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In Iran, senior cleric calls for Karroubi indictment

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A senior Iranian cleric says defeated presidential candidate Mehdi Karroubi must be prosecuted for "libeling the system", unless he can prove his allegations.

Ayatollah Ahmad Khatami on Thursday addressed the issue of a letter sent by Karroubi to Expediency Council head Ayatollah Akbar Hashemi-Rafsanjani in which the defeated candidate proposed an inquiry into allegations of sexual abuse of post-election detainees.

"If a person libels someone with allegations of sexual abuse, then he deserves to be punished for libel," said the cleric.

Under Iranian law, the punishment for libel consists of 80 strokes of the lash.

"If someone libels the system by saying that rape takes place in prisons, then he must either prove it or, if he cannot, then the system must press charges and the public prosecutor must act," Khatami insisted in his address to the clerics of the Political-Ideological Organization of the Ministry of Defense, ILNA reported.

"If allegations are proven with witnesses, then, without any considerations, the perpetrators must be severely punished. But, what if they are not proven?" asked the member of the Assembly of Experts. "How long should the system remain silent, in the face of such attacks?"

The controversy surrounding the report of sexual abuse of prisoners has attracted much attention in Tehran.

"The people who informed me about these events hold sensitive positions in the country ... these officials told me of the things that happened in the detention centers... Even if one count of what is said is true, it would be a tragedy for the Islamic Republic," Karroubi had said in his letter.

"A number of detainees have said that some female detainees were raped savagely," he said. "Young boys held in detention have also been savagely raped."

Following the probe request by Karroubi, Majlis Speaker Ali Larijani called for an inquiry into the report and assigned a special committee to investigate the issue.

On Wednesday, Larijani dismissed the allegations as "sheer lies", saying that a "precise and comprehensive" inquiry found no cases of sexual abuse. Larijani is among the officials who have demanded that Karroubi present evidence to prove his claims.

Majid Ansari, a member of Majma'e Rowhaniyoun-e Mobarez (the Combatant Clergy Association), has added to the controversy by telling IRNA that the issue was true.

"The very existence of such an issue (jail rape reports) has been confirmed and the report has been taken up with officials," the former vice president said.

On Tuesday, Ayatollah Hashemi-Rafsanjani demanded officials to respect the rights of the

detainees.

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