadinejad, and there were many who did, believed in his promises on redistribution of wealth and campaigning against corruption, but they didn’t vote for the sake of fundamentalist values,” says Professor Davoud Bavand, who teaches international law at Azad University (O’Loughlin, E. 2006, ‘Iran: Young Iranians struggle with conservatism’, *The Age*, 24 May – Attachment 18).

In June 2003:

Analysts see no sign that such conservatives are ready to compromise with the demonstrators, and that the protest may well be crushed in coming days. But the impact appears to widen with every day – with reports Sunday that protests had spread to three smaller cities.

“It’s a sign, [like] those small and relatively minor noises that can be heard when a dam is cracking,” says Shahriar Rouhani, a professor of physics at Tehran’s Azad University. “The engineer knows that this is not a joke ... [and] could result in a major catastrophe.” (Peterson, S. 2003, ‘90% of Iranians want change, 70% what dramatic change’, *Christian Science Monitor*, 5 June – Attachment 19).

Conservatism at Azad University

In June 2006 it was reported that

...a right-wing student group announced its formation on the Azad University campus in the city of Tabriz. The “Followers of the Line of the Imam Faction of the Islamic Association” of Azad Islamic University in the city of Tabriz issued a statement to announce its formation. The group said “We aim to revive the authentic identity of Islamic associations in other words to resolve the afflictions that have come to prevail over our society by virtue of reliance on the rich teachings of Islam. To that end we have embarked on forming an independent

faction” (‘Iran: The student movement in Iran’ 2006, BBC Monitoring Alert, source: Advarnews.com, 4-11 June – Attachment 20).

3. Please provide information on the “Human Law Firm” website.

www.humanlaw.ir, the Human Law Firm website, is still active.

It would appear that the website has been existence since at least as early as February 2006, which is when a search bot from the Internet Archive Wayback search engine first indexed the site (see: ‘Searched for <http://www.humanlaw.ir> – Search Results for Jan 01, 1996 – Nov 09, 2007’ 2008, Internet Archive WaybackMachine website, 22 April http://web.archive.org/web/*/http://www.humanlaw.ir – Accessed 22 April 2008 – Attachment 22).

A search of the web hosting details of the Human Law Firm website was run via the DNS website returning the following details. It would appear that the website is hosted by an Iranian business called Kara Host . The information follows:

% This is the IRNIC Whois server.

% Note: this output has been filtered.

% Information related to ‘humanlaw.ir’

domain: humanlaw.ir

admin-c: fa57-irnic

tech-c: fa57-irnic

zone-c: fa57-irnic

nserver: ns32.karahost.com

nserver: ns33.karahost.com

source: IRNIC # Filtered

person: Mohandesine Farakaranet

remarks: ---

address: ---

e-mail: *****@karahost.net

phone: 09123273532

fax-no: 88786935

nic-hdl: fa57-irnic

source: IRNIC # Filtered (available: ‘WHOIS – humanlaw.ir’ 2008, DNSstuff.com, 22 April <http://www.dnsstuff.com/tools/whois.ch?ip=http://www.humanlaw.ir> – Accessed 22 April 2008 – Attachment 23).

Kara Host would appear to be based in Iran. Its website lists an Iranian telephone contact number (Kara Host website <http://karahost.net/spLight/default.aspx?page=Document&app=Documents&docId=14954> – Accessed 7 May 2008 – Attachment 24).

The details of the hosting server, along with the Iran (ir) country code top level domain (ccTLD) employed in the website, would appear to suggest that the website is being hosted from a server located in Iran. The BuyDomains.com website provides the following information on the Iran ir ccTLD:

The .ir, the country code top-level domain (ccTLD) extension, is for the intended use of entities associated with Iran. Since 1994, the process of registering a .ir domain has been managed by the Institute for Studies in Theoretical Physics and Mathematics. Companies that have a physical presence in Iran are entitled to apply for a .ir domain name. Registration is also reserved to individuals residing in Iran and organizations associated with the official representations of Iran abroad.

The domain name registry of .ir domain names manages the following second level domains:

- .ac.ir : for academic organizations
- .co.ir : for registered commercial companies
- .net.ir : for official ISPs or other entities
- .gov.ir : for administrative bodies and organizations
- .id.ir : for Iranian individuals (residents and citizens)
- .org.ir : for registered non profit organizations, international associations, and learned societies
- .sch.ir : for schools, institutes and other academic organizations

There are certain rules that should be met by registrants in the process of submitting a registration form. For some .ir registrations, it is essential to present additional documents for confirmation.

Permitted characters within the .ir domain extension code are the 26 letters of the Latin alphabet and numerals 0 to 9. Hyphen symbols are also allowed, but cannot be placed at the beginning or the end of the domain name. You can even use names of national significance such as events, famous personalities of the past, resources, and natural features including lakes, mountains, peaks, and rivers of the country Iran as domain names. For the latter, however, written permission from the Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance is required. Additionally, if an applicant wishes to register a domain name with the name of a famous living personality, then it is required to receive written permission from that person ('.ir Registration' (undated), BuyDomains.com website <http://www.buydomains.com/domain-resources/international-domains/ir-registration.jsp> – Attachment 25; see also: 'Delegation Record for .IR' (undated) Internet Assigned Numbers Authority website <http://www.iana.org/domains/root/db/ir.html> – Accessed 7 May 2008 – Attachment 27).

Nonetheless, it should be noted that it is not unknown for webpages to carry the ccTLD of a particular country while not being physically hosted from the country designated. According to the WHIR webpage:

One common misconception is that ccTLDs can only be assigned to Web sites physically located in the suffix country. This is not necessarily true. While most countries have specific rules surrounding exactly who can register domains using their suffix and for what purpose, regulations in some countries are more stringent than others. While it is true that in certain cases, the registrant must be an individual/company located within the country of the country suffix they wish to register, there are no restrictions whatsoever in others. Micronesia's .fm domain extension, for example, is available to the general public worldwide; however, Canada's .ca domains can only be assigned to Canadian companies and individuals ('Understanding Country Code Top Level Domains (ccTLDs)' (undated), Web Host Industry Review <http://www.thewhir.com/find/domain-names/guides/cc-tld.cfm> – Accessed 7 May 2008 – Attachment 26).

4. Please advise if there are human rights advocacy groups in Iran? Is there information to indicate the extent of solitary as opposed to network activism?

Information follows below under the following subheadings: *Arrest of independent activists and surveillance of academics / teachers; Human Rights Groups in Iran; Other information.*

Arrest of independent activists and surveillance of academics / teachers

In January 2008 Human Rights Watch published a report which claimed that: “Individuals from an ever widening range of groups in Iran are subject to arrest on security grounds for political activism and peaceful dissent against the government”. The report refers to the arrest of persons affiliated with a range of movement advocating for various forms of human rights in Iran – including women’s movements, labour unions and student movements – and also refers to the arrest of persons “who do not directly affiliate themselves” with any political movement of network and also to the arrest of persons “with no history of activism” (a number of examples are noted on pages 36 to 41 and an overview of these is produced below). University academics are noted amongst those arrested in this regards and contact with a foreign institution, real or alleged, is cited as a common feature among some such arrests. Some pertinent extracts follow:

Independent Journalists, Scholars, and Activists

Many of the people detained since the inauguration of the Ahmadinejad administration are associated with broadly defined movements, such as student groups, women’s rights campaigns, or independent labor organizations. **Yet the government also has targeted independent scholars, journalists, and activists who do not directly affiliate themselves with any of these movements**, arbitrarily arresting and detaining them in Evin 209 and subsequently accusing them on familiar charges of being “spies,” having “relationships with foreigners,” “receiving funds from foreigners,” and “acting against national security.”

...Ayatollah Kazemi Boroujerdi

The authorities have targeted Islamic clerics who are critical of the government’s policies. On October 8, 2006, authorities arrested Ayatollah Kazemi Boroujerdi at his house in Tehran and transferred him to Evin 209. Boroujerdi espouses an interpretation of Islam that calls for the separation of religion and politics.¹²⁴ On October 10, two days after police arrested Boroujerdi, the semi-official Kayhan newspaper ran an article entitled, “Propagating Islam with the Assistance of the BBC and CIA,” accusing the cleric of working as an agent of foreign institutions. In June 2007 Boroujerdi appeared before the Special Clerical Court, but the authorities have.

...Ali Farahbakhsh, Haleh Esfandiari, and Kian Tajbakhsh

The cases of journalist Ali Farahbakhsh as well as Iranian-American scholars Haleh Esfandiari and Kian Tajbakhsh exemplify a pattern of detention and interrogation that has become commonplace in Iran during the two years of Ahmadinejad’s administration.

On November 26, 2006, the security forces in Tehran detained Ali Farahbakhsh, a journalist and economist, one week after he had returned from a conference for journalists held in India. Farahbakhsh, who has no known history of political or social activism, was an independent researcher of economics and had previously worked as the editor of the economic section of the newspaper Sarmaye. The fact that Farahbakhsh was not engaged in any political writing or activities prior to his arrest made his case particularly puzzling.

...After 318 days in prison, 45 of which were spent in solitary confinement, the authorities released Farahbaksh on September 26.

Haleh Esfandiari, a 67-year old dual Iranian and American citizen who heads the Middle East program at the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars in Washington, DC, traveled to Iran in December 2006 to visit her ailing 93-year-old mother. Prior to her planned departure from Iran on December 30, armed and masked men stopped her taxi and seized both of her passports. Iranian authorities did not return her passports and instead subjected her to repeated and protracted interrogation sessions.

On May 8, officials at the Ministry of Information arrested Esfandiari without warrant and later accused her of “furthering the interests of foreign powers,” “espionage,” “planning the soft overthrow of the government,” and “acting against national security.”

...According to statements by both Esfandiari’s family and her employers at the Woodrow Wilson Center, Esfandiari’s interrogators had pressured her to implicate herself and the Woodrow Wilson Center “in activities in which it had no part.” Since her release, she has not provided much commentary on her experience, other than to note that solitary confinement was hard for someone her age.

Agents from the Ministry of Information arrested Kian Tajbakhsh at his home on May 11, 2007, on the same charges under the Security Laws of “furthering the interests of foreign powers,” “espionage,” “planning the soft overthrow of the government,” and “acting against national security. The government apparently focused on Tajbakhsh because of his ties with foreign institutions, namely the Soros Foundation, for whom he worked as a consultant. An urban planner and scholar, Tajbakhsh had also worked with a number of Iranian organizations and ministries.

...Authorities detained another Iranian-American, Ali Shakeri, a peace activist, on May 8, 2007, as he was leaving Iran.¹⁴⁹ Initially, the government denied that they had detained him; three weeks after his detention, on May 29, the Judiciary’s spokesman, Alireza Jamshidi, said, “Shakeri is not in detention, and there are no charges against him.”¹⁵⁰ On June 10, however, Mohammad Ali Hosseini, the spokesman for Iran’s Foreign Ministry, confirmed that the Judiciary had arrested Shakeri, but did not address the charges against him.¹⁵¹ On September 21, three days before authorities released Ali Shakeri, Kaveh Shakeri reported to Human Rights Watch that the government had brought no charges against his father or even provided an explanation for his arrest (Human Rights Watch 2008, “*You Can Detain Anyone for Anything*”: *Iran’s Broadening Clampdown on Independent Activism*, January, Vol.20, No.1(E) <http://hrw.org/reports/2008/iran0108/iran0108webwcover.pdf> – Accessed 31 January 2008 – Attachment 32).

According to a *Rooz* report of June 2007 there is presently a serious suspicion amongst the Iranian authorities that foreign spy networks, principally those of the US, are attempting to recruit Iranian citizens in order to attempt a “‘soft’ overthrow of the Islamic Republic”.

According to this report the regime sees persons of influence (eg: “intellectuals, journalists, scientists or university professors, etc”) as being particular targets. Some pertinent extracts follow:

While journalist Mashallah Shamsolvaezin thinks that the remarks by the intelligence minister on “uncovering a US spy ring in Iran” and the recent “intensification of American attacks on Iran” are associated with the recent US-Iran talks in Baghdad, the Ministry of Intelligence warned university professors that they are “under the extreme danger of being manipulated by foreign espionage networks.” These espionage networks, according to the ministry, “are

attempting to gather intelligence about important and sensitive officials and places inside the country.”

While announcing the news of “identifying and striking blows to several spy rings supported by occupiers,” Iran’s counterintelligence chief at the Ministry of Intelligence called university professors to be the main targets of Western spy networks at a time when . hardline Keyhan daily had earlier accused many of Iran’s prominent artists and journalists of “spying for foreign elements.” This point was put differently by Hassan Abbasi, a theoretician of the Pasdaran Revolutionary Guards: “The main strategy of the United States is the ‘soft’ overthrow of the Islamic Republic. They say we aim not at the Iranian territory, but at the Iranian citizen.” And these citizens are “either intellectuals, journalists, scientists or university professors ,etc” because a “a soft overthrow refers to the war for hearts and minds.”

...An “intelligence officer” of the Islamic Republic says, “Foreign spy networks revert to all kinds of lies, corrupt practices, promises for residency and citizenship, as well as educational grants, and even physical threats to recruit spies.” Where do they look for recruits? “Unfortunately, our university professors are extremely vulnerable to threats made by foreign spy networks and become suddenly entangled in a dangerous web of espionage through a simple academic relationship.”

For this reason this intelligence officer points out, “We warn all of our citizens, particularly our scientists and university professors, not to easily trust foreigners, and not to accept money from people whose aims and even nationalities are not identified. These agents capture individuals with their tricks and these individuals suddenly come face to face with a giant and coldhearted spy agency.” And, in the heat of US-Iran negotiations in Baghdad, a “giant and coldhearted spy agency” announces that Haleh Esfandiari is charged with “conspiring to undermine national security by engaging in espionage and propaganda for foreigners.” Similar charges are laid against Kian Tajbakhsh: “This Iranian citizen is temporarily detained for conspiring to undermine national security by engaging in espionage and propaganda for foreigners.” The crime of Parnaz Azima, a Radio Farda reporter is similar: “Radio Farda is affiliated with the C.I.A and acts to undermine national security.”

The intelligence organization has found the key to securing the regime’s survival: cut off the access of the country’s inhabitants with the outside world, by producing a long list of names of individuals who have been banned from entering or exiting the country (Sarraf, F. 2007, ‘More Arrests to Avoid Color Revolution’, *Rooz* website, 2 June http://www.roozonline.com/english/archives/2007/06/more_arrests_to_avoid_color_re.html – Accessed 4 February 2008 – Attachment 33).

A December 2006 article may be of interest. It is written by an Iranian scholar who returned to her country in 1993 to conduct research and provides an overview of the kind state pressures that academics worked in at that time (Azad, A 2006, ‘Among rogue scholars’, Iranian.com, 18 December <http://www.iranian.com/Azad/2006/December/Memoir/index.html> – Accessed 7 May 2008 – Attachment 34).

Also of interest may be a Research Response of May 2007 which provides information relating to the case of a teacher who claims to have received warnings from the Iranian state’s Herasat intelligence agency. It provides general information on the function of Herasat and also on teacher related political industrial actions (RRT Country Research 2007, *Research Response IRN32665*, 1 May – Attachment 35).

Human Rights Groups in Iran

Human rights groups reported to be active in Iran include: Student Movement Coordination Committee for Democracy in Iran (the SMCCDI); the Shirin Ebadi led Centre for Defenders of Human Rights (CDHR); the Organization for Defending Victims of Violence (ODVV); and the Women's Solidarity Association (WSA) of Iran (for the SMCCDI, see: 'Who We Are' (undated), Student Movement Coordination Committee for Democracy in Iran website http://www.daneshjoo.org/article/publish/article_2566.shtml – Accessed 7 May 2008 – Attachment 36; for the CDHR, see: 'The Defenders of Human Rights Centre declared illegal Threats of prosecution against its members' 2006, International Federation Against Torture website, 8 August <http://www.fidh.org/spip.php?article3530> – Accessed 7 May 2008 – Attachment 38; for ODVV, see: 'Human Rights Organizations: Committee against Torture' (undated), Arab Human Rights website <http://www.arabhumanrights.org/en/hrorgs/index.asp?oid=5> – Accessed 7 May 2008 – Attachment 37; for the WSA, see: 'Opening 2004 Session, NGO Committee Recommends Consultative Status with Economic and Social Council for 16 Organizations' 2004, UN Information Service website, 10 May <http://www.unis.unvienna.org/unis/pressrels/2004/ngo529.html> – Accessed 7 May 2008 – Attachment 39).

Other information

Information on crackdowns on Internet bloggers may be of interest as, in reports of this kind, it is often unclear as to whether the individuals arrested were solitary publishers or contributors to a network. An October 2005 HRW report on the arrest of a number of bloggers make for such an example (Human Rights Watch 2006, 'Iran: Prosecute Torturers, Not Bloggers', 12 December <http://www.hrw.org/english/docs/2006/12/12/iran14824.htm> – Accessed 7 May 2008 – Attachment 40).

On 18 July 2007 *ABC News* reported on the story of a woman, granted refugee status in Australia, who had formerly been imprisoned for her activities as an Iranian student activist. She had thought she would not be arrested because of her low profile.

Former student activist at Tehran University, Zarah Ghahramani escaped from Iran after being tortured in the notorious Evin Prison. She has been living in Australia for the past three years and has written about the dual life she led in Iran and about the horrors of the prison interrogations in her memoir, *My Life as a Traitor*.

While she still opposes the Iranian Government, she does not want other Iranian students to follow her path in protesting against the Islamic regime.

...Ms Ghahramani, like many other students at university, began to demand more freedoms under the Iran regime.

She says although many of her friends were arrested, she did not think she would be a target.

"For me I was always cautious about it, I was not doing much and for me it was 'no, I'm not a target'," she said.

"But there was always this anxiety when something would happen, we would hear that someone's been taken, we were like – maybe I'm the next one.

"You just simply tell yourself that no, it's not happening, it's not happening and then it did.

"I think I thought that I hadn't done much, but obviously it was a lot for them.

“It was simply just to know what was happening inside us, which was just a simple student protest that happens everywhere in the world and it just happened” (Hall, E. 2007, ‘Former Iranian prisoner warns against activism’, *ABC News*, 18 July <http://www.abc.net.au/news/stories/2007/07/18/1981957.htm> – Accessed 7 May 2008 – Attachment 41; see: ‘High penalty for lonely political exile’ 2007, *Sydney Morning Herald*, source: *Sun-Herald*, 20 August <http://www.smh.com.au/news/books/high-penalty-for-lonely-political-exile/2007/08/19/1187462065110.html?page=fullpage#> – Accessed 7 May 2008 – Attachment 42).

5. Please provide information on Iranian dissident or human rights groups operating in Australia.

References were found referring to a group based in Sydney (some sources refer to a Kippax St Surry Hills address, others to an address in Mortdale) known as: Association to Defend Freedom & Human Rights in Iran-Australia (or Iran – Australia) (‘Take the Iranian democratic opposition off the “terrorist list”’ (undated), andesheh website <http://www.andesheh.com/maghalat28/4.htm> – Accessed 7 May 2008 – Attachment 43; ‘forum on iran’ 2005, Personal Political website, 16 November http://susoz.typepad.com/personal_political/2005/11/forum_on_iran.html – Accessed 7 May 2008 – Attachment 44).

Demonstrations staged by the “Society to Defend Freedom and Human Rights in Iran” have received coverage on the website of the National Council of Resistance of Iran (NCRI) (‘Iranians in Sydney Condemn Wave of Executions in Iran’ 2007, National Council of Resistance of Iran website, 5 August <http://www.ncr-iran.org/content/view/3925/152/> – Accessed 7 May 2008 – Attachment 45; ‘Refer Iran regime to UN Security Council – Iranians in Australia’ 2006, National Council of Resistance of Iran website, 15 January <http://www.ncr-iran.org/content/view/874/> – Accessed 7 May 2008 – Attachment 46).

According to Refugee Action Coalition NSW (RACNSW) the Association to Defend Freedom & Human Rights in Iran-Australia has been active at Sydney University and persons associated with the group have been investigated and pursued by the Australian Federal Police (AFP). The RAC report claims that this group and others have been improperly harassed in this regard. The report was note clearly dated and referred only to 1 December. Other reports were located which indicated that raids of this kind occurred in December 2004 and also June 2003. The RACNSW report follows:

Refugee activists believe recent actions by the Australian Federal Police (AFP) are reflective of a Federal Government campaign to weaken the refugee movement.

On December 1, at around 7am, the Australian Federal Police (AFP) conducted a simultaneous raid of seven homes (one in Queensland and six in Sydney) in connection with alleged offences of making false statements to obtain Australian and foreign passports contrary to the Passport Act 1938 (Cth). Four people were charged, 2 people arrested, one of whom was an unlawful citizen, while a second unlawful citizen was transferred to Villawood.

Ian Rintoul, an active member of the Refugee Action Coalition (RAC), had his Ipswich home raided. Seven AFP officers conducted the search, reporting the hard drive of his computer and taking copies of e-mails, documents and notebooks. His mother’s house was also searched by the AFP.

Mark Goudkamp, another active member of RAC had three AFP officers and five immigration officials appear at his Newtown home: “They charged down the corridors and

started banging on the doors of my room-mates, demanding passport identification from them.”

“It’s clear from the questioning that day and the presence of the immigration officials that they were hoping to find people who had escaped from Woomera or Port Hedland.”

Mr Goudkamp said the raids were about “trying to get people who are reasonably high profile refugee activists to stop speaking about mandatory detention, deportation and protection visas.”

Activists also believe the AFP is targeting small-scale demonstrations. On December 8, the Association to Defend Freedom and Human Rights in Iran – Australia booked a meeting room at Sydney University. Some people who had been subjected to the raid were scheduled to speak.

According to an organiser, the group received a call from the University informing them the AFP had contacted the University with concern about the meeting. Spokesman for Sydney University Union, George Livery stated that to his knowledge, the AFP simply contacted security at the University, asking them whether they required extra assistance on that day.

It is also alleged that a similar attempt at intervention by the AFP occurred in Brisbane. On 10 December, in celebration of Human Rights Day, the RAC collective in Brisbane organised a speak-out in Brisbane Mall. The recent raid by the AFP was one of the topics listed for discussion. According to Greg Brown, convenor of the Brisbane arm of RAC, employees of Brisbane City Council arrived with a small number of Queensland police, requesting the group put away its banners and cease speaking.

Mr Brown said an employee of the Council informed him the AFP had contacted the Council and “told them what they were really going to be doing today”. Eventually both police and council workers backed down. Brisbane City Council was contacted, but were unable to respond before the Hub went to print.

The AFP was contacted regarding both matters. A spokesperson from the media liaison office was unaware of any such alleged actions, and “could not fathom how the AFP would be involved in actions of such a nature.” (Frishling, N. (undated), ‘Sydney newspaper City Hub ran this article following the demonstration’, Refugee Action Coalition NSW website http://www.racnsw.net/archive_display.php?title=CityHub.txt – Accessed 5 May 2008 – Attachment 30; for the December 2004 raids, see: Jackson, A. 2004, ‘Homes raided in forgery probe’, *The Age*, 2 December <http://www.theage.com.au/news/Immigration/Homes-raided-in-forgery-probe/2004/12/01/1101577553082.html#> – Accessed 7 May 2008 – Attachment 31; for the June 2003 raids, see: ‘Iranian families raided across Australia’ 2003, *Sydney Morning Herald*, source: AAP, 4 June <http://www.smh.com.au/articles/2003/06/03/1054406193085.html> – Accessed 7 May 2008 – Attachment 48).

Information was also located on an activist in Australia affiliated with “the Iranian Women’s Association and the Association of Iranian Refugees in Melbourne” (‘The most serious situation in the world’ 2006, Evatt Foundation website, 18 April <http://evatt.org.au/news/386.html> – Accessed 7 May 2008 – Attachment 49).

In May 2004 the SBS program *Dateline* reported on a “small group of Iranian exiles” who were conducting weekly demonstrations in Sydney to oppose the current Iranian regime on a range of issues including human rights violation in Iran. The demonstrators reportedly had a particular connection to the People’s Mujaheddin of Iran (PMOI; also known as the

Mujahedin-e Khalq Organization; MEK or MKO) (Parish, G. 2004, 'Camp Ashraf', *Dateline*, SBS website, 19 May http://news.sbs.com.au/dateline/camp_ashraf_130395 – Accessed 7 May 2008 – Attachment 50; for background on the treatment in Iran of suspected MKO supporters, see: RRT Research & Information 2007, *Research Response IRN32062*, 15 August – Attachment 51).

Reports of various other groups were also located. The Iranian Community Organisation has reportedly been active in refugee advocacy and community specific groups such as the Sabian Mandaean Association and the Australian Baha'i Community have also campaigned on human rights issues affecting their communities in Iran (for the Iranian Community Organisation, see: 'Four Corners' response to Piers Akerman and others' 2001, *Four Corners*, ABC News website, 13 September <http://www.abc.net.au/4corners/stories/s350029.htm> – Accessed 7 May 2008 – Attachment 52; for the Sabian Mandaean Association, see: Zwartz, B. 2003, 'Baptism of fire for believers', *The Age*, 4 February <http://www.theage.com.au/articles/2003/02/03/1044122320127.html> – Accessed 7 May 2008 – Attachment 53; Hassall, G. 2000, 'Persian Bahá'ís in Australia', Bahá'í Library website, January <http://www.bahai-library.org/asia-pacific/persia.htm> – Accessed 7 May 2008 – Attachment 54).

Reports have appeared which suggest that local Iranian groups in Australia may be suspicious of students from Iran. On 10 September 2007:

State and federal security authorities are also keeping a close eye on Iranian students in Australia who are interested in becoming residents or citizens, amid growing suspicions that some may be intent on establishing an espionage foothold.

...It is understood their concerns about Iranian students were sparked by calls to the National Security Hotline and information from local Persian leaders (Kerbaj, R. 2007, 'Iranian students "spying on Oz for Tehran"', *News.com.au*, 10 September <http://www.news.com.au/story/0,23599,22389767-2,00.html> – Accessed 7 May 2008 – Attachment 55).

Reports of the nature of an Australian MOU with Iran may also be of interest insofar as the claims of some sources, if believed, might affect the willingness of Iranian refugee applicants to disclose their affiliations to Australian authorities insofar as dissidence is concerned. For instance, an article in the activist *Z Magazine* alleges that the MOU includes an agreement on the sharing of Australian government files on a refugee applicant's claims:

...under the terms of the MOU, Australian Immigration authorities have agreed to "information sharing" – that means that their file extracts travel with them on the plane to Iran, to be handed to the Iranian authorities on their arrival at Tehran airport; who then, in turn, can identify whether they were good former members of Iranian society who ran away (an imprisonable offence) – or political dissenters (Smit, J. 2004, 'Iranian Refugees in Australia', *Z Magazine*, 12 July <http://www.zmag.org/znet/viewArticle/8213> – Accessed 7 May 2008 – Attachment 56).

A May 2003 report by an activist of the National Anti-Deportation Alliance in Australia relates that: "In the *Australian Financial Review*, of 28 May 2003, a spokesperson for Ruddock denied handing over any more than 'passport information, village of origin and their health check information'". Nonetheless, the report also related that Iranian "asylum seekers from the Baxter detention centre have said that Al-Habib [a representative of the Iranian

embassy...who visited the Baxter detention centre on the 15 May 2003] was in possession of more information than this” (Corcoran, E. 2003, ‘Australia signs refugee deal with Iran – will Europe follow?’, *IRR News*, 31 May <http://www.irr.org.uk/2003/may/ak000018.html> – Accessed 7 May 2008 – Attachment 57).

6. Please provide background information on political and human rights issues over the past five years in Iran and, in particular, the context of speaking out on human rights issues in 2006?

2003

Extracts follow from Amnesty International’s May 2003 report on human rights in Iran.

Scores of political prisoners, including prisoners of conscience, were arrested. Others continued to be held in prolonged detention without trial or were serving prison sentences imposed after unfair trials. Some had no access to lawyers or family. Freedom of expression and association continued to be restricted by the judiciary, and scores of students, journalists and intellectuals were detained. At least 113 people, including long-term political prisoners, were executed, frequently in public and some by stoning, and 84 were flogged, many in public.

Background

Political and social tension intensified during the year, adversely affecting human rights. There was heightened political rivalry between President Khatami’s supporters and the large parliamentary majority favouring social reform on the one hand, and those favouring the conservative approach of the Supreme Leader Ayatollah Khamenei, the judiciary and many security officials on the other. Combined with rising unemployment, such factors added to social discontent, particularly among young people seeking greater social freedom. Weeks of student-led protests in October, which began after Hashem Aghajari was sentenced to death (see below), centred on the lack of freedom of expression.

The judiciary responded to expressions of social and political criticism with mounting curbs on freedom of expression and association, including arbitrary arrests; politically motivated prosecutions of students, writers, academics, members of parliament and prominent advocates of reform; and the arbitrary closure of pro-reform publications. Unfair trials, especially of such people, as well as torture and televised “confessions” continued to be reported. The judiciary used the death penalty and judicial sentences of flogging as a means of punishment in cases relating to freedom of expression.

Iran’s report to the UN Security Council’s Counter-Terrorism Committee provided a review of security measures already in place; no new measures were added.

The final report of the Special Representative of the UN Commission on Human Rights on the situation in Iran was presented to the Commission in April. In a narrow vote, the Commission ended the Special Representative’s mandate. In July the government stated that it would permit thematic rapporteurs to visit Iran (Amnesty International 2003, *Report 2003 – Iran*, May – Attachment 58).

In December 2003 *Fédération internationale des droits de l’homme* (FIDH; or International Federation Against Torture) noted of the university sphere:

Hossein Ghazian, a journalist at Norooz, is imprisoned since October 2002.

Another intellectual, Hachem Aghajari, writer and academic, was condemned to the death penalty in November 2002 because he had criticised a speech by the cleric. He is still in prison, since the sentence has been reduced to a three years prison term.

It should also be noted that several tens of students are still in prison in connection with the protests of 1999; this is notably the case of Ali Afchari, Ahmad Batebi, Manoutchehr Mohammadi and Akbar Mohammadi).

In June 2003, pacific protests in favour of democratic reforms in Iran were violently repressed by armed groups linked to the Hezbollah with the complicity of the armed forces. Militia groups, known as the "Basiji" militia spread terror among the protesters. Fully devoted to the Supreme Guide of the Revolution, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, they follow the orders of the Attorney-General of Teheran, Mr Saïd Mortazavi. During the demonstrations, they circulated amongst demonstrators, dressed-up in civilian clothes, on light motorbikes with iron bars. They beat the demonstrators and ravaged the students dormitories. They also proceeded to the "arrestations" or evictions of demonstrators. Demonstrators "re-appeared" then in detention under the auspices of the office of the Attorney-General of Teheran, which proves their link.

Several tens of persons have been injured and at least one student was killed by bullets at the Chiraz University. According to several sources, more than one thousand persons would have been arrested or would have disappeared. Officially, more than 250 protesters were arrested since 10 June 2003, when the protests began. Now, several hundreds of persons would still be detained ; their number and their identity have not been announced (International Federation Against Torture 2003, *Assessment of the Eu/Iran Human Rights Dialogue*, November <http://www.fidh.org/IMG/pdf/ir0112a.pdf> – Accessed 7 May 2008 – Attachment 59).

2004

Extracts follow from Amnesty International's June 2004 report on human rights in Iran. In addition to general information sections relating to academic and student activity are reproduced in the sampled text. These appear to be prominent in the 2004 report.

Scores of political prisoners, including prisoners of conscience, continued to serve sentences imposed in previous years following unfair trials. Scores more were arrested in 2003, often arbitrarily and many following student demonstrations. At least a dozen political prisoners arrested during the year were detained without charge, trial or regular access to their families and lawyers. Judicial authorities curtailed freedoms of expression, opinion and association, including of ethnic minorities; scores of publications were closed, Internet sites were filtered and journalists were imprisoned. At least one detainee died in custody, reportedly after being beaten. During the year the pattern of harassment of political prisoners' family members re-emerged. At least 108 executions were carried out, including of long-term political prisoners and frequently in public. At least four prisoners were sentenced to death by stoning while at least 197 people were sentenced to be flogged and 11 were sentenced to amputation of fingers and limbs. The true numbers may have been considerably higher.

Background

The development and fulfilment of human rights in Iran were adversely affected by the political stalemate between supporters and opponents of reform. Socio-political and human rights reforms, favoured by President Khatami and parliament, were often blocked by the Guardian Council (GC), the highest legislative body whose function is to ensure that laws uphold Islamic tenets and the Iranian Constitution. The GC follows a stricter interpretation of political and social conduct and moral codes. Its continued rejection of legislative reforms

contributed to a growing sense of despondency and alienation from political affairs among large swathes of society, especially students, and was reflected by a low turnout for municipal elections in March.

In June, the International Labour Organization called on Iran to report on the application of *gozinesh* (selection) – discriminatory and ideologically-based regulations that stipulate who is eligible to work in the state sector or who can attend university. During the year, discriminatory and arbitrary procedures based on *gozinesh* were employed in the selection of candidates for parliamentary elections scheduled for February 2004.

Following heightened domestic and international security concerns over Iran's nuclear power program, the country's accession in December to the International Atomic Energy Agency's Additional Protocol contributed to an easing of diplomatic tensions with the European Union (EU) and the USA.

A growing sense in Iran of the importance of international human rights standards was indicated by local initiatives to expose abuses. In June, the leading student body *Daftar-e Tahkim-e Vahdat* (Office for Strengthening Unity – OSU) issued an open letter to the UN Secretary-General describing human rights violations in Iran in terms of the rights set out in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Relatives of political prisoners and prisoners of conscience publicized the plight of their loved ones. Non-governmental organizations such as the Iranian Jurists Association for the Defence of Human Rights, and the Association for the Defence of Prisoners' Rights pressed for higher standards in the administration of justice and in prison conditions.

In August, the Secretary General of the parastatal Islamic Human Rights Commission stated that it had received over 12,000 letters from people interested in the human rights situation in Iran.

The judiciary and its security force continued to carry out arbitrary arrests and often held people in secret detention. Detainees were denied access for varying periods to relatives, legal representation and, in a number of cases, medical care.

...Imprisoned students

Following reports that universities would be privatized and tuition costs increased, a protest by a group of students in early June inspired mass demonstrations that continued throughout the month. In the resulting unrest, hundreds of people were arrested, including three members of the OSU who were arbitrarily arrested by plainclothes officials following a press conference. Most detainees were released without charge. However, 132 reportedly remained in detention without charge or trial at the end of the year. An AI request in August for information about their situation received no response.

Students convicted and imprisoned after student demonstrations in July 1999 were reported to have been ill-treated in custody. In several cases, they faced new charges, including some relating to defamation and insult, reportedly based on statements made in prison or given to the media while on temporary leave from prison.

Manuchehr Mohammadi, who had been sentenced to 13 years' imprisonment (reduced to seven years on appeal) following a manifestly unfair trial in October 1999, was reportedly transferred from Evin Prison in June to another prison, raising fears for his safety. He had reportedly been severely beaten by officials in Evin Prison after he gave an interview to a radio station based outside Iran. In July, his sister and father, who had travelled to Tehran from their home in the north of the country, were arbitrarily arrested by plainclothes officials.

Ahmad Batebi, who had been sentenced to death in connection with his participation in student demonstrations in July 1999, was granted temporary leave on medical grounds in October 2003. He went missing on 8 November and his family was subsequently informed that he had been rearrested on 17 November. It was widely believed that he was arbitrarily rearrested for having met the visiting UN Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of the right to freedom of opinion and expression. The government stated he had been arrested for violating the terms of his temporary leave (Amnesty International 2004, *Report 2004 – Iran*, June – Attachment 60).

In July 2004 FIDH noted of the university sphere:

The right of peaceful assembly and the right to demonstrate are continuously under restrictions. Public demonstrations are often banned, such as the commemorations of the 1999 deadly student protests. Recently, the fifth anniversary of the violent student unrest, scheduled for the 8th of July 2004, has been banned amid an effort to prevent fresh outburst of anti-regime dissent. Even the Tehran University campus has been shut down for the occasion. On each anniversary of the unrest, the regime seeks to prevent any gatherings from taking place. This is an illustration of the authorities' willingness to muzzle any protest.

... On 20 October 2003, the Special Rapporteur sent a communication to the Government of the Islamic Republic of Iran regarding the case of four Iranian prisoners who were allegedly hanged in public in different locations in the city of Arak on 30 January 2003. One of them was reportedly executed in front of the university's main entrance, allegedly to create a climate of fear after recent demonstrations staged by Arak University students (International Federation Against Torture 2006, 'Assessment of the Human Rights situation in Iran', July http://www.fidh.org/IMG/pdf/ir_ue072004a.pdf – Accessed 7 May 2008 – Attachment 61).

2005

Extracts follow from Amnesty International's May 2005 report on human rights in Iran.

Scores of political prisoners, including prisoners of conscience, continued to serve prison sentences imposed following unfair trials in previous years. Scores more were arrested in 2004, many in connection with press articles or publications both in print and on the Internet which were alleged to "endanger national security" or defame senior officials or religious precepts. Many of the families of those arrested also faced intimidation.

Independent human rights defenders were harassed. At least two individuals died in custody and 159 people were executed, including one minor. At least two of the 36 people who were flogged reportedly died following the implementation of the punishment; no investigations were carried out into these deaths. The true number of those executed or subjected to corporal punishment was believed to be considerably higher.

Background

A new parliamentary session started in May, following controversial and flawed parliamentary elections in February which were marked by mass disqualification of sitting deputies. The elections resulted in a comprehensive victory for groups opposed to social and political reform. Some of the statements from the new parliamentarians included attacks on women said to be "improperly attired". Incoming women parliamentarians rejected previous policies aimed at gender equality.

The emerging political trend in parliament gave impetus to members of the semi-official Hezbollah, which occasionally attacked gatherings of people they believed supported opposition political movements. It also encouraged the judiciary and its security force to limit

public dissent, resulting in arbitrary arrests and the detention of prisoners in secret centres. In the latter half of the year in particular, practices employed by the judiciary – including arbitrary arrest, denial of legal representation and detention in solitary confinement – were responsible for most of the human rights violations reported in the country.

International concern over Iran's obligations to the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) dominated the year. IAEA reports throughout the year suggested that Iranian officials were not always presenting the entire scope of the country's nuclear programmes. In November, following an agreement with the European Union (EU), Iran committed itself to suspending uranium enrichment.

The ongoing Human Rights Dialogue process between the EU and Iran led to few lasting benefits. In March, the EU stated that it had seen little improvement in human rights and that violations remained widespread. Several Iranian human rights defenders criticized the process for its lack of transparency and effectiveness. In a concluding statement, the EU reiterated long-standing human rights concerns including the use of torture, unequal rights for women, the use of the death penalty, religious discrimination and the lack of an independent judiciary. Iran's judiciary rejected these comments, while newspaper interviews given by the deputy head of the judiciary, Mohammad Javad Larijani, expressed contempt for the process and human rights.

In November, the UN General Assembly passed a resolution condemning the human rights situation in Iran. It drew attention to Iran's "failure to comply with international standards in the administration of justice, the absence of due process of law, the refusal to provide fair and public hearings and right to counsel..." and forms of systematic discrimination. It urged the authorities to appoint an independent and impartial prosecutor in Tehran and to fulfil Iran's international commitments. A proposed visit by the UN Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances was postponed at the government's request (Amnesty International 2005, *Report 2005 – Iran*, May – Attachment 62).

Extracts relevant to Internet and Academic freedom, as well as on freedom of assembly, follow below from the March 2006 US Department of State report on human rights in Iran in 2005 in Iran:

...The government restricted academic freedom. Government informers were common on university campuses. More generally, there were reports that the government maintained a broad network of student informants in Qom's major seminaries, who reported teachings counter to official government positions.

Admission to universities was politicized; all applicants had to pass "character tests" in which officials eliminated applicants critical of the government's ideology. To obtain tenure, professors had to refrain from criticism of the authorities. The new administration changed the heads of many universities. At Tehran University, students protested when the government overrode the normal selection process and for the first time named a cleric without an advanced degree, who was also a Tehran University professor, to run the institution.

Freedom of Assembly

The constitution permits assemblies and marches "provided they do not violate the principles of Islam"; however, in practice the government restricted freedom of assembly and closely monitored gatherings to prevent antigovernment protests. Such gatherings included public entertainment and lectures, student gatherings, labor protests, funeral processions, and Friday prayer gatherings.

During a wave of student protests in 2003, government-supported vigilantes beat many protestors, and police arrested approximately four thousand persons according to government figures shortly after the protests. It was not known how many of those arrested were still in jail; approximately 130 were still detained as of December 2004. An unknown number of students arrested in the 1999 demonstrations remained in prison (see section 1.e.).

Paramilitary organizations such as the Ansar-e Hizballah, a group of vigilantes who seek to enforce their vision of appropriate revolutionary comportment upon the society, harassed, beat, and intimidated those who demonstrated publicly for reform. They particularly targeted university students. On November 7, unknown assailants attacked a prominent political activist, Behzad Nabavi, in Khuzestan.

On June 8, human rights activists and representatives of the Union of Advocates of Democracy demonstrated at Evin prison and called for the release of Naser Zarafshan (see section 1.e.). A student committee in Tabriz held a hunger strike in support. Approximately 200 persons protesting Akbar Ganji's imprisonment clashed with police on July 12. According to the press, police beat dozens of the protestors with batons to break up the demonstration and arrested some distributing leaflets. Hashem Aghajari, a former political prisoner (see section 1.e.), and some family members of detainees participated. On August 11, a crowd of 100 to 250 persons gathered in front of the hospital where Ganji was held to protest his detention. Organized by a student organization, the office for strengthening unity, student leader Ali Afshari (see section 1.e.) called for Ganji's immediate release.

... Numerous publishers, editors, and journalists (including those working on Internet sites) were detained, jailed, tortured, and fined, or they were prohibited from publishing their writings during the year.

... Afshin Zarei, an Internet writer arrested at the beginning of the year, was charged with insulting the supreme leader. According to press accounts by his lawyer in August, Zarei had been held in "temporary detention" for eight months. At year's end no further information was available.

On February 2, Internet writer and journalist Arash Sigarchi received a sentence of 14 years in prison for charges including espionage, aiding "hostile" governments, and insulting the country's leaders. On March 17, he was released pending appeal, after posting \$127 thousand (100 million tomans) bail. In August he was summoned again to court and charged with insulting religious and political leaders and having a satellite dish, but was out of prison at year's end.

... Mojtaba Saminejad, an Internet writer, was arrested on February 13 and sentenced to more than two years in prison on charges including insulting the supreme leader. He was first detained in October 2004 after reporting the arrest of other Internet writers and, according to HRW, tortured and held for 88 days in solitary confinement. On January 27, he was released on \$62,500 (50 million toman) bail. He started another Internet site but was detained again, and his bail tripled, which he could not pay. His trial in May was held behind closed doors; he was sentenced to two years in prison for insulting Khomeini and the supreme leader and charged with apostasy. He was later acquitted of apostasy but remained in Rajai'i Shahr prison (US Department of State 2006, *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2005 – Iran*, 8 March – Attachment 63).

In October 2005 FIDH noted of the university sphere:

Several students are still in prison in connection with the protests of 1999. Mehrdad Lohrasebi and Abbas Deldar have been condemned to 15 years in prison; Javid Tehrani, condemned to seven years in prison and freed four years later, was re-arrested in June 2004. Peyman Piran

(condemned to ten years in prison) and his father, Mostafa Piran (condemned to 18 months in prison) are detained since more than a year.

Akbar Mohammadi (condemned to 14 years in prison), his brother, Manoutchehr Mohammadi (condemned to 13 years in prison), and Ahmad Batebi (condemned to 15 years in prison) have been freed after seven years of detention for health reasons but might be sent back in prison at any moment, notably if they communicate with the media. The same is true of Amir-Abbas Fakhraivar and Heshmattolah Tabarzadi. The latter, responsible of a students' association, had been condemned to 14 years in prison in January 2005 and was liberated for health reasons in August 2005.

Bina Darab-Zand, another student, was condemned in October 2004 to three years and a half in prison and is currently detained.

18 students were arrested in September and October 2005, arrests which were confirmed by the authorities. However, their name and the reason for their arrest were not disclosed (International Federation Against Torture 2005, 'Briefing note on the human rights situation in the Islamic Republic of Iran', October http://www.fidh.org/IMG/pdf/ir_un2005a.pdf – Accessed 7 May 2008 – Attachment 64).

2006

Extracts follow from Amnesty International's May 2006 report on human rights in Iran.

Scores of political prisoners, including prisoners of conscience, continued to serve prison sentences imposed following unfair trials in previous years. Hundreds more were arrested in 2005, mostly in connection with civil unrest in areas with large minority populations. Internet journalists and human rights defenders were among those detained arbitrarily without access to family or legal representation, often initially in secret detention centres. Intimidation of the families of those arrested persisted. Torture remained commonplace. At least 94 people were executed, including at least eight who were under 18 at the time of their alleged offence. Many sentences of flogging were imposed. The true number of those executed or subjected to corporal punishment was believed to be considerably higher than the cases reported.

Background

The political stalemate of the previous year continued until the election of a new president in June. Over 1,000 presidential candidates were excluded from the election by the Council of Guardians, which reviews laws and policies to ensure that they uphold Islamic tenets and the Constitution. All 89 women candidates were excluded on the basis of their gender under discriminatory selection procedures known as *gozinesh*. There were reports of arrests of people demonstrating against the elections. Up to 10 people were killed in separate pre-election bomb attacks in Ahvaz and Tehran, and six others were killed in a bomb attack in Ahvaz in October. The authorities faced armed opposition from Kurdish and other groups.

The election as President of former Revolutionary Guard Special Forces member Dr Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, who took office in August, completed the marginalization of pro-reform supporters from the political process and led to a concentration of power in the Office of the Supreme Leader, Ayatollah Sayed 'Ali Khamenei. In October, the Supreme Leader delegated some of his supervisory powers over the government to the Expediency Council, headed by defeated presidential candidate Hojjatoleslam AliAkbar Hashemi Rafsanjani.

Relations with the international community remained strained over human rights and Iran's nuclear programme, particularly after Iran announced in August that it was resuming uranium enrichment for civilian purposes. Iran accused foreign governments, particularly those of the

USA and UK, of instigating unrest in border areas; the UK accused Iran of aiding anti-UK insurgency activities in Iraq. The European Union-Iran human rights dialogue was suspended because of diplomatic tensions.

In December, the UN General Assembly passed a resolution condemning the human rights situation in Iran (Amnesty International 2006, *Report 2006 – Iran*, May – Attachment 65)

Extracts relevant to Internet and Academic freedom, as well as on freedom of assembly, follow below from the March 2007 US Department of State report on human rights in Iran in 2006 in Iran:

Internet Freedom

The government increased control over the Internet during the year as more citizens used it as a source for news and political debate. A 2004 poll by a domestic press outlet found many citizens trusted the Internet more than other news media. In 2005 approximately 6.2 million citizens used the Internet, and there were 683 Internet Service Providers (ISPs). All ISPs must be approved by the Ministry of Culture and Guidance, and the government used filtering software to block access to some Western Web sites, reportedly including the Web sites of prominent Western newspapers and NGOs. During the year approximately seven million citizens used the Internet, although the Communications Ministry estimated as many as 16 million users of the “Internet and information technology,” according to domestic press reports.

In October the government imposed a limit of 128 kilobytes per second (KBps) on Internet speed and required ISPs to comply with the limit by decreasing Internet service speed to homes and cafes. The new limit made it more difficult to report Internet material and to circumvent government restrictions to access blocked Web sites.

In January Arash Sigarchi, journalist and Internet author, was sentenced to three years in prison for “insulting the supreme leader” and “propaganda against the regime.” According to domestic press Sigarchi was reportedly released on medical leave on June 7, and on December 23, the government acquitted him of all charges and declared the case closed.

RSF reported that during the year that 38 journalists were arrested and dozens of media outlets censored. According to RSF repression of bloggers decreased during the year, but Internet censorship increased. According to RSF the news Web sites Advar and Entekhab were blocked during the year as well as several Web sites dealing with women’s issues inside the country. Women’s groups reportedly launched an online petition during the year to protest Internet filtering.

In January 2005 Judiciary Chief Shahrudi and other judiciary officials met with several Internet writers about their claims of mistreatment. Domestic media later reported that Shahrudi instructed the public prosecutor’s office to transfer the cases to a special committee. The report on the treatment of the Internet writers was never publicly released (see section 1.c.). Most of the writers were released on bail by the end of 2005. After their release, RSF reported authorities summoned the bloggers for questioning several times a week, and government officials threatened them.

In April the Minister of Communications and Information Technology announced the government’s intention to establish a “national Internet,” which would improve on the costly monitoring process that required Web site information to exit the country and then return. A study published by HRW in October 2005 listed Internet sites that had been blocked in the country, including women’s rights sites, several foreign-based, Farsi-language news sites, some popular sites of Internet writers, the Freedom Movement Party Web site, a Web site

promoting the views of Ayatollah Montazeri, several Kurdish Web sites, Web sites dedicated to political prisoners, and a Baha'i Web site. In October 2005 government authorities also blocked access to the Baztab news Web site. The Web site manager said they received a judicial order saying the temporary ban was based on a complaint related to the nuclear issue. In December 2005 13 Majles deputies protested Internet censorship in a letter to President Ahmadinejad and urged him to end the ban on these three sites.

Beginning in 2004 the government launched a major crackdown on sites based in the country, including blogs (web-based publications of periodic articles with commentary by the author and readers), reportedly blocking hundreds of Internet sites. According to HRW in the past three years, Tehran Chief Prosecutor Saeed Mortazavi reportedly ordered more than 20 Internet journalists and civil society activists arrested and held in a secret detention center in Tehran.

In 2004 four of these detainees denied any mistreatment during a televised "press conference" arranged by Tehran's Chief Prosecutor Mortazavi. However, widespread and credible reports indicated that while in secret detention, threats, torture, and physical abuse were employed to obtain false confessions and letters of repentance (see section 1.e.). After their release, some detainees testified to a presidential commission about their treatment. Commission member and former presidential advisor Mohammad Ali Abtahi later wrote on his Internet site that detainees claimed they were beaten, held in solitary confinement, denied access to lawyers, and forced to make false confessions. In January 2005 Abtahi reported that the government blocked access to his Internet site.

According to RSF the government claimed to have blocked access to 10 million "immoral" Internet sites during the year. In 2005 the judiciary announced the creation of a special unit to handle Internet-related issues. According to press reporting, the judiciary highlighted over 20 subject areas to be blocked, including insulting Islam, insulting the Supreme Leader or making false accusations about officials, undermining national unity and solidarity, and propagating prostitution and drugs.

Academic Freedom and Cultural Events

The government restricted academic freedom. In September President Ahmadinejad called for the removal of secular and liberal professors from universities. Reports indicated dozens of university professors were dismissed or forced to retire. Student groups reported that during the year the government used a "star" system to rank politically active students--each star denoted a negative mark. Students with three stars were reportedly banned from university or prevented from registering for upcoming terms. Government informers were common on university campuses. Additionally, there were reports the government maintained a broad network of student informants in Qom's major seminaries who reported teaching counter to official government positions.

...Admission to universities was politicized; all applicants had to pass "character tests" in which officials eliminated applicants critical of the government's ideology. Some seats in universities continued to be reserved for members of the Basij, regardless of their scores on the national entrance exam. To obtain tenure professors had to refrain from criticism of the authorities.

...Freedom of Assembly

The constitution permits assemblies and marches, "provided they do not violate the principles of Islam"; however, in practice the government restricted freedom of assembly and closely monitored gatherings to prevent antigovernment protests. Such gatherings included public

entertainment and lectures, student meetings, labor protests, funeral processions, and Friday prayer gatherings.

Paramilitary organizations such as the Ansar-e Hizballah, a group of vigilantes who seek to enforce their vision of appropriate revolutionary comportment upon society, harassed, beat, and intimidated those who demonstrated publicly for reform. They particularly targeted university students.

On March 8, police dispersed a rally in Tehran commemorating International Women's Day. Participants were reportedly attacked and beaten by police (see section 5). On June 12, police forcefully dispersed a women's rights demonstration; many protesters were detained and arrested, including former Majles deputy and human rights activist Ali Akbar Musavi Khoini. Khoini was subsequently released; however, others reportedly remained in prison at year's end.

On September 24, police reportedly arrested 30 activists who gathered in front of the UN office in Tehran to protest the death sentence of Kobra Rahmanpour, who was convicted of the stabbing death of her mother-in-law in 2000. She pled self-defense but received a death sentence.

On December 11, students disrupted a speech by President Ahmadinejad at Amir Kabir University, shouting slogans directed against him. Ahmadinejad reportedly spoke with some students following his speech and assured them they would not be punished for expressing their views; however, reports indicated some student participants still feared retaliation.

In December 2005 Sherkat-e-Vahed went on strike to protest nonpayment of wages, poor working conditions, and the arrests of 14 association leaders. Mansour Osanloo, the head of Sherkat-e-Vahed, was arrested at that time, and detained in Evin Prison. On January 28, Sherkat-e-Vahed members demonstrated, calling for the release of Osanloo and attention to their grievances. Police used force to disrupt the protest and arrested several hundred members of the syndicate, as well as some of their family members, according to the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC). Family members and some of the workers were released, but at year's end there was no information regarding other reportedly detained workers. On August 9, Osanloo was released on bail but re-arrested on November 19 (see section 6.b.) (US Department of State 2007, *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2006 – Iran*, 6 March – Attachment 66).

In January 2007 HRW noted of the situation of human rights defenders in Iran during 2006:

In 2006 the authorities intensified their harassment of independent human rights defenders and lawyers in an attempt to prevent them from publicizing and pursuing human rights violations. In August the Interior Ministry declared illegal the Center for Defense of Human Rights, led by Shirin Ebadi, the 2003 Nobel Peace Prize winner. Ebadi and her colleagues provide pro-bono legal counsel to hundreds of dissidents, journalists, and students facing prosecution for exercising fundamental freedoms, such as peacefully protesting or criticizing government policies. The authorities threatened Ebadi and her colleagues with arrest should they continue their activities in defense of human rights. Following international protests, the government has not carried out its threat, but Ebadi and her colleagues remain vulnerable.

In June 2006 government agents arrested Ali Akbar Mousavi Khoini, a former member of parliament and outspoken critic of the government's human rights record. The authorities held him in solitary confinement without access to his lawyers for more than four months. The Judiciary released him on October 21, only after he posted \$300,000 bail. During a brief release to attend his father's funeral in September, he publicly alleged that he was being

tortured and forced to “repent” for his activities (Human Rights Watch 2007, *World Report 2007 – Iran*, January – Attachment 67).

A December 2006 report provides an overview of the outbreak of political dissidence which occurred at Iran’s Amir Kabir University of Technology when President Ahmadinejad appeared there at the close of 2006:

As protests broke out last week at a prestigious university here, cutting short a speech by President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, Babak Zamanian could only watch from afar. He was on crutches, having been clubbed by supporters of the president and had his foot run over by a motorcycle during a less publicized student demonstration a few days earlier.

But the significance of the confrontation was easy to grasp, even from a distance, said Mr. Zamanian, a leader of a student political group.

...“It is not that simple to break up a president’s speech,” said Alireza Siassirad, a former student political organizer, explaining that an event of that magnitude takes meticulous planning. “I think what happened at Amir Kabir is a very important and a dangerous sign. Students are definitely becoming active again.”

The protest, punctuated by shouts of “Death to the dictator,” was the first widely publicized outcry against Mr. Ahmadinejad, one that was reflected Friday in local elections, where voters turned out in droves to vote for his opponents.

The students’ complaints largely mirrored public frustrations over the president’s crackdown on civil liberties, his blundering economic policies and his harsh oratory against the West, which they fear will isolate the country.

But the students had an additional and potent source of outrage: the president’s campaign to purge the universities of all vestiges of the reform movement of his predecessor, Mohammad Khatami.

Last summer the newly installed head of the university, Alireza Rahai, ordered the demolition of the office of the Islamic Association, which had been the core of student political activities on campus since 1963 and had matured into a moderate, pro-reform group.

Since then, students say, more than 100 liberal professors have been forced into retirement and many popular figures have been demoted. At least 70 students were suspended for political activities, and two were jailed. Some 30 students were given warnings, and a prominent Ph.D. candidate, Matin Meshkin, was barred from finishing his studies.

The students also complain about overcrowded and crumbling dormitories and proscriptions against women wearing makeup or bright colors, rules that were relaxed when Mr. Khatami came to power in 1997.

Amir Kabir University of Technology, a major polytechnic institute, has been a hotbed of student activism since before Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini’s Islamic Revolution of 1979. Drawing on networks at universities around the country through an office that links their Islamic associations, students can organize large protests on a moment’s notice. There are also student guilds, which are independent, and more than 2,000 student publications.

Mr. Zamanian, the head of public relations of the Islamic Association at Amir Kabir, said that while the situation had not been ideal in the Khatami years, Mr. Ahmadinejad’s antireformist campaign had led students to value their previous freedoms (Fathi, N. 2006, ‘Iran President Facing Revival of Students’ Ire’, *New York Times*, 21 December

2007

Extracts follow from Amnesty International's May 2007 report on human rights in Iran. In addition to general information sections relating to human rights defenders and student are reproduced in the sampled text. These appear to be prominent in the 2007 report.

The human rights situation deteriorated, with civil society facing increasing restrictions on fundamental freedoms of expression and association. Scores of political prisoners, including prisoners of conscience, continued to serve prison sentences imposed following unfair trials in previous years. Thousands more arrests were made in 2006, mostly during or following demonstrations. Human rights defenders, including journalists, students and lawyers, were among those detained arbitrarily without access to family or legal representation. Torture, especially during periods of pre-trial detention, remained commonplace. At least 177 people were executed, at least four of whom were under 18 at the time of the alleged offence, including one who was under 18 at the time of execution. Two people were reportedly stoned to death. Sentences of flogging, amputation and eye-gouging continued to be passed. The true numbers of those executed or subjected to corporal punishment were probably considerably higher than those reported.

Background

The rift between Iran and the international community over the government's insistence on maintaining its nuclear enrichment programme continued to widen. In March, the International Atomic Energy Agency referred Iran to the UN Security Council. In December the Security Council agreed on a programme of sanctions against Iran following Iran's failure to meet an August deadline to suspend the programme. Iran continued to accuse foreign governments of fomenting unrest in border areas, and in turn was accused of involvement in the worsening security situation in Iraq. In February the US government sought an extra

US\$75 million to "support democracy" in Iran. President Ahmadinejad continued to make statements threatening to the State of Israel and questioning the Holocaust. The European Union-Iran human rights dialogue remained suspended.

Local elections and elections to the Assembly of Experts, which oversees the appointment of the Supreme Leader, were held in December. The Council of Guardians, which reviews laws and policies to ensure that they uphold Islamic tenets and the Constitution, excluded all but 164 Assembly of Experts candidates, including at least 12 women who registered, on the basis of discriminatory selection procedures. The results of both elections were generally seen as a setback to the government of President Ahmadinejad.

The authorities faced armed opposition from Kurdish and Baluchi groups.

In December, the UN General Assembly passed a resolution condemning the human rights situation in Iran. Iran failed to set a date for visits by any UN Human Rights mechanisms despite having issued a standing invitation in 2002.

...Human rights defenders

Human rights defenders faced deepening restrictions on their work and remained at risk of reprisals. In January, the Ministry of the Interior was reported to be preparing measures to restrict the activities of non-governmental organizations that allegedly received finance from "problematic internal and external sources aimed at overthrowing the system". Students, who

remained a politically active section of society, were frequently targeted for reprisals, including arbitrary arrest and denial of the right to study in the new academic year.

- In August, the Ministry of the Interior banned activities by the Centre for Defenders of Human Rights (CDHR), run by Nobel Peace Prize Laureate Shirin Ebadi and other leading lawyers, stating that it did not have a permit. In September, the Ministry of the Interior said a permit would be issued “if changes were made to the [centre’s] mission statement”.
- Abdolfattah Soltani, a lawyer and co-founder of the CDHR, was released on bail in March. He was later sentenced to five years’ imprisonment for “disclosing confidential documents” and “propaganda against the system”. The sentence was under appeal at the end of the year.
- Prisoner of conscience Akbar Ganji, a journalist who implicated government officials in the murder of intellectuals and journalists in the 1990s, was released in March after completing his six-year prison sentence (Amnesty International 2007, *Report 2007 – Iran*, May – Attachment 69).

Extracts relevant to Internet and academic freedom, and also on freedom of assembly, follow below from the March 2008 US Department of State report on human rights in Iran in 2007 in Iran:

Internet Freedom

The government increased control over the Internet during the year as more citizens used it as a source for news and political debate. According to the May 1 Freedom House report, approximately seven million citizens used the Internet, although the Ministry of Communications reported as many as 16 million users, according to domestic press reports. The same Freedom House report noted that beginning in 2006 the government increasingly targeted the Internet.

All Internet service providers (ISPs) must be approved by the Ministry of Culture and Guidance, and the government used filtering software to block access to some Western Web sites, reportedly including the Web sites of prominent Western news organizations and NGOs. According to the Open Net Initiative (ONI), the government issued framing regulations in November 2006 to systematize control and management of Internet activity. ONI also reported that in January the Ministry of Culture and Guidance issued a notice requiring all owners of Web sites and blogs to register with the government by March 1 and to refrain from posting certain types of content.

In August the government announced that it would launch a new Internet police patrol. According to press reports describing the government announcement, the patrol would investigate suspicious advertisements, fraud, and economic and financial offenses.

In April 2006 the Minister of Communications and Information Technology announced the government’s intention to establish a “national Internet,” which would improve on the costly monitoring process that required Web site information to exit the country and then return. In October 2006 the government imposed a limit of 128 kilobytes per second on Internet speed and required ISPs to comply with the limit by decreasing Internet service speed to homes and cafes. The new limit made it more difficult to report Internet material and to circumvent government restrictions to access blocked Web sites.

According to RSF, arrests and intimidation of bloggers decreased in 2006, but Internet censorship increased. In 2006 and during the year the government blocked several Web sites dealing with women’s issues in the country, and women’s groups reportedly launched an online petition to protest Internet filtering. According to press reports, the government

claimed to have blocked access to 10 million Internet sites it deemed immoral during the year. A 2005 HRW study listing blocked Internet sites included Farsi-language news sites, some popular sites of Internet writers, the Freedom Movement Party Web site, a Web site promoting the views of Ayatollah Montazeri, several Kurdish Web sites, Web sites dedicated to political prisoners, and a Baha'i Web site.

Academic Freedom and Cultural Events

The government significantly restricted academic freedom. In September 2006 President Ahmadi-Nejad called for the removal of secular and liberal professors from universities. Reports indicated dozens of university professors have been dismissed, forced to retire, or denied sabbaticals abroad since 2006. Student groups reported that the government used a "star" system to rank politically active students — each star denoted a negative mark. Students with three stars were reportedly banned from university or prevented from registering for upcoming terms. Government informers were common on university campuses. Additionally, there were reports the government maintained a broad network of student informants in Qom's major seminaries who reported teaching counter to official government positions.

...Admission to universities was politicized; all applicants had to pass "character tests" in which officials eliminated applicants critical of the government's ideology. Some seats in universities continued to be reserved for members of the Basij, regardless of their scores on the national entrance exam. To obtain tenure, professors had to refrain from criticism of the authorities.

...Freedom of Assembly

The constitution permits assemblies and marches, "provided they do not violate the principles of Islam;" however, in practice the government restricted freedom of assembly and closely monitored gatherings to prevent antigovernment protests. Such gatherings included public entertainment and lectures, student meetings and protests, labor protests, women's gatherings and protests, funeral processions, and Friday prayer gatherings.

Paramilitary organizations such as the Ansar-e Hizballah, a group of vigilantes who seek to enforce their vision of appropriate revolutionary comportment upon society, harassed, beat, and intimidated those who demonstrated publicly for reform. They particularly targeted university students.

The government continued to prohibit and forcibly disperse peaceful demonstrations during the year.

On March 4, days before International Women's Day on March 8, police arrested more than 30 women demonstrating outside a Tehran courthouse, protesting the trials of five women's rights activists charged for peacefully demonstrating in June 2006. All were later released but continued to face harassment by the authorities at year's end.

On March 14, police forces disrupted a peaceful demonstration by teachers protesting outside the legislature for higher wages. Police reportedly arrested dozens of demonstrators. According to labor rights groups, many teachers received heavy suspended sentences for taking part in these protests.

On May 1, security forces arrested 11 workers attending a demonstration in Sanandaj protesting for labor rights. Each was sentenced to 91 days in prison and ten lashes. Two of the organizers of the rally, Sheys Amini and Sedigh Karimi, were sentenced to 30 months in prison by the Sanandaj criminal court.

On August 9, authorities arrested five members of a Tehran bus drivers' syndicate, along with some family members, who were demonstrating outside detained labor leader Mansur Osanloo's house, calling for the release of Osanloo and labor activist Mahmoud Salehi.

On September 25, police reportedly disrupted a peaceful demonstration by workers at a paper factory in Ahvaz who demanded payment of their wages. Police reportedly beat demonstrators, and some required hospitalization.

In late September and early October, police reportedly arrested a number of protesting workers in the western city of Shush, following three days of workers' protests over unpaid wages.

In early December AI reported that security forces arrested between 20 and 30 students, mostly in Tehran but also in other cities. Authorities detained some of the students before protests on December 7, the country's national University Student Day; others were arrested after the demonstrations.

Some participants arrested during the 2006 International Women's Day commemoration remained in prison at year's end (US Department of State 2008, *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2007 – Iran*, 11 March – Attachment 70).

HRW's World Report 2008 noted of the treatment of human rights defender in Iran in 2007 that:

In 2007 the authorities intensified their harassment of independent human rights defenders and lawyers in an attempt to prevent them from publicizing and pursuing human rights violations. In July Branch Six of Iran's Revolutionary Court sentenced human rights activist Emad Baghi, as well as his wife and daughter, to suspended sentences of three years for their work in documenting and publicizing human rights violations. In October court authorities arrested Baghi after he responded to a summons to appear before an interrogator, and at this writing he remains in detention.

The government closed nongovernmental organizations that encourage civil society participation and raise awareness of human rights violations. In March authorities raided and closed the offices of the Civil Society Organizations Training and Research Center, and closed the offices of Rahi Institution, a nongovernmental organization providing legal and social aid to women victims of violence (Human Rights Watch 2008, *World Report 2008 – Iran*, January – Attachment 71).

October 2007 saw student protests at Tehran University which reportedly mirrored those that occurred in December 2006. In the *Fox News* coverage of the event which appears below, the report notes the comments of one Azad University student:

A day after Iranian students protested against hardline President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, official response was muted Tuesday, but the country's independent press and students continued to criticize the president.

About 100 students participated in Monday's rare demonstration, chanting "Death to dictator" as Ahmadinejad gave a speech at Tehran University, prompting scuffles with hardline students, witnesses said.

The president faced a similar outburst during a speech in December when students at Amir Kabir Technical University called him a dictator and set fire to his picture.

Hoping to avoid a similar disturbance Monday, organizers imposed tight security, limiting access to people with invitations, a step the independent daily *Hambastegi* said triggered the protest.

Several independent newspapers and students criticized officials for barring people from the event, contrasting the measure with Ahmadinejad's willingness to take questions from students during a visit to Columbia University in New York last month.

The independent daily *Etemad Melli* published a large picture of the protesters on its front page carrying a sign with the slogan "We also have questions, why only Columbia?"

Milad Niazi, a student at Tehran Azad University, criticized the president for avoiding hard questions at home, saying "Supporters of Ahmadinejad praise his appearance at Columbia University as a heroic act, but they don't dare to let students appear in the speech hall."

Even the hardline *Hezbollah* newspaper, which criticized the protest, questioned the policy of preventing students from listening to Ahmadinejad.

"Allocation of special invitation cards and blocking students from attending the program was not expected from the government," said the paper in an editorial.

Government newspapers and those that support Ahmadinejad ignored the protests or only mentioned them in brief reports.

...Monday's protest prompted scuffles between the demonstrators and hardline university students loyal to Ahmadinejad who chanted "Thank you president."

Students were once the main power base of Iran's reform movement but have faced intense pressure in recent years from Ahmadinejad's hard-line government.

"I wish Ahmadinejad could manage the country in a softer and flexible way as he claimed at Columbia University," said Milad Niazi, 21-year-old chemistry student at Tehran Azad University.

Police remained outside the university gates during Monday's protest, and there have been no reports of arrests. Following the demonstration in December, several students were detained for their participation.

In recent months, dissenters have witnessed an increasing crackdown in Iran, and hundreds have been rounded up on accusations of threatening the Iranian system. Numerous newspapers have been shut down and those that remain have been muted in their criticism fearing closure ('Iranian President Faces Continued Criticism Following Rare Student Protest' 2007, *Fox News*, 9 October <http://www.foxnews.com/story/0,2933,300458,00.html> – Accessed 7 May 2008 – Attachment 72; see also: 'Students clash as President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad faces protest at campus speech' 2007, *The Times*, 9 October http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/news/world/middle_east/article2617562.ece – Accessed 7 May 2008 – Attachment 73).

For an extensive overview of the human rights situation in Iran up to 2007 see the March 2007 report produced by the American Jewish Committee and supplied as Attachment 74 (Fridman, A. & Kaye, M. 2007, *Human Rights in Iran 2007*, Mission for Establishment of Human Rights in Iran website, March <http://mehr.org/HumanRightsinIran07.pdf> – Accessed 7 May 2008 – Attachment 74).

A February 2008 report provides an overview of the manner in which students and academics in Iran have been becoming increasingly active in Iran and have, as a consequence, been subject to an increasing number of arrests:

Babak Zamanian, a lanky 23-year-old student of mining engineering, vividly remembers the last time he bellowed slogans denouncing President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad. "Death to the dictator!" he chanted vociferously on a freezing winter day in December 2006, leading a crowd of Iranian students as the Iranian leader delivered a speech at Amirkabir University of Technology, a hotbed of student protests in Tehran.

...In the year since Zamanian took part in protests, student movements in some Iranian universities have been gathering steam. On Dec. 7, 2007, Students Day in Iran, hundreds of leftist university students marched at university campuses with portraits of Che Guevara. Smaller groups of Marxist students held similar protests in several other cities. Other groups soon joined, including students from Islamic schools.

About 50 students have been arrested since then, according to estimates by defense lawyers. The security officials have reportedly called them "rebel students," and family members have been told that their children "had acted against national security." Security officials in the past year have hit out at groups like the labor movement, women's rights advocates, and students, labeling them centers of conspiracy. The universities similarly have been targeted within the past year. Nonconformist lecturers have been dismissed, student associations closed, publications banned, and a range of other actions taken to muzzle student leaders.

According to the Office for Fostering Unity, a leading reformist student organization, 43 student organizations critical of the government have been closed down, at least 130 student publications banned, and hundreds of students detained since the Ahmadinejad government came to power. During this time, they say around 550 students have been summoned to disciplinary hearings, and more than 100 prominent lecturers have been dismissed or forced to retire.

Last year, the Iranian minister of intelligence, Gholam Hossein Mohseni Ejeji, reiterated the official view that Iran's enemies were planning to use the students' and women's movements as the vehicle for a "soft coup."

Iranian dissident students and human-rights observers expressed shock at the news last month of the death in detention of two young Iranians, Ebrahim Lotfallahi, 27, a prominent student activist from Sanandaj, and Zahra Bani-Ameri, a 27-year-old female physician.

While the Iranian authorities are eager to dismiss these deaths as suicides, human-rights observers blame the Intelligence Ministry, which reportedly conducts interrogations of political detainees and is said to use violence to obtain confessions. "The sudden death in detention of two apparently healthy young people is extremely alarming," said Joe Stork, Middle East deputy director at Human Rights Watch. "The government only heightens our concern by quickly passing them off as suicides."

Local student and human-rights activists are concerned about the safety of many other young Iranian students in prison, recently arrested for antigovernment protests.

A leading dissident, a former professor in the University of Tehran who asked that his name not be used, actively supports the student movement. Often, at great personal risk, he shelters politically active students, on the run from the Basij, or the state-sponsored militia, in his apartment in northern Tehran.

...Most of the students are being kept in Evin prison's notorious Section 209, where detainees are held in solitary confinement. Section 209 is solely controlled by Iran's Intelligence Ministry, and even Evin authorities don't have access to this section. Some others are being detained in tiny lockups of the intelligence agency in central Tehran called Daftar-e-Peygiri, or Tracking Office.

Clashes between student groups and the authorities came to a head at the beginning of May 2007 during anti-Ahmedinejad protests (Chopra, A. 2008, 'Iran Cracks Down on Student Protesters', *US News & World Report*, 21 February <http://www.usnews.com/articles/news/world/2008/02/21/iran-cracks-down-on-student-protesters.html> – Accessed 7 May 2008 – Attachment 75).

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