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4 January 2010

IRN103327.E

Iran: Treatment by Iranian authorities of relatives of persons who have left Iran and claimed refugee status, including former members of the Bureau of National Security and Intelligence (SAVAK), of a Fedayeen organization, or opposition protestors

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Information about the treatment of relatives of Iranians who have claimed refugee status was scarce among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

In a telephone interview with the Research Directorate on 16 December 2009, the executive director of the Iran Human Rights Documentation Center (IHRDC), an organization based in the United States (US) which aims to document the human rights situation in Iran since the 1979 revolution (IHRDC n.d.), stated that whether relatives in Iran are targeted is "more an issue of dissent and criticism," and depends on whether the refugees continue their activities outside Iran (IHRDC 16 Dec. 2009). In a telephone interview with the Research Directorate on 22 December 2009, a professor of political science at York University similarly stated that authorities will selectively target the relatives of some dissidents who are active outside Iran. The Executive Director of the IHRDC stated that relatives who are targeted typically face the threat of being called into local police or intelligence offices; in cases of a more active dissident, the relatives can face more serious consequences, such as having family possessions or property confiscated by the government (IHRDC 16 Dec. 2009).

In 9 December 2009 correspondence with the Research Directorate, the director of the International Campaign for Human Rights in Iran (ICHRI), an organization based in New York and Hamburg that supports Iranian human rights activists (ICHRI 5 Jan. 2009), stated that whether relatives are targeted by authorities

. . . depends on the nature of activities of the person who left Iran and how much the Iranian government is sensitive to those activities. In general, the Iranian intelligence and security forces target the families of activists and dissidents as a means to force them to end their activities. Interviewing former detainees, we routinely hear that interrogators threaten to harm or detain family members of the detainees if they do not cooperate or make false confessions.

The Director of the ICHRI noted that there have been several cases where

family members were detained to exert pressure on activists and dissidents (ICHRI 9 Dec. 2009). The Professor of Political Science was also aware of cases where relatives of dissidents were detained, but also stated that it is "not typical" (22 Dec. 2009). In 9 December 2009 correspondence with the Research Directorate, the President of the Foundation for Democracy in Iran (FDI), a US not-for-profit human rights organization (FDI n.d.), stated that family members of protesters who have left Iran have experienced "harassment."

Media sources report cases where family members in Iran received threats by authorities because of the activities of their relatives (NPR 5 May 2008; *The Wall Street Journal* 4 Dec. 2009). National Public Radio (NPR) reports that in 2007, an Iranian activist who fled Iran after receiving a death sentence and subsequently worked as a Persian language radio broadcaster in Washington, DC, quit her job because her family in Iran had received threats (5 May 2008). *The Wall Street Journal* conducted interviews with approximately 90 Iranians abroad, including students, housewives, doctors, lawyers and businesspeople, and found that "dozens" of those who criticized Iran on Facebook or Twitter said that their relatives in Iran were questioned or temporarily detained because of their activities (4 Dec. 2009). *The Wall Street Journal* also reports that a prominent human rights lawyer in Iran stated that prior to the summer of 2009 she did not believe that the Iranian government threatened Iranians abroad or their families back in Iran (4 Dec. 2009). However, since that time, she noted, ". . . the cases are too many to count. Every day I get phone calls and visits from people who are being harassed and threatened' because of relatives' activities abroad" (*The Wall Street Journal* 4 Dec. 2009).

The Bureau of National Security and Intelligence (SAVAK)

Information about the treatment of relatives of former members of the Bureau of National Security and Intelligence (SAVAK) was scarce among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate. According to the President of the FDI, the Iranian government targeted the family members of prominent former SAVAK members in the past, but that this issue has receded with time (FDI 9 Dec. 2009). The Director of the ICHRI was not aware of cases where relatives of former SAVAK members were targeted (ICHRI 9 Dec. 2009). According to the Professor of Political Science, the Iranian government does not seem to be interested in the pre-revolutionary authorities or those who were active 30 years ago during the revolution; instead, they are interested in those who are their active opponents now (22 Dec. 2009). However, the Executive Director of the IHRDC suggested that if a protester was arrested and the authorities discovered that his or her family had connections to SAVAK, the protester would be treated more severely (16 Dec. 2009).

Supporters of Fedayeen organizations

Information about the treatment of relatives of supporters of Fedayeen organizations was scarce among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate. According to the President of the FDI, the Iranian government has outlawed the Fedayeen Minority and pursues its members both inside and outside of Iran (9 Dec. 2009). He stated that the Fedayeen Majority (also known as *Aksariat*) "has given up anti-regime activities and is cooperating with the reformists within the regime"; he was not sure whether Fedayeen Majority members are subject to harassment by authorities now that the government is also pursuing reformists (FDI 9 Dec. 2009). The Professor of Political Science stated that members of the Minority or Majority factions of the Fedayeen would

likely be targeted only if "the individual is known to be an active opponent of the regime" (22 Dec. 2009). The Director of the ICHRI similarly stated that whether the relatives of Fedayeen supporters are targeted by authorities would depend on the level of activity of the supporter (ICHRI 9 Dec. 2009). He stated, "[i]f the Iranian government wants to pressure dissidents to stop their activities, it does rely on intimidation and persecution of family members" (ibid.). According to the Executive Director of the IHRDC, relatives of Fedayeen supporters would not necessarily be targeted, but the relatives may be treated more severely if they came to the attention of the authorities for other undisclosed reasons (IHRDC 16 Dec. 2009).

Post-election protesters

The Director of the ICHRI stated that "[t]he relatives of post-election protestors have been heavily targeted, [including] those of persons residing inside Iran, those who have left and are seeking asylum, and those who were already abroad and engaged in protests outside Iran" (ICHRI 9 Dec. 2009). He noted that the ICHRI has received several reports of such "persecution" (ibid.). Amnesty International (AI) reports that following the protests against the June 2009 election, harassment of clerics, political leaders and journalists became an integral component of the government's response to political dissent (AI Dec. 2009, 28). During student protests in December 2009, Gholam-Hossein Mohseni-Ejei, the government's chief prosecutor, reportedly stated, "'[f]rom now on, we will show no mercy' to protesters or their families" (*Pittsburg Post-Gazette* 9 Dec. 2009). The Professor of Political Science stated that a senior security official announced that they would target those outside Iran who criticize the government (22 Dec. 2009).

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

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Additional Sources Consulted

Internet sites, including: European Country of Origin Information Network (ecoi.net), Freedom House, Human Rights Watch (HRW), Institute for War and Peace Reporting (IWPR), International Crisis Group, Office of the United Nations (UN) High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) Refworld, Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty (RFE/RL), U.S. Committee for Refugees and Immigrants (USCRI).

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