



Iran: Journalists Receive Death Threats After Testifying

Presidential Commission Heard Their Testimony of Torture During Detention

(New York, January 6, 2005) -- After testifying to a presidential commission about their torture during detention, a group of Iranian journalists have received death threats from judicial officials under Tehran chief prosecutor Saeed Mortazavi, Human Rights Watch said today.

Human Rights Watch is extremely concerned about the safety of the journalists, whose testimony to a presidential commission, tasked with investigating mistreatment of detainees, provided detailed information on their torture and mistreatment while they were detained, without being charged, by secret squads operating under the authority of the judiciary.

“We want the Iranian government to know that the world is watching what happens to these young journalists. The Iranian government is responsible for their safety,” said Sarah Leah Whitson, executive director of Middle East and North Africa Division at Human Rights Watch. “The Iranian authorities should be protecting citizens who testify before presidential commissions instead of sending them death threats.”

On December 25, Hanif Mazroi, Massoud Ghoreishi, Fereshteh Ghazi, Arash Naderpour and Mahbobeh Abasgholizadeh—all of whom are journalists detained by the government—testified about their detention before the presidential commission. Fereshteh Ghazi provided details of her treatment by interrogators, including severe beatings that resulted in a broken nose during one interrogation session. The detainees were kept under lengthy solitary confinement in a secret detention center and were repeatedly subjected to psychological and physical torture.

On January 1 two other former detainees, Omid Memarian and Ruzbeh Mir Ebrahimi, also appeared in front of the commission. In their testimonies, as made public by commission member Mohammad Ali Abtahi, they confirmed details of their torture.

Since their appearances before the commission, Saeed Mortazavi, chief prosecutor of

Tehran, has threatened each of these former detainees with lengthy prison sentences and harm to their family members, as punishment for their testimony. Mortazavi continues to issue numerous subpoenas for the journalists without specifying charges. His operatives also harass the journalists by phone on a daily basis. On January 3, Mortazavi held a press conference denying any mistreatment of detainees and threatening to prosecute the former detainees for “allegations against security forces and prison officials that are politically motivated.”

The journalists’ testimonies exposed Mortazavi’s role in authorizing their torture to extract confessions and in compelling them to appear on television to deny their mistreatment while under detention.

“The brave testimony of these young journalists has reaffirmed evidence of Mortazavi’s leading role in the torture of detainees,” said Whitson. “It’s high time for the Iranian government to investigate Mortazavi’s abuses and bring him to justice.”

Saeed Mortazavi has spearheaded the judiciary’s attack on press freedoms since the current crackdown began in 2000. He is responsible for the closure of numerous newspapers, as well as the arrests and prosecution of journalists, which is detailed in the recent Human Right Watch report on Iran, “[Like the Dead in their Coffins.](#)”