



کانون نویسندگان ایران (در تبعید)  
Iranian Writers Association  
( in Exile )

## **An Open Letter from the Iranian Writers Association (in Exile) to the International PEN**

With the warmest greetings.

Dear friends,

You are aware of the worrying and inhumane conditions in Iran under the Islamic regime. The government of Iran continues to blatantly trample under its feet all those civil rights and political freedoms guaranteed under international laws, conventions and treaties to the implementations of which it is legally committed, whilst ignoring the terrible tragedy that awaits Iran. It has now embarked on a campaign of intensified repression at home and is deliberately creating a sense of fear and terror in Iranian society. These increasingly worrying concerns forces us to request your help and assistance and to ask you all to join us in an international campaign in defense of civil rights in Iran, including freedom of expression and organization; against torture and executions, and for the release of all political prisoners.

The known and secret prisons of the Islamic Republic are now full of political prisoners; young and old, male and female, writers and poets, artists and journalists, students and teachers. Thousands of activists from the students, women, workers, national and religious minorities movements in Iran now face an intensified repression, imprisonment, torture and executions.

Iranian society is indeed awaiting many catastrophic events. In addition to the sanctions imposed by the UN Security Council and the threat of military intervention, the increasing attacks on the people by the repressive apparatus of the Iranian regime has created a disastrously critical situation in our country. Whilst according to the admission of Ahmadi Nezhad's own minister, Mr Mohammad Abbasi in a press conference on 10<sup>th</sup> August 2008, there are now 10 million unemployed and tens of thousands of workers not having been paid for many months, high prices and inflation are causing havocs for millions of people. The only answer the Iranian regime has is to severely punish all protests. The murderous Islamic judiciary in its campaign of repression and terror against the Iranian people has just executed over 40 or so in Tehran on 27<sup>th</sup> and 28<sup>th</sup> of July.

This is not the first time the Iranian regime has resorted to the summary execution of political prisoners. During the first few years of the Islamic Republic and then again in the summer of 1988 tens of thousands of political prisoners were handed over to the regime's death squads. According to the regime's own official reports, only in the last four months they have executed over 250 prisoners. To this must be added the unreported disappearance, torture and executions of individuals in the hands of official and unofficial security forces which are a daily occurrence in Iran.

Amnesty International in its latest reports names Iran as having had the second largest number of executions in the world; 317 in 2007 as compared to 470 in China. Of these, in blatant contradiction of its own international commitments at least 140 were below the age of 18. Human Rights groups have recently published a report indicating 8 male and female prisoners are now facing death by stoning. The European Union issued a statement on 24<sup>th</sup> July this year asking the Iranian government to respect human rights and international conventions and to stop its inhumane punishments such as stoning.

Another major worrying concern of us is the dangerous situation facing our own association. Since the recent election of the new secretariat of the Iranian Writers Association inside Iran, the Iranian government has decreed the whole association to be illegal and has openly threatened all its members. In an interview with the official news agency of the Islamic Republic, IRNA, Mohsen Parviz, the Deputy Minister of Culture and Islamic Guidance declared that our association has no legal rights and accused it of being "not a cultural association" but "just a bunch of people who have got together to issue political statements against the government". He then called on the judiciary to deal with this "illegal institution". Keyhan newspaper, which is in reality an official paper of the regime and whose editor is directly appointed by Khamenehi, the leader of the Islamic Republic, repeated these accusations and once again called on the authorities to stop our activities. Elsewhere, individuals associated with the government have openly accused some members of our secretariat with various crimes. These declarations are extremely worrying for us as given the situation of censorship and repression in Iran they are simply a prelude to arrests and executions.

Yusef Azizi Banitaraf, a member of our secretariat and author of over 25 books, has just been sentenced to 5 years jail by the Islamic Revolutionary Court of Tehran. This is just an indication of the dangers threatening our membership. We speak from bitter experience of decades of repression and attacks against our association by the Islamic regime. This is a government which has already executed thousands of writers in its 30 years of rule and is infamous in its opposition to all forms of freedom of expression. Mohammad Mokhtari, Mohammad Jafar Puyandeh and Ghaffar Hosseini, previous members of our secretariat were kidnapped and killed in 1999 by the security forces and their mutilated bodies were later discovered in fields outside the city.

The ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance has now issued a warning that IWA have no rights to organize any meetings. The Islamic parliament has also recently passed a law which threatens independent bloggers with imprisonment and even the death sentence.

You can appreciate why we are all so concerned and why the world public opinion must become aware of the new conspiracy of the Islamic regime against Iranian Writers Association and its continuing attacks against all the democratic and just struggles of the Iranian people against repression, torture and executions. We do urgently need your support and solidarity.

Dear colleagues,

27 years after the arrest and execution of Said Soltanpoor, a distinguished and active member of our association, and 20 years after the massacre of thousands of political prisoners in 1988, not only has the repressive rule of the Islamic Republic against the Iranian people not stopped but is now on the verge of entering a new and even more horrendous phase of naked terror. A

new wave of arrests, imprisonment, torture and execution has been unleashed against activists from all the different social and political domains; from students and intellectuals to workers, women and national minorities.

Hundreds of books, some even previously published, are now banned. Pressure on independent publishers has sharply increased. Many movies have been declared "non-Islamic" and their film makers face renewed harassment. A number of cultural and artistic organizations have been shut down. Iran has now more journalists in jail than the entire Middle East. Mostly have been arrested illegally and tried in secret or closed courts without the right to defence lawyers. Most political prisoners are kept for long periods in solitary confinement and without access to medical care.

Since the appointment of Ahmadi Nezhad in 2005 the pressure against the independent press and media has reached unprecedented levels. Censorship and public attacks on writers and journalists simply for what they write is increasing daily. Under his regime, the ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance (under Sardar Saffar Harandi) has sent more than 50 journalists to jail and closed down scores of journals and newspapers.

Under such conditions the only reply the Islamic regime has for the freedom loving people of Iran who dare to protest is further repression. As an example we draw your attention to few recent cases:

- Afshin Shams Ghaffarrokh, a leading member of Isfahan Association of Caricaturists was arrested and imprisoned on 3rd of July for his defence of workers rights. His house was raided 2 days later by security services and all his writings and documents confiscated.
- Hana Abdi, 21 years old, a student at Payam Noor University in Birjand, a women's right activist who was arrested and imprisoned in Sanandaj last September has now been sentenced to 5 years jail.
- On the anniversary of 8<sup>th</sup> July attack (in 1999) by the security forces against student halls of residence, scores of students were arrested in many different cities. Protests against such arrests were treated with more arrests.
- On 3<sup>rd</sup> July the so-called appeal court confirmed the prison sentence against Abed Tavanche who had been arrested earlier. Throughout his trial his defence lawyer Dr Haji Mashhadi was denied access to his case files and was not permitted to attend the court and defend his client.
- Mansur Osanloo, the president of Tehran Bus Workers Union, arrested last year, is still in jail without any formal charges against him.
- Mohammad Sadigh Kabudvand, a journalist and one of the founders of the Human Rights Organisation in Kurdistan was sentenced to 11 years jail for "actions against national security". Saman Rasoolpoor, another journalist and member of the same organization who was arrested on 27<sup>th</sup> July in Mahabad has now been moved to Orumieh Jail and as yet no explanation has been offered by the security forces.

- Yaghub Mehrnad, a writer and weblogger (Mehrnahad Weblog) was executed in Zahedan on 4<sup>th</sup> August. He was a member of a Youth Association called the Voice of Justice. His 16-year old brother who protested against this is now also in jail.
- On 5<sup>th</sup> August, 4 workers who had been arrested in Sanandaj last May for participation in May Day celebrations were sentenced to public lashing and prison terms. Susan Razani, 9 months and 70 lashes; Shiva Kheyraadi, 4 months and 15 lashes; Abdollah Khani, 9 days and 40 lashes; Seyed Ghaleb Hosseini, 6 months and 50 lashes. On the same day in Tabriz, Ali Dadashi, a journalist was sentenced to 50 lashes.
- According to Amirkabir University's News Bulletin, on 6<sup>th</sup> August, from over 40 teacher training students who were ordered to attend the "Disciplinary Committee", 7 were expelled and denied further education for 2 terms.
- According to a report published on 7<sup>th</sup> August in Etemad Melli, a newspaper belonging to Mehdi Karrubi, the previous Speaker of the Islamic Parliament and a candidate in the last presidential elections, more than 35 newspapers and journals are now in the Islamic courts. In addition, a government committee overseeing the press has already banned a further 21.
- Habibollah Lotfi, a law student from Sanandaj was sentenced to death on 13<sup>th</sup> August. He was arrested a year ago and has since been in jail. Because of internal bleeding due to torture he has been hospitalized on a number of occasions. Before this, 7 other civil rights defenders were also sentenced to death: Adnan Hasanpoor (journalist), Hiva Butimar (journalist), Farzad Kamangar (teacher), Anvar Hosseinpanahi (teacher), Farhad Vakili, Ali Heydarian and Arsalan Oliyae.

Dear Colleagues,

These were just a few recent example of the crimes committed against the people by the Islamic regime which opposes all forms of freedom of expression. The Iranian Writers Association (in Exile) on the basis of the IWA Charter in defence of freedom of expression and against censorship condemns these repressive actions and resolutely defends all those who struggle against it.

We are an independent democratic organization of Iranian writers living in exile. We have condemned the threat of military intervention and sanctions against Iran which have only worsened the situation of the people. It is clear for us that any regime change in Iran must come as a result of the actions of the freedom loving people of Iran and the support and solidarity of people everywhere and not by military adventures of foreign powers.

Iranian society is currently going through a critical and dangerous period. We are deeply worried that the Islamic Republic is about to embark on a new wave of terror against the members of the Writers Association in Iran. We request that you invite all organizations associated with PEN world-wide to join us in launching an international campaign of solidarity so that the voice of our protests against this brutal regime is heard everywhere.

We thank you in advance for your attention to our cause and your solidarity with the just struggles of freedom loving Iranian writers and the people of Iran and eagerly await your response and your humanitarian assistance.

With respect,  
The Secretariat of IWA (in Exile)  
19<sup>th</sup> August 2008

Contacts:

Germany: Shahla Aghapour, [shahla@aghapour.de](mailto:shahla@aghapour.de)  
GB: Sattar Laghahi, [bookpressuk@aol.com](mailto:bookpressuk@aol.com)  
Sweden: Bahram Rahmani, [bamdadpress@ownit.nu](mailto:bamdadpress@ownit.nu) :

Copy to:

The Media,  
Reporters Without Borders,  
Amnesty International,  
UN Human Rights Commission,  
EU Human Rights Commission,  
...