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OVER 100 IRANIANS FACE GROSSLY UNFAIR TRIALS

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More than 100 people have gone on trial in Tehran accused of organizing recent widespread civil protests. The protests broke out in response to the official announcement that the 12 June presidential election was won by the incumbent, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad.

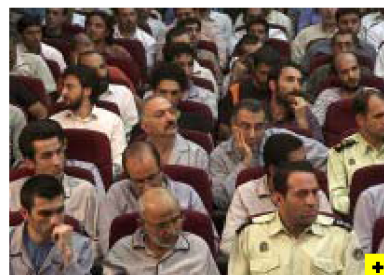
Those charged include a former Vice President and other senior former officials, an advisor to one of the presidential candidates, academics and journalists. The trial, being held before the Revolutionary Court in Tehran, is the latest in a long catalogue of unfair trials before Iran's Revolutionary Courts, which Amnesty International has repeatedly criticized for their failure to apply international standards for fair trial.

The defendants are accused of fomenting the largely peaceful, mass demonstrations which occurred in Tehran and other centres in protest against the official election result. Many people in Iran dispute the result that said the incumbent president won by a large majority.

The accused include Mohammad Ali Abtahi, who was Vice President in the administration headed by President Mohammad Khatami (1997-2005) and an advisor to presidential candidate Mehdi Karroubi during the recent election campaign; Mohammad Atrianfar, a journalist, former deputy minister and leading member of the Construction Party; other senior officials under President Khatami; Mohammad Ali Dadkhah, a well-known human rights lawyer; and Maziar Bahari, an Iranian-Canadian dual national and journalist who has written for Newsweek.

According to the official IRNA news agency, the defendants face charges of rioting, attacking military and government buildings, having links with armed opposition groups and "conspiring against the ruling system". If convicted, they face up to five years in prison unless they are deemed by the trial judges to be a "mohareb" (an enemy of God), in which case they could be sentenced to death.

The trial, which began in Tehran last Saturday, has been closed to all but state media. Amnesty International has said that it bears the hallmarks of a "show trial" in which the authorities seek to pin the blame for recent unrest on those who have challenged the official election result and to deter others



Opposition political activists and protesters in court, Tehran, Iran, 1 August 2009

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from continuing their protests.

The Public Prosecutor's Office has labelled the protests as "organized and planned crimes", despite their largely peaceful nature. It says it has categorized those responsible into three groups: the "plotters and inciters" of unrest, "groups affiliated to foreign services", and "opportunists and thugs" who damaged public and private property and disturbed "the peace and security of society".

Most or all of the defendants were detained incommunicado for several weeks before they were brought before the Revolutionary Court last Saturday. Many are reported to have been tortured or ill-treated in order to force them to "confess" to involvement in a conspiracy against the state.

Some appeared to have lost weight and to be diminished in spirit in film of the trial broadcast on Iranian state TV. At least four prominent reformists were shown telling the court that they no longer believed that the election was fraudulent. Mohammad Ali Abtahi and Mohammad Atrianfar were shown on television telling the court that every Iranian should believe in the guardianship of Iran's Supreme Leader, Ayatollah Khamenei.

Mohammad Ali Abtahi's demeanour led his wife and daughter to express concern that his "confession" had been coerced. On 2 August, state TV showed both Mohammad Ali Abtahi and Mohammad Atrianfar denying that their "confessions" had been coerced or that they had been drugged by the authorities before the trial.

However, presidential election candidate Mir-Hossein Mousavi has denounced the "confessions", saying they were extracted under "medieval-era torture", and Mohsen Rezaei, another of the presidential candidates, has questioned the fairness of the proceedings and asked publicly why no members of the security forces responsible for killings of protestors and other serious human rights violations have been brought to trial. The authorities have acknowledged some 30 killings though the true number is believed to be higher.

Saleh Nikbakht, a lawyer representing Mohammad Ali Abtahi and other defendants, complained on Saturday, after the trial opened: "I have not had access to the prosecution case files at any point since the arrest of my clients. I was not aware of the trial until 11am today. And I did not get permission to enter the court room."

He also questioned the legal validity of the trial: "According to article 135 of the Iranian constitution, trials held without lawyers being present are illegal."

Amnesty International has documented the routine use of torture and ill-treatment in pre-trial detention over many years. Detainees in so-called national security cases are systematically denied access to family members, lawyers and, in many cases, face restricted access to adequate medical care.

Iranian intelligence services have repeatedly had high-profile detainees filmed "confessing" to vaguely-

worded charges, which are often not recognizably criminal offences. Some of these “confessions” have been aired on TV, often before their trials have taken place, compromising their right not to incriminate themselves.

Those released either before or after trial have told of the coercive techniques by which officials isolate and break detainees, who eventually agree to make “confessions” in order to end their ill-treatment. Many have later retracted such “confessions”.

In addition to the more than 100 defendants whose trial opened on Saturday and is due to continue on 6 August, 10 people whom the authorities describe as “street protestors” also went on trial before the Revolutionary Court in Tehran on Sunday. Their trial is also believed to be still continuing.

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