

# The Systematic Repression of the Women's Rights Movement — May 2008

## Summary

Iranian authorities have systematically thwarted peaceful and legal civil society efforts to advocate for women's rights in Iran, abusing the legal system and gravely violating internationally protected civil rights in the process. This report illustrates this process by providing concise but comprehensive documentation of the persecution of women's rights defenders in Iran.

Women's rights advocates have been beaten, harassed and persecuted for exercising their right to assembly, association and expression: for peaceful demonstrations; for collecting signatures on behalf of the "Million Signatures Campaign" to remove legal discrimination against women in Iran's legal codes and system; for writing and publishing articles; for convening meetings; and for traveling for the purpose of having contact with their peers abroad.

They have received court summonses, and have been interrogated, ill-treated, kept in solitary confinement, denied access to lawyers and families, and subjected to pressures to confess to spurious charges. Court procedures in their cases have been universally unfair and in violation of Iranian law. Bail amounts have been excessive, forcing many defendants to remain in detention. Persecuted women's rights advocates have generally been charged with "acts against national security" and other vague and/or unreasonable offenses. Many have been convicted and sentenced to jail terms and suspended sentences apparently aimed to keep them in a state of isolation and fear, and thus to suppress and repress further human rights activity.

The women's rights movement is one of the most vivid and well-

organized widespread human rights campaign in Iran. Under the government of former President Mohammed Khatami, civil society was encouraged and supported. Over 600 nongovernmental organizations were established to promote and encourage respect for and implementation of women's rights.

These groups found common cause advocating for changes in a legal system in which discrimination against women is deeply embedded. They began to campaign for equal rights between women and men in marriage; equal compensation for injuries and accidental death; equal inheritance rights; for prosecuting perpetrators of honor killings; for equal access to and treatment in courts of law; and against death sentences by stoning in cases of adultery.

With the government of President Ahmadinejad, the status of Iranian women has deteriorated precipitously. A "Program for Social Safety" allows the authorities arbitrarily to harass women for not wearing "appropriate Islamic dress." A "Family Protection Act" has been promulgated that would harm the welfare and rights of women further, by legitimizing polygamy, allowing temporary marriages, marriage at the age of only 13, and other measures. Furthermore, a system of quotas has been introduced giving males an unfair advantage in obtaining admission to the system of higher education.

As this report shows, not only the precarious situation of Iranian women themselves but also their possibility to defend their rights are increasingly exposed and in peril. The *International Campaign for Human Rights in Iran* includes in the report a set of recommendations for removing legal discrimination against women and respecting the internationally guaranteed human rights including standards for human rights defenders.

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## Recommendations

The *International Campaign for Human Rights in Iran* calls on the Iranian authorities to take the following actions with respect to the cases of women human rights defenders outlined in this report:

- Guarantee the physical and psychological integrity and safety of all human rights defenders in Iran, and put an end to all forms of harassment against them, including obstruction of their ability to peacefully assemble, travel and engage in activities aimed at protecting and promoting human rights;
- Release immediately and unconditionally all Iranian women's rights defenders who remain arbitrarily detained because of their human rights activities;

- Put an immediate end to all judicial proceedings against all women's rights defenders involved in the "One Million Signatures Campaign" as well as those who peacefully gathered on 4 March 2007, and 12 June 2006, as they have been prosecuted and sentenced arbitrarily and in relation to their human rights activities;
- Ensure that women's rights defenders who have already been sentenced be granted fair and impartial trials when appealing their sentences. The appeals courts must take into account that the charges against them have been handed down through unfair and partial court proceedings and are based solely on the basis that these women's rights defenders have justifiably advocated for women's human rights;
- Take concrete steps, in collaboration with the legislature, designed to address and rectify legal discrimination against women in Iran's civil and penal codes;
- Adhere to the provisions of the UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders, adopted by the General Assembly of the United Nations on 9 December 1998, in particular: Article 5a, which states that "for the purpose of promoting and protecting human rights and fundamental freedoms, everyone has the right, individually and in association with others, at the national and international levels, to meet peacefully;" Article 6b, which states that "everyone is free to publish, impart or disseminate to other views, information and knowledge on all human rights and fundamental freedoms;" and Article 8(2), which provides that "everyone has the right, individually and in association with others, to submit to governmental bodies and agencies and organizations concerned with public affairs criticism and proposals for improving their functioning and to draw attention to any aspect of their work that may hinder or impede the promotion, protection and realization of human rights and fundamental freedoms."

## **The Emergence of the Women's Rights Movement**

The Iranian women's movement is the most vibrant social movement

in Iran today. Despite repressive policies aimed at women and women's rights activists adopted by the government of President Ahmadinejad, women's rights activists have been able to articulate their message of legal reform, take it to the public, and influence discourse on women's rights at the highest levels of political decision-making. Much of the power and effectiveness of the women's movement today can be attributed to liberal policies adopted during the reform period and the Presidency of Mohammad Khatami. Khatami, who was elected on a platform of promoting civil society, eased restrictions on the establishment of nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), and adopted policies specifically promoting the establishment of NGOs aiming to empower women and address the problem of honoring and implementing women's rights.

By the end of the reform period, and according to statistics provided by the Office of Women's Participation, over 600 women's NGOs had been established and registered. At the same time, the reformist government adopted policies and programs designed to strengthen the effectiveness of women's NGOs and promote networking. The government provided financial assistance for the establishment of women's NGOs and the implementation of their programs, and, indirectly, provided an opportunity for women's active social participation through civil society organizations.

According to one women's rights activist, who wished to remain anonymous:

While these programs did little to directly empower those who are involved and in some way leading the women's movement today, the atmosphere of the time allowed for women's rights activists to set up organizations—many for the first time—and while working to empower women and meet their needs, these women's rights activists also became empowered in addressing social issues, found an opportunity to collaborate with one another, and learn about and identify the real priorities of Iranian women. As such, the reform movement and the opening up of social space facilitated greatly opportunities for women's rights activists, many of whom in the past

had limited their activities to writing about women's issues, to test their capacities in social realm, and to learn how to work collaboratively.[1]

According to another women's rights activist, awarding the Nobel Peace Prize to Shirin Ebadi also invigorated women's rights activists:

For the first time, it seemed that the world was watching women's rights activists and civil society in Iran, and we felt at the time that we should come together to work collaboratively to address women's issues on a broader scale. We came together in the form of a Forum, or Hamanidishi Zanan, where women's rights activists met regularly to discuss issues of importance to women and approaches toward devising joint strategies for addressing women's concerns.[2]

This collaboration, which began in 2004, led to a protest in front of Tehran University in June 2005 objecting to laws that discriminate against women. The demand of the protesters to change discriminatory laws against women was the result of over a year of discussions among this group, who agreed that the most pressing issue facing and limiting women was indeed legal discrimination. Changing laws that place limits on women and discriminate against them was also the most common issue of concern for women's rights activists from different political and ideological backgrounds. Given that the protest was planned in the weeks leading up to the Presidential elections, and the relatively open social atmosphere of the time facilitated by the election atmosphere and Khatami's Reform Movement, the protesters—while facing some resistance by security forces—were tolerated. But while this protest was a major unifying event for the women's rights activists and NGOs who organized it, little was done to follow-up its demands in the year that followed.

On 8 March 2006, on the occasion of International Women's Day, a similar but smaller protest was held in Daneshjoo Park in Tehran, demanding changes to laws that discriminate against women as well as calling for peace—a demand in response to the increasing international pressure placed on Iran. This protest was broken up by

security and park police who attacked the crowd and beat them with batons.

In June 2006, on the anniversary of the protest in front of Tehran University, another protest was planned in Haft-e Tir Square in Tehran. The organizers of the protest expected that security and police officials would use violence to disperse the crowd, and issued several statements in advance emphasizing the peaceful nature of the protest and its emphasis on the reform of laws that discriminate against women, focused this time primarily on family law. But the protest indeed ended in violence when police officers beat women protesters and more than 70 protesters were arrested. The majority of those arrested were released within the following week. This was the first time female police were used in a public assignment. The use of female police to beat and violently attack peaceful protesters was widely criticized by political observers and commentators as well as women's rights activists who had for years advocated for the establishment of a female police force in the hopes that women's issues would be dealt with more sensitively and appropriately. The violence used against protesters, the widespread arrest of equal rights defenders, and the security charges launched against protesters and organizers marked the first major crackdown against women's rights activists in Iran. But women's rights activists who had planned the protest were not deterred by this crackdown and instead devised a new plan to get to their message of equal rights to the public and law-makers. They started the One Million Signatures Campaign.

### **The One Million Signatures Campaign**

The One Million Signatures Campaign is seeking to reform discriminatory laws against women. Activists are asking for equal rights for women in marriage; equal rights to divorce for women; an end to the practice of polygamy and temporary marriage; an increase of the age of criminal responsibility to 18 for both girls and boys

(currently 9 for girls and 15 for boys); the right for women to pass on nationality to their children; equal diyh (compensation for bodily injury or death) between women and men; equal inheritance rights; the reform of laws that reduce punishment for offenders in cases of honor killings; equal testimony rights for men and women in court; and to remove other laws that discriminate against women, including stoning sentences issued in cases of adultery.[3]

In an article about the campaign, activists describe their efforts in the following manner:

The One Million Signatures Campaign officially launched on August 27, 2006, aims to collect one million signatures in support of a petition addressed to the Iranian Parliament asking for the revision and reform of current laws which discriminate against women. One of the main aims of the Campaign is to educate citizens and particularly women about the negative impact of these discriminatory laws on the lives of women and society as a whole. Those who agree with the aims of the Campaign can support it by signing the petition. Those who are interested in becoming more involved can become involved in local groups working on the Campaign. The Campaign uses a face-to-face education approach in promoting awareness about the laws, and Campaign activists after going through a training course on the laws, and face-to-face approach, can become more involved by collecting signatures from fellow citizens. To date, nearly 1,000 individuals have been trained in this method, but there are countless others who have downloaded the petition from the Campaign's site or have received it from friends and who are engaged in signature collections. The Campaign is officially active in over 15 provinces. In Tehran, the Campaign is organized in a committee format, where the bulk of the activities of the Campaign are carried out. In the provinces, local volunteers decide the structure of the Campaign and how to carry out their work based on local needs and resources. The document "[About the One Million Signatures Campaign](#)" explains more about the Campaign, its goals and its methodology. [4]

It is noteworthy that other campaigns addressing women's rights



have emerged around the same time, including the campaign to Stop Stoning.

### **The Campaign to Stop Stoning Forever**

The Campaign to Stop Stoning Forever was launched in the spring of 2006, and aims to identify and document cases where a stoning sentence has been issued; identify attorneys who will represent the accused; and, through activism and publicity, to free those who have been issued stoning sentences with a view toward abolishing stoning altogether. Stoning is a cruel and archaic punishment.[5] Stoning sentences are usually handed out in cases of adultery according to Iran's penal code. Despite a moratorium on the implementation of such sentences by the head of the Judiciary Ayatollah Mahmoud Hashemi Shahroudi in 2002, stoning sentences have been handed out and even carried out by some judges. While this Campaign still follows up on individual cases in Iran with the aim of preventing the implementation of such punishments, according to its founders, because of limitations and pressures it has for the most part ceased awareness-raising activities in Iran, and has merged with the Global Campaign to Stop Killing and Stoning Women.[6]

### **Policies Designed to Limit Women's Social Participation**

The Ahmadinejad presidency initiated several major policies to limit women's presence in the social sphere. Three of the most notable, upon which women's rights activists have focused their attention and criticism, include:

#### **Program for Social Safety**

The Program for Social Safety, which includes several components for combating immorality and criminality, was officially launched in March 2007. The first and most visible component of this program

included combating inappropriate dress. The program, which has been carried out by special Guidance Police, includes identification of women whose appearance allegedly does not conform to appropriate Islamic dress and their subsequent arrest and detention. Special Guidance Police vans are usually placed strategically in busy squares. The officials identify women with bad hejab (Islamic covering) and load them into the vans, transferring them to local detention centers or offices of Amaken (in charge of monitoring immoral behavior in public places) where they are held until a family member can bring them appropriate clothing. These women are given a warning and are asked to enter into a signed agreement not to dress inappropriately in public again. Repeat offenders are referred to courts where fines and even lashings are issued as sentences. Women's rights defenders have objected to the Program for Social Safety on the grounds that it actually robs women of a sense of safety, is intended to restrict women's presence in public spaces, and is arbitrary: while observance of Islamic dress is the law, there is no standard within the law, and arresting officers are left free to judge whether a woman meets the standard or not. These arrests have apparently disproportionately targeted younger Iranians.[7] Thousands of women have been detained through this program.

### **The Family Protection Act**

Originally intended to streamline family legislation and court proceedings, this Act, submitted to the Parliament by the Judiciary in August 2007, included several provisions that women's rights activists found problematic. These provisions, it was later revealed, were included unconventionally, by the Executive Branch. The provisions that aroused the objections of women's rights activists and even reformist and some conservative political women included: 1) a provision that would allow men to take on a second wife, without obtaining an agreement from the first wife, and through court approval based solely on his financial ability to support more than one family; 2) a provision that would facilitate temporary marriage—the

details of which were to be worked out by officials at a later date; 3) a provision that would set a standard rate for Mehrieh[8] and would impose a tax on Mehriehs that exceeded the standard rate –whether the sum of Mehrieh has been received by the woman or not; and 4) the insistence of the drafters on 13 as the age of marriage for women.[9] Women’s rights activists in the One Million Signatures Campaign hosted the first meeting to examine the Family Support Act, and issued a statement protesting the legislation.[10] Other groups, including the Women’s Commission of the Participation Front, the main reformist political party, held similar meetings. Following these activities, some female members of Parliament objected to certain provisions in the legislation as well. The legislation remains in the Parliamentary Commission, and has not yet been presented to the full Parliament for a vote. Women’s rights activists have threatened to hold a demonstration in front of the Parliament should the Act come up for a vote.

### **Quotas to Limit Admittance of Female University Students to Centers of Higher Education**

On 8 April 2008, a statement objecting to a governmental program designed to limit attendance and acceptance of female students in some fields of study within the higher education system was released.[11] The statement was signed by over 700 student and women’s rights activists. The program, which seeks to address and rectify the disproportionately high rate of university entrances by female students as compared to male students, secretly imposed limits on the acceptance of female students to certain fields of study. While this issue has been up for public debate for some time, no official legislation had been adopted to implement quotas on female students. But on 8 February 2008, the organization charged with of the admission of university students to institutions of higher education (Sazeman Sanjesh) reluctantly admitted that they had been enforcing a quota system limiting the presence of female students in some fields of study for the academic years 06-07 and 07-08. The

organization also admitted that they had been working to positively promote the acceptance of male university students into some fields of study with a formula of 30-40% female or male and 10% based on competition.[12] The quota systems had been enforced in the academic year 06-07 for 26 fields and for 07-08 for 39 fields of study. It is worth mentioning that prior to being accepted to University, prospective students must take a rigorous and competitive entrance exam, and those scoring highest are accepted first. Women's rights and student rights activists have objected to this gender-based quota system, claiming that it limits women's participation in the social sphere, and in particular in an area where they have enjoyed great and justified success.[13] Prior to the implementation of this quota system, the female acceptance rate to University was around 65%.

### **Closure of *Zanan Monthly***

On 28 January 2008, the feminist monthly *Zanan* (Women) was banned by order of the Secretariat of the Press Oversight Council. The Council justified its decision by claiming *Zanan* to be "a radical feminist publication, engaged in publishing false claims of violence against women and unjustly criticizing laws governing the lives of women as discriminatory, exaggerating the negative conditions of women's lives, and damaging the image of the Basij Volunteer Force." The Council banned the monthly despite the fact that banning of publications is not one of its duties.[14] *Zanan* is recognized as the first feminist publication in Iran. With a sixteen-year history, *Zanan* also boasts being the longest running feminist publication. Prior to its closure it provided the only print medium dedicated solely to addressing issues of importance to women, the concerns of women's rights activists, and developments in the women's movement. A supporter of the One Million Signatures Campaign, *Zanan* often covered news about developments within the Campaign, which most other print publications have refused to do. On the 13 February 2008, over 1500 persons objected to the closure of the monthly.[15] *Zanan* is currently planning to object to the decision of the Council, and has

lodged a court complaint asking for the reversal of the decision to ban the publication, on grounds that the action was illegal.

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### **The Crackdown on Women's Rights Activists**

As women's rights activists increased their demands for equal rights and voiced their opposition to policies that worked against women, the crackdown on women's rights activists including pressure by security agencies increased proportionately. What follows is documentation of the pressure, harassment and prosecution that women's rights activists have faced in the past 2 years.

### **The 12 June 2006 Protest in Haft Tīr Square**

Women's rights activists and their supporters called for a public protest in Tehran on 12 June 2006. During the days leading up to the planned demonstration, Judiciary officials summoned a number of these activists in an attempt to cancel the demonstration. On the evening of 10 June 2006, Judiciary agents delivered summonses to the homes of Parvin Ardalan, Sussan Tahmasebi, Noushin Ahmadi Khorasani, and Fariba Davoodi Mohajer. Ms. Shahla Entsari was arrested on the day of the protest at her place of employment and was held in detention for one day. She was later dismissed from her job. Ms. Davoodi Mohajer received her summons in person and turned herself in for interrogation on the day of the protest.

The demonstration was planned to take place in Haft Tīr Square in central Tehran. When hundreds of demonstrators approached the Square on the afternoon of 12 June, they encountered a heavy presence of security forces and the police stationed around the square. The security forces prevented demonstrators from holding a peaceful assembly. They beat the demonstrators with batons, used pepper gas against them, and sprayed them with color paint to mark

and arrest them.

Government forces detained a total of 70 men and women on that day. Over a period of one week, all of the detainees were released on bail except for Ali Akbar Mousavi Khoini, a former member of Parliament and human rights activist. Khoini remained in detention for over four months, most of which was spent in solitary confinement. He received beatings and injuries during his time in detention. The authorities released him on bail on 22 October 2006. He was charged with acting against national security; the case remains open, with no court date scheduled.

The situation of 13 other women's rights activists, prosecuted by the government in relation to the 12 June demonstration, is detailed below.

Parvin Ardalan, Noushin Ahmadi Khorasani, Shahla Entesari, Sussan Tahmasebi, and Fariba Davoodi Mohajer: Judicial officials put these five women's rights activists on trial for organizing the 12 June demonstration. Their trial was scheduled for 4 March 2007. On that date, dozens of their colleagues appeared in front of the court house to express solidarity with the defendants. Before the trial's onset, security forces detained four of the defendants and their supporters. The authorities detained a total of 33 women on this date and subjected them to prosecution for their peaceful gathering in front of the courthouse. The next section of this report provides details of prosecutions related to these arrests.

Due to the detention of the four defendants, Parvin Ardalan, Noushin Ahmadi Khorasani, Shahla Entesari and Sussan Tahmasebi, their trial was held in absentia. The fifth defendant, Fariba Davoodi Mohajer, was abroad at the time of the trial and remains outside the country at present.

The Sixth Branch of the Revolutionary Court in Tehran issued a decision on 24 April 2007. According to this decision, the court sentenced Parvin Ardalan, Nousheen and Shahla Entesari to a total of three years' imprisonment under article 610 of the Islamic Penal

Code. They were charged with “collusion and assembly to endanger national security.” The court’s decision required a six-month prison term for each defendant and a suspended sentence of two-and-a-half years, in effect for the next five years. The same court also charged Fariba Davoodi Mohajer with “collusion and assembly to endanger national security.” Davoodi Mohajer was not present at the demonstration because earlier on that day she had been summoned by the Judiciary and interrogated. The court sentenced Davoodi Mohajer to one year of actual imprisonment as well as to a three-year suspended prison term. The court sentenced the fifth defendant, Sussan Tahmasebi, to two years’ imprisonment with one-and-a-half years of it suspended. She was charged with “acting against national security through organizing an illegal protest.”

These five women’s rights activists have appealed their sentences and no final ruling has been issued.

Azadeh Forghani: On 11 April 2007, the Iranian Labor News Agency reported that the Revolutionary Court in Tehran had issued a suspended sentence of two years imprisonment for Azadeh Forghani, in effect for five years. The court charged Forghani with “acting against national security” for her participation in the 12 June demonstration. The court dropped charges of “causing rioting” against her.[16] She appealed her sentence. The Appeals Court revised her sentence by replacing it with a fine in amount of 2 million Rials (\$220).[17]

Delaram Ali: Delaram Ali was originally tried on 29 May 2007 for her participation in the 12 June 2006 protest, on security charges. She was sentenced to a two year and ten months prison term and 10 lashings, which was reduced to two years and six months and the lashing sentence eliminated in a ruling issued by the Appeals Court announced on 4 November 2007.[18] The courts contacted Ms. Ali on the morning of 4 November 2007 to inform her of an order to implement the sentence immediately. On 10 November 2007, following a letter she wrote to the office of Ayatollah Shahroudi, Chief of the Judiciary, protesting the sentence, he ordered a temporary

stay, postponing the implementation of the sentence pending examination of the case.[19] Her case is currently pending review by the courts, but it is considered likely that the original sentence or a portion of it will be upheld and implemented. Delaram was beaten severely during the 12 June 2006 protest and dragged on the ground by police officers prior to her arrest. According the website Change for Equality, Delaram suffered a broken arm as a result of these beatings. She filed a complaint against police officers for use of excessive force, but the police were acquitted on these charges.[20]

**Bahareh Hedayat:** Bahareh Hedayat was put on trial for her participation in the 12 June 2006 demonstration. Branch Six of Tehran's Revolutionary Court charged her with "acting against national security," "disturbing public order," and "propaganda against the state" on 18 April 2007. Her lawyer, Nasrin Setoodeh, was not allowed into the courtroom.[21] On 27 May 2007, the Revolutionary Court sentenced Hedayat to a two-year suspended prison sentence, in effect for five years, under article 610 of the Islamic Penal Code for "acting against national security." The Court dropped charges of "disturbing public order" and "propaganda against state" against Hedayat.[22]

**Nasim Soltan Beigi:** Branch 15 of Tehran's Revolutionary Court sentenced Nasim Soltan Beigi to a two-year suspended prison sentence, in effect for five years, for her participation in the 12 June 2006 demonstration. According to her lawyer, Mohammad Sharif, she was charged with "acting against national security." [23]

**Alieh Eghdamdoost:** Alieh Eghdamdoost received one of the heaviest sentences for participating in the 12 June demonstration. On 6 July 2007, the Iranian Students News Agency reported that Branch 15 of Tehran's Revolutionary Court sentenced Eghdamdoost to three years imprisonment for "acting against national security," and another four months imprisonment for "disturbing public order." The Court also sentenced Eghdamdoost to 20 lashes. The court held its hearing on 6 June 2007 and issued its sentence a month later.[24] Eghdamdoost has appealed her sentence. The Appeals Court has not issued its



decision yet.

Maryam Zia: On 25 July 2007, Branch 13 of Tehran's Revolutionary Court sentenced Maryam Zia to a suspended sentence of six months imprisonment and 10 lashes, in effect for two years. According to her lawyer, Yousuf Mowlaii, she has appealed the sentence. The Appeals Court has not issued a final decision.[25]

Ma'soumeh Zia: Ma'soumeh Zia was sentenced on 7 November 2007 to one year imprisonment for her participation in the 12 June demonstration. She has appealed the ruling. According to her lawyer, Farideh Gheirat, "The trial was held on Wednesday, November 7th. The Judge immediately issued his decision and I also immediately protested it." [26]

Bahman Ahmadi Amoui'e: Journalist Bahman Ahmadi Amoui'e who attended the 12 June 2006 protest in Haft-e Tir Square as a reporter, was arrested and spent a week in detention. In September 2006, the courts charged him with actions against national security by citing several articles that he had written addressing other issues, as well as human rights statements that he had signed. The 13th branch of Revolutionary Court found Amoui'e guilty and sentenced to him a 6-month suspended prison sentence in effect for two years. The sentence was appealed and upheld in the Appeals Court in a ruling issued in February 2008.[27]

#### **4 March 2007: 33 Women's Rights Activists Arrested on the Eve of International Women's Day**

On 4 March 2007, Noushin Ahmadi Khorasani, Parvin Ardalan, Shahla Entesari, and Sussan Tahmasebi appeared in court for their trial in relation to the protest on 12 June 2006. These four women, along with Fariba Davodi Mohajer, who at the time was represented by her lawyer, were on trial on security charges related to the planning of the June protest. A group of women's rights activists had called for a protest in front of the Revolutionary Court to demonstrate

their solidarity with the women on trial and object to the increasing pressures on women's rights activists. When police began arresting the peaceful protesters, the four women, Parvin Ardalan, Noushin Ahmadi Khorasani, Sussan Tahmasebi, and Shahla Entesari along with Shadi Sadr, Entesari's lawyer, exited the courtroom. The five women were arrested along with 28 others. The 33 women arrested were initially taken to Vozara Detention Center, then to Ward 209 of Evin Prison, managed by the Ministry of Information. All but two were released within five days. Shadi Sadr and Mahboubeh Abbasgholizadeh were released on 15 March, having posted bail amounts of 200 and 250 Million Tomans respectively (approximately \$220,000 and \$280,000). During this time, their respective organizations, Raahi and NGO Training Center, were shut down by security officials.[28] The 33 women arrested during this crackdown included (in alphabetical order):

Mahboubeh Abbasgholizadeh; Nasrin Afzali; Noushin Ahmadi Khorasani; Asieh Amini; Zara Amjadian; Elnaz Ansari; Parvin Ardalan; Jila Baniyaghoub; Parastoo Dokooohaki; Shahla Entesari; Nahid Entesari; Farideh Entesari; Somaiyeh Farid; Azadeh Forghani; Niloofar Golkar; Fatemeh Govaraie; Maryam Hosseinkhah; Mahboubeh Hosseinzadeh; Sara Imanian; Nahid Jafari; Jelveh Javaheri; Nahid Keshavarz; Saghar Laghai; Sarah Laghai; Sara Logmanian; Maryam Mirza; Rezvan Moghadam; Mahnaz Mohamadi; Minou Mortazi; Zeinab Peyghambarzadeh; Shadi Sadr; Parastoo Sarmadi; and Sussan Tahmasebi.

All the women were charged with illegal gathering and collusion intended to disrupt national security, disruption of public order and refusal to adhere to the orders of the police, prior to their release from detention. Many were subsequently called into court for interrogation sessions.

According to the site of the Campaign, Change for Equality, at least twelve women have been acquitted on similar charges in the same case.[29]

Six others, however, were found guilty of illegal gathering and collusion intended to disrupt national security. They include Minou Mortazi, Nasrin Afzali, Rezvan Moghaddam and Nahid Jafari who were sentenced by the 13th branch of the Revolutionary Court to a six-month suspended prison term and ten suspended lashings. The same court sentenced Parvin Ardalan to a two-year suspended sentence.[30] Zeinab Payghambarzadeh was also found guilty on the same charge by the 16th branch of the Revolutionary Court and sentenced to a two-year suspended sentence. [31]

All six women intend to appeal their sentences, but the disparity in the nature of the sentences issued in the cases attests to pressures that security forces have placed on the judiciary.

### **Pressure on Activists Involved in the One Million Signatures Campaign**

Since its launch in August 2006, activists in the One Million Signatures Campaign have faced harassment and obstruction of their peaceful efforts by security forces.[32] They have been systematically denied space for convening meetings. Additionally, activists have been arrested while collecting signatures in support of the Campaign's petition asking the Parliament to reform laws that discriminate against women, for convening meetings and for writing on the Campaign's website. To date, 44 members of the Campaign have been arrested for alleged violations in relation to their peaceful activities in support of women's rights.

### **Imprisonment for Collecting Signatures**

Zeinab Peyghambarzadeh: This woman's rights and student activist was the first member of the Campaign to be arrested. She was arrested on 15 December 2006 while collecting signatures on the Metro in support of the Campaign's petition. She spent five days in detention, and was released on a third party guarantee on 19

December 2006, after she was charged with “acting against national security.” She is awaiting a court trial.

Nasim Sarabandi and Fatemeh Dehdashti: These two women’s rights activists were arrested on 10 January 2007, also while collecting signatures on the Metro. They were both held in Gisha detention center for one day and released. While at first it appeared that the case against them was closed, they received a summons in April 2007, and were charged by the Security Branch of the Revolutionary Court with “acting against national security.” Their trial was held on 12 August 2007. The judge sentenced them to six- month suspended prison sentences, for a period of two years. They have both appealed their cases.

Saeedeh Amin, Sara Imanian, Mahboubeh Hosseinzadeh, Nahid Keshavarz, and Homayoun Nami: These Campaign activists were arrested on 2 April 2007 while collecting signatures in Laleh Park. Security forces turned over the detainees to the office of Amaken (in charge of monitoring immoral behavior in public places) at Niloufar Square. After spending hours being questioned there, the detainees were transferred to the Vozara detention center where they spent the night. The next day, three of the detainees– Sara Imanian, Saeedeh Amin, and Homayoun Nami– were freed on their personal guarantees. Nahid Keshavarz and Mahboubeh Hosseinzadeh were transferred to Evin prison. Their transfer to Evin took place despite the fact that, during their appearance in the Revolutionary Court, they were told that they would be freed after posting bail. Mahboubeh and Nahid remained in detention in Evin’s public ward for 13 days. They were eventually released on 15 April, with a third party guarantee in the amount of 20 million Tomans (US \$22,222), paid only if they flee. Before leaving Evin prison, the authorities told them they were charged with “acting against national security through propaganda against the Order.” These activists are awaiting trial.

Ehteram Shadfar (62 years old, a mother and a campaigner) and her neighbor were arrested on 10 June 2007. Ehteram’s neighbor, a 50-year old woman involved in the Campaign, who wishes to remain

anonymous, was arrested while collecting signatures. She was asked to provide the name of the person who provided her with the petition and Campaign materials. Subsequently, the officers escorted the 50-year old neighbor to the home of Ehteram Shadfar, after which both women were transferred first to the police station (Amaken office) at Niloufar Square where a detention order for 24 hours was issued for them and then transferred to the Vozara detention center, where they were detained for 24 hours. At the security branch of the Revolutionary Court, Shadfar and her neighbor were released with their own personal guarantees. The neighbor's judicial case was declared closed, but on 19 February 2007, Shadfar was sentenced to a six-month suspended prison sentence for the period of two years.

Amir Yaghoob-ali was arrested on 11 July 2007 while collecting signatures in Andisheh Park. He was transferred to solitary confinement in Evin prison's ward 209. When Amir's mother asked the judge what the charges against her son were, the judge told her: "Amir is a man. Why is he involved in women's issues? He should pay attention to his studies." Amir's detention became lengthy, so in an effort to follow-up his case, members of the Mothers Committee of the Campaign wrote a letter to the head of the Judiciary branch, protesting Amir's detention, and demanding proper judicial processes. Amir was released after 28 days of solitary confinement, and upon posting bail in the amount of 20 million Tomans (US\$22,222). Amir Yagoubali's trial was held on 25 February on the charge of "actions against national security" and "spreading propaganda against the state." According to his lawyer, Nasrin Sotoodeh, Yagoubali pleaded not guilty on these charges.[33] He is awaiting the court's decision with respect to his trial.

Ronak Safazadeh and Hana Abadi: Security forces detained Ronak Safazadeh, a women's rights activist in Sanandaj, at her home on 9 October 2007. According to her family, Ronak, along with her friend Hana Abdi, participated in a celebration on the occasion of Children's Day, during which they distributed copies of the Campaign's literature. As they engaged in signature collection, a security agent

took the sign-up sheet away from Ronak. The next morning security forces went to Ronak's and Hana's homes at 7:00 in the morning. They couldn't find Hana, but detained Ronak as she was walking to work. Then they entered her house, searched it, and confiscated some of Ronak's personal belongings. Initially Ronak was transferred to the local branch of the Intelligence Ministry. After several months in detention at the local office of the Intelligence Ministry in Kurdistan, Ronak was transferred to the public ward of Sanandaj prison in February, 2008, where she remains as of this writing. According to her lawyer, Mohammad Sharif, a trial was held for Ronak, who was charged with security violations on 13 March 2008.[34]

Hana Abdi: A month after Ronak's detention, Hana Abdi, another women's rights activist, was detained on 4 November 2007. Hana had been collecting signatures together with Ronak on 8 October. According to her family, intelligence agents detained Hana at her grandfather's home in Sanandaj. After detaining her, the agents went to her house, confiscating her computer and Campaign literature. As of this writing, Hana is detained at the Sanandaj prison's public ward, awaiting trial for security violations. She is also being represented by Mohamad Sharif.

Mohammad Sharif has objected to illegal interrogations in Ronak's and Hana's cases. He has cited their long stay in solitary confinement and pressures by the security officials to obtain confessions to justify his objections. Additionally, he has objected to the court's refusal to free his clients on bail.[35]

Ronak, 21 years old and a graphic artist, has been active in local women's organizations and is a member of the Azarmehr Women's Association in Kurdistan. Hana is also 21 years old and studies psychology at Payam Noor University in Birjand.

Raheleh Asgarizadeh and Nasim Khosravi: These two women's rights activists were arrested on 14 February 2008 while collecting signatures at Daneshjoo Park following a street play about polygamy, which was performed as part of the international Fajr film festival.

Security forces first took the detainees to the local police station branch 129 (Jami), then to the Security Police No. 8 where they were interrogated. They were subsequently transferred to Vozara detention center, where they spent two nights in detention. On 16 February, the Revolutionary Court set bail in the amount of 20 million Tomans (US\$22,222) for the two young women. Not being able to meet such heavy bail, they were transferred to Evin prison's public ward. The two were finally released on 26 February on a third party guarantee bail amount of 10 million tomans (\$11,000), paid only if they flee.

### **Imprisonment for Writing of Articles**

Maryam Hosseinkhah: This woman's rights activist and member of the Campaign, who is also a journalist and Internet blogger, was arrested on 18 November 2007, in relation to her activities and writings in support of women's rights. She had received a summons to appear at the security branch of the Revolutionary Court on 15 November 2004. During her interrogation on 17 November, she was charged with acting against national security, publication of lies, and disturbing public opinion by writing for the Campaign's website (Change for Equality) and the Zanestan website (belonging to the Women's Cultural Center). She returned the next day for more interrogations but bail was set in the amount of 100 million tomans (US \$ 111,000), which her family could not afford. She was transferred to Evin prison's public ward on 18 November. She was in detention for 45 days as her family could not afford such heavily bail. She was eventually released when her bail amount was reduced to a bank guarantee in the amount of 5 million toman (US\$5,555).

Jelveh Javaheri: This member of the Campaign was detained on similar charges to those against Maryam Hosseinkhah, and in relation to her writings for the Campaign's website. She was summoned to the security branch number one of the Revolutionary Court. After interrogation, she was charged with "disturbing public opinion, propaganda against the state, publication of lies for writing for the site

of the Campaign (Change for Equality).” Her bail was set at 50 million toman (US\$ 55,555), which her family was unable to post. After 30 days in prison, she was eventually released when her bail amount was reduced to a bank guarantee in the amount of 5 million toman (US\$5,555).

Both Maryam and Jelveh are awaiting court hearings and their cases remain open. In addition to Maryam Hosseinkhah and Jelve Javaheri, Parvin Ardalan and Nahid Keshavarz have both been summoned to court and charged with security charges in relation to their activities and writings on the site of the Campaign and the site of Zanestan, the webzine of the Women’s Cultural Center. Nahid Keshavarz was summoned to court on the 13th of January, 2008, and charged with actions against national security, through propaganda against the state.[36] Parvin Ardalan was summoned to court on April 6, 2008 and charged with propaganda against the state. The cases against these activists are pending.

### **Imprisonment for Convening Meetings**

Detention of 25 participants during an educational workshop in Khorramabad: On 14 September 2007, police violently attacked an educational workshop arranged by the Campaign in the private home of a volunteer in the city of Khorramabad. Only a few minutes into the start of the workshop, 10 armed policemen, both uniformed and in plain-clothes, accompanied by three female police officers, broke into the house violently. From the moment of their entrance, they attacked the host, severely beating him with their gun barrels and kicking him. The police officers searched the house, insulted the participants, confiscated personal items, and detained all the participants. The men were taken out of the house in handcuffs; the women screamed in protest, refusing to be handcuffed. Upon being taken outside, the participants, to their amazement, encountered a crowd who had gathered to watch their arrest. The police had told the crowd that the participants were arrested for participating in a gathering that



promoted debauchery. Twenty local participants, along with the five campaigners from Tehran, including, Nafiseh Azad, Zara Amjadian, Jelveh Javaheri, Mansoureh Shojaii, and Nazli Farrakhi, who conducted the workshop, were released after a period of 12 hours, along with most other participants. Reza Dowlatshah, Bahman Azadi, and Khosrow Nasimpour, three local social activists from Khorramabad, however, were held for three days. They were released on the evening of 16 September. All these individuals are awaiting trial and no information exists on the status of their case.

Khadijeh Moghaddam: This woman's rights and civil society activist and member of the Mother's Committee of the Campaign, was arrested on 8 April 2008 after security police forcibly entered her home. She spent seven days in solitary confinement at Vozara detention center. Originally a bail amount of 100 million Tomans (roughly \$110,000) was issued for her release. But on Tuesday 15 April, this amount was reduced to a third party guarantee, after which she was transferred to Evin prison. Moghaddam was released on 16 April after spending two days in Evin's public ward. In repeated interrogations sessions, the special court investigator of the security branch of the Revolutionary Court charged Moghaddam with actions against national security, disruption of public opinion, and propaganda against the state, through the convening of gatherings related to the Campaign in her private home. Prior to this, Moghaddam had been called in for interrogation by the Security Police in relation to Campaign gatherings in her home. As of this writing, she is free on bail and awaiting trial.[37]

### **Lack of Freedom to Assemble for Campaign Activists**

Authorities have also systematically thwarted efforts by Campaign activists to convene meetings and gatherings in their homes. Since these activists have been denied permits to use public spaces for their meetings, they contend that they have no choice but to hold meetings in their homes. They further contend that convening

meetings and gatherings in private homes is legal and does not endanger national security, as claimed by security and judiciary officials. According to Change for Equality, the website of the Campaign, the following individuals have been harassed for holding meetings and gatherings in their private homes, demonstrating the intent of security officials to obstruct and prevent their freedom of assembly: “In Tehran, the security police has summoned and interrogated Nafiseh Azad, Parastoo Allahyari, Najmeh Zare, Behnaz Shekaryar, Nasrin Farhoumand, and Khadijeh Moghadam for holding meetings at their private homes, or attending meetings of the Campaign. According to reports from the provinces, campaign members have also been interrogated in other cities, including in Isfahan, Shiraz, Kermanshah, Anzali, Rasht, and Hamedan.”[38]

### **Travel Bans Issued for Members of the Campaign**

On March 3, 2008 Parvin Ardalan, who was awarded the Olof Palme Award for her activism on behalf of women’s rights, was on her way to Stockholm to take part in an event in her honor organized by the Olof Palme Foundation. At the last minute, despite having made it through the security and passport control check points, she was pulled off the plane and told that she was under a travel ban.[39] Ardalan was summoned to court on April 6, 2008, in relation to her activities and writings in support of women’s rights on the site of the Campaign, Change for Equality, and Zanestan, the site of the Women’s Cultural Center. No information regarding her travel ban was provided during this court session.[40] The ban imposed on Ardalan is a continuation of a policy designed to limit the access of women’s rights defenders, and especially Campaign members, to the international community, through barring them from travel. Similarly, on 9 March 2008, Mansoureh Shajaie, also a member of the Campaign, while on her way to Dubai was told that she was barred from travel. Prior to this trip, Security officials contacted Nasrin Sotoodeh, a lawyer representing many Campaign activists, who was due to travel to Dubai with Shojaie, to warn her against travel. While a

travel ban was not imposed on Sotoodeh, she decided to forgo the trip, when her colleague Shojaie was stopped at the airport.[41] Also, Talat Taghinia, was barred from travel while on her way to Morocco on 10 January 2008, where she intended to vacation.[42] Sussan Tahmasebi, also a member of the One Million Signatures Campaign, was stopped at the airport on 23 October 2008. She was told that she had to forfeit her laptop computer before boarding the plane. Harassment by security officials at Mehrabad Airport, who had confiscated her passport, in an effort to secure her laptop, resulted in her missing her flight.[43] The Iranian security forces have a long history of banning intellectuals and activists from travel, confiscating their passports, and harassing them into choosing not to travel abroad. This policy, intended to isolate the activists involved in the One Million Signatures Campaign, is a continuation of a long-standing policy of the security forces against activists, aimed at creating fear and isolation.

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