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Iran Broadcasts Confessions by 2 Opposition Figures on Trial

By [ROBERT F. WORTH](#) and NAZILA FATHI

BEIRUT, Lebanon — A day after Iranian authorities began a mass trial of more than 100 government opponents, state television broadcast a chilling segment in which two defendants — both prominent reform figures — said they had “changed” since being arrested, and disputed widespread claims that their publicized confessions had been coerced through torture.

The segment was broadcast shortly after a Tehran prosecutor, Saeed Mortazavi, who is running the trials, released a statement warning that anyone criticizing the trial as illegitimate, as many opposition figures have done, would also be prosecuted.

The two steps reflected an intensified effort to intimidate [Iran’s](#) opposition movement before President [Mahmoud Ahmadinejad](#) is inaugurated for a second term on Wednesday.

Opposition supporters maintain that his landslide victory in the June 12 elections was rigged. Some senior reformist figures have hinted they will boycott the inauguration, or the ceremony Monday in which Iran’s supreme leader, Ayatollah [Ali Khamenei](#), is to confirm Mr. Ahmadinejad as president.

The broadcast on Sunday was a deliberate provocation to opposition leaders, who had singled out the use of televised confessions as an especially appalling tactic. The two men who appeared were Muhammad Ali Abtahi, a former vice president and blogger, and Muhammad Atrianfar, a former deputy interior minister.

An alleged confession by Mr. Abtahi was at the core of the accusations leveled by prosecutors on Saturday, in which they took aim at virtually every figure associated with reform in Iran, and many others abroad.

Mr. Abtahi was quoted as saying that the opposition’s claims of a stolen election were false, and that opposition leaders had conspired in advance to misrepresent the vote. Such confessions are almost always obtained under duress, according to human rights groups.

Although [Mir Hussein Moussavi](#) and other opposition leaders have not been arrested, the state news agency published statements with hard-line lawmakers Sunday hinting that this was the next step.

“Today’s confession has opened the way to dealing with the leaders of the unrest,” said one lawmaker, Hamid Resaee, according to IRNA, the state news agency. “There is no longer any reason to tolerate or compromise.”

Another hard-line figure, the cleric Elias Naderan, was quoted as saying: “Those within the inner circle who managed the unrest must be put on trial. We shouldn’t chase after weak, second-class figures with no influence.”

A separate trial began Sunday for 10 additional people arrested after the disputed presidential election, Iran's semiofficial ISNA news service reported, citing a judiciary official.

The government's newly combative stance seemed to set the stage for a test of wills with the opposition, which continues to muster street demonstrations.

On Sunday, opposition leaders denounced the mass trial as illegitimate, though they commented before Mr. Mortazavi warned about possible prosecutions.

[Mohammad Khatami](#), the former president, called the trial an "unconstitutional" act that would do profound damage to public trust in Iran's system of government. He also said he believed the trial had been carried out against the will of Iran's judiciary chief, Iran's state-run Press TV reported.

In recent days, Mr. Khatami and other officials have said the judiciary had not had access to the hundreds of people who remained in detention after being arrested in the unrest after the election.

Although Mr. Mortazavi is technically in charge of the court that is handling the mass trial, many Iranians believe the broader effort to tame Iran's opposition movement is being run by the [Revolutionary Guards](#).

Mr. Moussavi said those responsible for the trial "are disgracing the political establishment," according to a statement on his Web site.

Members of the defendants' families gathered Saturday at Mr. Abtahi's home in Tehran and issued a statement denouncing his confession, the reformist newspaper Etemad Melli reported.

"Not only do we not accept the confession, we also know that Abtahi said these things due to a long period of imprisonment for the purpose of obtaining a confession," the statement said.

Mr. Abtahi's wife, Fahimeh Mousavinejad, dismissed her husband's confession as false in a court hearing on Saturday, Etemad Melli reported.

"The things he was saying and the parts of it published in Fars news were not at all in Mr. Abtahi's style," she said, referring to the Fars news agency. "As his family, we know the way he expresses himself. Many people have read his blog. The sentences he was using were not his own."

Robert F. Worth reported from Beirut, and Nazila Fathi from Toronto.

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