

Doc Number: EU000063



August 01, 2009

Prominent Iranian Reformists Go On Trial For Post-Election Unrest

For the first time since Iran's 1979 Islamic Revolution, dozens of high-ranking officials -- including former vice presidents, ministers, and lawmakers -- are on trial in the Islamic state.

Iran's official IRNA news agency did not specify how many defendants were in the courtroom as the trial opened on August 1. But the semi-official Fars news agency said more than 100 defendants were being tried for alleged involvement in street protests following the disputed June 12 presidential election.

Thousands of Iranians took to the streets in the days that followed the vote, which protesters say was rigged in favor of hardline President Mahmud Ahmadinejad.

The protests were violently suppressed, leaving an estimated 30 people dead and hundreds in prison.

The trial has drawn strong criticism both in and outside Iran.

Nasrin Sotoudeh, a prominent rights activist and lawyer, told Radio Farda: "As a member of Iran's legal community, I wish to express the deep concern of lawyers and public opinion about the show that began today under the name of a trial, whose aim is to curb the civil movement by intimidating people who have done a great service for this country over the years."

Among those in the dock are prominent reformists such as former vice presidents Mohammad Ali Abtahi and Mohsen Safai-Farahani, former Industries Minister Behzad Nabavi, former Deputy Interior Minister Mostafa Tajzadeh, and Mohsen Mirdamadi, the leader of the biggest reformist party, the Islamic Iran Participation Front.

The defendants face charges that include acting against national security by planning unrest, attacking military and state buildings, and conspiring against the ruling system.

Under Iran's Islamic law, acting against national security -- a charge commonly used against opposition activists -- can be punishable by the death penalty.

Saleh Nikbakht, a lawyer who represents some of the most prominent defendants, told Radio Farda that authorities have sidelined him from the trial.

"I have repeatedly notified the judiciary that I have agreed to represent the defendants at their request," Nikbakht said. "But I was never granted permission to see the detainees and I wasn't notified about today's trial."

Nikbakht continued: "They had told me earlier that today's trial would be a trial of 'thugs' detained on the streets and that it had nothing to do with my clients. I first heard about the trial today at 11:30 a.m. on television. When I went there, the doors were closed and they did not let me in."

Pictures from the courtroom today showed defendants Abtahi and Mirdamadi sitting in the front row and wearing prison uniforms. A large group of defendants could be seen sitting in the packed courtroom, many of them handcuffed but without prison uniforms.

Fars quoted the prosecution as saying that some defendants testified that "there was no fraud in the election."

The trial is part of the government's efforts to put an end to post-election unrest -- the biggest challenge to the cleric-led regime since the 1979 revolution.

It comes as Ahmadinejad seeks to ease tensions within his own camp and just days before he is due to be sworn in for a new four-year term.

Opposition protests are continuing despite the crackdown, with thousands of protesters holding a memorial at a Tehran cemetery on July 30 to mark the 40th day since the death of Neda Agha-Soltan -- a young woman whose killing during a protest has become a symbol of the anti-Ahmadinejad movement.

Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty © 2009 RFE/RL, Inc. All Rights Reserved.

Print: Include Comments (0)
Adjust font si