

THE OBSERVATORY

for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders

L'OBSERVATOIRE
pour la Protection
des Défenseurs des Droits de l'Homme

EL OBSERVATORIO
para la Protección de los
Defensores de Derechos Humanos

Arbitrary arrests and sentences against women's rights defenders in Iran: the Observatory urges the international community to react

The International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH) and the World Organisation Against Torture (OMCT), in the framework of their joint programme, the Observatory for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders, are deeply concerned with the unprecedented levels of repression against women's rights defenders in the **Islamic Republic of Iran**, and are calling for international attention and reaction.

Context

As of September 3, 2007, 42 women's rights activists are being or have been prosecuted for their involvement in the defence of women's rights. The Observatory has been compiling all the information available on these cases in two synthetic documents ([see annexes 1 and 2](#)).

The repression started on June 12, 2006, when several dozen of women's rights activists took part in a peaceful gathering on Haft e-Tir square in Tehran, organised by the "Women's and students' rights" association, in order to ask for discriminatory legislation against women to be changed. This peaceful gathering was violently repressed by the Iranian police forces and several activists were arrested and taken to the Evin prison in Tehran. All of them were subsequently released on bail, but twelve of them have already been charged and condemned to imprisonment and in some cases to lashes ([see annex 1](#)). They have all appealed their sentences.

Following these events, a large campaign called the "One million signatures campaign" was officially launched by women's rights defenders on August 27, 2006.

The main objectives of the campaign are:

- to promote collaboration and cooperation for social change;
- to identify women's needs and priorities;
- to amplify the collective voice of women;
- to develop knowledge and promote democratic action;
to obtain rights for women.

Systematic repression

On March 4, 2007, 33 women peacefully gathered in front of the Tehran Revolutionary Court to mark International Women's Day, which was to be celebrated on March 8, 2007. They were also protesting against the trials of six women human rights defenders who were being prosecuted in connection with their participation in the peaceful assembly of June 2006. All of them were arrested and subsequently released on bail.

In July 2007, two activists, Ms. **Bahareh Hedayat** and Mr. **Amir Yaghoub-Ali** were arrested and detained in the Evin prison (see annexes 1 and 2 *infra*). They were released on bail one month later, and are awaiting trial:

Ms. Bahareh Hedayat, one of the activists involved in the “One million signatures” campaign, and a member of the Central Council of the Office to Foster Unity (*Shoraye Markazi Daftare Tahkime Vahdat*), the main reformist student organisation in Iran, was held in solitary confinement from July 9, 2007 to August 9, 2007. She was arrested together with seven other students for staging a peaceful protest to mark the anniversary of the popular student uprising in 1999 which ended in violence, widespread arrests and the death of a student activist, as well as the arrest in May 2007 and continued detention of fellow students of the Amir Kabir University. Ms. Hedayat had been condemned to two years suspended imprisonment on May 26, 2007 for her involvement in the “One million signatures” campaign. With this recent arrest, the Observatory fears that she be sentenced to real-term imprisonment, as it often occurs in such cases. Further, it has been reported that Ms. Hedayat’s relatives have recently been harassed by the Iranian authorities.

Mr. Amir Yaghoub-Ali, a young man also involved in the “One Million Signatures” campaign and in the student movement, was arrested on July 11, 2007 while collecting signatures. He was detained at the Evin prison until August 9, 2007. He is currently facing 11 charges.

Women’s rights activists who receive the most severe sentences are usually young students (as for Ms. **Delaram Ali**, Ms. **Alieh Eghdamdoust**, Ms. **Maryam Zia** - see below) with no “long-term” involvement in the defence of human rights. It seems that Iranian authorities are resorting to this strategy in order to dissuade young Iranians from joining the movement or to push them to leave it.

Once they are arrested, women’s rights activists are arbitrarily detained, then charged, before being released on high bail awaiting trial. The bail they have to pay sometimes amounts to USD 250,000, which is an amount that is usually applied to extremely serious crimes. The Observatory considers that the amount of the bail constitutes *per se* an act of repression.

Furthermore, the Observatory expresses its concern about the sentences to corporal punishment pronounced by the Iranian judiciary against some of these women human rights defenders, as they constitute acts of torture and inhuman and degrading treatment and are contrary to Article 7 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights ratified by the Islamic Republic of Iran. The United Nations Special Rapporteur on Torture considers that corporal punishment is inconsistent with the prohibition of torture and other cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment or punishment enshrined in various international human rights instruments.

Calls to the international community through the use of defenders' protection mechanisms

In view of these elements, on August 3, 2007, the Observatory called upon the United Nations protection mechanisms¹ to react. The context of systematic repression was highlighted and concrete actions were demanded.

On August 7, 2007, the Observatory urged the European Union to act expeditiously in relation to these situations, on the basis of the EU Guidelines on Human Rights Defenders and other relevant instruments developed in the framework of the Common and Foreign Security Policy.

The EU was encouraged, in particular, to:

- mobilise a number of third countries and encourage them to take concrete measures on this situation;
- undertake diplomatic and/or public actions, with particular focus on the two defenders who are presently arbitrarily detained;
- systematically attend and observe the upcoming trials concerning the women's rights activists in question (both first instance and appeal trials);
- convene a dialogue focused on human rights between the Islamic Republic of Iran and the European Union, in conformity with the 2001 European Union Guidelines on Human rights dialogues;
- work towards the adoption of a resolution of the European Parliament on the situation of women's rights defenders in Iran.

¹ A communication was sent to Ms. Hina Jilani, Special Representative of the UN Secretary General on Human Rights Defenders, to Mr. Manfred Nowak, Special Rapporteur on Torture, to the UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention and to the Special Rapporteur on Violence against Women.

Observatory recommendations

The Observatory expresses its deep concern about the increasing repression of the Iranian authorities against human rights defenders, in particular pro-reform students, intellectuals and women's rights activists. The Observatory strongly condemns the increasing use of violence by the Iranian authorities over the past months in order to repress peaceful gatherings and to arrest defenders.

The Observatory condemns more generally the recurrent use of torture and cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment and punishment against human rights defenders, in violation of Article 7 of the 1966 International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights ratified by Iran and of UN General Assembly Resolution A/RES/61/153, which provides that freedom from such treatments "is a non-derogable right that must be protected under all circumstances".

The Observatory further wishes to insist on the fact that Iran had committed to "uphold the highest standards in the promotion and protection of human rights" by presenting its candidacy to the Human Rights Council 2006 election and had insisted in this regard on the fact that the country had "continuously put great efforts into safeguarding the status and inherent dignity of the human person as well as the promotion and protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms". In order to ensure the continuation of these efforts, the Observatory urges the Islamic Republic of Iran to conform with international human rights standards.

Since January 2007, the Observatory has issued nine urgent appeals and two press releases ([see annex 2](#)), urging the Iranian authorities to:

- i. Guarantee the physical and psychological integrity of all human rights defenders in Iran, and put an end to all forms of harassment against them;
- ii. Release immediately and unconditionally all Iranian women who remain arbitrarily detained because of their human rights activities;
- iii. Put an immediate end to all judicial proceedings against all women's rights defenders involved in the "One million signatures" campaign as well as those who peacefully gathered on March 4, 2007, as they aim at dissuading them from being active in the women's campaign;
- iv. Ensure that the women defenders who have already been sentenced be granted a fair and impartial trial when appealing her sentencing, so that the charges against her be dropped as they seem to merely sanction her human rights activities and as such are arbitrary;
- v. Conform with the provisions of the UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders, adopted by the General Assembly of the United Nations on December 9, 1998, especially its Article 5a, which states that "for the purpose of promoting and protecting human rights and fundamental freedoms, everyone has the right, individually and in association with others, at the national and international levels, to meet peacefully", Article 6b, which states that "everyone is free (...) to publish, impart or disseminate to other views, information and knowledge on all human rights and fundamental freedoms", and Article 8(2), which provides that "everyone has the right, individually and in association with others, to submit to governmental bodies and agencies and organisations concerned with public affairs criticism and proposals for improving their functioning and to draw attention to any aspect of their work that may hinder or impede the promotion, protection and realisation of human rights and fundamental freedoms";
- vi. Ensure in all circumstances respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms in accordance with international human rights standards and international instruments ratified by Iran.

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Family Name	First Name	Date (s) of arrest	Date of release / Arbitrary detentions	Charge (s)	Date of decision (first instance)	Sentence	Appeal scheduled for...	Latest update on...
Hedayat	Bahareh	12/06/2006 and 09/07/07 (for her involvement in the peaceful protest of her student organisation)	June 2006 and 9 August 2007	Collusion and association endangering state security (art. 610 of the Islamic Penal Code)	26/05/07	2 years' suspended imprisonment		10/08/07
Hosseinkhah	Maryam	04/03/07	Between 6 and 8 March 2007 (on bail)	Actions dangerous to national security				09/07/07
Hosseinzadeh	Mahboubeh	04/03/07, and 02/04/07 (while collecting signatures)	9 March 2007 (on bail) and 14 April 2007 (on bail)					09/07/07
Imanian	Sara	04/03/07, and 02/04/07 (while collecting signatures)	9 March 2007 (on bail)					09/07/07
Jafari	Nahid	04/03/07	Between 6 and 8 March 2007 (on bail)					09/07/07
Javaheri	Jelveh	04/03/07	Between 6 and 8 March 2007 (on bail)					09/07/07
Keshavarz	Nahid	04/03/07, and 02/04/07 (while collecting signatures)	9 March 2007 (on bail) and 14 April 2007 (on bail)	Actions dangerous to national security				09/07/07
Laghai	Saghar	04/03/07	Between 6 and 8 March 2007 (on bail)					09/07/07
Laghai	Saghi	04/03/07	Between 6 and 8 March 2007 (on bail)					09/07/07
Loghmani	Sara	04/03/07	Between 6 and 8 March 2007 (on bail)					09/07/07
Mirza	Maryam	04/03/07	Between 6 and 8 March 2007 (on bail)					09/07/07
Moghadam	Khadijeh	04/03/07	Between 6 and 8 March 2007 (on bail)					09/07/07
Mohamadi	Mahnaz	04/03/07	Between 6 and 8 March 2007 (on bail)					09/07/07
Mortazi	Minou	04/03/07	Between 6 and 8 March 2007 (on bail)					09/07/07
Nami	Homayoun	04/03/07	Between 6 and 8 March 2007 (on bail)					09/07/07
Peyghambarzadeh	Zeynab	04/03/07	16/05/07					09/07/07
Sadr	Shadi	04/03/07	19 March 2007 (on bail)					09/07/07
Sarabandi	Nasim	January 2007 (while collecting signatures in the subway)	January 2007	Actions dangerous to national security	12/08/07	Six months suspended imprisonment		22/08/07
Shadfar	Fakhri	04/03/07	Between 6 and 8 March 2007 (on bail)					09/07/07
Shadfar	Maryam	04/03/07	Between 6 and 8 March 2007 (on bail)					09/07/07
Tahmasebi	Sousan	12/06/06, and 04/03/07	June 2006 and between 6 and 8 March 2007 (on bail)	Collusion and association endangering state security (art. 610 of the Islamic Penal Code)	18/04/07	2 years imprisonment of which 1 1/2 suspended		30/07/07
Taghiniyah	Talat	04/03/07	Between 6 and 8 March 2007 (on bail)					09/07/07
Yaghoub-Ali	Amir	11/07/2007 (while collecting signatures)	9 August 2007	11 charges (under investigation)				10/08/07

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ANNEX 2 – COMPILATION OF THE URGENT INTERVENTIONS OF THE OBSERVATORY ISSUED BETWEEN JANUARY AND AUGUST 2007 (extracts)

In 2007, the Observatory has issued eleven urgent interventions relating to the repression against women human rights defenders in Iran.

**Blocked access to a reformist website
January 17, 2007 - IRN 001 / 0107 / OBS 003**

Since January 2007, the access in Iran of the website *www.we-change.org* has been blocked by the authorities. This website is a campaign on-line that was launched by Iranian feminist groups on August 27, 2006, asking for the elimination of all forms of legal discrimination against women in Iranian law, and asking legislators to review and reform existing laws, so that they conform with the government's commitments to international human rights conventions. However, it remains accessible from abroad.

The Observatory expresses its deep concern about these events, along with the recurrent obstacles put on freedom of expression in Iran. Indeed, several dozens of international and national websites of NGOs and newspapers, calling for democratic reforms and the respect of fundamental freedoms, or denouncing human rights violations, have been blocked over the past few years.

**Arbitrary detentions / Obstacles to freedom of assembly / Releases on bail / Hunger strike /
Sentencing / Releases / Judicial proceedings
January 29, 2007 - Press release
March 5, 2007 - IRN 002 / 0307 / OBS 023
March 8, 2007 - IRN 002 / 0307 / OBS 023.1
March 20, 2007 - IRN 002 / 0307 / OBS 023.2
April 5, 2007 - IRN 002 / 0307 / OBS 023.3
April 30, 2007 - IRN 002 / 0307 / OBS 023.4
May 21, 2007 - Press release
May 30, 2007 - IRN 002 / 0307 / OBS 023.5
August 22, 2007 - IRN 008 / 0807 / OBS 095**

* On January 27, 2007, Ms. **Mansoureh Shojaei**, Ms. **Sedigheh Taghinia** (*alias* Tal'at Taghinia) and Ms. **Farnaz Seifi**, three journalists at the forefront of the campaign launched last summer on women's rights in Iran² were arrested at the Imam Khomeini Airport, and prevented from leaving the country. They were on their way to India to participate in a journalism workshop, organised by the *Shahrazad News* website. They were transferred to the 209 section of Evin Prison, in Tehran.

Before their transfer, police officers searched their houses, and seized some of their personal belongings, such as cell phones, computers, books and notes.

The three women were subsequently released on bail on January 28, 2007, in the afternoon, without any official charges against them.

* On March 4, 2007, 33 women rights activists were arrested while they were peacefully gathering in the front of the Tehran Revolutionary Court to mark International Women's Day, which was celebrated on March 8, 2007. They were also protesting against the trials of six women human rights defenders who are prosecuted in connection with their participation in a peaceful assembly in June 2006, and with their involvement in the "One million signatures" campaign.

The 33 women who were arrested included Ms. **Assieh Amini**; Ms. **Gila Baniyaaghoub**; Ms. **Mahboubeh Abbasgholizadeh**; Ms. **Mahboubeh Hosseinzadeh**; Ms. **Sara Loghmani**; Ms. **Zara Amjadian**; Ms. **Maryam Hosseinkhah**; Ms. **Jelveh Javaheri**; Ms. **Niloufar Golkar**; Ms. **Parastou Dokouhi**; Ms. **Zeynab Peyghambarzadeh**; Ms. **Maryam Mirza**; Ms. **Saghar Laghai**; Ms. **Khadijeh Moghadam**; Ms. **Saghi Laghai**; Ms. **Nahid Keshavarz**; Ms. **Mahnaz Mohamadi**; Ms. **Nasrin Afzali**; Ms. **Talat Taghinia**; Ms. **Fakhri Shadfar**; Ms. **Maryam Shadfar**; Ms. **Elnaz Ansari**; Ms. **Fatemenh Govarai**; Ms. **Azadeh Frghani**; Ms. **Samiyeh Farid**; Ms. **Minou Mortazi** and Ms. **Sara Imanian**.

Five of the six women who are prosecuted for their participation in the June 2006 peaceful assembly were also amongst those arrested: Ms. **Nahid Jafari**; Ms. **Sousan Tahmasebi**; Ms. **Parvin Ardalan**; Ms. **Noushin Ahmadi-Khorasani** and Ms. **Shahla Entesari**. Ms. **Fariba Davoudi-Mohajer** is the sixth woman to be prosecuted in this case. One of their lawyers, Ms. **Shadi Sadr**, was also arrested.

Between March 6 and 8, 2007, 30 of these 33 women were released, apart from Ms. Gila Baniyaaghoub, Ms.

² This campaign on-line was launched by Iranian feminist groups on August 27, 2006, asking for the elimination of all forms of legal discrimination against women in Iranian law, and asking legislators to review and reform existing laws, so that they conform with the government's commitments to international human rights conventions.

Mahboubeh Abbasgholizadeh and Ms. Shadi Sadr, who remained detained at the Evin prison. They then went on hunger strike.

While Ms. Gila Baniyaaghoub was released on bail on March 9, 2007, Ms. Abbasgholizadeh and Ms. Shadi Sadr were released on bail on March 19, 2007. They had to pay respectively 250,000 and 200,000 USD for the bail.

* On April 2, 2007, Ms. Nahid Keshavarz and Ms. Mahboubeh Hosseinzadeh, two members of the media committee of the “One Million Signatures Campaign”, were arrested at the Laleh park, in Tehran, while collecting signatures in support of a petition to change discriminatory laws against women.

Three other members of the Campaign, Ms. Sara Imanian, Mr. **Homayoun Nami** and Ms. **Saiedeh Amin**, were released after spending one day in detention at the police station.

On April 3, 2007, Ms. Nahid Keshavarz and Ms. Mahboubeh Hosseinzadeh were taken to the Revolutionary Court. During their interrogations, they were asked to sign a statement agreeing to end their activities in the “Campaign”. When they refused to do so, the two women were charged with “actions against national security” and transferred to the Evin Prison.

In particular, they were told that the demands of the “Campaign” with respect to equal rights to inheritance for women, equal value of testimony of men and women, equal financial remuneration for bodily injury or death, and the elimination of polygamy were in contradiction with the tenants of Islam.

On April 14, 2007, Ms. Keshavarz and Ms. Hosseinzadeh were released on bail.

Ms. Nahid Keshavarz is a member of the Women’s Cultural Centre and provides regular news reports and articles for the website of this leading women’s NGO www.herlandmag.info and the site of the “Campaign” www.weforchange.net. Ms. Keshavarz is a sociologist and also a regular contributor to other leading publications.

Ms. Mahboubeh Hosseinzadeh is a member of the Iran Civil Society Organisations Training and Research Centre www.koneshgaran.net, which was shut down by security forces. She served as a journalist for the website of this leading NGO engaged in capacity building for civil society. She has also been a journalist with reformist dailies for seven years.

* On April 11, 2007, Branch 15 of the Revolutionary Court in Tehran sentenced Ms. Azadeh Forghani to a suspended sentence of two years for “acting against national security by participating in an illegal gathering”.

On April 18, 2007, Ms. Sousan Tahmasebi and Ms. Fariba Davoudi-Mohajer were sentenced by the Revolutionary Court to prison for “actions against the State” and “threatening national security” (article 610 of the Islamic Penal Code). Ms. Davoudi-Mohajer, who is currently abroad, was sentenced to four years in prison, three of which are suspended. Ms. Tahmasebi was sentenced to two years’ imprisonment, with one year and a half suspended.

On April 24, 2007, the Sixth Branch of the Revolutionary Court in Tehran sentenced Noushin Ahmadi-Khorasani, Shahla Entesari and Parvin Ardalan to three years’ imprisonment for “collusion and assembly to endanger the national security” (article 610 of the Islamic Penal Code), two-and-half years being suspended.

The women were all tried in absentia. They will be required to serve the suspended sentences if “found guilty of another crime” during the next five years. Their lawyers appealed their sentences.

* On May 16, 2007, Ms. Zeynab Peyqambarzadeh, who was detained at the Evin prison, was released on bail.

Ms. Peyqambarzadeh’s arrest had come after she was summoned on May 5, 2007 to appear before the Revolutionary Court within three business days in relation to a previous arrest following the March 4, 2007 non-violent demonstrations before International Women’s Day. Neither she nor her lawyer were able to see a written summons and, in addition, the Court detained her without presenting any charges.

When Ms. Peyqambarzadeh appeared before the court on May 7, 2007, a high bail of 20 million tomans (roughly 16,000 €) was promptly set for her, and, as she was unable to pay it, she was sent to Evin prison in Tehran. When, on May 9, her father first attempted to pay the bail, he was rebuffed by the court and denied permission to see his daughter. The arbitrary handling of this case by the Revolutionary Court’s own standards, as in the case of setting a bail and then not accepting it, is an issue of grave concern.

With help from the families of other members of the campaign, Ms. Peyqambarzadeh’s bail was met and finally accepted by the Revolutionary Court following an additional week in prison after her father’s first attempt to pay the bail.

* On May 26, 2007, Ms. **Bahareh Hedayat**, a member of the “One million signatures” campaign and the head of the Women’s Commission of the main Iranian student organisation, the Office for the Consolidation of Unity, was condemned to a suspended sentence of two years’ imprisonment by a Revolutionary Court for “acting against national security by participating in an illegal gathering”. She had participated in the peaceful gathering on June 12, 2006, in Tehran. She appealed her sentence.

She was held in solitary confinement from July 9 to August 9, 2007 for staging a peaceful protest to mark the

anniversary of the popular student uprising in 1999.

* On August 12, 2007, the Tehran Revolutionary Court sentenced Ms. Sarabandi and Ms. Dehdashti to six months' suspended imprisonment for "actions against national security through the spread of propaganda against the State". These two women were arrested in January 2007 while collecting signatures in the subway, in the framework of the "One million signatures" campaign. They were subsequently held in detention at Gisha prison for 24 hours before being released on bail.

* According to Ms. Hedayat's lawyer, Ms. Nasrin Sotoudeh, there have been 121 cases of women's rights activists being arrested, interrogated, or sentenced in the past two years and the government has raised over one million euros by imprisoning the activists and releasing them on high bail.

Sentencing / Torture
July 5, 2007 - IRN 004 / 0707 / OBS 073

On July 2, 2007, Ms. **Delaram Ali**, a women's rights activist, was sentenced by an Iranian court to 10 lashes and two years and 10 months imprisonment for "participation in an illegal gathering", "propaganda against the system", and "disturbing public order".

Ms. Ali was involved in the "One Million Signatures" petition campaign. She had been arrested in June 2006, during the protest organised in Tehran to denounce these discriminatory provisions. Since June 2006, several other women have also been arrested and sentenced for taking part in the campaign.

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