

Reporters Without Borders

<http://www.rsf.org/iran-press-freedom-violations-recounted-21-01-2015,47521.html>

Middle East/North Africa - Iran

Press freedom violations recounted in real time January 2015

3 June 2015

03.06.2015 - Long jail term for woman blogger

Reporters Without Borders is appalled to learn that blogger and human rights activist **Atena Ferghdani** was sentenced to 12 years and nine months in prison on 2 June.

Ferghdani had been held for the past five months on charges of "activities against national security," "anti-government propaganda by means for performance art," and "insulting government officials and parliamentary representatives in a published cartoon."

She was arrested on 11 January when she responded to a summons from a Tehran court for posting [a video](#) on Facebook and YouTube on 26 December in which she described her experiences in Section 2A of Tehran's Evin Prison – a section controlled by Revolutionary Guards – after a previous arrest last August.

"I was interrogated for nine hours a day," she said in the video. "The questions were mainly about my activities and what I posted on Facebook (...) In the bathroom, they had installed cameras that filmed everything we did. I found it very embarrassing. When I protested, the guards said they were turned off (...) but one day I took a plastic cup back to my cell and guards arrived within two minutes and tore my blouse in order to get it back. I just wanted to use it to do drawings."

Her family said that during her court appearance in January she hit by guards as she was being taken off to prison. "The guards slapped my daughter right in front of us," her father told journalists. She was put with non-political detainees in Gharchak prison in Varamin, a municipality south of Tehran.

She was hospitalized on 27 February, 18 days after beginning a hunger strike. Her lawyer, Mohammad Moghimi, said she "had a heart attack and was taken to Firozgar Hospital in Sharrai." She was transferred to Evin prison a week later.

Two other human rights defenders, **Atena Daemi** and **Omid AliShenas**, were sentenced to 14 and 10 years in prison respectively the same day.

19.05.2015 – Association of Iranian Writers targeted again

Reporters Without Borders condemns the latest case of judicial harassment of Iran's writers and journalists.

Several members of the executive bureau of the Association of Iranian Writers were summoned and interrogated from 3 to 5 May. They included **Reza Khandan Mahabadi**, who has been charged with "anti-government publicity" and "publishing a newspaper illegally." The charges refer to the association's Facebook page.

Plainclothes officers from the intelligence ministry searched his Tehran home on 29 April, confiscating his computer, hard drives and manuscripts.

Iranian civil society's oldest organization, the Association of Iranian Writers has been banned under both of the Shah's two regimes and the Islamic revolution. Two of its leaders, the writers and journalists **Mohamad Makhtari** and **Mohamad Jafar Pouyandeh**, were murdered in 1998.

18.05.2015 - Journalist freed on completing six-year jail term

Reporters Without Borders has learned that the journalist **Kaivan Samimi Behbahani** was released on 16 May on completing a six-year jail sentence on charges of “publishing false information with the aim of disturbing public opinion” and “activities against national security.”

The former editor of *Nameh* (The Letter), an independent monthly closed by the authorities in 2005, Behbahani was arrested on 13 June 2009, the day after President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's disputed reelection, and was convicted on 2 February 2010.

He was also banned from working as a journalist and, all the time he was held in an individual cell in Section 209 of Tehran's Evin prison and in various sections of Rajaishahr prison, he was subjected to a great deal of pressure to renounce his journalistic commitments.

27.04.2015 – Prestigious women's monthly suspended

Reporters Without Borders condemns today's decision by the Press Authorization and Surveillance Committee to suspend the women's monthly *Zanan Emroz* (“Women” in Persian) under paragraph 2 of article 6 of the press code, which bans “content and photos encouraging prostitution and vices contrary to public decency.”

The suspension was prompted by a special issue about “white marriage” – cohabiting without contracting a formal Islamic marriage, a growing trend among young couples. Entitled “White Marriage, social ill or cure,” the issue elicited angry reactions from conservative media that support Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei.



Zanan was previously suspended in January 2008 for publishing “content harmful to society's psychological tranquillity.” The Press Authorization and Surveillance Committee gave it permission to resume publishing in June 2013.

14.04.2015 - Newspaper journalist freed on bail

Reporters Without Borders has learned that **Yaghma Fashkhami**, a political reporter for the pro-reform daily *Roozan*, has been released on bail pending trial after being held for three and a half months. He was freed on 11 April.

Plainclothes intelligence officers arrested him on 24 December, a day after the prosecutor's office closed the newspaper because of an alleged “irregularity” in the supplement it published with its 20 December issue to mark the fifth anniversary of [Ayatollah Hossein Ali Montazeri's](#) death.

The public prosecutor has given his permission for the newspaper to resume publishing in a letter to the deputy minister of culture and Islamic guidance dated 23 March.

09.03.2015 - Four website activists freed after three and a half years

Reporters Without Borders is relieved to learn that four lawyers and contributors to the Sufi news website [Majzooban Noor](#) – **Afshin Karampour, Amir Islami, Farshid Yadollahi** and **Omid Behrouzi** – were released on 2 March as a result of a court decision to halve their jail sentences.

Arrested in raids in Tehran and Shiraz from 8 to 10 September 2011, they were sentenced to seven years in prison at the end of an unfair trial before a Tehran revolutionary court on 13 July 2013. Last December, a Tehran appeal court reduced their jail terms to three and a half years (plus a suspended 30-month term).

six other contributors to the site who were given jail terms ranging from six to ten years – **Reza Entesari, Hamidreza Moradi, Mostafa Abdi, Kasra Nouri, Salehldin Moradi, and Mostafa Daneshjo** – are still detained.

27.02.2015 - Authorities block two websites

Reporters Without Borders condemns the blocking of two websites since yesterday at the behest of judicial officials. They are [Jamaran](#), the official site of the Islamic Republic's late founder, Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, and [Bahar](#), a site that support Iran's reformers.

The judicial authorities ordered them blocked for posting a photo of former President Mohammad Khatami attending the mourning of a member of the Khomeini family.

Judicial system spokesman Golamhossien Mohsseni Ejeji told the media on 16 February [that any coverage of Khatami](#) was henceforth banned at the behest of the High Council for National Security and Justice. Media that ignored the prohibition would be subjected to publishing bans or other sanctions, he warned.

23.02.2015 – Journalist arrested to serve old jail sentence

Reporters Without Borders condemns the 21 February arrest of **Ali Maghamai**, a journalist and son-in-law of a prominent human rights defender, to begin serving a jail sentence he received more than a year ago.

Originally arrested on 27 December 2010 and then released on bail, Maghamai, was sentenced to four months in prison on 11 January 2014. He was also given a suspended eight-month jail sentence. He did not appeal and was not told that an appeal court had upheld the sentence.

The editor of the networking section of a website specializing in information technology, Maghamai also worked for several reformist newspapers including *Mardom Emroz*, [which was closed last month](#).

Like *Mardom Emroz* editor **Mohammed Ghoochani**, he is the son-in-law of **Emadoldin Baghi**, a leading journalist and defender of prisoner rights who has been hounded by the authorities.

Prosecutors attached to the Tehran "media and culture" court charged Ghoochani on 26 January with "insulting Islam" for publishing a front-page photo of US actor George Clooney under an "I am Charlie" headline on 13 January.

The Islamic Republic's intelligence services still often harass the relatives of leading journalists and human rights defenders as a way of putting pressure on the media.

13.02.2015 - Six months in jail and 74 lashes for "insults"

Reporters Without Borders condemns the six-month jail sentence imposed on former journalist **Abass Salimi Namin**, who heads an Iranian history research society and edits its website (<http://www.irhistory.com/index.php>).

In an [open letter](#) on 2 February revealing the sentence and requesting the help of his colleagues, he denounced "the repeated and baseless complaints" brought against him by the prosecutor and "the profits made by those who own power and wealth."

Namin was given the six-month sentence for his comments about former President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad in a 2011 TV debate, in which he said "Ahmadinejad's extravagance was the result of the conservatives' silence." He was also sentenced to 74 lashes and a fine for insulting the judicial authorities and those running the University of Tehran.

Namin used edit to *Kyhan Havai* – a supplement of the newspaper Kyhan that was targeted at diaspora Iranians and stopped publishing in 1998 – and for years was one of a number of journalists known to have close links with the intelligence services.

03.02.2015 - Court closes online paper run by Ahmadinejad supporters

Reporters Without Borders condemns the Tehran culture and media court's decision to close the online newspaper *HMA*, which derives its name from the initials of "Supporters of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad" in Persian.

[The newspaper posted the court's decision on its front page today](#). Issued on 26 January, the ruling said *HMA* is to be closed under paragraph D of article 7 of the press law for "publishing without permission," and in order to "prevent the occurrence of a crime" under paragraph 5 of article 156 of the constitution.

President from 2005 to 2013 and, like Supreme [Leader Ali Khamenei](#), named as a Predator of Press Freedom by Reporters Without Borders, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad was one of the architects of a relentless crackdown on opposition politicians, journalists and human rights defenders accompanied by Stalinist-style trials.

Dozens of newspapers were closed during his two terms in office and more than 200 journalists and bloggers were arrested after his controversial reelection in June 2009. Some of them are still in prison.

29.01.2015 – Reformist weekly closed "to prevent a crime"

Reporters Without Borders condemns the closure of the reformist weekly *Setareh Sobh* (Dawn Star) by Tehran's culture and media court on 12 January. The court said it was closed to "prevent the occurrence of a crime" under paragraph 5 of article 156 of the constitution.*

In its 10 January issue, the weekly published an open letter by Ali Motahari, a moderate conservative parliamentary representative for Tehran, to Mohammad Sadegh Amoli Larijani, the head of the Judicial Authority.

It criticized Larijani's claim that the detention of the three leaders of the protest movement against President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's controversial reelection in 2009 was "legal and ordered by the High Council for National Security."

The three detainees include two 2009 presidential candidates. They are **Mir Hossein Mousavi**, a former prime minister and owner of the closed newspaper *Kalameh Sabaz*, and **Mehdi Karoubi**, a former parliamentary speaker and owner of the closed newspaper *Etemad Melli*. The third detainee is Mousavi's wife, best-selling author **Zahra Rahnavard**.

Detained on 24 February 2011, they have been held under house arrest and denied all rights.

Before its closure, *Setareh Sobh* had been planning to publish its first issue as a national daily this week.

*Article 156 of the Iranian constitution: The judiciary is an independent power, the protector of the rights of the individual and society, responsible for the implementation of justice, and entrusted with the following duties:

1. Investigating and passing judgement on grievances, violations of rights, and complaints; the resolution of litigation; the settling of disputes; and the taking of all necessary decisions and measures in probate matters as the law may determine;
2. Restoring public rights and promoting justice and legitimate freedoms;
3. Supervising the proper enforcement of laws;
4. Uncovering crimes; prosecuting, punishing, and chastising criminals; and enacting the penalties and provisions of the Islamic penal code; and

5. Taking suitable measures to prevent the occurrence of crime and to reform criminals.

27.01.2015 - Newspaper editor charged with insulting Islam

Reporters Without Borders has learned that **Mohammed Ghoochani**, the editor of the reformist daily *Mardom Emroz*, was charged yesterday before a Tehran "media and culture" court with "insulting Islam" for publishing a front-page photo of US actor George Clooney under an "I am Charlie" headline on 13 January.

Ghoochani's lawyer, Mahmoud Alizadeh-Tabatabaie, said he was granted a provisional release pending trial after payment of 100 million toman (100,000 euros) in bail. *Mardom Emroz* was closed on 17 January.

Reporters Without Borders has also learned that **Mehrdad Sarjoui**, a Tehran-based journalist who used to work for several English-language newspapers, was released on 13 January after being deemed to have completed his main sentence.

Sarjoui was returned to prison on 28 November 2012 after getting a three-year jail sentence and a suspended seven-year sentence. He was previously arrested on 14 January 2011 and sentenced to 10 years in prison by a Tehran court on a charge of "espionage by publishing interviews of citizens of enemy countries." An appeal court subsequently commuted the sentence.

21.01.2015 - Journalist and rights activist arrested at her home

Reporters Without Borders has learned that **Zahra Khandan**, a former journalist with several reformist news outlets who defends women's rights online, was arrested at her Tehran home on 19 January by Revolutionary Guard intelligence operatives in plain clothes. Her home was also searched. The authorities have not said why she was arrested or where she is being held.

According to the information obtained by Reporters Without Borders, several other women's rights activists have been arrested in Tehran after campaigning for the release of **Mahdieh Golro**, a fellow activist arrested during a protest outside the parliament building in Tehran on 22 October in protest against a series [of acid attacks on women in Isfahan and Tehran](#).

20.01.2015 - Young woman arrested in court over Facebook video

Reporters Without Borders condemns young human rights activist **Atena Ferghdani's** arrest in a Tehran court on 11 January when she responded to a summons about the [video she posted](#) on Facebook and YouTube on 26 December in which she described what happened to her after her arrest last August.

After her arrest on 24 August, she was incarcerated in Section 2A of Tehran's Evin Prison – a section controlled by Revolutionary Guards – and was held until 2 November, when she was released on bail on 600 million toman (700,000 euros) pending trial.

"I was interrogated for nine hours a day," she said in the video. "The questions were mainly about my activities and what I posted on Facebook (...) In the bathroom, they had installed cameras that filmed everything we did. I found it very embarrassing. When I protested, the guards said they were turned off (...) but one day I took a plastic cup back to my cell and guards arrived within two minutes and tore my blouse in order to get it back. I just wanted to use it to do drawings."

Ferghdani is charged with "activities against national security," "anti-government propaganda by means for performance art," and "insulting government officials and parliamentary representatives in a published cartoon."

Her family said that during her appearance in court she was the victim of violence by the guards who took her off to prison. "The guards slapped my daughter right in front of us," her father told journalists. She is currently being held in Gharchak prison in Varamin, a city to the south of Tehran. It is a prison used for holding non-political detainees.

[Press freedom violations recounted in real time \(January-December 2014\)](#)

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[Press freedom violations recounted in real time \(June-December 2009\)](#)
