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Iran: Arrests of women may be an attempt to prevent International Women's Day calls for equality

Amnesty International today called for the immediate and unconditional release of over 30 women activists who were arrested on Sunday, 4 March while staging a peaceful demonstration in Tehran. The organization believes the arrests may be intended to deter activists from organizing events to mark International Women's Day on 8 March.

The women were arrested outside Tehran's Revolutionary Court, where they had gathered to protest at the trial of five women charged in connection with a demonstration held on 12 June 2006 to demand that women be given equal rights with men under the law in Iran. The June demonstration was violently dispersed by security forces, who arrested at least 70 people.

"Rather than arresting peaceful demonstrators, the Iranian authorities should be taking seriously women's demands for equality before the law and addressing discrimination against women wherever it exists in the Iranian legal system," said Irene Khan, Amnesty International's Secretary General. "We worry that the women detained yesterday may be kept in detention until after 8 March, a day on which they were planning to campaign for their internationally recognized right to equality."

Those arrested on Sunday, who included at least four of the five on trial, were taken to the Vozara Department for Social Corruption, a detention centre usually used for people accused of minor crimes, such as violations of the dress code. Family members of those detained are said to have gone to the Vozara Building in an attempt to gain access and secure the release of their relatives, without success. According to reports, all the women were later transferred to Section 209 of Evin Prison, which is run by the Ministry of Intelligence and is outside the control of Iran's prison service.

Background

Those arrested in the 12 June 2006 demonstration include Fariba Davoodi Mohajer, Shahla Entesari, Noushin Ahmadi Khorassani, Parvin Ardalan and Sussan Tahmasebi. All had been summoned to appear before Branch 6 of the Revolutionary Court in Tehran on charges of "propaganda against the system", "acting against national security" and "participating in an illegal demonstration".

Others have also been charged in connection with the 12 June demonstration, but have not yet been summoned to court. Another, Zhila Bani Ya'qoub, a journalist who was among those arrested on 4 March, was tried and acquitted in January 2007 on a charge of participating in an illegal demonstration relating to the 12 June demonstration.

In August 2006, Iranian women's rights activists launched a "Campaign for Equality", aimed at collecting a million signatures from Iranians in support of changes to the law to end legalised discrimination against women. The campaign's website has been filtered by the Iranian authorities on several occasions in recent weeks, making it difficult for people in Iran to access information about the campaign. Amnesty International is supporting this campaign and will issue a joint statement calling for equal rights for women in Iran on International Women's Day with Iranian lawyer and prominent human rights activist Shirin Ebadi, 2003 Nobel Peace Prize Laureate.

Public Document

For more information please call Amnesty International's press office in London, UK, on +44 20 7413 5566
Amnesty International, 1 Easton St., London WC1X 0DW. web: <http://www.amnesty.org>

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