



## RESPONSES TO INFORMATION REQUESTS (RIRs)

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Iran: The treatment of student protestors or activists (June 2006 - November 2007)  
Research Directorate, Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada, Ottawa

#### Background

"Open dissent" by university students in Iran against the government has been building since at least 2006 when students at Tehran's Amirkabir University demonstrated against President Ahmadinejad during his visit to the university in December 2006 (RFE/RL 9 Dec. 2007; BBC 20 Dec. 2006). Media reports note that despite a crackdown by authorities, student protests are continuing (RFE/RL 24 Apr. 2007; Iran Focus 6 Nov. 2007). On 10 April 2007, Iran's Minister of Intelligence accused students and women's rights activists of being trained by foreign powers to engage in "soft subversion" of Iran's political system. (AI 27 July 2007; RFE/RL 12 Apr. 2007). In August 2007, he threatened to "confront" people who, he claimed, were in universities under the pretext of being students but actually intended to destroy the Iranian system. (*The Guardian* 29 Aug. 2007; RFE/RL 26 Aug. 2007). In early December 2007, at least 20 students were detained following a number of demonstrations and other student actions at universities in Tehran and in other cities, including Hamadan, Isfahan, Mazandaran, Shiraz, and Kerman (AI 13 Dec. 2007; Iran Focus 11 Dec. 2007; RFE/RL 9 Dec. 2007).

#### Restrictions on university education

In October 2006, Human Rights Watch (HRW) noted that there had been a "year-long official drive to punish student activists for political activities, beliefs, writings, and membership in student associations that are not officially endorsed" (HRW Oct. 2006, 1). Politically active students face disciplinary committees (US 6 Mar. 2007, Sec. 2a; RFE/RL 24 Apr. 2007) courts (US 6 Mar. 2007, Sec. 2a; RFE/RL 24 Apr. 2007), jail sentences (US 6 Mar. 2007, Sec. 2a), expulsion (US 6 Mar. 2007, Sec. 2a, Freedom House 2007b), bans from university (US 6 Mar. 2007, Sec. 2a; HRW Oct. 2006, 2; RFE/RL 24 Apr. 2007) or restrictions on registering (US 6 Mar. 2007, Sec. 2a; HRW Oct. 2006, 2; Freedom House 2007b). HRW also indicates that some students have had to sign promises not to engage in protests (HRW Oct. 2006, 5-6). The British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) reports that as many as "181 students have received letters warning them not to get involved in politics, while 47 student publications and 28 student organizations have been closed" (BBC 20 Dec. 2006). Student groups report interference with their activities and with student elections (US 6 Mar. 2007, Sec. 2a). All applicants to universities must pass "character tests" which officials use to deny entry to those who are seen as dissenting from the government's

ideology (US 6 Mar. 2007, Sec. 2a). Students also note that a "star system" is used in universities to label politically active students, with three stars sufficient to have a student banned from further university studies. (BBC 20 Dec. 2006; US 6 Mar. 2007, Sec. 2a). Government informers are reportedly common on university campuses (US 6 Mar. 2007, Sec. 2a). The government closely monitors gatherings, including student meetings, to prevent anti-government protests (US 6 Mar. 2007, Sec. 2a). Paramilitary organizations such as the *Ansar-e Hizballah* and the *Basij* [governmental volunteer paramilitary youth force] have disrupted public demonstrations generally (Freedom House 2007b). In particular, reformist demonstrations by students have been the target of Ansar-e Hizballah (US 6 Mar. 2007, Sec. 2b) and the Basij (Freedom House 2007a, Sec. 1.74, 2.17). Some seats in universities are reserved for members of the Basij regardless of their academic scores (US 6 Mar. 2007, Sec. 2a).

### **Treatment while detained**

Human rights organizations indicate that jailed students are subject to lengthy detentions in prison, including time in solitary confinement; are denied access to family or to lawyers; and have subjected to routine physical abuse and interrogations aimed at eliciting coerced confessions (HRW 22 June 2007; HRW 27 July 2007; AI 26 Sept. 2007; Front Line n.d.a). The non-governmental organization Front Line reports that some detained students have been "subjected to severe beatings, forced to stand for 48 hours, detained in solitary confinement, and deprived of food" (Front Line n.d.a). Front Line is a Dublin-based non-governmental organization that aims to protect human rights defenders who are "at risk" (Front Line n.d.b). It reports that detained students have been denied access to medical care, they have been threatened with death and they have received threats against their family members (Front Line n.d.a).

### **Specific individuals**

In July 2006, student protester Akbar Mohammadi died in Evin Prison following medical complications possibly related to a hunger strike (US 6 Mar. 2007, Sec. 1a). Police first arrested Mohammadi following his participation in July 1999 student demonstrations (US 6 Mar. 2007, Sec. 1a; HRW 3 Aug. 2006). HRW reports that sources claimed Akbar Mohammadi had been tortured in prison (HRW 3 Aug. 2006). He was released on an indefinite medical leave in July 2004; however, he was re-arrested on 11 June 2006 (HRW 3 Aug. 2006). His brother, Manuchehr Mohammadi, a student activist also involved in the July 1999 student protests, fled Iran in October 2006 while on furlough from Evin Prison where he was serving a 13-year sentence (US 6 Mar. 2007, Sec. 1e).

Student activist Ahmad Batebi, who was involved in the 1999 Tehran student protest, remained in custody as of October 2006 after being briefly released (US 6 Mar. 2007, Sec. 1e; RFE/RL 23 Feb. 2007). He had reportedly been "severely beaten" and "harshly interrogated" while in prison (US 6 Mar. 2007, Sec. 1e). Batebi's wife, Somayeh Bayenat, was reportedly missing and presumed arrested on the evening of 21 February 2007. (RFE/RL 23 Feb. 2007).

Hessam Firouzi [also spelled Firuzi], the doctor who treated Batebi prior to his re-arrest, was arrested and released in October 2006 (US 6 Mar. 2007, Sec. 1d). In August 2007, Firouzi was convicted for giving interviews to foreign media about the health of Batebi and calling for Batebi's release (RFE/RL 20 Aug. 2007). He told Radio Farda that he had been detained and jailed three times in "recent months" (ibid.). Radio Farda is a joint project of Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty

(RFE/RL) and Voice of America (VOA) that broadcasts news and analysis of events concerning Iran (Radio Farda n.d.).

Kianush Sanjari, a "student activist and devoted blogger," was arrested in October 2006 on unspecified charges and released on 27 December 2006 after posting a bail of 1 billion Iranian Rials [approximately 107,214 Canadian dollars (XE.com 30 Nov. 2007)] (RFE/RL 11 Jan. 2007). Sanjari states that he was beaten in custody and subjected to solitary confinement for one and a half months (ibid.).

In May 2006 the government detained two students at Amirkabir University in Tehran, blogger Abed Tavanche and Yashar Qajar, of the Islamic Students Union (US 6 Mar. 2007, Sec. 2a). Tavanche and Qajar were held without charge and released at the end of July 2006 (US 6 Mar. 2007, Sec. 2a).

### **Office for Consolidation of Unity (OCU) (Daftar-e Tahkim-e Vahdat, also known as Office to Foster Unity or Office for Strengthening Unity [OSU])**

The OCU is the largest and best known student group calling for reform (RFE/RL 8 Nov. 2007). The OCU has reported harassment and detention of its members by government authorities (US 6 Mar. 2007, Sec. 2a). Some of its members and leaders who have been detained or arrested since 2006 include Abdullah Momeni, a spokesman of the OCU who was detained by plainclothes security forces on 31 May 2006 (US 6 Mar. 2007 Sec. 2a) and Behareh Hedayat, the head of the Women's Commission of the OCU, who was arrested during a 12 June 2006 demonstration (AI 27 July 2007; AI 13 July 2007) and sentenced in May 2007 to a suspended sentence of two years' imprisonment (AI 27 July 2007). She and five other members of the OCU's Central Council were detained on 9 July 2007 during a demonstration to protest the continued detention of eight other students arrested in May and June 2007 (AI 13 July 2007). At least two other student activist members of the OCU were arrested in the first week of November 2007 (HRW 10 Nov. 2007; RFE/RL 8 Nov. 2007).

### **Alumni Association of Iran (Sazman-e Danesh Amukhtegan-e Iran-e Eslami or Advar-e Tahkim-e Vahdat)**

The Alumni Association of Iran is a legally registered political organization open to graduates of Iranian universities (AI 27 July 2007). Ten people, including members of the association, were arrested on 9 July 2007 at the offices of the Alumni Association of Iran (AI 13 July 2007; ibid. 27 July 2007; HRW 27 July 2007). Authorities "reportedly fired guns in the air, and confiscated computers and documents before sealing the office" (AI 13 July 2007; Front Line n.d.a).

### **Other incidents**

According to HRW, university supervision committees have banned 19 student publications and suspended or dissolved Islamic Students' Associations in the following 15 universities: Amirkabir University, Isfahan University of Medical Sciences, Hamedan University of Medical Sciences, Loristan University, Uromieh University, Sabzevar Teacher Training College, Birjand University, Sahand University of Technology of Tabriz, Allameh Tabatabayi University, Razi University of Kermanshah, Kermanshah University of Medical Sciences, Shahrekord University of Medical Sciences, Kashan University of Medical Sciences, Shahidrajaei University, and Industrial University of Isfahan (HRW Oct. 2006, 1).

In Ahvaz, five student journalists and activists were arrested on the campus of Chamran University on 16 October 2007 (HRW 10 Nov. 2007). According to a government official the students were detained to prevent them from distributing fliers (ibid.).

On 30 October 2007, a demonstration of students took place at Allameh Tabatabayi University (Reuters 30 Oct. 2007; Iran Focus 6 Nov. 2007) protesting the "recent government-orchestrated crackdown inside Iranian universities" (Iran Focus 6 Nov. 2007). At least 20 students were arrested for involvement in this event (ibid.). Iran Focus is a non-profit news service focused on Iran and Iraq (Iran Focus n.d).

According to Human Rights Watch, eight students of Amirkabir University were arrested between 3 May and 6 June 2007 and accused of "defaming Islam" in student publications which were distributed one week before the annual elections to the Islamic Students' Association (ISA) (HRW 22 June 2007; AI 26 Sept. 2007). On 17 October 2007, three of the students were sentenced to up to three years imprisonment on charges of "insulting Islam's sanctities and its authorities" in a student newsletter. (RFE/RL 22 Oct. 2007; Jurist 17 Oct. 2007).

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 to refugee status or asylum. Please find below the list of additional sources consulted in researching this Information Request.

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