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Middle East/North Africa - Iran

Demand by families

RWB calls for independent inquiry into police search of Evin prison

24 April 2014

At least 12 political prisoners held in Section 350 of Tehran's Evin prison began a hunger strike on April 20 in protest against the outburst of violence during a raid on the prison by the security forces on April 17, in which around 50 people were injured including some political prisoners. They were joined the next day by 21 fellow prisoners. Seven inmates in Raji Shahr prison have since also joined the protest. Yesterday the head of Iran's prison organization, Gholamhossein Esmaili, was moved to a new position as head of the Tehran province's justice department on the orders of the head of the judiciary, Sadegh Amoli Larijani.

"Impunity prevails in Iran," said Réza Moïni, the head of the Reporters Without Borders Iran-Afghanistan desk. "So far none of those responsible for the systematic and flagrant human rights violations has been brought to justice."

"The fact that the director of the country's prison organization has been transferred after this blunder is a victory for the prisoners' families and for Iranian civil society. But we must get to the bottom of the circumstances of the police operation and, more generally, of the conditions in which political prisoners are held."

"These prisoners are deprived of medical care and are continually threatened, and their lives are in danger more than ever. We ask that the the UN special rapporteur on the human rights situation in Iran, Ahmed Shaheed, be allowed into Iran to conduct an independent investigation into this serious breach of the rights of political prisoners."

When prisoners' families visited Section 350 on 21 April, they were shocked to see their loved ones and relatives covered in bruises and with broken limbs, and most of them with their heads shaved.

Their accounts of what happened contradict the denials of the prison authorities and statements by the justice minister, Mostafa Pour Mohamadi, who said that "there were no assaults on prisoners while cells were being searched" and that "the assault allegations are not serious".

On 19 April, 74 prisoners in Section 350 wrote an open letter to the Tehran prosecutor giving their version of what they called 'an illegal and inhuman assault' adding that 'as witnesses to the crime, we demand that an inquiry be opened'."

After their families came to their support, some prisoners who had been placed in solitary confinement in Security Section 240 the day after the police raid were taken back to their cell block. However, some are still suffering from their injuries and have received no medical attention.

"They want to remove all trace of what they did, so that there is no proof of their crime," one prisoner's wife told Reporters Without Borders. "Evin has turned into Abu Ghraib!"

Two days ago, an adviser to the president agreed to meet a delegation of prisoners' families after a gathering took place outside the presidential palace. [Among their demands were](#) "the dismissal of the justice minister, the formation of a commission of inquiry, the return of all prisoners from solitary confinement, medical treatment for all injured detainees and an opportunity for prisoners to contact their families".

The next day, [government spokesman Mohammad Baghar Nobakhat](#) announced during an interview with the *ISNA* news agency "the creation by the government of a commission of

inquiry, which will publish its report shortly". That evening, state [television broadcast](#) an interview with the prison organization head Esmaili, accompanied by images of the inspection of cells, showing "cell phones, makeshift radios and headphones" which he said could be used to "contact enemy news media and tell them what was going on in the prison". Images were also shown of "prisoners breaking the glass in the door". Some of the images had already been shown a year earlier in the program "Behind the Bars in Iran" on [Press TV](#), the Islamic Republic English-language television station.

Yesterday, judiciary head Larijani removed the director of the prison organization, Gholamhossein Esmaili, and put him in charge of the Tehran province's justice department. On the same day Iran's public prosecutor, [Gholam Hossein Mohseni Ejei](#), told a press briefing that the move "had been decided 50 days ago and had nothing to do with the recent events in Section 350 of Evin prison", adding: "Mr. Esmaili is one of our best directors. His transfer is in reality a promotion."

At around 9 a.m. on 17 April, about 100 riot police, accompanied by Revolutionary Guards and Intelligence Ministry officials in civilian dress, began a major inspection of the cells in Section 350, where political prisoners are held.

According to relatives, when the prisoners objected to this irregular search and stayed in their cells to monitor their belongings, the police responded to the protest with extreme violence, smashing TV sets, equipment and personal effects.

Dozens of detainees were beaten and then placed in solitary confinement in Security Section 240, regardless of their injuries. They included journalists and bloggers such as **Mohammad Sadegh Kabovand, Hossein Ronaghi Malki, Mohammad Davari, Said Matinpour, Siamak Qaderi, Said Haeri and Yashar Darolshafa** and **Alireza Rajai**. They also included human rights lawyers **Abdolfattah Soltani** and **Hotain Dolati**, and **Behnam Ebrahimzadeh**, an activist in the workers' movement.

In an interview for the *ILNA* news agency, Iranian prison system director Esmaili denied "the false reports and rumours published by enemy news sites."

Nonetheless, according to the information obtained by Reporters Without Borders, the operation was prepared and organized by senior officials in the justice system, information department, Revolutionary Guards and Intelligence Ministry, and the presence of representatives from all of these departments during the raid was no coincidence.

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