

report

Editor: International Society for
Human Rights, German Section

Human Rights in Iran

Edition 2 | 2011



Status Quo of human rights in Iran

Nearly every year, the UN general assembly passes a new resolution on severe human rights abuses within the Islamic Republic Iran. The last UN resolution of the general assembly (No. A/RES/64/176), which was passed on March 26, 2010, condemns the Islamic Republic in many cases. Among others the government is blamed with its behavior surrounding the 2009 presidential elections and its heavy limitations of civil rights.

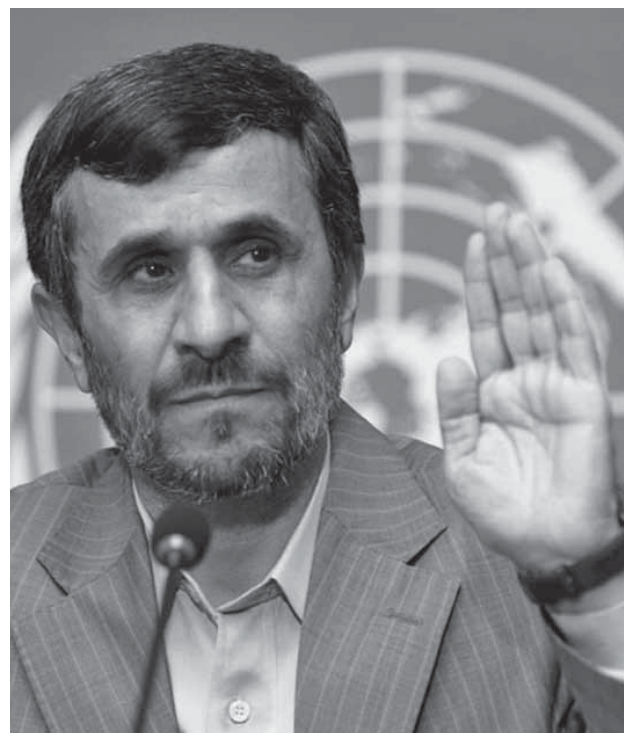
Iran limits the freedoms of speech, press, and the right of assembly; denies the right of personal freedom; and prevents the freedom of religion. The following explains the constant abuses of the human rights by giving some examples:

Political prisoners

The Iranian government always denies having political prisoners. Only during the presidential term of Khatami, in 2004, was the existence of political prisoners confirmed. Today there are no exact numbers; however, opposition groups estimate that there are several hundreds of prisoners convicted for expressing their opinion or criticizing the government. In August 2006, Human Rights Watch commented on the death of student activist Akbar Mohammadi in Evin prison and urged the Iranian government to allow an independent investigation of the circumstances of his death. However, the government denies that he ever was a political prisoner.

Serial killings

More than 80 authors, interpreters, poets, political activists and "normal" citizens have fallen victim to serial killings. They have been killed in very different ways: car accidents, stabbings, robberies, shootings, and injections with potassium to simulate heart attacks. Some believe that the variety of ways of killing is supposed to obliterate any potential traces and evidences. Only in 1998 did a sketch of a "killing stra-



The Iranian president Mahmud Ahmadinejad constantly abuses human rights. At the same time, he uses the panel of the United Nations for continuous attacks on the West and Israel

tegy" become known, when the well-known politician Dariush Forouar, his wife, and three dissident writers were killed within two months.

The journalists Emadeddin Baghi and Akbar Ganji wrote several investigative reports on those murders. In a series of articles in the newspaper Sobh Emrouz, published by Saeed Hajjarian, Akbar Ganji disclosed the criminals with the code names such as "Excellency Red Garmented" or "Excellencies Gray" and "Master Key."

In December 2000 Akbar Ganji announced that the former minister of intelligence Hojjatoleslam Ali

Fallahian was hidden behind the name "Master Key." Additionally, he published several names of clerics, such as Ayatollah Mohammad Taqi Mesbah-Yazdi, who have knowingly signed Fatwas or have encouraged religiously motivated directives for killings.

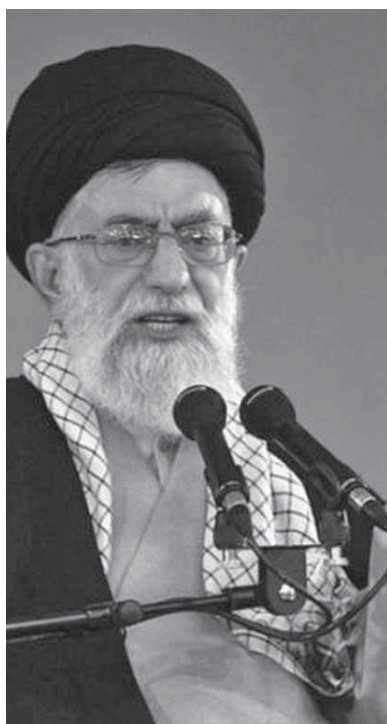
Bus union

On December 22, 2005, 10 members of Tehran bus union were arrested. A series of bus drivers strikes in Tehran and surroundings (especially the districts 6, 8 and 10) followed. Those strikes were supported by big parts of the population. Among others, the union leader Mansour Osanloo was arrested. In January 2006, the protests for his release were violently broken down and several people were arrested by Special Forces of the Iranian police. After having spent seven months in prison, Osanloo was released on bail in autumn 2006. Since summer 2007 he is in prison again.

Situation of the Bahá'í

In Iran, the Bahá'í are considered as apostates of Islam. In contradiction to Christianity, Judaism or Zoroastrianism, the Bahá'í are not allowed to carry out their religion. They are constantly subjugated to persecution and oppression. Since 2005, students were forced to mention their religious background when applying to study at the university. They could only choose between Islam and the other three officially recognized religious groups.

After 2005 they were allowed to participate in the entrance exam; however, they still were rejected



Supreme Leader of the Revolution Ali Khamenei prevents Iran from joining the human rights covenants of the United Nations.

from joining the university. Finally in 2008 nearly 200 Bahá'í students were accepted at a public university. In spring 2008, seven leading members of the community were arrested and sentenced to 10 years in Gohardasht prison.

Executions

According to official statistics, in January there were 85 executions. At least three of victims were imprisoned in relation to the protest against the fraudulent presidential elections in 2009. Compared to the previous year, this shows a strong increase in operated executions.

The annual report of Iran Human Rights (IHR) shows a dramatic increase of executions for the year 2010. According to IHR, in 2010 at least 546 persons were executed; this is the biggest number of executions since the mass executions in the summer of 1988. According to statistics, China is the world champion of executions; Iran is closely following on the second place. However, considering executions per capita, Iran is the clear leader.

Results of the Iranian presidential elections

The Green Movement, already considered as dead and disappeared, awakened again on February 14, 2011 due to activities of the opposition leaders Karroubi and Moussavi. The people called for new protests against the regime but also for support of the people in Egypt. A new level of the Iranian liberation movement has started.

Many people heard the call and joined the protests. It became clear that the Green Movement was still alive and strong. The government felt the strong pressure. The claims of the protests became more and more general. After such a long time of silence, the slogan of today's manifestations in the street changed from "Where is my vote?" to a clear rejection of the government of Khamenei and Ahmadinejad.

The leader of the opposition, Mehdi Karroubi, stated, "The existing governing system is not Islamic and it is clearly no republic!" However, from my perspective, it is even worse to be confronted with a regime which plainly lies. Mahmud Ahmadinejad's government became a symbol for lies, hatred and evilness.

The first king of Iran, King Cyrus, wished us to pray: "Lord of Iran, protect our country from lies, enemies and drought." This quote shows our high values. However, as we are stuck with a lying government, such high values are ignored and de-valued.

Amir Rashidi

The Iranian government continues to propagate misinformation and fabricated videos on the internet

According to reports, misinformation has been purposely disseminated in order to hide the brutality and arbitrariness of the government. This follows the ever-increasing circulation of reports exposing the wrongdoings of the Iranian government.

On February 14, 2011, Saneh Jaleh, a 26-year-old Kurd, was shot dead by government forces during a demonstration. A drama student at the College of Fine Arts at the University of Teheran, he participated in the protest expressing solidarity with people in Tunisia and Egypt. It was the first time since the election turmoil in 2009 that protesters made

use of slogans such as “Tunisia, Egypt, Iran” and “Mubarak, Ben Ali and now Seyed Ali (Ayatollah Khamenei)”.

What is obvious to his friends - that he was shot because he participated in a peaceful demonstration - has been completely distorted by the government. Statements were published by the government claiming that Saneh Jaleh was a member of the notorious Basji militia and had been shot by members of the opposition during the protest. Photos were manipulated and published on the internet to substantiate this claim. His family and friends are currently undertaking great efforts to rectify this distorted impression in order to uphold Saneh Jaleh’s memory.

It seems that nine months ago the government created a department whose only mission is the manipulation of the media. It operates by producing and disseminating misinformation and fabricated video clips. This department has a budget of approx. 100 billion Tuman (100 million US dollars). The head of the department is a close friend of Iran’s leader. The department also browses through websites such as Facebook, Twitter and YouTube using special networks called “Ma” (we), “Shoma” (you) and “Paydari” (resistance). In particular, the department uses the Paydari network to create fake accounts, with the aim of manipulating other users of those sites to provide images and information.

The other two networks, Ma and Shoma, publish video clips and photos on YouTube and intend to “expurgate” this platform. This department is working in the guise of public telecommunication. This is why the cyber police can detect websites and is able to close them should users criticize the government. It has not been known so far who these government hackers in fact are. On February 14, 2011, they hacked into the pro-democracy website Balatarin as a means of proving that they had the means to do so. They circulated false information about the victim Saneh Jaleh. They also fabricated video clips and photos of the daughter of Mir Hossein Mousavi, an opposition politician. What is more, they tried to exaggerate the size of the demonstration on February 11, while downplaying the size of the opposition demonstrations in which Saneh Jaleh had participated.



The fake Saneh Jaleh (top) and the real Saneh Jaleh (bottom). The distinction is clearly visible.

Islamic Republic of Iran

Death Sentence for Pastor



Pastor Youcef Nadarkhani (born in 1977) was sentenced to death in Iran. The sentence when pronounced on September 22, 2010 was hanging. The reason given was that he had become a Christian. Conversion to a non-Islamic religion is a capital crime in Iran for a man with Islamic background. For this reason Pastor Nadarkhani is in danger of his life.

We the undersigned support legal equality for all men irrespective of their race, religion and gender. We explicitly refer to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of the UNO against which the sentence constitutes a flagrant violation. No person can ever be persecuted for his religious conviction nor be robbed of his life because of it.

With my signature I demand the immediate and unconditional release of Pastor Youcef Nadarkhani.

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Please send further info about the work of ISHR/IGFM

Please send to (even if incomplete): International Society for Human Rights (ISHR/IGFM), Borsigallee 9, D-60388 Frankfurt/M., Germany, Phone: 0049-69-420108-0, Fax: 0049-69-420108-33, eMail: info@ishr.org, Internet: www.ishr.org



Iranian bloggers and internet censorship

To begin I would like to recall one particular blogger, Hossein Ronaghi Maleki. For 15 months he has been in prison and was sentenced to 15 years imprisonment. Although he has suffered from a kidney disease for months, Iranian authorities have not released him, not even for medical treatment.

That leads to the question: why is the Iranian regime so afraid of bloggers and the internet?

The wave of Farsi blogs began in September 2001, when Hossein Derakhshan published on his blog instructions in Farsi explaining how to set up one's own blog (By the way, he has been in jail for two years and was sentenced to 19 ½ years imprisonment.).

The blogosphere belongs to the most growing internet areas in Iran. Within just a few years, Farsi became one of the most used languages in the blogosphere. According to estimates, there are about 70,000 up to 100,000 Farsi blogs.

The most important force behind this development is certainly the young educated Iranian generation, which yearns for freedom and is inquisitive. The Iranian blogosphere is not only very diverse, but also very fast and up-to-date.

Themes range from conservation and animal welfare to literature and art. Blogs especially offer women a space to express their issues and even to break certain societal taboos. There are many feminist blogs, which call attention to discrimination in law and society. For years, also the women's movement in Iran has dis-



Iranian girls and women search the internet



Our author Parisa Najafi Tonekaboni at the 2011 Annual Conference of the ISHR/IGFM in Bonn.

Source: IGFM

covered the medium for itself. And of course, political themes are popular, because blogs serve as an important source of information.

A blog is a medium that promotes dialogue. People with different opinions are meeting, talking and discussing with each other. I have often participated in discussions about human rights, the death penalty, women's rights and much more. The internet makes it possible for supporters of the regime and dissidents to talk with each other. This is something that hardly ever happens in Iranian society and politics.

The political censorship by the Iranian regime forces people to search for alternative media. We are talking about a country in which television and radio are state-controlled and only spreading propaganda. Newspapers can be closed in just one day. This means that hundreds of people – not only journalists, but also technical employees – become suddenly unemployed. That is why self-censorship is widespread in the Iranian press and among journalists.

In a situation such as this, blogs provide the biggest opportunities. Several years ago many journalists began to publish their texts and articles that they could not place in the press in their personal blogs.



Among the Iranian bloggers are many highly educated women

Blogs also offer activists abroad a new source of information about life in Iran and the subjects that affect people there. They constitute a connection between the activists inside and the opposition outside Iran.

Years ago the Iranian regime already began censoring the internet by blocking certain sites. But recently internet censorship has taken on a new quality and the suppression of the internet activists has grown substantially. The Iranian regime has founded state institutions – like the Cyberarmy a division of the revolutionary guards, and the Internet Police – to systematically suppress freedom of opinion, and to threaten and criminalize bloggers and other internet activists.

At least eleven bloggers are imprisoned in Iran. The organisation “Reporters without Borders” estimates an even higher number. Especially after the presidential election of 2009 and the following protests, the regime has come to understand more than ever the meaning of the internet and is therefore reacting against it. Many blogs and websites were blocked or even deleted. The entire internet access in Iran was shut off multiple times, and host and domain providers were arrested. Blog providers were ordered to block or delete critical blogs.

Representatives of the regime now openly remark that the Cyberarmy is tasked with attacking critical websites (now called “enemy websites” by the regime). This means taking advantage of security flaws in order to destroy contents and therefore hack the website. Moreover, there are new guidelines for internet cafés. The owners are obligated to outfit their cafés with surveillance cameras, to record the data of each customer, and to save them for six months.

In spite of all the regime’s efforts, Iranian bloggers are continuing. Most are not impressed by the fact that their pages will be closed. For many internet users are utilizing proxys to evade the blockade. Bloggers sometimes even publish the number of visitors to their blogs, in order to show the government that its measures do not have much effect. If their blogs are deleted, they will start a new one.

Content in the internet can never fully be regulated, neither in Iran nor anywhere else, but internet activists in Iran fight a hard battle. We should support them.

Parisa Najafi Tonekaboni

The EIH Bank – The German business relations must be based on human rights standards!

The European-Iranian Trade Bank AG (German: Europäisch-Iranische Handelsbank, EIHB), which was founded in 1971 as the German-Iranian Trade Bank AG, continues to thrive in the heart of Hamburg. According to the information of the International Society for Human Rights (ISHR/IGFM), the bank is one of the most significant monetary supporters of the Iranian regime.

This global actor so important to the Ahmadinejad government is a German bank with exclusively Iranian owners. It is financed by four shareholders. The Iranian Bank of Industry and Mining holds 52 percent; the remaining 48 percent is divided among the Mellat, Tejarat and Refah Banks – all three of which are under state control.

Additionally, the Mellat and Refah Banks are on the EU sanctions list and are led by high-ranking Iranian functionaries, whose names can also be found on the sanctions list. Through the EIHB, financial transactions necessary for the Iranian nuclear program have been and continue to be handled. The ISHR



International astonishment due to the personal handshake between German Minister for Foreign Affairs Westerwelle and Iranian President Ahmadinejad in Tehran, February 2011

has evidence demonstrating that, since 2003, Bank Mellat has made possible transactions in the sums of hundreds of millions of dollars for the Iranian nuclear, rockets and armaments industries. The EIHB participated directly in many of these deals.

The bank Mellat holds 26 percent of the EIHB and is listed in the EU list (961/2010). The ISHR/IGFM holds the opinion that this should have been already more than enough to let the German federal government change its mind and to act strictly to sanction this bank and limit its commercial possibilities. The statements and the actions taken by the government are not sufficient. ISHR/IGFM-spokesman of the board Martin Lessenthin asks, "The German Federal Government claims to be strongly committed to human rights – but does this hold true also for the dealings with the EIHB?"

As long as there are many German entrepreneurs doing business with the Islamic Republic Iran, an Iranian bank remains stationed on German ground and the German Federal Reserve supports such a situation. The ISHR/IGFM cannot see "a practical desire to realize the commitment."

German companies are still doing big business with Iran

According to information by the ISHR/IGFM, global players, such as Siemens and ThyssenKrupp, are withdrawing gradually from doing business with the Islamic Republic Iran. However, medium-sized companies in particular remain increasingly involved. Many entrepreneurs deal with "free," or non-sanctioned, products. Nevertheless, it is important to consider that even a "free" product like a construction crane is often used for public executions within the Islamic Republic.

According to human rights activists within the periphery of the ISHR/IGFM, it is practically impossible to do business in Iran without involving oneself with the infamous Pasdaran, which are listed on the US list of terror organizations and on the EU list of sanctioned entities. These revolutionary guards are the biggest entrepreneurs of the whole country. They are involved in nearly all sectors, but mainly in the field of energy production.



EIHB – puppet of Ahmadinejad's regime

Various well-known German companies are involved in commercial activities in Iran. Among those are Babcock Borsig Service GmbH, Deutz AG, Festo AF & Co (with a Farsi Website www.festo.ir), KSB AG, Lenze AG (with a Farsi website www.lenze.ir), MultiMetall Reiner Schulze e.K. (with a Farsi website), Schaeffler KG, SWF Krantechnik GmbH, ZF Friedrichshafen, and several others.

Many well-known representatives of German industry were present at the April 2011 Tehran trade show, "Iran Oil Show 2011." Those include, among others, Pfeiffer Chemie-Armaturenbau GmbH, Leusch GmbH, Leoni - Kerpen GmbH, Erndtebrücker Eisenwerk GmbH & Co. KG, and LESER GmbH & Co. KG. Because the EIHB is being used for arranging financial transactions with the Islamic Republic Iran, it remains a very important partner for the German business world. Without this partnership, the financial flows would be strictly limited and therefore highly complicated.

Economic interest more important than human rights?

There are a great number of sanctions against the Islamic Republic Iran, such as the massive restrictions on international payments and currency exchange. Yet, until recently Germany did support this bank and thereby the terror regime in Iran.

Iranian dissidents close to the ISHR/IGFM continually confirm that the human rights record of Iran has steadily worsened, especially in the aftermath of the fraudulent presidential elections in 2009: protests are stifled violently; people are imprisoned and tortured arbitrarily. According to the understanding of the ISHR/IGFM, Germany must emphasize its commitment to protection of human rights - if necessary, even with negligence of the country's economic interests. However, the German hesitation and

refusal to do so was only motivated by fiscal focus. This can be easily inferred from the statements of several representatives of the German economy, who noted that German companies may suffer from losses in the hundreds of millions due to the coming sanctions.

Giving in of the federal government – only partly a success

In August 2010 United States President Barack Obama hoped to achieve German measures against EIHB when he called the German chancellor to draw her attention to its connections to the Iranian terror regime. When Chancellor Merkel refused, American, Israeli and British diplomats arrived in Berlin, and the international pressure increased. The ISHR/IGFM participated as well: several press conferences and press releases were dedicated to the EIHB and the direct German business connection to the massive human rights abuses in Iran.

The first TV channel of Germany ARD broadcast a special report ("Report München") on April 18, 2011. The biggest German newspapers dedicated several issues to the subject. In particular, the planned transactions for the "Iran-India oil deal," supported by the German Federal Reserve, in February 2011 resulted in a big media echo – and an even bigger public outcry. Finally, the response from Berlin was given: should the European Union take the decision to list the bank for sanctions, the German government will not interfere. A semi-success has been achieved. Although the final reasons for such a decision remain unclear, experts assume that the Chancellor has yielded to the heavy international and national pressure.

The ISHR/IGFM urges the Federal Government to take a clear position for the human rights!

The ISHR/IGFM urges the federal government to take voluntarily a clear, reliable and sustainable position for the protection of human rights. In addition, it urges the German entrepreneurs to reconsider business activities with the Islamic Republic Iran – out of moral responsibility towards the Iranian people.

The spokesman of the board, Martin Lessenthin, clarifies, "Only with the active cooperation of all stakeholders, the Iranian terror regime, in Germany represented by the EIHB, can be brought down!" He adds, "This is the only way Germany can reclaim its position as a 'tough-minded defender of human rights.'" *Daniel Holler*

Iran ignores the economic contributions of women

Interview with the Iranian women's rights activist Amir Rashidi

Amir Rashidi is one of the activists of the Iranian women's rights and democratic movement. He is an active member of the "One Million Signature Campaign Against Discriminating Laws." His work is focused on equality before the law, secularism and democracy. Additionally, he is publisher and co-founder of the "Free My Family Campaign," which fights for political prisoners and their families in Iran.

During the presidential election campaigns in 2009, he was one of the organizers of the "free citizens" campaign, which was the first to demand that veiling should be of free choice – and not required by law, as it is in the Islamic Republic. After the election, he was arrested and subsequently forced to flee the country.

Mr. Rashidi, you – as a man – are a member of the campaign "One Million Signatures for Women's Rights." What is your motivation?

Already long before the campaign, I was involved with religion and Islam. I was introduced to the campaign and learned about their website through different weblogs. I joined the campaign because I am convinced that we, male and female, are humans in the first place and that the female claim for equality is justified. In the beginning I was working within the male committee of the campaign, but step by step I also joined other committees, such as committee for education and art. I was involved with the weekly collections of signatures as well.

Our work is not only concerning women. The fact that women are not equal to men is putting severe pressure on men as well. For example, in Iran, the man is responsible for covering all costs of living. If he does not succeed, the woman can sue him accordingly. Admittedly, within the patriarchic system of Iran, such claims will normally not succeed. However, I always asked myself, why the man should be solely responsible for covering the



Amir Rashidi (center) and other activists after an event organized by the Iranian women's rights movement
Source: ISHR/IGFM

costs of living. The answer is plain and simple. Subconsciously, we do not allow women to be economic independent, as we are afraid to reach a situation in which they do not need us anymore. This could be one of the reasons. Nevertheless, this leads to high pressure for men.

Do you believe that it is possible to be active for human rights in today's Iran?

Yes. Before the elections in 2009 there were fewer repressions, and we had more human rights activists and human rights organizations in Iran. Sadly, after the elections, most of the human rights activists were imprisoned and such an engagement has become really difficult. However, they still continue. I believe that we have to build pressure on our government as well as continue to educate the people. We need a change of daily pattern and culture – the human rights must become a part of culture. For example, there are still many people, even within the intellectuals and educated layers of society, who support the death penalty and do not agree to equality of women and men. What we did and still do with our campaign in order to educate the people is to look for personal exchange as well as offer workshops and seminars. This is one way to educate the society.

How does today's women's rights movement in Iran look like?

Today the women's rights activists are still very active in Iran. They organize workshops and seminars, but it became much more difficult than before. The pressure from the government has increased severely, and even lawyers are arrested. It became more difficult and has slowed down, but our work has not stopped. I believe that this movement cannot be stopped as long as there is at least one person who believes in equality. The activists still organize workshops and seminars - and in connection with special events, such as the International Women's Day on March 08, they create and distribute leaflets and brochures concerning various issues, such as equality of sex or sexual education.

But why do you think people should take the risk and fight for their human rights in today's Iran?

All things in life represent a risk, even when only crossing the street. The life itself is a risk. Sometimes such risks just cannot be avoided anymore. Some issues are worth to take the risk for. In my opinion, freedom is such a case and it is worth to take risks in order to achieve it. It is worth to go to prison or leave the country in order to fight for one's freedom!



Amir Rashidi during a press conference of the ISHR/IGFM in Bonn in 2011. Source: IGFM

Because of your commitment to women's and human rights you have been in Evin prison. Can you describe some of your experiences?

When we were arrested on the street – that was still before the election in June 2009 – we were on our way to visit some family and relatives of convicts. From the beginning the behavior of the security forces was very aggressive and offensive. At the police station we were berated and humiliated, and even physically attacked. Some of us were hit. Late at night we were transferred into Evin prison. The quarantine section of the prison was really dirty and the sanitations were really unhygienic. The meals were also very bad. Once per day we were allowed to go outside into the yard for fresh air.

After two days, we were transferred into Gezelhesar prison in Karaj. There it was clean, but partly we were treated worse than in Evin. For example, I



A daily scene: Veiled cyclists in the streets

can remember one morning they publicly abused one young inmate because he stole a traveler's check from another convict. The warden in plain clothes tied his arms behind his back to the prison fence and kicked him in the chest. Anyone who wanted to complain was attacked forcefully. This happened inside the general section of the prison. One can only imagine what might happen to the inmates in the security sections such as Section 209 of Evin prison or Section „Dou-Alef,” which is under control of the Revolutionary Guards.

In the prison, my friends and I tried to inform the inmates concerning their civil rights and the rights of any suspects. This is necessary, as most of the convicts have no knowledge concerning their rights and have been treated in a very bad way. In some cases, the prisoners were totally resigned and said that they were treated as “dirt,” having rights or not. However, some of the captives listened and showed real interest. Some prisoners even dared to demand their rights from the guards

and insisted to be treated according to law. Some guards really accepted and followed the demands!

What would you suggest to Iranians who want to become active for human rights?

Well, this is really a very difficult question. Considering my own experiences, I would say that human rights activists have to strengthen their own belief in the human rights! If you ask somebody if s/he wants the human rights, I guess they all would say “yes,” but still behave against the human rights in daily life. I know somebody who always carries the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in his pocket and often refers to it; however, his attitude is strongly contradictory to women's rights!

Since I have worked with people like him, I have become clearer about the full meaning of the human rights. I believe that we Iranians are still in a learning process. We find ourselves at the door step to democracy and therefore we are also in the middle

of a learning process. I consider this as the most important issue.

The Iranian government filters and blocks many Farsi-language websites in Iran. In January 2011 a new Cyber-police was established. You are an IT-specialist – but can “normal” people still access information, which is not censored by the government?

Basically, to have such a police is not necessarily a bad thing. However, the problem is that we cannot have any trust into the police and the jurisdiction of our country. The behaviors of the police and the jurisdiction have shown that they do not work for protecting the citizens but only for the security of the system and the regime. This is contradictory to the official philosophy of the security apparatus, which is focused on the establishment of a secure country for its population – but the police and the judicial system give security only to the government and not to the population.

One example: If the minister for information informs the government that the mail boxes of the political opponents have been hacked and the public access to website has been limited – how can this help create trust? It basically means that even the private sphere of the population is not respected and there is no security for the people.

We cannot trust the police and the security forces. This does not only concern the internet. Some time ago on the Kag Square in Tehran, a man attacked another man with a knife and killed him. In the internet a video can be found of this happening which also shows police cops. However, the police did not do anything to catch the murderer. Instead, they attacked the people who complained about such failure, hit them, and even ran some over with their cars. It is absolutely impossible to trust such a police.

Do you believe that in Iran there is an understanding of the meaning of the human rights? If so, do you think that this has changed throughout the years?

During the last years, the situation has improved. However, even today, I understand that there are many people who do not know anything about human rights. I can show you people who always carry the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, who quotes the articles, but if you ask them about polygamy, they answer that they conform to this tradition!

It is really painful and it shows that we have to do much more educational work. In fact the civil society

in Iran has to become much more active as ever before! In the current situation, this is really difficult, but I think that the current knowledge, which has been planted into the people of Iran, is the sole result of constant work of all activists. But it is still vitally important to continue that work.

Due to your involvement for human rights, you have been subjugated to a lot of repression and threats. You have been in prison and finally you had to leave your country. If given the choice, would do the same again?

Without any doubt, I would have done the same activities again as I still do it today. However, if I had today's experiences, it would have been much better. Today my perspective towards many issues have changed and improved. If I had those experiences already in the past, I could have acted in a much better way.

Especially the experience to live abroad, getting to know new cultures and other points of view (for example, from non-governmental organizations concerning human rights and Iran), and also the experiences of a really tough time had strong influence on my personal development. The same applies to contact with many people, who used my name or the name of other human rights activists in order to achieve their goals but ultimately forgot about us.

A part of those experiences consists in learning about the human rights problems in other countries and the living conditions of women in such countries. For me it was quite a surprise as an Italian women's rights activist showed me the magazine “Second Hand,” which also promotes prostitutes. For me, the promotion was not really the problem, but rather that they were described as „Second Hand.” What a disdainful newspaper which offers women as products!

If the government really had the motivation to implement reforms – which would you consider as the most important ones?

I think that the Iranian constitution must be changed and that it should be re-written considering the criterion of human rights and democracy. This is the most important aspect. The civil society must be given the chance to become more active and involved; freedoms, such as freedom of press and other all freedoms, must be guaranteed. In my opinion those are the most important modifications that should be accomplished.

Questions asked by Max Klingberg

Dr. Ahmad Zeidabadi

Fake trial against UNESCO laureate

On April 7, 2011, imprisoned Iranian journalist Ahmad Zeidabadi was honoured with this year's UNESCO/Guillermo Cano World Press Freedom Prize. Ahmad Zeidabadi is viewed as one of the most important people in the Iranian reform movement.

He is well-known in Iran as a journalist, academic, author, political analyst and General Secretary of the "Office for Strengthening Unity" (OSU), and is the winner of the 2010 "Golden Pen of Freedom" of the World Association of Newspapers and News Publishers (WAN-IFRA). Ahmad Zeidabadi has been imprisoned several times because of his journalistic work. In June 2009, shortly after the presidential election, he was once-again arrested and was sentenced to six years in prison in December 2009.

Ahmad Zeidabadi was born in 1965 in Zeidabad in the province of Kerman. He is married to and has two children with Mahdiah Mohammadi Gorgani. In 2010, Ahmad Zeidabadi received the WAN-IFRA "Golden Pen of Freedom" award because of an open letter he wrote while in prison during the same year, which protested the judiciary's treatment of imprisoned journalists. In the letter,



Dr. Ahmad Zeidabadi before his arrest

he accused the judges of "opposing and infringing upon the criteria and regulations of the Quran."

Work

Ahmad Zeidabadi began his professional work as a journalist in 1989 for the newspaper Ettela'a. Contributions by him, the former chief editor of the newspaper „Azad," were published in the Tehran daily „Hamshahari," the BBC Persian Service and the Persian-English news website „Rooz." In his articles he has always defended ethnic and religious minority rights without attacking people or making compromises in the struggle for minority rights. His courage and integrity is admired by many of his colleagues, even if they do not hold his same opinions.

He is a member of the Iranian Journalists Association and President-elect of the Iranian Alumni Association, one of the largest student organizations in Iran. Zeidabadi holds a Ph.D. in International Affairs from the University of Tehran. He is also professor of political science and has taught at numerous academic institutions, including the Department of Iranian Studies at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) in Cambridge, USA.

Arrest and process

In 2000 Zeidabadi was arrested and convicted of incitement of public opinion and acting against national security and sentenced to 13 years in prison. In March 2001, he was provisionally released on bail. In 2003, Zeidabadi was re-arrested. This time he was sentenced to 23 months in prison and excluded for five years from participation in „all public and social activities, including journalism." In 2004 he was released from prison. Before the presidential elections of June 12, 2009, he worked as campaign-worker for opposition politicians Karroubi - and shortly after learning about the likely falsified election results, he was on June 21 arrested and jailed.

A week after the start of negotiations was Zeidabadi on a hunger strike to protest against his arrest, and went to a hospital after he was found unconscious in his cell for 17 days. According to reports, doctors were able to convince him to end his hunger strike. By August 8, 2009, when he had to attend a state in the televised show trial, he was kept in solitary confinement. During his detention, he had to go through



Zeidabadi during his fake trial in August 2009

numerous hearings, in which he was tortured mentally and physically. Nevertheless, his interrogators were able to force a confession from him.

Prison conditions

His wife Mahdieh Mohammadi Gorgani reported after one of their rare visits to the prison, that Ahmad was on the brink of suicide. She was allowed to visit for the first time on August 17, 2009. She told of his extremely poor physical and mental condition. He was first held in a coffin-shaped, 1.5 m long cell and then underwent 35 days of solitary confinement.

The next time he met his wife mid-September 2009. He told her that he was beaten during an interrogation. In an interview on September 23, 2009, she reported on what the interrogators told her husband: „We have orders to make up done and if you do not cooperate with us, we can do with you what we want. If you are not to sign the interrogation report, we will force you to eat it.“

On November 23, 2009 he was sentenced to six years imprisonment. He also received a lifetime ban on social and political activities. This effectively means

that Zeidabadi may never write again in Iran. In addition, he was condemned to spend the first five years after his release from prison in exile in the northeastern Iranian city of Gonabad. He was imprisoned first in Tehran’s Evin prison, but was moved on February 1, 2010 to the one closest to Tehran Karaj city.

Ahmad Zeidabadi is in Rajae Shahr prison - not in cells with other political prisoners, but rather with common criminals, thieves and murderers. The hygienic conditions in this prison are not humane. In particular, the water quality is unacceptable and the risk of becoming infected with AIDS is very high. In Iranian prisons, a large proportion of prisoners are HIV-positive.

Persecution of critical journalists

Zeidabadi and more than 40 other journalists have been indicted as a result of the disputed presidential election of 2009. Also, around 100 major supporters of the reform movement in the country were put on trial and charged with planning a “soft revolution” to overthrow the clerical theocracy. At least 26 other journalists are still detained; some of them have to adjust to prison sentences of between five and nine years.

About Us

Editor:

**International Society for
Human Rights
German Section e.V. (ISHR)**
Borsigallee 9
D-60388 Frankfurt a.M.

Tel: +49 (0)69 420 108 0
Fax: +49 (0)69 420108 33
Email: info@igfm.de
Internet: www.igfm.de

Staff:

Martin Lessenthin (administration), Max Klingberg,
Dr. Petra Upphoff, Elena Gerken, Anne-Katrin Hochstrat,
Sonia Kūpeliyan, Ulrike Lessenthin (layout and compo-
sition), Parisa Najafi Tonekaboni, Amir Rashidi, Daniel
Holler.

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www.gozaar.org	Forum concerning human rights and democracy (English and Persian).
http://www.forequality.info/english	Campaign for equality in Iran organized by women (German, English, French, Italian, Spanish and Persian).
http://iranianminorityshumanright.blogspot.com	Detailed information (English) concerning (persecuted) minorities in Iran.
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