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Middle East/North Africa - Iran

woman journalist arrested

Ailing woman journalist arrested, government decrees new media controls

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Reporters Without Borders strongly condemns the arrest of **Narges Mohammadi**, a journalist and spokesperson of Nobel peace laureate Shirin Ebadi's Centre for Human Rights Defenders. She was detained in the northern city of Zanjan on 21 April after receiving an intelligence ministry summons and was transferred to Tehran's Evin prison to serve a six-year jail sentence.

The press freedom organization also deplores a 21 April government decree making it obligatory for news agencies and other news media to always identify the source of any information they publish.

Originally arrested at her home on 10 June 2010, Mohammadi had a nervous breakdown and became seriously ill while held, and was provisionally released on 2 July 2010. She was sentenced two months later to 11 years in prison on charges of collaborating with the Human Rights Defenders Centre, "meeting and conspiring against the Islamic Republic" and anti-government propaganda. The sentence was reduced to six years on appeal on 4 March 2011.

Mohammadi's husband, fellow journalist **Taghi Rahmani**, told Reporters Without Borders he is very worried about her deteriorating health. Rahmani, who has worked for many media since 1981, has also been constantly harassed by the security services and has spent a total of 14 years in Iranian prisons. He finally fled the country earlier this year.

Adopted at a cabinet meeting on 21 April, the decree defining "executive regulation of the press law" states that its goal is "organizing the activities of news agencies and electronic media and exercising more control over their work." It says news agencies, like other media, must "identify the origin of the information they publish" and are "forbidden to quote information from websites that have been blocked or newspapers that have been suspended."

When parliament amended the press law in August 2009, it added the following phrase to the first article: "News agencies have the same rights and responsibilities as the print media."

The Islamic Republic's first press law, adopted in 1985, aimed to implement the constitution's vague statement of media freedom principles but it was also very imprecise. It was reinforced by an explicitly repressive package of measures that conservatives rushed through the fifth parliament in April 2000 with the aim of reining in the reformist press. Since then, the judicial authorities have repeatedly banned reformist newspapers.
