



## RESPONSES TO INFORMATION REQUESTS (RIRs)

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28 June 2006

### IRN101301.E

Iran: Treatment of supporters of opposition groups or parties since 2003; whether ordinary supporters of political causes or groups distribute pamphlets by hand and, if so, the response of the Iranian authorities; whether persons perceived as political opponents can work for state companies (2003 - June 2006)  
Research Directorate, Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada, Ottawa

### Background

The Iranian Action Committee (IAC) is a non-governmental organization (NGO) whose mission is to initiate and assist in the initiation of proceedings before international tribunals in an effort to hold officials and agents of the Islamic Republic of Iran accountable for their actions (IAC n.d.a). An uncorroborated report on the IAC Website stated that "thousands" of individuals were imprisoned in Iran for expressing their opinion and that "there have been more than 110 political assassinations of Iranian opponents of the regime outside of Iran, not counting [the] 200 or more aborted attempts. The pursuit of such a policy clearly shows that it is the regime's intention to eliminate political opponents abroad as well" (ibid. n.d.b).

According to an article in *Khaleej Times*, the head of the Iranian judiciary admitted that "the rights of political dissidents had in some cases been violated by investigators in Iran's detention centres" and he accused the investigators of "violating Islamic and ethical principles to elicit confessions from dissidents" (6 May 2005). This information was corroborated in Human Rights Watch's annual report on Iran which cited a July 2005 report in which the judiciary acknowledged the use of "serious human rights violations, including [the] widespread use of torture, illegal detentions and coercive interrogations to obtain confessions" (HRW Jan. 2006). An article by the National Council of Resistance of Iran (NCRI) reported a Judiciary spokesman's claim that the execution of political prisoners was "a lie" and his statement that people claiming to be "political prisoners" were in fact "terrorists and criminals" (20 Apr. 2006). NCRI then criticized the fact that political prisoners had been executed without trial or sentenced to death by a single judge acting as "prosecutor, lawyer, judge and jury all at the same time" (NCRI 20 Apr. 2006). NCRI added that, since 1981, more than 120,000 political prisoners have been executed and that various United Nations bodies had expressed concern 52 times regarding human rights violations in Iran (ibid.; see also *Israel Insider* 14 Apr. 2006 and UK 1 Feb. 2006).

Freedom House reported that "[s]uspected dissidents are often held in unofficial, illegal detention centers, and allegations of torture are commonplace" (6 July 2005). Similarly, Human Rights Watch (HRW) indicated that the Iranian

government "routinely use[d] torture and ill-treatment in detention" as well as solitary confinement to "punish dissidents" (Jan. 2006). In their report entitled "Like the Dead in Their Coffins", HRW described the ill-treatment and detention conditions of dissidents using testimony from political detainees, many of whom were students (June 2004). *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2005* reported that the government used "questionable criminal charges" to arrest, convict and execute persons who had committed offences of a political nature (8 Mar. 2006, Sec. 1.e). In addition, *Country Reports 2005* indicated that although some political prisoners received suspended sentences or leave of absence from prison, they could be ordered to return to prison at any time; the government reportedly controlled other political activists by keeping their file in the court system which could be opened at any time (8 Mar. 2006, Sec. 1.e).

## **Monarchists**

Meepas, a company providing independent political and economic analysis (Meepas n.d.a), published the following information regarding the Iranian Monarchist Organisation on their Website:

This group, [which] mainly consists of the Shah's supporters, can be considered more as a political threat than a military one against the current Iranian administration.... Headed by Reza Pahlavi who is the son of the former Shah, the monarchist movement's advocacy of non-violent calls for democracy in Iran have contributed to the group's popularity [among] the exiled Iranian population. Although, comparatively speaking, support for this organisation is small, nevertheless the group's sponsorship by wealthy ex-members of the royal family and its continued political activity against the current Iranian Islamic regime in Western capitals, especially in Washington, is considered as a threat against the Islamic regime in Tehran (Meepas n.d.b).

Media reports indicated that, in May 2006, a Canadian-Iranian intellectual was arrested for reportedly "having ties to monarchists and other 'counterrevolutionary groups'" (RFE/RL 5 May 2006; see also AFP 4 May 2006 and *Toronto Star* 22 May 2006). Similarly, a journalist was imprisoned in 2002 for being implicated with monarchists (RSF 16 Apr. 2004; *Country Reports 2005* 8 Mar. 2006, Sec. 1.e). In March 2005, a group of 56 monarchists refused to leave a plane that had landed in Brussels in protest of the Iranian government (AP 11 Mar. 2005; Reuters 11 Mar. 2005; AFP 11 Mar. 2005).

According to the *Los Angeles Times*, members of the Constitutionalist Party of Iran (CPI), a pro-monarchist party (26 June 2005), have set up an office in Tarzana, California, which they keep secret "because of the terrorist regime" (20 Mar. 2005).

In correspondence dated 3 June 2006, a representative of the CPI stated that he was not aware of any declared monarchist organization in Iran (CPI 3 June 2006). He explained that being accused of having ties with monarchists was "one of the worst accusations" and cited the example of Dr. Ramin Jahanbeglou who remained in detention as a result of such accusations (ibid.). The representative also stated that "[t]he very fact that nobody in Iran openly expresses his/her support for any serious opposition group, including our party (the Constitutionalist Party of Iran), shows the extent of intimidation [that dissidents face in Iran]" (ibid.). Regarding the treatment of CPI supporters, the representative indicated that "in Iran, they would end up in jail, if bold enough to be uncovered; abroad, some are pressured to work with the security operatives

of the Islamic regime, spying on our organization or trying to break it up" (ibid.).

Another CPI representative and member of the Central Committee provided the following information to the Research Directorate in correspondence dated 7 June 2006:

Due to the absence of democracy and freedom of political expression, no pro-monarchist political party is allowed to form an organisation in Iran as far as I am aware and should anyone display their beliefs in this regard or be suspected of any connections with such an organisation, they will surely be imprisoned and punished accordingly.

### **Socialist Party of Iran**

In December 2002, the Website of the Socialist Party of Iran (SPI) posted an urgent call demanding that two active members of the SPI who had fled to Germany not be deported back to Iran for fear of what would happen to them if they returned (30 Dec. 2002). No current information on the SPI could be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate.

### **Freedom Movement of Iran (FMI)**

The Freedom Movement of Iran (FMI), also known as the Iranian Freedom Movement (IFM), or *Nehzat-e Azadi-e Irân*, in Persian, is also referred to as the Liberation Movement of Iran (*Political Handbook of the World 2005-2006* Dec. 2005, 540). The FMI was dissolved in 2002 by the government (*Political Handbook of the World 2005-2006* Dec. 2005, 540; *Country Reports 2005* 8 Mar. 2006, Sec. 3). In 2002, over 30 FMI members were sentenced to imprisonment while others received fines and were prevented from taking part in political activities (ibid.). In 2004, RFE/RL indicated that although the FMI was "banned", it was still "tolerated" (16 Feb. 2004). In December 2002, Ebrahim Yazdi, former foreign minister (*Country Reports 2005* 8 Mar. 2006, Sec. 1.e; *Asia Times* 1 Apr. 2006) and FMI leader, along with other FMI members, lodged a complaint with a parliamentary committee to protest the fact that the FMI had been banned and their property had been seized (IRNA 3 Mar. 2003). They also objected to the charges of subversion brought against them, as well as the absence of a jury during their trial (ibid.). Reuters reported that Yazdi faced charges of "acting against state security [and] insulting" the supreme leader and that his trial was scheduled for September 2004 (1 Sept. 2004). Shirin Ebadi, renowned human rights activist, lawyer and Nobel Peace Prize laureate, agreed to act as defence counsel for Yazdi (AP 31 Aug. 2004). However, an article published on the FMI Website indicated that Yazdi did not present himself for his trial to protest the absence of a jury and the fact that his hearing was closed to the public (Tajik 5 Oct. 2004). *Country Reports 2005* stated that, as of December 2005, Yazdi had not yet begun to serve his sentence and that his court case was still pending (8 Mar. 2006, Sec. 1.e). In a report on court cases against FMI members posted on the FMI Website and originally published in Persian by the Iranian newspaper *Shargh*, it was stated that Yazdi had been interrogated 52 times between 2002 and 2004 (Tajik 5 Oct. 2004).

*Iran Daily* reported that three FMI members received prison sentences of eight months each for "setting up an illegal body and propagating against the system" even though their lawyer argued that the non-governmental organization they created conformed to relevant Iranian legislation (14 Mar.

2006).

*Encyclopaedia Britannica* reported that 15 FMI members were imprisoned in May 2004 (n.d.). According to a FMI statement sent to the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) in March 2006, the FMI complained that its offices were locked and that authorities continued to question FMI members (BBC 2 Apr. 2006).

### **Fedayeen Khalq**

The National Memorial Institute for the Prevention of Terrorism (MIPT) is a non-profit organization which strives to prevent terrorism in the United States (US) or to mitigate its effects (MIPT n.d.a). MIPT was established in 1995 and is funded by the US Department of Homeland Security (ibid.). One of the MIPT's databases is the Terrorism Knowledge Base (TBK), a database containing information on terrorist groups and leaders, as well as terrorist incidents and related court cases (ibid.). According to the TKB, the Fedayeen (or Fedae, Fadaian, Feda'iyān, among other spellings) Khalq "has only been active in Iranian politics through its participation in the National Council of Resistance or Iran (NCRI) ... and the publication of its Internet news Website, Gooya News, which is censored by Iranian Intelligence" (ibid. n.d.b).

### **Mujaheddin e Khalq (MEK)**

The Mujaheddin (or Mojahedin, Mojaheddin, Mujahedin, among other spellings) e Khalq (MEK), also known as the People's Mujahideen Organization of Iran (PMOI), is a member of the NCRI (*Israel Insider* 14 Apr. 2006; MIPT n.d.c), a coalition of Iranian opposition groups (ibid.). The MEK is designated as a foreign terrorist organization by the US Department of State (*Country Reports on Terrorism 2005* 28 Apr. 2006, Ch. 8) and has been listed as such since 1997 (RFE/RL 28 Sept. 2004). The European Union (EU) gave this same designation to the MEK's military wing in May 2002 (ibid.). The MEK also appears on the List of Entities made pursuant to the Criminal Code of Canada which provides the names of terrorism-affiliated organizations (Canada 11 Apr. 2006). However, the NCRI and Agence France-Presse (AFP) reported that the United Kingdom was considering removing the PMOI from its list of terrorist organizations (NCRI 13 Feb. 2006; see also AFP 13 Mar. 2006).

In 2006, the Iranian government reportedly offered amnesty to members of the MEK living abroad and approximately 300 repatriated to Iran voluntarily (*Country Reports 2005* 8 Mar. 2006, Sec. 2.d; SRC 4 Apr. 2006). However, *Country Reports 2005* also stated that some persons with ties to the MEK were reportedly imprisoned for years (8 Mar. 2006, Sec. 1.e). Various sources reported that Valiollah Feyz-Mahdavi, a member of the PMOI, was sentenced to death and was scheduled to be executed in May 2006 (Iran Focus 7 Apr. 2006; HRW 16 Mar. 2006; AI 29 Mar. 2006). Amnesty International (AI) later reported that his death sentence had been commuted to life imprisonment (2 June 2006). Another member of the PMOI, Hojat [also spelled Hojjat] Zamani, was executed on 7 February 2006 (RFE/RL 21 Feb. 2006; AI 27 Feb. 2006; HRW 27 Feb. 2006; NCRI 20 Feb. 2006).

According to the NCRI, the Iranian authorities were increasingly using torture against political detainees, including members of the PMOI, and "[t]he regime's henchmen had threatened that if the regime's nuclear file were referred to the Security Council, they would kill all Mojahedin political prisoners similar to the massacre of political prisoners in [the] summer of 1988" (ibid.).

In 16 June 2006 correspondence with the Research Directorate, a representative of the NCRI stated that:

Members of dissident groups, including those affiliated with the People's Mojahedin are treated extremely harshly. In fact, at present there are several members and sympathizers of the group currently in Iranian prisons, including in Evin Prison in Tehran and Gohardasht Prison in Karaj (west of Tehran).

On February 7 [2006], a member of the People's Mojahedin, Mr. Hojjat Zamani, 31, was hanged in Gohardasht Prison, after enduring more than four years of torture and mistreatment, including long duration of solitary confinement.

There are currently other prisoners who are now imprisoned with their status in limbo. More than that, even members and sympathizers of the Mojahedin and affiliated groups who engage in merely political activity outside Iran are sentenced to death in absentia (NCRI 16 June 2006).

### **Distribution of pamphlets**

According to the NCRI, "all dissidents and opponents are considered criminals" and "teenagers or pregnant women, executed for simply sympathizing with the Mojahedin or distributing leaflets or newspapers, were considered as murderers" (20 Apr. 2006). In correspondence with the Research Directorate, however, a representative of the CPI indicated that he did not know if supporters of any political cause or group distributed pamphlets in Iran (CPI 3 June 2006). However, he stated that "people in Iran express their disgust [for the regime] by whatever means at their disposal" and that "Weblogs became so virulent that authorities staged a crackdown" (ibid.).

Another representative of the CPI and member of the CPI Central Committee provided the following information on the distribution of pamphlets in 7 June 2006 correspondence with the Research Directorate:

I am not aware of exactly how such actions are taking place as they are not done so in the open. However, like any other political activity, the regime takes such actions very seriously and imposes heavy punishments and imprisonment [which could] lead to further inhumane treatments.

AI reported that six individuals were arrested and prosecuted for "distributing material against the state," without specifically stating if the offence involved the distribution of pamphlets (AI 31 Mar. 2006; see also ibid. 9 Sept. 2005). An American online newspaper reported that, during a rally for Women's Day on 8 March 2006, some participants were arrested, including supporters of the PMOI who were distributing pamphlets and posters (The American Thinker 17 Mar. 2006). Iran Focus also reported that other political activists were also arrested for distributing leaflets (27 Feb. 2006; Iran Focus 19 June 2005).

The following information was provided by a representative of the NCRI in correspondence dated 16 June 2006. When asked whether ordinary supporters of any political cause or group distribute pamphlets, and what the authorities' reaction to such an activity might be, the representative stated:

This is rather a frequent occurrence. On a number of occasions, such individuals have been arrested and in some cases, even shot on the spot. Others have been sentenced to long-term prison terms. The government has demonstrated zero tolerance toward such activity (NCRI 16 June 2006).

### **Dissidents working for state companies**

In correspondence with the Research Directorate, the NCRI representative also stated that persons perceived as political opponents cannot work for state companies (ibid.). The representative added that "those who are perceived to be ... opponents of the regime and affiliated with opposition groups are denied job opportunities in the private sector, let alone [employment] with government-run companies" (ibid.). Additional information on whether persons perceived as political opponents could work for state companies could not be found among sources consulted by the Research Directorate.

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.

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**Oral sources:** The following sources did not provide information within the time constraints: an assistant professor at California State University, Constitutionalist Movement of Iran, Constitutionalist Party of Iran, Freedom Movement of Iran, Iranian People's Fadaee Guerrillas, National Council of Resistance of Iran, Organization of Fedaian (Minority), Organization of Iranian People's Fedaian (Majority), People's Mojahedin Organization of Iran, a professor from George Mason University in Virginia, Rastakhiz Iran, a researcher with the École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales, and Socialist Party of Iran.

Attempts to contact Guardians of Eternal Iran, Iran Nabard, Marze Por Gohar Party (Glorious Frontier Party), National Movement of Iranian Resistance, and the Secretariat of Reza Pahlavi were unsuccessful.

A professor from Rice University in Texas did not have information on the subject.

**Internet sites, including:** Constitutionalist Party of Iran, Daryoush Homayoun, Democracy for Iran, European Country of Origin Information Network, Factiva, Foundation for Democracy in Iran, Freedom Movement of Iran, Gooya News, the Guardians of Eternal Iran and the Constitutionalist Movement of Iran, Integrated Regional Information Networks, Iran Focus, Iran Nabard, the Iranian People's Fadaee Guerrillas, Islamic Republic News Agency, *Jane's Intelligence Review*, *Jane's Terrorism and Security Monitor*, Marze Por Gohar Party, National Union for Democracy in Iran, Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, Organization of Fedaian (Minority), Organization of Iranian People's Fedaian (Majority), Organization of Iranian People's Fedayee Guerrillas, Organization of Young Iranian Constitutional Monarchists, People's Mojahedin Organization of Iran, Rastakhiz Iran, Socialist Party of Iran, and *Tehran Times*.

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