

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL

PUBLIC STATEMENT

20 October 2009

AI Index: MDE 13/112/2009

IRAN: FEAR OF REPRISAL AGAINST BALUCH POPULATION FOLLOWING SUICIDE ATTACK IN PISHIN BY ARMED GROUP

In the light of media reports that many civilians were among the dead and injured, Amnesty International fears that a suicide attack in south-eastern Iran on 18 October 2009, claimed by the People's Resistance Movement of Iran (PRMI) may have been disproportionate and in violation of the principles of international humanitarian law that the PRMI has pledged to uphold. The organization is also concerned at reports that the PRMI has threatened the lives of local members of parliament.

The organization is also concerned about the Iranian government's promise to have a "crushing response" in reaction to the attack as this is likely to lead to human rights violations. Amnesty International's fears are heightened by the Iranian authorities' reaction in the past to such attacks and the reprisals taken against the Baluch civilian population by carrying out arbitrary arrests, torturing suspects and summarily executing Baluch prisoners on death row.

According to news reports, at least 42 people died and a dozen of people were injured in a suicide attack in the Sistan-Baluchistan province in south-eastern Iran. The attack targeted a group of Iran's Revolutionary Guards commanders who were visiting the district of Pishin near the borders with Pakistan to meet local tribal leaders. At least six Revolutionary Guards leaders were killed and many of the other casualties are believed to have been civilians, including tribal leaders.

The PRMI is a Baluch armed group opposed to the Iranian government and which claims to be fighting on behalf of Baluchis and Sunnis, and is also known as Jondallah.

In recent years, the PRMI has carried out several attacks on Iranian governmental forces in Sistan-Baluchistan province, carrying out bombings, including suicide attacks, and killing captured officials. Amnesty International has repeatedly condemned such abuses.

Shortly before the presidential elections in June, a PRMI member carried out a suicide bomb attack on a mosque in the provincial capital of Zahedan on 28 May. At least 25 people were reported to have been killed and dozens more were injured. The PRMI said that the attack was a reprisal for the execution of several Sunni clerics in recent years.

Less than 48 hours after the bombing, three men were hanged in public near the site of the attack amid claims that they were responsible. Later comments clarified that the three men had been in detention at the time of the bombing, but that they had "confessed" to providing the explosives used in the bombing. Further unrest broke out afterwards with up to ten people killed, and dozens arrested. Subsequently on 14 July 2009 13 Baluch prisoners whom the authorities said were PRMI members and had been convicted of "enmity against God" for "kidnapping foreigners, killing innocents and of carrying out terrorist acts for the Jondallah group," were executed in prison in Zahedan

Earlier, five days after the February 2007 bombing of a bus carrying Revolutionary Guards personnel in Zahedan, the authorities announced the execution of Nasrollah Shanbezehi. Arrested in the hours after the bombing, he was hanged in public at the site of the bombing. At the time of his execution, pictures showed an injury on his face. He was said to have been tried and sentenced by a branch of the Revolutionary Court after his televised "confession" had been broadcast the day after the bombing. Baluchi sources have said that he was arrested because he was taking a picture of the bus with his mobile phone.

Although Amnesty International believes that Iran has a responsibility to maintain security and bring those responsible to human rights violations to justice, the Iranian authorities must act in accordance with international human rights law. The PRMI must also immediately desist from carrying out human rights abuses, such as attacks on civilians including local politicians, indiscriminate and disproportionate attacks, hostage-taking, and the killing of hostages or of captured members of the security forces.

Background

Iran's Baluch minority suffer discrimination by the state authorities leading to gross violations of their economic, social and cultural rights. They live mainly in the provinces of Sistan-Baluchistan and Kerman, and are believed to constitute between one to three per cent of the country's total population of around 70 million. They are mostly Sunni Muslims, whereas the majority of Iran's population are Shi'a Muslims.

For further information, see <http://www.amnesty.org/en/news-and-updates/news/iran-presidential-election-amid-unrest-and-ongoing-human-rights-violations-20090605>

<http://www.amnesty.org/en/for-media/press-releases/iran-government-must-stop-executions-14-men-20090713>

and Iran: Human Rights Abuses against the Baluchi minority <http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/info/MDE13/104/2007>

Public Document

For more information please call Amnesty International's press office in London, UK, on +44 20 7413 5566 or email: press@amnesty.org

International Secretariat, Amnesty International, 1 Easton St., London WC1X 0DW, UK
www.amnesty.org