

CRACKDOWN IN IRAN

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On June 12 2009, two hours after polls closed, Iran's state run news agency declared incumbent president Mahmoud Ahmadinejad the winner by a large majority. The next morning, election officials announced that Ahmadinejad won 63 percent of the popular vote. The declaration was met with skepticism amongst much of the Iranian public and demonstrations soon broke out. They have continued.

In response, the Islamic regime has cracked down, creating a human rights crisis. This issue of the IHRDC Newsletter looks at several aspects of that crackdown: repression of speech and expression, arbitrary arrests, detention, torture, and execution. All violate Iran's obligations under international law. It is offered in honor of those who have been killed and those who remain imprisoned by the regime simply for expression.



Police on motorbikes pursuing demonstrators in Tehran. Photo was posted on the web on June 22. (Getty Images)

Violence against Demonstrators

On June 14, protesters in Tehran were isolated and then beaten with clubs by government forces. On June 15, hundreds of thousands of people marched in silent protest. The Basij militia and police brutally broke down the protests. On June 19, Ayatollah Khamenei warned that further protests would make the opposition responsible for the ensuing "bloodshed and chaos."

The day after the Ayatollah's speech, ten people were killed. More than a hundred were wounded. The protestors were met with water cannons, tear gas, and gun fire. A young woman, Neda Agha Soltan, was shot and killed. Neda's death became a symbol of the regime's brutal crackdown.

On June 24 the violence intensified. One witness saw 500 people with clubs beat demonstrators and throw them off a bridge. A woman was beaten until she was drenched in blood.

Iran ratified the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) thirty-four years ago. This treaty guarantees rights to life, freedom of expression and assembly, freedom from arbitrary detention, freedom from torture, and freedom from arbitrary execution. Iran's actions in the past few weeks violate all of these human rights.

Iran Targets Opposition Leadership

The Islamic Republic has used the post-election protests to justify the arbitrary arrest of reform oriented leaders and to decapitate the opposition movement. It has arrested hundreds of activists, student leaders, intellectuals, journalists, and human rights lawyers.

The regime has targeted current opposition party leaders. Mousavi reportedly was placed under house arrest. On June 17, the Secretary General of the opposition group Freedom Movement, Dr. Ebrahim Yazdi, was taken from Pars Hospital where he was undergoing medical treatment.

The regime has targeted supporters of Khatami, former reformist president, and Ayatollah Akbar Rafsanjani, current chairman of the Assembly of Experts. On June 13, government forces arrested Khatami's brother in a sweep of 120 activists and journalists. Former members of Khatami's regime were arrested on June 16. Among them was Saeed Hajjarian, who was detained despite his need for constant medical attention. On June 21, Rafsanjani's daughter and four other relatives were arrested. Tehran's former mayor, Karbaschi, an ally of Rafsanjani, and 100 prominent civic figures from Tabriz loyal to Mousavi have also been arrested.

Torture and Coerced Confessions

The Iranian regime has reportedly arrested and detained more than 2,000 Iranians since the June 12 election. This startling number of arrests signals the beginning of a frightful cycle of abuse in violation of international law.

The mass arrests have pushed the limits of prison facilities, forcing authorities to transform ministry building basements into jails. Accounts have come

Human rights lawyers are also at risk. Abdolfattah Soltani was reportedly arrested in his office by security forces posing as clients. On June 25 plainclothes officers arrested human rights lawyer Mohammad Mostafa'i while he was traveling with his wife and daughter. Saeed Laylaz, a prominent economist, was also detained.

Security forces have also targeted youth leaders, including Mohammadreza Jala'ipour, an Oxford student and active member of the youth branch of the Participation Front. Jala'ipour was arrested as he was boarding a plane to London. Students at Tehran University and Shiraz University were arrested following clashes on June 14, and on June 24, 70 university professors were reportedly arrested following a meeting with Mousavi.

The Islamic Republic must end the arbitrary arrest of its political opposition. Article 9 of the ICCPR states that no one shall be subject to arbitrary arrest or detention. The IHRDC calls on Iran to respect international law, stop arresting peaceful opposition leaders and supporters, and free those already detained.

from Evin prison in Tehran, where brutality against prisoners is well-documented. A student demonstrator recently released from Evin described 200 prisoners to a room; it was too small to even sit down. Prisoners were denied food and water for the first 48 hours after their arrests. Many fainted as guards randomly beat them. The student who gave the account had to be hospitalized for internal bleeding after his release.

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In brazen violation of international law, fierce interrogations and torture reportedly have followed in an effort to force jailed reformists to publicly confess to conspiring with foreign actors. Historically, such false confessions rarely have led to exoneration or release. Saeed Mortazavi, Prosecutor of Tehran, is in charge of the interrogations. Known as the “Butcher of the Press”, Mortazavi has been implicated in the death of photo-journalist Zahrah Kazemi, and the arrests, torture, and coerced confessions of many journalists and bloggers.

Mostafa Tajzadeh, Abdollah Ramezanzadeh, Mohammad Ali Abtahi and Mohsen Aminzadeh, Mousavi supporters who also served former reformist president Khatami, reportedly are among those prisoners. Cries of pain have been said to be coming from Section 209 of Evin prison, a special unit for political prisoners run by the Intelligence Ministry. Some cries have been credited to Tajzadeh, a former deputy interior minister, and Ramezanzadeh, who” was Khatami’s government spokesman.

Iran’s state television has already broadcast several arrested demonstrators apparently confessing to being terrorists. Journalists have been forced to recite words implicating themselves as conspiratorial foreign media: “*Bismillah, al-rahman al-rahim. I*



Man shot at a Tehran rally where Basiji militia were shooting. Photo uploaded on web on June 15, 2009. Source unknown.

admit that I demonstrated under the influence of the BBC, the radio Voice of America and other foreign media.”

Most detainees are being held incommunicado, without formal charges against them or access to lawyers. They cannot see their families. Amir Hussein Shemshadi, a leader of the youth unit of Mousavi’s campaign in Tehran, was detained on June 15. His father told Human Rights Watch: “Since his arrest eight days ago, there haven’t been any calls or contact with my son. We don’t know where he is. No one responds to our inquiries. When they detained him, they showed us no warrant and they didn’t say what my son’s crime had been...[H]e is nowhere to be found.”

In its relentless post-election crackdown, the regime has clearly flouted due process rights guaranteed in the Iranian Constitution and the ICCPR.

Special Commission will Determine People’s Fate

On June 29, an official Iranian news agency, confirmed the creation of a special commission to decide “the fate” of those arrested. Ayatollah Mahmoud Hashemi Shahroudi, Head of the Judiciary, issued the order after meeting with Supreme Leader Khamenei. The commission will include Hojjatoleslam Dorri Najafabadi (General Prosecutor), Ebrahim Ra’isi (Deputy Judiciary Chief), and Mostafa Pour-Mohammadi (Interior

Minister). The commission is to coordinate with Saeed Mortazavi, Tehran’s Prosecutor.

The order followed a Friday sermon by Ayatollah Ahmad Khatami calling on the judiciary to charge demonstrators as *muharibin*, or “ones waging war against god.” A person convicted as *muharib* is subject to the most severe punishment, including execution. Khatami explained:

“I want the judiciary to ... punish leading rioters firmly and without showing any mercy...[they] should be punished ruthlessly and savagely.”

The threat echoed warnings issued earlier in the week by Ebrahim Ra’isi. On June 22, the official IRNA news agency reported Ra’isi’s announcing that “rioters should be dealt with in an exemplary way and the judiciary will do that.”

As history grimly reflects, the order augurs brutality and injustice. Ra’isi and Pour-Mohammadi, two of the named commissioners, were members of special commissions created in July 1988 by order of then-Supreme Leader

Ayatollah Khomeini. Known as Death Commissions, they sent thousands of already sentenced political prisoners to their deaths. The regime has never acknowledged the mass executions. The exact numbers and identities of those secretly executed remain unknown.

On Tuesday, July 1, 2009, a state-run news agency reported that 6 people were hanged in Evin. None were identified by name, age, or crime. Another 10 men were reported hanged in Evin on Wednesday. Iranian news said the convicts were robbers and murderers. In Yazd, 9 men were hanged in 2 days. The government-run daily newspaper reported that 2 men, identified only by their first names, were hanged in Isfahan.

Crackdown on Media and Free Expression

Immediately following the announcement of the election results, Iran began stifling freedom of speech and information. The crackdown was prompted by the opposition movement’s use of internet and cell phones, and its ability to use these tools to gain international attention. In the run-up to the election, Iran’s text messaging system was shut down hours before polls opened.

Individuals used online tools to organize protests and post photos and videos. In response, the regime began filtering more websites via the internet arm of its telecom monopoly. Facebook, Twitter, and other internet-based communications were blocked. The government has also restricted bandwidth so that the internet is running at less than one tenth its normal speed. This makes it difficult for internet users to upload images and videos.

The regime has also cracked down on the mainstream media. The press credentials of foreign journalists were revoked on June 15, and foreign journalists were banned from the streets.

Some foreign journalists were expelled from the country, and at least two foreign journalists were arrested. The BBC, Voice of America, and other broadcasters reported that their satellite broadcasts into Iran were jammed.

The assault against Iranian domestic media has been even harsher. Days after the election, Iran became the world’s leading jailer of journalists. Nearly 40 Iranian journalists have been arrested, including the entire 25 person editorial staff of opposition candidate Mousavi’s newspaper. On July 1 the regime banned the newspaper of opposition candidate Mehdi Karroubi.

The government of Iran must end the repression of internet communication and the arbitrary arrests of journalists. Iran is a party of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, Article 19 of which requires Iran to protect freedom of expression. Iran’s media crackdown is described in detail in IHRDC’s report *Ctrl + Alt + Delete: Iran’s Response to the Internet*.

In Memoriam



"We will not tire. We will be in the streets every day." Tehran street corner. Posted after June 14, 2009. Source unknown.

Just how much blood has been spilled in the regime's crackdown is difficult to ascertain; the Iranian government has clamped down hard on communications. Daily estimates of the number of people killed range from 19 to 150. The government claims that only twenty people have died but more than 1000 have been detained. The IHRDC would like to honor those who have lost their lives during these demonstrations.

New Faces at IHRDC

IHRDC is expanding. Chris Lasala joined us in April as Database Manager and has been working hard on our website and database. www.iranhrdc.org now has a "secure submissions" page that allows users to anonymously contact IHRDC and submit files. We have added a current events page that includes video and image galleries, and we are now on Facebook and Twitter. Search for IHRDC at www.facebook.com and www.twitter.com.

In May we welcomed six summer interns: Angela Achen, University of Minnesota Law; Maria-Elena Kolovos, Fordham University Law; Peter Krzywicki, UCLA Law; Christine Van Geyn, Osgoode Hall Law School and Elina Stelman, Lafayette College.

June 15, Tehran: *Mostafa Ghanian, Mehdi Karami, Fatehmeh Barati, Kasra Sharafi, Mobina Ehterami, Kambiz Shoaee, Mohsen Imani*
June 17, Tehran: *Mohammad Asgari*
June 18, Tehran: *Naser Amirnejad*
June 20, Tehran: *Neda Agha Soltan, Kaveh Alipour, Ashkan Sohrabi, Bahman Jenabi*
June 23, Tehran: *Shalar Khazri*
June 24, Tehran: *Kianoush Asa*
After June 25, Tehran: *Yagoub Barvayeh*
Date unknown, Tehran: *Farzad Hashti*
Date unknown, Kermanshah: *Famil Tahmasebi*

Finally, the IHRDC remembers those who have lost their lives yet whose names remain unknown.

UPCOMING REPORT: The IHRDC's next investigative report examines the mass execution of political prisoners which swept through Iran's prisons in 1988. It documents the "Death Commissions" which sent thousands of already sentenced political prisoners to their deaths based solely on their responses to a few questions. The Iranian government secretly executed the prisoners and has never acknowledged that they took place. To this day, the exact numbers and identities of those executed remain unknown.