

## PRESS RELEASE

### Iran Human Rights Documentation Center welcomes decision to reopen the Zahra Kazemi case

(New Haven, November 28, 2007) - The Iran Human Rights Documentation Center (IHRDC) welcomes the decision by Iran's Supreme Court to reopen the investigation into the 2003 death in custody of Iranian-Canadian photojournalist Zahra Kazemi.

Ms. 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. An investigation by the IHRDC conducted in 2006 found that available medical evidence directly contradicted official explanations that Ms. Kazemi either died of a stroke or became faint and fell, sustaining injuries. Instead, the evidence indicated that Ms. Kazemi was tortured, beaten, and raped and sustained multiple blunt head injuries that could not have resulted from a fall.

The IHRDC published the results from its investigation in a report entitled *Impunity in Iran: The Death of Photojournalist Zahra Kazemi*. The report singled out Tehran's Chief Prosecutor, Saeed Mortazavi, who was present for part of Ms. Kazemi's interrogation, as bearing particular responsibility for the circumstances leading up to her death. Mortazavi is implicated in a series of efforts to interfere with the investigation into Ms. Kazemi's death, and the report reviews evidence that Mortazavi intimidated witnesses and coerced individuals to produce false or altered testimony. Mortazavi, who has a well documented history of threatening and abusing detainees, has evaded attempts by Iranian legislators to examine his role in the affair and retains his eminent position in the Iranian judiciary.

"While we believe that it is a positive sign that Iran's Supreme Court is revisiting the case, we note that previous official investigations have either sought to deny the basic facts of the case or focused on minor functionaries," said Tom Parker, Executive Director of the IHRDC. "Ms. Kazemi's case demonstrates the weakness of the rule of law in Iran and highlights senior officials' reliance on legal institutions to restrict the rights of individuals while ignoring legal constraints on their own power. The IHRDC calls on the government of Iran to conduct a fair and open investigation of Ms. Kazemi's case, and let the law of the land to take its proper course. The murderers of Zahra Kazemi must be called to answer for their crime."

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***Impunity in Iran: The Death of Photojournalist Zahra Kazemi*** is currently available for download in English and Farsi on IHRDC's website at <http://www.iranhrdc.org>.

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