

Human Rights Watch

Torture, Former Combatants, Political Prisoners, Terror Suspects, & Terrorists

<https://www.hrw.org/news/2005/02/07/iran-political-prisoners-held-violent-criminals>

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Hunger Strikers Protest Conditions

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The confinement of political prisoners in Iran together with violent criminals endangers their lives, Human Rights Watch said today. Human Rights Watch called for the immediate release of all prisoners held for the peaceful expression of political opinions.

Six prisoners in Rajaii Shahr prison near Karaj, a suburb of Tehran, launched a hunger strike on January 25 to protest their confinement with dangerous and belligerent criminals who have assaulted and intimidated them. The six prisoners are Bina Darab-Zand, Arzhang Davoodi, Hojat Zamani, Mehrdad Lohrasbi, Farzad Hamidi, and Jaafar Iqdami. Prior to their hunger strike, Farzad Hamidi was assaulted inside the prison by a well-known drug dealer who threatened his life.

Bina Darab-Zand and Farzad Hamidi were arrested last June in front of the United Nations building in Tehran during a protest against human rights violations in Iran. Darab-Zand was sentenced to three and half years imprisonment for his participation in the protest. Mehrdad Lohrasbi was arrested during the student protests at Tehran University in 1999 and is serving a 15-year prison term.

Iranian authorities regularly claim they hold no prisoners for political reasons. This has absolutely no credibility, said Joe Stork, Washington director of Human Rights Watch's Middle East division. These prisoners are being held for no reason other than their expression of peaceful political views.

Human Rights Watch is extremely concerned for the safety and health of prisoners who are on hunger strike. After the first week of hunger strike, the health of one of the prisoners, Mehrdad Lohrasbi, deteriorated so considerably that other prisoners asked him to end his participation in the hunger strike.

We hold the Iranian government responsible for these prisoners' lives and well-being, Stork said. Confining them with violent criminals could certainly endanger their lives.

Human Rights Watch said Iran has recently intensified its harsh treatment of political activists. The judiciary is handing down lengthy prison sentences following unfair trials of critics.

In one recent case, Heshmatallah Tabarzadi, a student leader, was sentenced by Tehran's revolutionary court on December 26 to sixteen years in prison for propaganda against the regime and acting against national security. Human Rights Watch said that his trial was held behind closed doors and in the absence of his lawyer. The judge's final ruling cites interviews with foreign radio, writing letters to the Leader, and disseminating statements against the regime as the basis for the harsh sentence.

None of these activities are crimes in any recognized sense, said Stork. Iranians should be able to speak their minds without putting their lives at risk.

Human Rights Watch urged the Iranian government to end its harassment and prosecution of peaceful activists, writers, and journalists.

The Iranian government is well aware of the intense public scrutiny of its human rights record. A minimum requirement for improving the human rights conditions in Iran is the unconditional release of all prisoners held solely for their political beliefs, said Stork.

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