



## Iran: Judiciary Uses Coercion to Cover Up Torture

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Joe Stork, Washington director of Human Rights Watch’s Middle East division

### ***On National TV, Journalists Forced to Deny They Were Tortured***

(New York, December 20, 2004) The Iranian judiciary is using threats of lengthy prison sentences and coerced televised statements in an attempt to cover up its arbitrary detention and torture of internet journalists and civil society activists, Human Rights Watch said today.

Since September, more than 20 internet journalists and civil society activists have been arrested and held in a secret detention center in Tehran. Most have since been released on bail. In a public letter to President Mohammed Khatami on December 10, the father of one of those detained, Ali Mazroi—who is also president of the Association of Iranian Journalists and a former member of parliament—implicated the judiciary in the torture and secret detention of the detainees.

Immediately afterwards, the chief prosecutor of Tehran, Judge Saeed Mortazavi, filed charges against Mazroi for libel. On December 11, Mortazavi ordered the detention of three of the released detainees—Omid Memarian, Shahram Rafizadeh and Ruzbeh Mir Ebrahimi—as witnesses for the prosecution in the case. These three journalists and Javad Gholam Tamayomi, a journalist who has been in detention since October 18, were brought to Mortazavi’s office.

Mortazavi threatened the four detainees with lengthy prison sentences if they did not deny Mazroi’s allegations. They were interrogated for three consecutive days for eight hours each day.

On December 14, the four detainees were brought in front of a televised “press conference” arranged by Judge Mortazavi, and forced to deny that they had been subjected to solitary confinement, torture and ill-treatment during their earlier detention. That evening, Iran’s government-controlled television news broadcast videotapes that showed the four detainees saying that their jailors treated them as “gently as flowers.”

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trials instead of forcing them to appear on television and say their torturers treated them well,” said Joe Stork, Washington director of Human Rights Watch’s Middle East division.

Human Rights Watch has obtained detailed information about the torture and solitary confinement of the detainees at the secret detention center.

The detainees had been kept at a secret location within one hour of central Tehran, where they were held in solitary confinement in small cells for up to three months. During the entire length of their detention they were subjected to torture—including beatings with electrical cables—and interrogations that lasted up to 11 hours at a stretch.

The detainees were denied access to lawyers, and to medical care when they fell ill. They were allowed family visits rarely. They were often threatened with the arrest of family members and friends if they did not cooperate. Their mental stress had reportedly reached such a level that many detainees had become suicidal.

The apparent purpose of this torture and mistreatment was to extract confessions that implicate reformist politicians and civil society activists in activities such as spying and violating national security laws. The detainees were interrogated by the same person, an operative who uses the pseudonym “Keshavarz.” The magistrate in charge of these detainees is known as “Mehdipoor.” Both the interrogator and magistrate repeatedly delivered messages and threats to the detainees on behalf of Judge Mortazavi.

“These detainees had been detained and tortured by secret squads apparently taking orders from Judge Mortazavi himself,” Stork said. “Mortazavi obviously has a lot at stake in covering up his role in this affair.”

Human Rights Watch called on the Iranian government to investigate Judge Mortazavi’s role in orchestrating the detention and torture of nonviolent journalists and activists and to end its campaign of repression against free speech.