

Increasing crackdown on Iranian human rights defenders

Paris-Geneva, February 3, 2009. The Observatory for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders, a joint programme of the International Federation for Human Rights and the World Organisation Against Torture (OMCT), firmly denounces the general crackdown on human rights defenders in the Islamic Republic of Iran.

As of February 2, 2009, Ms. **Jinus Sobhani**, administrative assistant of the Defenders of Human Rights Centre (DHRC), closed down in late December, was still detained incommunicado and was denied access to her lawyer^[1]. This detention seems to aim at exercising further pressure on the DHRC. The Observatory fears that the Iranian authorities might seek to obtain fake confessions from Ms. Sobhani in the framework of her detention, confessions that could subsequently be used against the DHRC since there are no legal grounds for its closure.

The Observatory was also informed that in the course of January, a nearly homonymous government-controlled organisation (governmental non-governmental organisation or GONGO), called the Students Defenders of Human Rights Centre, was established in Iran, with the probable objective to create an ambiguity with the DHRC. This visible attempt to muzzle the DHRC seems to come as a reaction to the increasing recognition inside and outside Iran of the quality of the work of the DHRC, which was even quoted as a source in the report of the United Nations Secretary General on the situation of human rights in the Islamic Republic of Iran^[2].

Another part of the muffling strategy against the DHRC is the censorship of its website from the very day it was launched, a few weeks ago. Access has indeed been denied, a message appearing on the computer's screen and explaining that “according to a decision of the judiciary, the DHRC has been closed down”.

Those attacks on the DHRC and its members take place amid another ongoing series of attacks on women's human rights defenders involved in the “One Million Signatures” campaign. On January 29, 2009, Ms. Alieh Eghdamdoust, sentenced to three years' imprisonment as a result of her participation in the June 12, 2006 protest in Haft Tir Square, was incarcerated in Evin prison, Tehran. Further, on January 30, Ms. Nafiseh Azad was arrested while collecting signatures. She remains detained in Vozara Detention Centre.

“We are particularly concerned with the multiform muffling strategies that are increasingly used by the Iranian authorities in order to intensify their crackdown on all segments of the independent civil society” said Karim Lahidji, President of the Iranian League for the Defence of Human Rights (LDDHI) and FIDH Vice-President.

“The creation of this GONGO is symptomatic of policies of repression used by the Iranian Government, which are in clear violation of Iran's international obligations, including the United Nations

Declaration on Human Rights Defenders. Civil society in Iran nevertheless remains dynamic and the “One Million Signatures Campaign” is still gaining in popularity, its members being as a consequence continuously subjected to harsh repression”, said Eric Sottas, OMCT Secretary General.

Accordingly, the Observatory calls upon the Iranian authorities:

- to guarantee in all circumstances the physical and psychological integrity of Ms. Sobhani, Ms. Eghdamdoust and Ms. Azad;
- to take prompt action in order to locate Ms. Sobhani and make public her whereabouts;
- to release Ms. Sobhani, Ms. Eghdamdoust, and Ms. Azad immediately and unconditionally since their detention is arbitrary as it only aims at sanctioning their human rights activities;
- to stop any kind of harassment against them, all women human rights defenders and all DHRC members, and more generally against all human rights defenders in Iran;
- to reopen the DHRC as it is subjected to an arbitrary closure, in violation of international human rights standards on freedom of association;
- more generally, to conform with the United Nations Declaration on Human Rights Defenders, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights as well as international human rights instruments ratified by Iran.

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[1] On January 24, in particular, Ms. Sobhani's lawyer met with the instructing judge and was denied access to his client.

[2] See Report A/63/459, October 1, 2008.

L'OMCT a son siège à Genève, en Suisse. Elle coordonne le réseau SOS-Torture composé de 282 organisations régionales et internationales dans 93 pays sur cinq continents.
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