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Iran: Treatment by Iranian authorities of relatives of persons who have left Iran and claimed refugee status, including those persons who are or were members and/or supporters of the Bureau of National Security and Intelligence (SAVAK) or a Fedayeen organization (2004 - 2006)

Research Directorate, Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada, Ottawa

Information on the treatment of relatives of persons who have left Iran and claimed refugee status was scarce among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate. While documentary sources of information did not report on the treatment of family members by Iranian authorities, a professor of political science at York University in Toronto, who is also a specialist in Iranian politics, provided the following information in correspondence to the Research Directorate dated 8 May 2006. When asked how Iranian authorities treat relatives of persons who have left Iran and claimed refugee status, the professor stated:

It all depends on the case. The Iranian regime knows very well that many have fled Iran for socio-economic reasons. However, as a general rule, if a person has been implicated in anti-government activities and/or working with subversive organizations, whether pro-Monarchy or socialist, and known to have sought political asylum in a foreign country, her/his relatives will definitely be questioned. Whether they would be prosecuted or not depends on several factors and the severity of each factor:

1. the relatives' prior knowledge of the involvement of their family members' in anti-governmental activities;
2. their support of such activities;
3. their loyalty to the regime.

...

The regime is still as intolerant of dissent as it was more than a decade ago, but it has become more sophisticated in handling these cases. To my knowledge, nowadays, only the relatives of those refugees who are actively involved in anti-government activities and/or affiliated to 'serious' opposition groups (either independent or supported/financed by the west) ... abroad would face mistreatment (verbal, psychological, physical) by the Iranian regime.

What needs to be considered is that since the behaviour of Iranian authorities towards dissidents and their families, as in other cases, is neither consistent

nor predictable, each case should be handled individually (8 May 2006).

Regarding relatives of members and supporters of the Bureau of National Security and Intelligence (SAVAK) or a Fedayeen organization, the professor of political science at York University explained:

Immediately after the 1979 revolution, the regime paid more attention to and was sensitive about [...] relatives of persons who were members and/or supporters of the SAVAK more than political organizations such as Fedayeen khalq. However, this situation significantly changed when the regime consolidated its power in 1981-83. As the threats of foreign-inspired/supported coup d'état by the reminiscent of the Shah's regime diminished, the regime focused its repressive activities more on domestic opposition, particularly those who were involved in armed-struggle or serious subversive activities. In this context, the relatives of persons involved were almost subjected to the same repressive treatments as their sons or daughters. Regarding those who had fled the country, the regime would use any means possible from intimidation to coercion (psychological or physical) to gain their cooperation in denouncing and/or forcing their family members to return to Iran. The main objective of the Iranian authorities was to let anyone who dared to flee the country know, as a deterrent measure, that their relatives would not be left alone if they sought refugee status in other countries. This was the situation up until Khomeini's death and conclusion of the Iran-Iraq war [1988] (8 May 2006).

The professor did not provide more current information on the treatment of members or supporters of SAVAK or the Fedayeen. The following information was provided by the Director of the United States-based Foundation for Democracy in Iran (FDI), a non-profit organization which monitors human rights in Iran, in a 1 May 2006 telephone interview. The treatment by Iranian authorities of relatives of persons who have left Iran and claimed refugee status is not systematic and varies from case to case. The director explained that sometimes relatives are harassed, sometimes they are imprisoned while in other cases, nothing happens to the relatives of refugee claimants (FDI 1 May 2006).

The director stated that the Iranian authorities had killed most SAVAK members and supporters; however, grandchildren of SAVAK supporters and members could still be targeted by Iranian authorities for ill-treatment (ibid.).

In the opinion of the FDI director, relatives of Fedayeen supporters could face a higher risk of ill-treatment than relatives of SAVAK supporters because current Iranian authorities view the Fedayeen as dissidents (ibid.). The director added that people affiliated with the Fedayeen continue to use pseudonyms because they are afraid of reprisals by the authorities against their families in Iran (ibid.).

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

References

Foundation for Democracy in Iran (FDI). 1 May 2006. Telephone interview with

the Director.

Professor of Political Science, York University, Toronto. 8 May 2006.
Correspondence.

Additional Sources Consulted

Oral sources: The Canadian Embassy in Tehran, the International Federation of Iranian Refugees, the Islamic Human Rights Commission, the Mission for Establishment of Human Rights in Iran, the Organization for Defending Victims of Violence [Tehran], the Permanent Mission of the Islamic Republic of Iran to the United Nations, the Refugee Action Coalition [Newtown, Australia], the Refugee Action Committee [Canberra, Australia] and the Refugee Council of Australia did not provide information within the time constraints of this response.

The Australian Council for International Development and the Centre for Refugee Studies of York University did not have information on the subject.

Internet sources, including: Amnesty International, Citizenship and Immigration Canada, Factiva, Freedom House, Human Rights Watch, Islamic Human Rights Commission, International Federation of Iranian Refugees, *Iran Daily*, Iran Nabard, Mission for Establishment of Human Rights in Iran, Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, the Organization of Fedaian (Minority), Organization of Iranian People's Fedaian (Majority), Organization of Iranian People's Fedayee Guerrillas, Refugee Action Coalition, Refugee Action Committee, Refugee Council of Australia, Refugees International, *Tehran Times*, United Kingdom Home Office, United States Department of State, World News Connection.

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