

PUBLIC

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18 April 2005

UA 91/05 Arbitrary arrest/torture

IRAN Kazem Mojadam (m)
 Abdoulghader Hamadi (m)
 Mojahed Baldi (or Baladi) (m)
 Salem Beradea (m)
 Nabi Manabi (m)
 Hassan Manabi (m)
 Sabri Houzedar Sefed (m)
 At least 130 others

The seven men named above, and at least 130 others, all members of Iran's Arab minority, were arbitrarily detained between 15-18 April, and are at risk of torture. They were detained or around the city of Ahvaz, south-western Iran, after protests about the government's supposed plan to disperse or dilute the country's Arab population. They are not known to have been charged, or to have had access to legal representation, their families or any medical treatment.

The demonstrations took place in Khuzestan province, in the city of Ahvaz and the neighbouring towns of Kut 'Abdallah and Hamidiye. Order is now being restored to the affected areas, according to Iranian press reports of 17 April.

According to a 17 April report in the government-run Persian-language newspaper *Iran*, 137 people had so far been arrested in connection with the unrest and at least eight injured. Other reports indicate that up to 250 people may have been arrested

There are unconfirmed reports that at least 29 people have been killed in the disturbances, and up to 500 injured. The security forces have reportedly sealed off some areas of the city of Ahvaz, and cut their power supply, telephone connections and water. They have reportedly used excessive force, possibly including extrajudicial executions, after demonstrators allegedly killed up to seven police or security officials. Reports allege that they are now operating a "shoot-to-kill" policy.

The unrest reportedly began on 15 April in the Shalang Abad (also known as Da'ira) area of central Ahvaz. Around 1,000 demonstrators reportedly assembled to protest at the contents of a letter, reports of which began to circulate on 9 April, allegedly written in 1999 by an advisor in the office of President Khatami. The letter sets out policies for the reduction of the Arab population of the province of Khuzestan, which include resettling Arabs in other regions of Iran, resettling non-Arabs in the province, and replacing Arabic place names with Persian ones. Government sources, including the letter's supposed author, have strongly denied that it is genuine. The text, with an English translation, can be found at <http://www.ahwaz.org.uk/images/ahwaz-khuzestan.pdf>; the supposed author's denial that he wrote the letter, along with an explanation of the contents, can be found (in Persian) at <http://www.webneveshteha.com/>. The government has reportedly begun a limited enquiry into the unrest, as has the parliament, but these do not appear to be sufficiently wide-ranging or impartial.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The Arab community in Iran makes up around 3% of the total population, with Persians apparently making up around 50%. The Arab community lives mainly lives in the Khuzestan region, which borders Iraq. It is strategically important because it is the site of much of Iran's oil reserves. The Arab population do not feel they have benefited as much from the oil revenue as the Persian population; historically they have been

marginalised and discriminated against, for instance being denied the right to an education in their own language.

Arbitrary mass arrests occur regularly during unrest in Iran. A peaceful demonstration by another ethnic minority group, the Baluchis, was dispersed by the arbitrary use of excessive force in September 2002; Thousands were arbitrarily arrested after student-led demonstrations in July 1999, known as the "18 Tir" demonstrations after the Iranian date. Scores were reportedly ill-treated, and at least seven were tortured (Please see <http://web.amnesty.org/library/Index/ENGMDE130282004?open&of=ENG-IRN>).

Up to 4000 were reportedly arrested in June-July 2003 during demonstrations against the privatisation of universities.

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send appeals to arrive as quickly as possible, in English, Arabic, Persian or your own language:

- expressing concern for the safety of Kazem Mojadam, Abdoulghader Hamadi, Mojahed Baldi (or Baladi), Salem Beradea, Nabi Manabi, Hassan Manabi and Sabri Houzedar Sefed;
- asking whether the seven detainees have been charged, and if so with what offence, and whether others have been detained;
- asking if the seven detainees have had access to lawyers, and interpreters if necessary;
- expressing concern at the reports that both police and protestors have been killed;
- urging the security forces to implement urgently the standards set out in the United Nations Basic Principles on the Use of Force and Firearms by Law Enforcement Officials, in particular Principle 4, which requires the authorities to use non-violent policing methods before resorting to firearms, and Principle 9, which limits the use of firearms to specific cases of self-defence;
- calling on the authorities to set up an independent commission of inquiry to investigate both the sources of the unrest and policing methods.

APPEALS TO: (Please note: email addresses in Iran can be unreliable at times, please keep trying)

Leader of the Islamic Republic

His Excellency Ayatollah Sayed 'Ali Khamenei

The Presidency, Palestine Avenue, Azerbaijan Intersection, Tehran, Islamic Republic of Iran

Fax: + 98 21 649 5880 (please mark 'For the attention of the Office of His Excellency, Ayatollah al Udhma Khamenei)

Email: info@wilayah.org

Salutation: Your Excellency

Head of the Judiciary

His Excellency Ayatollah Mahmoud Hashemi Shahroudi

Ministry of Justice, Park-e Shahr, Tehran, Islamic Republic of Iran

Email: irjpr@iranjudiciary.org (mark 'Please forward to HE Ayatollah Shahroudi')

Salutation: Your Excellency

COPIES TO:

Speaker of Parliament

Gholamali Haddad Adel

Majles-e Shoura-ye Eslami (Parliament)

Imam Khomeini Avenue,

Tehran, Islamic Republic of Iran

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and to diplomatic representatives of Iran accredited to your country.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY. Check with the International Secretariat, or your section office, if sending appeals after 30 May 2005.