



JOINT PUBLIC STATEMENT

Iran:

End arbitrary house arrests of Mousavi, Karroubi, and Rahnavard; Free all prisoners of conscience

(Beirut, London, Paris, 13 February 2013) - The Iranian authorities should immediately release from arbitrary house arrest two former presidential candidates Mehdi Karroubi and Mir Hossein Mousavi, his wife Zahra Rahnavard, author and political activist, and cease harassing or detaining without cause the couple's two daughters and Mehdi Karroubi's son, said the Nobel Peace laureate Shirin Ebadi and six leading human rights bodies.

Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, International Campaign for Human Rights in Iran, International Federation for Human Rights, League for the Defence of Human Rights in Iran, and Reporters Without Borders co-signed today's appeal.

On 14 February 2011, security and intelligence officials placed two former presidential candidates and Zahra Rahnavard, and Karroubi's wife, Fatemeh Karroubi, under house arrest after they called for demonstrations to support the popular "Arab Spring" uprisings across the region. Zahra and Narges Mousavi, daughters of Mir Hossein Mousavi and Zahra Rahnavard, and Mohammad Hossein Karroubi, son of Mehdi Karroubi were arrested on Monday 11 February 2013, two days before the second anniversary of arbitrary house arrests of their parents and Mehdi Karroubi. They were released later the same day.

"For two years now Iranian officials have stripped these opposition figures of their most basic rights without any legal justification or any effective means of remedy," Ebadi said. "They and their families should not have to endure even one more day under these wholly unjustifiable and abusive conditions."

Mir Hossein Mousavi, former Prime Minister and Mehdi Karroubi, former Speaker of Iran's parliament, had been presidential candidates in the 2009 election in which the incumbent President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad was declared the winner, in disputed circumstances. The announcement of his victory set off huge protests in Tehran and other cities, which the authorities violently suppressed, followed by arrests and show trials of journalists, government critics, and opposition activists linked to the campaigns of Mousavi and Karroubi. After the election, authorities tightly monitored and controlled the movements of Karroubi, Mousavi, and their wives, and suspended the presidential candidates' newspapers *Etemad-e Melli* and *Kalameyeh Sabz*. In mid-February 2011, in the wake of their joint appeal for Iranians to demonstrate in support of pro-reform protests in Egypt and Tunisia, the men and their wives were placed under house arrest without court orders.

Fatemeh Karroubi has since been released from house arrest. But the three detained opposition figures remain cut off from the outside world by the terms of their house arrest and are prevented from meeting and communicating regularly with other members of their families.

Iran's senior officials have given varied accounts of the action against the opposition figures. In November 2011, Mohammad Javad Larijani, head of the High Council for Human Rights, said that the detainees had engaged in "illegal activities" and incited violence. He also said that no one could be placed under house arrest in Iran "without trial and without a court order," and that the public would soon be informed of the charges against the detainees. More than a year later, during which no charges were brought, Iran's police chief, Esmael Ahmadi Moghaddam said on 25 December 2012, that the country's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, had approved the detention of the opposition figures in advance of their "house arrest".

Despite these pronouncements, Iranian officials, including Iran's judiciary, have failed to provide any legal justification for the opposition figures' continuing arbitrary detention under house arrest.

The UN bodies have repeatedly called on the Iranian government to release the three opposition figures, declaring their detention arbitrary and unlawful.

On 11 February, three UN Special Rapporteurs called for the immediate release of Mir Hossein Mousavi and Mehdi Karoubi and their family members and hundreds of other prisoners of conscience who remain in prison for peacefully exercising their rights to freedom of opinion and expression, or freedom of association and assembly.

In August 2012, the United Nations Working Group on Arbitrary Detention, a body of five independent experts acting under the UN Human Rights Council, issued an opinion that the detentions are "arbitrary (and thus prohibited)," and recommended that the Iranian government release the detainees immediately and compensate them for their wrongful imprisonment. In September 2011, the UN Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances initiated urgent investigations to determine the fate of the opposition figures, whose whereabouts were unknown at the time.

Other UN officials and bodies, including the Secretary General, the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Iran, the Human Rights Council, and the General Assembly have also characterized the house arrests as arbitrary detention and called for the detainees' immediate release.

"If authorities had evidence showing that these opposition figures had committed a serious crime they should have charged and prosecuted them in a fair and transparent manner quite some time ago," Ebadi said. "The fact that they have failed to do so for two years is a clear indication that they have no such evidence and that the continuing house arrest of these three critics is politically motivated."

As Iran prepares for new presidential elections on 14 June 2013, hundreds of opposition figures and critics of the government, as well as journalists, students, lawyers and other human rights defenders, remain in prison. Many were arrested in the government's post-2009 election crackdown and sentenced after televised show trials in which they were shown "confessing" to vaguely-worded national security 'crimes,' including supporting a "velvet revolution." Since 26 January, Iran's security and intelligence forces have initiated a new wave of arrests against journalists accused of having "connections" to foreign media, apparently in an effort to silence dissent prior to the presidential election.

"Thirty-four years after the establishment of an Islamic Republic founded upon the principles of freedom and justice, jails in Iran today are overflowing with hundreds of political prisoners, including prisoners of conscience, many of them ordinary Iranians whose only "crime" was to speak out," said Ebadi.

Ebadi and the six rights groups called on Iranian authorities to release immediately and unconditionally everyone detained for exercising their rights to freedom of expression, assembly, or association, and to cooperate with UN human rights bodies with a view to improving the current rights situation in Iran.