

Press Release

Iran: DI Expresses Concern Over Kurdish Prisoners On Hunger Strike

Oslo - Norway, September 8, 2008. Defend International is deeply concerned about the situation of Kurdish prisoners, including journalists, civil society activists and human rights defenders, who have been on hunger strike since 25 August 2008 to protest against their detention and the constant harassment by the authorities.

Defend International (DI) calls on the United Nations Human Rights Council to act without delay to address the rapidly deteriorating human rights situation in Iran. DI welcomes and endorses the statements of NGOs urging the Islamic Republic of Iran to take concrete measures to end the discrimination and associated human rights violations, in accordance with their obligations under international human rights law. DI urges all governments to take necessary measures to remind the Iranian government that it has a responsibility to ensure the protection of human rights and dignity of all individuals in Iran.

A hunger strike is taking place by Kurdish prisoners since the 25th of August 2008. Over 80 prisoners are protesting their harsh detention conditions. The demands cover a wide spectre, but in particular they call upon the Iranian authorities to ensure that conditions of detention conform to international standards for the treatment of prisoners.

The International Secretariat of DI has followed the situation of the Kurdish prisoners in Iran. Many prisoners have been executed; many others are sentenced to death after trial proceedings that failed to meet international standards of fair trials. Lawyers for the prisoners have reportedly no access to their clients and are forced to withdraw. The prisoners are not allowed to take exercise and not allowed visitors and sometimes are not permitted to use toilet facilities nor given any bedding.

DI recalls that a basic norm outlined in the UN Body of Principles for the Protection of all Persons Under Any Form or Detention or Imprisonment is the right of a detained or imprisoned person to be "*visited by and to correspond with, in particular, members of his family and shall be given adequate opportunity to communicate with the outside world, subject to reasonable conditions and restrictions as specified by law or lawful regulations.*"

Family members, NGOs and human rights defenders are expressing their solidarity with the Kurdish prisoners in their struggle for basic principles of human rights and fundamental freedoms.

"The prisoners are protesting their prison conditions that have worsened since the new wave of state repression against Kurds. They started a hunger strike inside the prison to focus attention on the "illegal approach" of the judicial and prison officials, while we held peaceful demonstrations outside the prisons gates." DI Defender in Iran said; he preferred to stay anonymous.

DI believes that conditions of detention should conform to the UN Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners and other international human rights standards. At the Board Meeting of Defend International, in Norway on 08 September 2008, the DI Executive Committee unanimously voted to keep Iran on the DI Watch List.

DI President Widad Akrawi commented: "The ongoing harsh treatment of journalists, human rights defenders and civil society activists in Iran is distressing. The government should recognize the valuable contribution

that such groups are making to address all forms of discrimination and intolerance, to promote universal values and granting every person the right to full and equal recognition and exercise of his human rights and freedoms, without distinction, exclusion or preference based on race, colour, sex, civil status, religion, political convictions, language, ethnic or national origin, or social condition. We urge Iran to ensure the humane treatment of prisoners and to adhere to its international human rights obligations."

DI calls for the immediate and unconditional release of all prisoners of conscience, including the two Kurdish journalists **Adnan Hassanpour** and **Hiwa Butimar**, sentenced to death on July 2007 [1] [2] [3], DI member Ms. **Zeynab Bayazidi**, sentenced to four years' imprisonment [4], Messrs. **Farzad Kamangar** [5] [6] [7] and **Ali Heydarian**, both condemned to death, Messrs. **Anwar Hossain Panahi**, **Farhad Wakili**, **Ali Hardarian**, **Arsalan Olyaei**, **Habib Latifi**, all civil rights activists on Iran's death row, Mr. **Mohammad Sadigh Kaboudvand**, President of the Association for the Defence of Human Rights in Kurdistan (RMMK), sentenced to ten years imprisonment, Ms. **Hanna Abdi**, an active member of the One Million Signatures Petition Campaign, sentenced to five years' imprisonment, Ms. **Ronak Safarzadeh**, an active women's rights activist, detained since October 2007, Mr. **Massoud Kordpour**, member of the Foundation for Democracy and Human Rights in Iranian Kurdistan, detained since August 2008, student **Yasser Goli** detained since October 2007, and his mother, Ms. **Fatemeh Goftari**, sentenced to eight months' imprisonment.

DI calls upon the Iranian government to take into account the needs of members of particularly vulnerable groups. DI urges the Government to adopt and take into domestic legislation the effective measures set out in the Declaration on the Right and Responsibility of Individuals, Groups and Organs of Society to Promote and Protect Universally Recognized Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms, and to take appropriate measures to ensure the full protection of human rights defenders in Iran in the light of the universally recognized fundamental freedoms and human rights norms endorsed by the country. In particular, DI urges the relevant Iranian authorities to ensure that the right to freedom of expression, association, and particularly the right to offer legal counsel and be free from retaliation for acting in the defense of human rights are respected.

DI is strongly opposed to the death penalty as the ultimate cruel, inhuman and degrading punishment and a violation of the right to life as proclaimed in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

DI calls on the Iranian government to cease all executions and adopt an immediate moratorium on executions in accordance with the UN General Assembly ground-breaking resolution calling for a worldwide moratorium on executions. Although Iran voted against the resolution on December 18, 2007 DI urges the Iranian government to reconsider their position and acknowledge the overwhelming weight of international opinion against death penalty.

Moreover, DI is alarmed by allegations of torture and ill-treatment of prisoners during detention as well as regarding reported grave violations during the period between initial detention and the first appearance of a detainee before a judge. DI wishes to recall that according to international rules, any statement which is established to have been made as result of torture shall not be invoked as evidence in any proceedings. In addition independent institutions should carry out unannounced and unrestricted visits to all detention centers in Iran.

DI further recalls that the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, to which Iran is a state party, prohibits cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment and sets out the international procedures to guarantee the right to a fair trial.

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Notes to Editors:

For further information, please contact: DI Media Committee, media@defendinternational.org

About DI:

Defend International (DI) is an international, non-profit organisation with its headquarters in Norway. It forms a worldwide community of DI defenders with members, activists, friends and subscribers in every part of the world.

DI is working to stop human rights violations; advance democratization; encourage dialogue between cultures and civilizations and promote the advancement of women's rights and empowerment and their participation in democratic processes. DI acts for peace, non-violence, tolerance, justice and gender equality in law and practice. DI represents the voices of civil society in Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region on the international scene and identifies strategies to promote and protect all human rights worldwide.

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