

Doc_Number: GDE00164

Coerced Confessions in the Islamic Republic of Iran

August 15, 2007

Washington DC, August 15, 2007

Iran is witnessing a wave of publicly announced executions, unprecedented in more than a decade, and a serious crackdown on the government's critics and proponents of legal reforms within civil society. With this new surge of state violence, the Islamic Republic's decades-long practice of using coerced confessions to establish detainees' guilt is a great cause for concern and should be subject to serious international scrutiny. Since January 2007, at least 247 individuals have been executed and scores more have been [sentenced](#) to death. In the absence of an independent national mechanism to defend the detainees' rights, Iranians can only rely upon the international community's outcry regarding the judicial process leading to these executions.

On July 18th and 19th, 2007, the international community's attention was drawn to the "confessions" of two Iranian-American academics, Haleh Esfandiari and Kian Tajbakhsh, broadcast on Iran's state-run television network. Excerpts from the "confession" of Ramin Jahanbegloo, another Iranian scholar who was detained in 2006, were also added to the footage. All three had for years been carrying out activities that were legal and known to the government. All three were detained for months prior to their televised "interviews," interrogated repeatedly under harsh conditions, and denied visitation by family members or access to an attorney.

On July 19th, in a Washington Post article, Haleh Esfandiari's daughter compared her mother's television appearance to a "KGB-style television 'confession'". She also stated that her 67-year-old mother "has been subjected to hundreds of hours of harsh and intimidating interrogations, often while blindfolded, totally cut off from the outside world"

On July 20th, the website created to advocate on behalf of Kian Tajbakhsh (freekian.org) pointed to the "deceptive" nature of the interviews and expressed outrage. It noted that Esfandiari and Tajbakhsh's "statements to an unseen interviewer or interrogator are spliced together with other unrelated footage, while two commentators make false connections between their work and a supposed plot to undermine the government."

Most recently, the Deputy Prosecutor of Tehran stated in an interview to the Islamic Republic News Agency (August 12) that Haleh Esfandiari and Kian Tajbakhsh "will have some writings to do upon completion of which further decisions will be made about them." The Abdorrahman Boroumand

iranrights.org/english/newsletter-1.php

Other recent newsletters

[Iran: In Support of the International Campaign Against the Death Penalty](#)
February 22, 2011

[Iran Uses the Holidays to Announce the Imminent Execution of a Student](#)
December 24, 2010

[Iran Cannot Hide the Truth Behind Sakineh](#)
December 10, 2010

[Iran: A Reflection on the Death Penalty and a Failed Anti-Narcotic Campaign](#)
October 31, 2010

[Iran's Interrupted Lives](#)
October 1, 2010

[Iran's leadership guilty of crimes against humanity](#)
June 8, 2010

[Three Iranian human rights activists receive the Lech Walesa Prize](#)
September 29, 2009

[Terror in Buenos Aires : The Islamic Republic's Forgotten Crime Against Humanity](#)
July 18, 2009

[Authorization Denied: The high cost of the public expression of dissent in Iran](#)
July 9, 2009

[Neither Free Nor Fair, Elections in the Islamic Republic of Iran](#)
June 12, 2009

» [And more...](#)

Visit the Human Rights and Democracy Library

[International Human Rights Organizations' Reports on Human Rights Abuses in Iran](#)

[Testimonies of Victims and Perpetrators](#)

Foundation for the Promotion of Human Rights and Democracy in Iran ([ABF](#)) strongly condemns the detention and treatment of these scholars by the government of Iran. During their detention, Esfandiari and Tajbakhsh have been denied the most basic rights granted to detainees under international law. Further, based on the Deputy Prosecutor's statement, they may be under pressure by the Iranian authorities to provide them with written confessions. Self-incriminating confessions obtained under such circumstances cannot be considered as evidence against them. Rather, they underline the Islamic Republic's routine violation of basic due process, including abuse of solitary confinement practices and prolonged interrogations that facilitate torture and ill-treatment in detention.

ABF has collected testimonies, documents, interviews, and human rights reports attesting to the fact that the security and judicial authorities practice widespread and consistent use of torture to extract videotaped or signed confessions. In the case of high profile detainees, these confessions have been broadcast on television. Confessions extracted to validate charges of espionage for foreign countries or vaguely-worded charges accusing detainees of activities against the Islamic Republic are often pretexts to silence critics of the government. (See [Ali Afshari](#) 2005, [Roya Toloui](#) 2006, [Ayatollah Seyed Hossein Kazemeini Boroujerdi](#) 2007. See also [Tortured Confessions](#)) The Iranian authorities not only use coerced confessions for political purposes, but they also do so in politically motivated as well as criminal cases *simply to make up for missing evidence*.

From the inception of the Islamic Republic, judges have convicted and sentenced to death detainees charged with political, religious, sexual or other offenses, solely based on such forced confessions. Scores of prisoners have been executed for refusing to confess or recant their beliefs in a televised confession. Over the years, former prisoners, victims' relatives, and human rights organizations have repeatedly reported the torture of detainees in Iran and the use of coerced confessions against defendants by Iranian judicial authorities. (See Amnesty International, 1985, [Newsletter](#); Human Rights Watch, 2004, [Like the Dead in their Coffins](#).)

[Razieh Fuladi](#) (1980), one of the many victims of the government's morality campaign, was executed after being flogged and forced to confess to adultery. [Mohseni Kabiri](#) (1981), incarcerated along with thousands of other leftist political prisoners, confessed to being an apostate before being executed. [Abbas Ra'isi](#) (1988), another Marxist political prisoner, was executed for not agreeing to recant his beliefs in a televised confession. [Feyzollah Mekhoubad](#) (1994), an active member of the Iranian Jewish community, was executed in spite of his reported attempt to retract the

[of Human Rights Abuses in Iran](#)

[Iran's Pro-democracy Voices](#)

» [And more...](#)

confession he had made under torture. [Helmut Szimkus](#), a German citizen who was held for more than 5 years (1989-1994) in the Evin prison on charges of spying, reported having been gravely tortured and having witnessed many other cases of torture aimed at extracting confessions during his detention. In response to the UN inquiries regarding Mr. Szimkus's allegations, the Iranian government referred to the latter's confession as proof of his guilt ([UN 1995 Report](#) on the Situation of Human Rights in the Islamic Republic of Iran).

These stories – a handful among thousands – as well as the reports on the treatment of Haleh Esfandiari and Kian Tajbakhsh bring to light the systematic denial of detainees' right to due process of law. This denial is facilitated by laws and procedures that govern detention and interrogation in the Islamic Republic and calls into question the judiciary's process of establishing detainees' guilt. As long as the Iranian government does not introduce necessary legal and practical measures to prohibit torture and grant detainees their basic human rights, the practice of coercing confessions will recur, sadly, in Iran-related [news](#) and flaw the Islamic Republic's judicial process.