

Iran Human Rights Documentation Center (IHRDC) Releases Report: *“Impunity in Iran: The Death of Photojournalist Zahra Kazemi”*

(New Haven, Connecticut, August 10, 2006) – The Iran Human Rights Documentation Center, a New Haven-based non-profit with the mission of documenting the human rights situation in Iran, today released a report on the death of Zahra Kazemi, the Iranian-Canadian photojournalist detained in June 2003. The report, ***Impunity in Iran: The Death of Photojournalist Zahra Kazemi***, finds that the Kazemi case illustrates chronic, structural problems in Iran’s law enforcement and justice systems that contribute to ongoing impunity for human rights violations. The report examines specific violations of domestic and international law that occurred in the Kazemi case and suggests that Iran’s judiciary has become a primary contributor to impunity for violators.

“The Kazemi case provokes serious questions about whether Iran has satisfied its obligations under international law to hold violators accountable, through criminal sanctions if necessary,” said Mora Johnson, Executive Director of the IHRDC. “More than three years since Kazemi’s death in official custody, no one has yet been held responsible.”

Kazemi was arrested in June 2003 as she was photographing a demonstration outside Tehran’s Evin Prison. She was interrogated for more than three days before being transferred to Baghiatollah Al-Azam hospital, where she later died. The report finds that available medical evidence directly contradicts official explanations that Kazemi either died of a stroke or became faint and fell, sustaining injuries. Instead, the evidence indicates that Kazemi was tortured, beaten, and raped and sustained multiple blunt head injuries that could not have resulted from a fall.

Kazemi’s case draws attention to the weakness of the rule of law in Iran and highlights officials’ reliance on legal institutions to restrict individual rights while ignoring legal constraints on their own power. ***Impunity in Iran*** singles out Tehran’s Chief Prosecutor, Saeed Mortazavi, who was present for part of Kazemi’s interrogation. Mortazavi is implicated in a series of efforts to interfere with the investigation into Kazemi’s death, and the report reviews evidence that Mortazavi intimidated witnesses and coerced individuals to produce false or altered testimony.

In addition, IHRDC’s report finds that while Kazemi was in state custody, numerous indicators should have alerted superiors at Evin to potential human rights violations and indicated a clear need for further inquiry. “Superiors who possessed effective command and control over those officials holding Kazemi in custody failed to take the action necessary under international law to prevent and punish the crimes,” said Johnson.

As in Kazemi’s case, domestic laws protecting the rights of accused persons and prohibiting torture are routinely disregarded in Iran. These systemic problems raise concerns regarding the treatment of countless others detained and interrogated by Iranian authorities, as the pattern of violations suggests serious reason to fear that detainees’ legal rights will not be respected. “We call upon the Iranian authorities to ensure that the rights of all persons in detention in Iran are respected.” Johnson said. “These rights, which Iran has agreed to respect under the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, include the right to be free from arbitrary arrest, the right to be charged promptly, the right to counsel, and the right to be free from torture, inhumane treatment and forced confessions.”

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FOR MORE INFORMATION:

The IHRDC report ***Impunity in Iran: The Death of Photojournalist Zahra Kazemi*** and documentary appendices are available on IHRDC’s website at <http://www.iranhrdc.org>.

For further information on the Kazemi report:

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