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## Contact Us

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## Trial of the Arrested Bahá'ís

The Islamic Republic recently announced that it will try seven leading members of the Iranian Bahá'í community who have been in custody since May 2008. Since their arrests, the group has been held incommunicado and denied access to legal representation. All seven are reportedly charged with espionage for Israel, insulting religious sanctities and propaganda against the Islamic Republic. These accusations stem from their membership in a group called 'Yaran' or Friends, a national coordinating group for the Bahá'ís in Iran. The group was established in the wake of the 1983 dissolution of the National Spiritual Assembly of Iran. According to the Baha'i World News Service, Friends in Iran was formed with the full knowledge of the Iranian government.

It is believed that over thirty Iranian Bahá'ís are currently being held in prisons throughout the country while another eighty members of the faith have been released on bail and are awaiting trial. The arrests are in addition to continuous raids on Bahá'í homes and desecration of Bahá'í cemeteries in several Iranian cities. Many fear that this recent wave of raids and arrests is part of a continuing and systematic campaign by the Islamic Republic to destroy Iran's Bahá'í community and eradicate the Baha'í faith.

## Relevant News

- Mohammad Sadegh Kabudvand, Kurdish Iranian writer and journalist, received the Human Rights Watch Hellmann/Hammett grant for persecuted writers. Kabudvand used his writings to bring attention to the situation of Iranian Kurds. He was arrested, taken to section 209 of *Evin* Prison and subsequently sentenced to 10 years' imprisonment for action against national security, propaganda against the regime, disagreeing with Iranian criminal laws, and supporting political prisoners. He is currently serving his 10 year sentence and in need of urgent medical attention.
- In February of 2009, the Commission for Clemency and Forgiveness rejected the request of Hashemi Shahroudi, head of the Judiciary, to forgive the stoning sentence of Ashraf K. Earlier this year, three men were stoned in Khorasan-Razavi province, one of whom managed to escape death. In related news, Abdullah Farivar who was sentenced to be stoned in the City of Sari, was instead executed by hanging. Anti-stoning activists inside Iran worry that this trend will become more commonplace and that the execution sentence may be carried out for 14 other people who are presently imprisoned in Iran waiting to be stoned.
- Somayeh Zandelshani, Said Ghaedrahmat, Mohammad-Reza Dadvadpour, and Siavash Taragheh, Kurdish social activists were sentenced to two years' imprisonment for attending an illegal gathering and conspiring to overthrow the regime. Ms. Zaynab Jallalian was sentenced to death by a Kurdish Court for being 'at war with God.' The court reportedly convened in the absence of her defense attorney and lasted merely a few minutes. A group of *Amir Kabir* (Tehran Poly Technique) University Students who protested the burial of five unknown martyrs of the eight year war between Iran and Iraq on University grounds were arrested and taken to *Evin* Prison.

## IHRDC Launches Newspaper Collection

The **Iran Human Right Documentation Center** released its collection of editions of the *Ayandigan* newspaper on the anniversary of the Islamic Revolution of Iran, February 11. *Ayandigan* was a major liberal Iranian newspaper that was shut down by the Islamic revolutionary government soon after the 1979 revolution.

In November 1978, in protest of heavy censorship imposed by the government of Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, a slew of Iranian newspapers including *Ayandigan* began a sixty-two day strike that lasted until January 1979. Upon the formation of Shapour Bakhtiar's government and pursuant to his promise of press freedom, the newspapers resumed publishing, and *Ayandigan* continued its work under new and more liberal leadership. However, in a matter of months, on August 7, 1979, the Khomeini government shut down *Ayandigan* and arrested some of its employees.

The closure of *Ayandigan* was one of the first instances of the Islamic Republic of Iran's limitation of press freedom, and it incited a lot of controversy and protests from various parties and societies inside Iran. Many other journals and newspapers were later shut down by the government, but no closure was as significant as that of *Ayandigan*.

As the Iranian government continues to silence voices of dissent (see p. 4), the **Iran Human Rights Documentation Center** urges the Iranian government to observe and protect the rights of all Iranians, both under Iranian and international law, to freedom of expression and the press.

## Iran's Upcoming Election

On February 4 2009, Mohammad Khatami, former Iranian president and proponent of reform and civil society announced his candidacy in the upcoming election. While his announcement met with significant enthusiasm from his supporters inside Iran, human rights activists worry that upon assuming the post of presidency by Khatami, in order to maintain their hold on the country, the conservative clerical establishment will employ parallel intelligence apparatuses to control the activities of reformists and civil society activists.

The **Iran Human Rights Documentation Center** will soon publish a detailed report on the Parallel Intelligence Apparatus (PIA), the secret groups that operated during Mohammad Khatami's presidency from 1997 to 2004. Linked to government agencies, including the Judiciary, the PIA aided the conservatives in retaining control over the government. During the reform era, PIA agents clandestinely arrested, detained and tortured reformists, dissidents, journalists and student activists in an effort to silence pro-reform voices.

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## Remembrance: Anniversary of Iranian Revolution

February 11<sup>th</sup> 2009 marked the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Islamic Revolution of Iran. In February 1979, Iran saw the overthrow of the Shah's regime and the ascendance of an Islamic regime based on the rule of religious authority.

In Iran, the anniversary of the Revolution is celebrated over ten days to symbolize the period of time between the return of Ayatollah Khomeini from exile and the collapse of the Shah's rule. During the "Ten Days of Dawn," the colors of the Iranian flag are prominently displayed on buildings and in streets. This year, the Iranian government scheduled numerous events to commemorate the success of the Revolution in Tehran and other cities. They included the opening of a museum depicting the events of the Revolution and cultural events such as a painting workshop attended by 1000 artists, a film festival and the release of a media package assembled by Iranian filmmaker Reza Mirkarimi. The package, called "30 Years, 30 Views," included 30 documentaries, 30 short films, 30 film soundtracks, and over 100 previously unpublished photographs taken at the time of the Islamic Revolution by Mahmud Kalari. Finally, a rally was held in Freedom Square in Tehran where hundreds of thousands of Iranians were addressed by President Ahmadinejad. Iran also released Omid, the first domestically produced satellite into orbit on February 2, 2009.



Yet, as Iran and the rest of the world reflect on the thirty years that have passed since the Revolution, an opposing viewpoint has emerged. Reform-minded Iranians have criticized the oppressive policies of the regime and called for the fruition of the greater freedoms originally promised in 1979. It appears that many ordinary Iranians, including journalists, ethnic and religious minorities and women's rights activists share this sentiment. Meanwhile, the international human rights community has condemned the Islamic Republic's human rights record.

The **Iran Human Rights Documentation Center** strongly urges the Iranian government to actively respect and protect the rights of all people in Iran regardless of their ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation, gender or political views.



## Spotlight on: IHRDC

In January, the **Iran Human Rights Documentation Center** announced the appointment of Renee C. Redman as the new Executive Director of the center. "We are thrilled to have Renee Redman as the new Executive Director," said Owen Fiss, Chair of the IHRDC. "She takes charge at a moment when all eyes are turning to Iran and brings to the endeavor a scrupulous regard for the facts and an uncompromising commitment to human rights."

Redman is an experienced human and civil rights attorney. Prior to joining IHRDC, she practiced immigration law at New Haven Legal Assistance Association and served as Legal Director of the ACLU of Connecticut. Until 2004, she practiced commercial litigation with Hughes Hubbard & Reed, LLP in New York City. She clerked for the Immigration Courts in New York City and Newark, New Jersey, and the Honorable Warren W. Eginton of the United States District Court in Bridgeport, Connecticut.

## Crackdown on Freedom of Press

In the year 2008, the Islamic Republic of Iran closed thirty newspapers. In recent months, the Iranian government has continued its campaign against freedom of expression within its borders in an effort to stifle those critical of the regime.

On December 31, 2008, the Ministry for Culture and Islamic Guidance's Commission for the Authorization and Surveillance of the Press closed the daily newspaper *Kargozaran* for allegedly inciting individuals and groups to act against the security of the Islamic Republic, and for defending Israel's actions in Gaza and its crimes against the Muslim population. The biweekly Kurdish Persian paper *Rozh-he-lat* was also closed on January 11, the second time in its history. *Rozh-he-lat* had only resumed publishing for three months before its second closure. On January 23, the government announced that the newly launched BBC Persian television station was now banned, calling it a "cultural invasion." Even the popular video hosting website YouTube has been blocked by Iranian authorities.

Furthermore, Iranian proponents of free speech are being targeted. Abdolreza Tajik, a journalist and member of the Human Rights Defenders Centre which was shut down by the Iranian regime in December 2008 was detained while attempting to board a flight to Spain. Members of the Iranian press have objected to the Islamic Republic's increasingly aggressive policies towards the media. On January 9, the Iranian Journalists Union issued a statement criticizing the regime's limitations on freedom of expression within its borders and urging the government to follow its own Constitution which guarantees freedom of speech.

The **Iran Human Rights Documentation Center** is currently working on a report about the limitations of freedom of speech in Iran.

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