

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL

Public Statement

AI Index: MDE 13/049/2007 (Public)
News Service No: 086
1 May 2007

Iran: Beating and arrest of workers is no way to commemorate May Day

Amnesty International is concerned at the reported beating today of workers taking part in peaceful May Day demonstrations in Tehran and Sanandaj as well as the arrest in Sanandaj of Sedigh Karimi and Khaled Rasouli, members of the Union of Unemployed and Dismissed Workers (*Ettehadiye Kargaran-e Bikar va Ekhraji*). According to information available to Amnesty International, scores of others may have been detained in the course of the May Day demonstrations.

Amnesty International calls on the Iranian authorities to ensure that the right to peaceful assembly is upheld and to promptly charge those detained with an internationally recognisable criminal offence or to release them.

Reports indicate that a small number of peaceful demonstrators separated from the May Day demonstration permitted by the authorities in Shahid Shiroudi stadium in central Tehran and began to move towards the 7th of Tir Square. A group of around 600 workers reportedly chanted slogans against the government and parliament, as clashes between demonstrators and security forces broke out in places.

Up to 15 Intelligence Ministry officials reportedly attempted to detain Mansour Ossanlu, head of the Syndicate of Tehran and Suburbs United Bus Company at the 7th of Tir metro station, though he apparently managed to escape. Reports suggest that scores of others have been detained in connection with the May Day demonstration in Tehran.

In Sanandaj, the capital of Kordestan province in north-western Iran, at 10 am, Intelligence Ministry officials reportedly broke up a gathering of around 400 workers, injuring and arresting an unknown number of participants.

Behzad Sohrabi and Hassan Qaderi, workers rights activists, were reportedly beaten and injured while Sedigh Karimi, member of the Board of Directors of the Union of Unemployed and Dismissed Workers, and Khaled Rasouli, Deputy Director of the same organisation, were detained by Intelligence Ministry officials.

Article 21 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), to which Iran is a state party, guarantees the right to peaceful assembly.

Article 3 of the United Nations Code of Conduct for Law Enforcement Officials states that force may only be used when strictly necessary and to the extent required for the performance of their duty. The same Code of Conduct states that the use of force by law enforcement officials is an exceptional and principles of proportionality are to be respected.

In advance of a planned demonstration by teachers, scheduled to take place on 2 May, Amnesty International is calling on the authorities to protect the right of participants to assemble peacefully and to ensure that the policing of any demonstration, whether a permit has been granted or not, is in accordance with international human rights standards.

Background

Since March teachers have held demonstrations and strikes demanding better pay and conditions in Tehran and other towns and cities which have led to the arrest of dozens of trade union activists. Up to nine teachers continue to be held apparently without charge or trial in connection with these activities.

On 28 April, a speech by Mansour Ossanlu, to be given to the Islamic Society of Students at the Faculty of Law of Tehran University was cancelled at the last minute by the university officials. He had been scheduled to discuss the problems faced by labour organisations and delivered his talk informally at gates of the university.

Mansour Ossanlu was detained between December 2005 and August 2006, and was re-arrested in November 2006 and held at Section 209 of Evin Prison until 19 December, when he was released on bail. His lawyer said on 12 December 2006 that he had been detained because of his trade union activities as well as his contacts with international organizations such as the International Labour Organization, UN and international workers' organisations. Amnesty International believes that Mansour Ossanlu was a prisoner of conscience.

For more information, see:

<http://web.amnesty.org/library/Index/ENGMDE130112007?open&of=ENG-2MD>