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AUSTRIA SEEKS TO INTERVIEW JOURNALIST OVER AHMADINEJAD MURDER ACCUSATIONS

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VIENNA, July 5 (AFP) - Austrian legal authorities Tuesday said they wanted to interview an Iranian journalist, living in France, who claims to have evidence that Iranian president-elect Mahmood Ahmadinejad was involved in the 1989 assassination of a Kurdish rebel leader.

"If the witness is ready to come to Austria, the Austrian security services will listen to him," a spokesman for the Austrian public prosecutor's office, Ernst Kloiber, told AFP.

Kloiber said, despite initial hesitations by the journalist, "it seems that he has changed his mind and he is now ready to come to Austria".

The Austrian Green party's spokesman on security, Peter Pilz, revealed Saturday that the Austrian government had obtained documents implicating Ahmadinejad in the 1989 assassination in Vienna of Abdul Rahman Ghassemlou, leader of the Kurdistan Democratic Party of Iran (KDPI) -- banned by Tehran.

This was later confirmed by the Austrian interior ministry which said the documents had been passed on to public prosecutor's office.

A official of the rebel KDPI told AFP at his base in Iraq on Monday that Ahmadinejad had been directly involved in the assassination.

Pilz said that his evidence included testimony from an Iranian journalist he met on May 20 in Versailles, France.

The unnamed journalist claimed to have a detailed account of the assassination from one of the supposed members of the hit-squad -- Revolutionary Guard General Nasser Taghipour -- who died three years ago.

However Kloiber cast doubt on the strength of the journalist's testimony.

"According to our information, he has third-hand information on the murder," Kloiber said. "It would therefore be very difficult" to open an investigation against Ahmadinejad, he said.

"We will have to see if he has concrete details about the murder," Kloiber said.

The Iranian foreign ministry has flatly denied Ahmadinejad's involvement in the Kurdish killing and warned European countries not to be duped by "the Zionist propaganda" campaign to smear the president-elect's reputation.

Ahmadinejad, who won a shock landslide on June 24, has also been accused of involvement in the 1979 hostage-taking at the US embassy in Tehran, which led to the severing of ties between Iran and the United States the following year.

Close aides to Ahmadinejad have said he played no role in the seizure of the hostages, dismissing allegations of his involvement as a "propaganda war".

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