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Ahmadinejad in the United Nations

On September 23, 2008 members of various human rights organizations and activists who have left Iran for fear of persecution appeared in front of the United Nations building and hotel where Mahmoud Ahmadinejad was staying during his trip to New York City to protest the Iranian president's visit to address the General Assembly. Among the protesters were Iranian dissidents, former political prisoners, royalists, members of disbanded groups, and many others opposed to the oppressive policies of the Islamic Republic both inside and outside Iran.

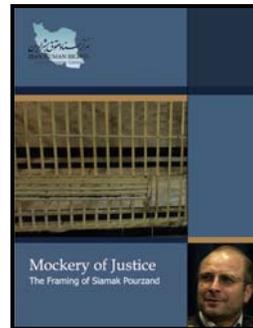
Dr. Ramin Ahmadi, one of the founders of the IHRDC was invited to speak at the "Wall of Shame" rally organized by the nonprofit group Stop Child Execution Campaign. Coordinated by Nazanin Afshin-Jam, Iranian-Canadian former Miss Canada, the rally which took place in front of the UN brought attention to the execution (or impending execution) of individuals under the age of 18 by the Islamic Republic. In addition, Ramin Ahmadi also discussed other under-age victims of Iran's orchestrated campaign of violence. "I talked about two of the victims of the Chain Murders, which was a government led campaign to wipe out Iranian dissidents inside of Iran," Dr. Ahmadi said. "I thought it would be appropriate to speak of Hamid Hajizadeh and his son, Karoun, at the rally because Karoun was only nine years old when he was brutally stabbed to death along with his father in the summer of 1998."

Relevant News

- Mohammad Ali Mansouri, who was arrested in September of 2007 for having participated in a ceremony marking the 19th Anniversary of the 1988 prison massacre of political prisoners, was sentenced to 17 years' imprisonment. He is to be exiled and transferred to the notorious Gohardasht prison in Karaj, a suburb of Tehran.
- The trial for Jamal Rahmani and Rashed Abdollahi, University of Isfahan students who were arrested in June 2008, has come to a close. Both students were accused and convicted of having contacts with Kurdish opposition groups. Mr. Rahmani was sentenced to 6 years' imprisonment in Izeh, while Mr. Abdollahi received a 3 year discretionary sentence and was transferred to a prison in Masjed Soleiman.
- In October of 2008, the Iranian Judiciary announced that the execution of minors will be commuted where the defendant is convicted of drug-related offenses otherwise punishable by death. However, in cases where the death penalty is imposed for crimes of a private nature, such as murder, the Iranian Judiciary may not intervene and commute the sentence. Under Islamic *Shari'a* law, any pardoning of non-commutable offenses rests with the family members of the victim and not the government. Although a step in the right direction, the IHRDC and other human rights organizations will continue to push for an end to all executions in Iran.

IHRDC Releases New Report

On August 22, 2008, the IHRDC released its latest report: *Mockery of Justice, the Framing of Siamak Pourzand*. Siamak Pourzand, a journalist in his 70s, was abducted in November 2001 by IRI officials, held in a series of secret detention facilities, and forced to make a televised confession to a number of serious offenses he had not committed. Throughout his ordeal, the courts colluded in his mistreatment. The case against Mr. Pourzand was manufactured and exploited by hard-line conservatives in Iran's clerical establishment in order to discredit members of the reform movement.



Siamak Pourzand's case sheds much needed light on the parallel intelligence organizations run by the conservative establishment during Iran's short-lived reform era and the power they enjoyed. Mr. Pourzand was vilified in Iran's government-controlled media, imprisoned unlawfully, denied due process, denied a fair trial and forced into self-incrimination.

In a wider sense, Siamak Pourzand's treatment also discredits claims that the Islamic Republic allows the people of Iran to influence events in their country. Siamak Pourzand was an innocent victim exploited for the purpose of thwarting the will and mandate of the Iranian people for reform.

IHRDC Launches Online Database

On March 4, 2008 the IHRDC launched its new online human rights database, the *Aadel* Collection. The database uses innovative Optical Character Recognition (OCR) software to allow visitors to the IHRDC's website to browse scanned images of original documents in both Persian and Latin script.

The *Aadel* Database contains documents recovered by the IHRDC's investigations and reporting program and includes items such as rare newspapers, court records and personal memoirs that have been donated to the Center. This collection will provide human rights advocates, students, researchers, and historians around the world with an opportunity to search the IHRDC archives for documents relating to various human rights violations perpetrated by the Islamic Republic since 1979.

Most of the documents currently contained in the *Aadel* Database have been contributed by individuals and groups during the investigations of the various reports IHRDC has worked on. The Center will add materials relating to new investigations as they are recovered. It is the IHRDC's hope that the Iranian community will further contribute to the expansion and diversity of the database by sharing their documents and individual stories.

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Remembrance: 1988 Prison Massacre

In the summer of 1988, the Islamic Republic of Iran began a secret and massive execution campaign to wipe out all opponents imprisoned inside the country's jails. Between 4,500 and 5,000 Iranian prisoners of all ages, religions and political affiliations are believed to have been victims of this systematic campaign of violence. This August marked the 20th anniversary of the 1988 prison massacres.

Twenty years later, the events of the prison massacres and its victims are remembered. The Commemorative Committee for 1980s Massacre of Iranian Political Prisoners held a three day conference in Montreal, Canada. The conference featured panels composed of former political prisoners who witnessed and survived the prison massacres, including writer Iraj Mesdaghi, Amnesty International Representative Béatrice Vaugrante, University of Toronto Professor Shahrzad Mojab and female political prisoners Soudabeh Ardavan, Setareh Abbasi, and Shohreh Kia. IHRDC Board Member, Payam Akhavan, an expert in international human rights law and professor of international law at McGill University also participated in various panel discussions and presented a talk entitled "Accountability and Building Democracy."

In Stockholm, Sweden, the Association of Iranian Political Prisoners in Exile (AIPP) held a two day conference based on the themes of commemoration and justice. Ahmad Mossavi, who spent ten years in Iranian prisons and survived torture and execution, delivered the conference's opening remarks. Kaveh Shahrooz and Payam Akhavan also addressed the conference, calling on the international community to hold the Islamic Republic of Iran accountable for gross violations of human rights perpetrated during the campaign. Mitra Lager, another survivor of the massacres, spoke on behalf of her co-prisoner, who was executed along with her husband.

Since 1988, survivors and family members of the victims of the prison massacres have gathered, albeit under the watchful eye of Iranian security forces, at the site of the mass grave in Khavaran cemetery in Tehran to commemorate the murders of their loved ones. Last year several people were detained by the Ministry of Intelligence and taken to Section 209 of Evin Prison for participating in the commemoration ceremony. This year, the Islamic Republic of Iran attempted to prevent survivors and family members of the victims from commemorating the anniversary at the site of the mass grave.

The **Iran Human Rights Documentation Center** intends to document this dark chapter of Iranian history and will produce a report detailing events surrounding the prison massacres. It is IHRDC's hope that this report will help shed more light on the circumstances surrounding some of the most systematic and egregious human rights violations perpetrated by the Islamic Republic since 1979. The **IHRDC** invites all individuals who wish to assist in or contribute to the development of this project to contact the Center.

Spotlight on: Change for Equality Campaign

The Change for Equality, aka One Million Signatures Campaign, has been one of the most active and vocal movements focusing on women's rights in Iran. Active since 2006, the men and women who participate in the struggle for gender equality in Iran have raised awareness of this issue by seeking to petition the Iranian parliament to reform discriminatory laws related to marriage, divorce, honor killings, compulsory dress codes and punishment by stoning. Despite a general acceptance that the goals of organizations such as Change for Equality are not incompatible with the tenets of Islam, the One Million Signatures Campaign has encountered heavy resistance from the Iranian government. Only a week ago, the home of Sussan Tahmasebi, one of the campaign coordinators, was searched and her property seized by security officials. And a few weeks ago Esha Momeni, another campaign activist, was arrested and taken to Evin prison while on a family trip to Iran. In spite of these measures, the One Million Signatures Campaign remains active and steadfast in its goal of securing equal rights for all Iranian women.

Crackdown on the Bahá'ís

Since the inception of the Bahá'í faith, its followers have been systematically persecuted, harassed, humiliated and purged from Iranian universities and governmental organizations in Iran. The IHRDC has meticulously documented this persecution in its report entitled 'A Faith Denied: the Persecution of Bahá'ís of Iran.'

Within the past year, the government's anti-Bahá'í propaganda campaign has steadily intensified. In the spring of 2008, all seven members of "Yaran," the group that coordinates the activities of the Bahá'í community in Iran (in the absence of a National Spiritual Assembly) were arrested, held for several months and denied access to legal counsel. Bahá'í cemeteries in Isfahan and Yazd were attacked, and various reports indicate vandalism and confiscation of Bahá'í property.

In addition, the government has initiated a public petition seeking the dissolution of all Bahá'í institutions in Iran. Between July and October, the government-sponsored newspaper *Kayhan* published at least 60 articles featuring false information concerning the Bahá'í faith. Various anti-Bahá'í books and pamphlets have been published and disseminated by state organs, and there have been many reports of threatening phone calls and letters directed at members of the Bahá'í community.

The IHRDC condemns any and all acts of intolerance and hatred directed at this critically vulnerable community, and calls on government officials to cease their coordinated anti-Bahá'í activities immediately.

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