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Karroubi wants top meeting to prove 'jail rape'

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After bringing allegations of sexual assault in Iranian prisons to the fore, leading opposition figure Mehdi Karroubi says he will present evidence to prove his controversial claims.

A day after Iranian authorities shut down the former Parliament speaker's newspaper -- Etemad-e-Melli (National Trust) -- for publishing his letter claiming that jailers brutally 'raped' prisoners in Iran's detention centers, Karroubi defiantly brought up the subject yet again on Wednesday.

Karroubi, who has emerged as an opposition figure following the disputed election in June, called on Parliament Speaker Ali Larijani to organize a meeting with the country's top officials -- including the president -- to present evidence of the alleged sexual assault on some post-election detainees.

"I ask you to organize a meeting with the heads of the three branches of the government -- Judiciary, Legislative and Executive -- and the head of the Expediency Council and the Assembly of Experts and the country's prosecutor general... along with a representative from the special Majlis committee tasked with probing the situation in Iranian prisons so that I can present my documents and evidence on the issue of rape in some prisons in their presence," Karroubi said in a letter to Larijani on Wednesday.

Based on Karroubi's request, the meeting would be attended by newly-appointed Judiciary chief Ayatollah Sadeq Larijani, Majlis Speaker Ali Larijani, President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, two-time former President Akbar Hashemi-Rafsanjani and the state prosecutor Qorban-Ali Dorri-Najafabadi.

The call for a meeting to look into evidence of jail rape comes as the allegations provoked a storm of controversy in the country.

In a sermon at Tehran University on Friday, Principlist cleric Ayatollah Ahmad Khatami called Karroubi's claims a "total slander against the Islamic establishment."

He went as far to call for the opposition figure's prosecution, arguing that "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."

Karroubi said the session will define whether he has caused a slander against the establishment or those who from the position of the leader of the Friday prayers call on the country's judicial authorities for a violent treatment of protestors.

Ayatollah Khatami had earlier said that those who disturbed the peace and destroyed public property were "at war with God" and should be "dealt with without mercy."

The development comes as earlier on August 10, Parliament Speaker Larijani called for an investigation into claims of 'jail rape'; a day later, he said the allegations were "baseless".

"On the basis of thorough and comprehensive investigations conducted about the detainees at Kahrizak and Evin prisons, no cases of rape and sexual abuse were found," Larijani said last Wednesday.

The Majlis speaker then encouraged the defeated presidential candidate to come forward with evidence proving his claims.

To conclude his letter to Larijani, the opposition figure said "I am awaiting your quick and well-thought-out action" on the matter.

Earlier on Monday, as a result of the fierce controversy over the issue of jail rape, an investigating judge at the Civil Servants Prosecution Office, which handles press cases, said that Karroubi's popular newspaper had been ordered shut until further notice for what was described as "publishing unlawful and criminal material."

Following the daily's shutdown, fellow leading opposition figure Mir-Hossein Mousavi threw his weight behind Karroubi, saying that his claims have caused major worries for the authorities making them "nervous."

"Such nervousness exposes horrid news about many issues we yet have no information on," Mousavi said in a letter to Karroubi on Tuesday.

"I praise your courage and hope the other clerics join and strengthen your efforts," added the opposition leader, who is a two-time former prime minister.

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