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## Iran: Investigate Security Chiefs in Post-Election Abuse

Nature, Scale of Abuses Indicate Coordinated Efforts Ordered at Highest Levels

August 14, 2009

(New York) - The Iranian government should investigate the nation's top security officials to determine whether attacks on demonstrators and detainees following the disputed June 12, 2009 election were ordered and coordinated at the highest levels, Human Rights Watch said today.

Human Rights Watch said that its research indicates a pattern and degree of coordination in the repeated serious abuses against largely peaceful protesters and detainees that suggests that the abuse was ordered at top levels. Those investigated should include Esmeeel Ahmadi Moghaddam, chief of Iran's national police, and Hossein Taeb, leader of the Basiji paramilitary, both hierarchical organizations that operate from the top down.

"The number and scale of the abuses by both the police and Basij make it pretty clear that they must have been following orders," said Joe Stork, deputy Middle East director at Human Rights Watch. "Investigation into the abuse needs to go right to the top to find out who gave the orders."

Witnesses interviewed by Human Rights Watch in the weeks following the presidential election indicate that Basij paramilitaries and the police were responsible for regular and widespread abuses across Tehran, at least (Human Rights Watch was not able to interview witnesses outside Tehran). In episode after episode, the police and Basiji detained dozens of people, assaulting them during the arrests, and then beating them in detention.

In just one example, on the night of June 14, police and plainclothes Basiji forces, attacked Tehran University dormitories, assaulting students and damaging the buildings. According to an official in the office of the Supreme Leader, more than 100 people were wounded. The parliamentary fact-finding committee, speaking to reporters on June 19, said, "Some of the attackers were official uniformed police officers and some of them were plainclothes forces who were not part of the police force, but who were acting in complete unison with the police." Several students who live in the dormitories told Human Rights Watch that the police did not intervene on their behalf when plainclothes forces attacked them.

The Basij and police arrested a number of students at the dormitory that night and transferred them to a detention area on the fourth floor of the Ministry of Interior, where, the students have said, the Basij and police physically and verbally abused them. The parliamentary fact-finding committee confirmed the existence of this detention center, and said that the police had refused to provide information necessary to investigate allegations of abuse.

Human Rights Watch also documented other instances in the post-election period in which Basij paramilitaries, in apparent

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coordination with police, beat and detained peaceful protesters in various areas of Tehran.

A released detainee whom plainclothes security forces arrested on June 16 in Tehran's Baharestan Square told Human Rights Watch that his captors took him to a Basij base near the location of his arrest, where 18 other detainees were being held in a 20- square-meter basement:

"As soon as I arrived, three plainclothes Basij beat me so badly that I was bleeding from my face and knees. During the time I was there, they severely beat all new detainees and cursed us with profanities. I was there for more than 72 hours. Then they drove me and other detainees to a police station. They handed us over to the police, and we were held there for a few more days before being released."

Other witnesses told Human Rights Watch that Basij and police also acted together during nighttime raids aimed at silencing protesters who were chanting from the rooftops of their residences.

One location in which Moghaddam, the police chief, appears to have direct responsibility is the Kahrizak detention center, near Tehran, where Iranian authorities have acknowledged that abuses and at least one death took place. On July 27, the supreme leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, ordered Kahrizak closed following the death in detention of Mohsen Roohalamini, the son of a prominent government official.

Security forces had detained Roohalamini on July 9 and informed his family of his death on July 23. Authorities later said that the Kahrizak director had been dismissed and that three guards would be prosecuted for prisoner abuse. Authorities have not said when or where Roohalamini died, or under what circumstances.

Iran's Judiciary authorities had ordered the Kahrizak detention facilities closed two years ago, citing "nonconformance to standards," but it remained open until the end of July.

Moghaddam said in a public ceremony on August 9 that any detainee deaths at Kahrizak were from an unspecified "viral illness." He also acknowledged that junior police officers at Kahrizak had severely beaten detainees, but claimed that senior police officials had no role in any abuse. "I intend to take responsibility, but from the very beginning I had said that students should not be held at Kahrizak and should not be detained with criminals," he said. "Nevertheless they were sent to Kahrizak by the order of the Judiciary. The reason was lack of detention space elsewhere, and I don't think that was proper."

Statements by members of parliament suggest, though, that senior police officers should be held accountable for the abuses at Kahrizak. On August 9, Hamid-Reza Katouzian, a member from Tehran who served on the governmental fact-finding committee mandated to review post-election abuses, told reporters that, "The chief of police is responsible for Kahrizak and he must be held accountable." Katouzian added that Moghaddam "receives daily reports" about conditions there. According to the daily *Etemad*, Kazem Jalali, another member of the parliamentary committee, said that police authorities have not responded to the committee's requests for information.

"Closing one detention center and blaming abuses on a few low-ranking officials is hardly enough to ensure accountability for the widespread abuses since the election," Stork said. "The government should investigate high-ranking officials as well, and punish any found to have ordered abuses."

## **Background**

The Basiji (Nirooye Moghavemate Basij, the Resistance Mobilization Force) is a volunteer paramilitary force of men and women, "a large people's militia," created by Ayatollah Khomeini in November 1979 to advance the aims of the Islamic Revolution. They engage in

a wide range of activities, but their core duties are to help maintain law and order, repress dissent, and enforce their conservative interpretation of Islamic codes of dress and behavior. There are numerous documented examples of how, during times of protests, they frequently beat and intimidate protesters. The Basiji have been unofficially operating as a shadow police force, setting up checkpoints at night to catch drunk drivers and otherwise act as morality police.

The Basij forces are a two-tiered system made up of a semi-decentralized network of volunteers and paid commanders, who issue orders to the volunteers. The Basijis have branches throughout Iran, including in many social institutions such as schools, universities, state-owned factories, mosques, and government offices. The vast majority of Basij bases have access to arms.

Although the volunteers may occasionally act as individuals, they receive instructions from commanders for events such as protests. The commanders, in turn, take orders from the chief of Basij. Taeb was named to that position in October 2007 by General Mohammad-Ali Jafari.

Iran has a national police force. Police stations report to district chiefs, and district chiefs report to the provincial chiefs, who in turn report to Mughaddam. Tehran has 22 police districts.

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