

Iranian regime accused of crimes against humanity

Condemning the continuing arbitrary arrests and illegal detention of journalists, many of whom are being held *incommunicado* for long periods, Reporters Without Borders today accused the Iranian regime of “crimes against humanity” and urged the international community to speak out.

“The systematic suppression of all criticism of the regime’s political and religious institutions is creating a climate of terror that forces journalists to censor themselves or flee the country,” Reporters Without Borders said. “Following arrest, journalists are held in secret locations in extremely harsh conditions and with long periods of solitary confinement, in flagrant violation of their most fundamental rights.”

The press freedom organisation added: “These *incommunicado* detentions, which can be regarded as forced disappearances and crimes against humanity, are violations of international law. The international community cannot continue to remain silent.”

The latest arrest is that of **Azad Lotpoury**, the editor of the Kurdish and Farsi-language newspaper *Yaneh*, who was arrested by intelligence ministry officials at his home in Sanandaj, in Kurdistan province, on 14 January. In a search of his home lasting several hours, computers and books were confiscated, the door and windows were broken and members of his family were insulted. It is not known why he was arrested or where he is being held.

Several journalists arrested more than 10 days ago are still being held in secret locations and their families and lawyers have received no information about them since their arrest. This is the case with **Kivan Mehrgan** of the daily *Etemaad*, **Nassrin Vaziri** of the *ILNA* news agency and **Abdolreza Tajik** of *Mashaallah Shamsolvaezin*, who is also the spokesman of the Association of Iranian Journalists and the Press Freedom Defence Committee.

The family of leading journalist and human rights activist **Emadoldin Baghi** is extremely worried about him since the short phone call he managed to make to them from Tehran’s Evin prison, during which he said: “I don’t feel very well.” His wife, Fatemeh Kamali-Ahmad-Sarai, said she was all the more concerned because intelligence ministry officials openly threatened him at the time of his

arrest on 28 December, telling him that if he did not modify his views, “it’s not sure you will remain alive.”

According to the information obtained by Reporters Without Borders, several of the journalists arrested in Tehran are under the control of the Revolutionary Guards and are being held in section 240 of Evin prison, where they are being subjected to a great deal of pressure to make confessions. Contrary to Iranian legal provisions, their names do not appear in the official prison registers or on the justice ministry website.

Nemat Ahmadi, a lawyer who represents several journalists including **Ali** and **Mahssa Hekmet** and **Mohammed Reza Zohdi**, told Reporters Without Borders: “The grounds given by the authorities for not allowing lawyers to see their clients is a change in judicial procedure not originally envisaged in the law. They added a period during the investigation in which the case is assigned to a ‘specialist’ before being sent to the prosecutor’s office, and during this special period, no information is given to the detainee’s relatives or lawyers.”

The Commission for Press Authorisation and Surveillance, an offshoot of the Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance, is meanwhile continuing to suspend the licences of newspapers. *Hemat*, a conservative weekly that has tended to support the government, was suspended on 14 January. *Moj Andisheh* (*Wave of Opinions*), another *Hemat* publication, was suspended four days later. These two newspapers are the victims of in-fighting between different conservative factions.

Farhang Ashti, a newspaper that has been suspended several times in recent years, was closed for good on 18 January and its licence was withdrawn by the Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance. According to a statement posted on its website, the decision was prompted by the publication of comments about a warning issued by the ministry’s new media chief, Mohammed Ali Ramin.

A Holocaust denier and loyal adviser to President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, Ramin has issued many warnings and threats to the media, especially the print media, since taking over this position last October. He has said the purpose of suspending newspapers is to render them more compliant.

Reporters Without Borders defends imprisoned journalists and press freedom throughout the world. It has nine national sections (Austria, Belgium, Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Spain, Sweden and Switzerland). It has representatives in Bangkok, New York, Tokyo and Washington. And it has more than 120 correspondents worldwide.