

## BIG ARREST OF DISSIDENTS IN IRAN

(New York, March 13, 2001) Human Rights Watch today condemned the Sunday arrest of more than 20 political activists for taking part in a meeting at a private house in Tehran. The arrests were ordered by the Tehran Revolutionary Court-Branch 26 and as of this time the charges against and the whereabouts of the detainees remain unknown.

Those arrested come from a variety of non-violent opposition groups who collaborate in an informal religious-nationalist alliance. The alliance had been supportive of the reform policies of President Khatami and critical of efforts to block reform by conservative clerics. They had been holding weekly meetings since 1984, at which they debated current political events. Since the 1997 election of President Khatami, they had widened participation in this forum and attendance had increased accordingly.

These detentions appeared to be timed as a response to President Khatami's speech before parliament on Sunday, where he defended his reformist program. The arrests also follow a pattern of measures taken by conservatives to embarrass the president prior to major foreign trips. President Khatami left for Moscow yesterday.

<http://www.hrw.org/press/2001/03/iranarrest0313.htm>

## SEXUAL ORIENTATION AS A BASIS FOR PERSECUTION

Homosexuality is a capital crime in Iran. In July 1980, a 38-year-old man, married with 6 children, was stoned to death in the town of Kerman in southern Iran. He had been convicted of homosexuality and adultery.

"My own discussion with judicial figures in Iran such as the former Chief Justice, the former head of the Revolutionary Tribunal, members of the Majlis and Guardianship Council leave me in no doubt that the regime is intent on identifying and punishing anyone regarded as "mofsed fil arz" or "mohareb" (corrupt on earth or at enmity with God) and that this includes in particular homosexuals ..." Testimony of an expert witness called to give evidence to the Refugee Status Appeals Authority in New Zealand.



<http://www.refugee.org.nz/rsaa/text/docs/1312-93.htm#Introduction>

# NO DEPORTATIONS TO IRAN

On March 13 2003, Immigration Minister Philip Ruddock claimed to have signed a deal with the Islamic Republic of Iran. The minister said Iran had agreed to the involuntary repatriation of 277 Iranian detainees in Australian detention centres.

Detainees in South Australia's Baxter detention centre were told on Monday, April 28 that they had 28 days to accept voluntary return or face the dire consequences of involuntary repatriation.

What will happen on the expiry date of the offer – 26 May – remains a mystery. The Iranian Embassy denied that Iran has agreed to accept the forcible return of Iranians. A spokesman told the *Australian Financial Review* on Friday 2 May, "Iran does not want any involuntary repatriation and we accept no responsibility for Iranians living in Australia that do not want to return to Iran."

What we do know is that the Australian government has forcibly deported Iranian asylum seekers before. On June 1 2002, Nadar Estahbanati was forcibly deported from Australia; the previous year Nadar's brother, Naser, was prevailed upon to return 'voluntarily' to Iran and he has not been seen nor heard of by anyone since.



## REFUGEE RIGHTS ACTION NETWORK

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## SIRVAN GHADERI'S LIFE SAVED AFTER AN INTENSE IFIR CAMPAIGN

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On 11 April 2003 at 10am, Sirvan Ghaderi, a political activist who fled Iran because of persecution at the hands of the Islamic regime of Iran and a member of IFIR-Turkey, was detained by the Turkish police in the city of Ankara. The authorities planned to deport him by early afternoon. Though he had been interviewed by the UNHCR, he had not received any response. The International Federation of Iranian Refugees (IFIR) began an immediate campaign on his behalf demanding that Sirvan Ghaderi be granted refugee status, his deportation order be cancelled and that he be immediately released. At first his deportation was delayed until the following Monday. After ongoing pressure exerted on the UNHCR via our branch in Turkey as well as internationally, Sirvan was granted refugee recognition and his deportation to Iran cancelled.

<http://www.hambastegi.org> (April 18, 2003)

## NON-REFOULEMENT = NO DEPORTATIONS!

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“Certain provisions of the Convention are considered so fundamental that no reservations may be made to them. These include the definition of the term “refugee”, and the so-called principle of *non-refoulement*, i.e. that no Contracting State shall expel or return (“*refouler*”) a refugee, against his or her will, in any manner whatsoever, to a territory where he or she fears persecution.”

*1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees*

## WHY FLEE?

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A refugee is a person who "owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group, or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality, and is unable to or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country..."

*The 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees*



## RELIGION

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Since 1980, as part of a government-directed attempt to destroy the intellectual and cultural life of the 300,000-member Bahá'í community, young people who declare their Bahá'í identity have been systematically excluded from colleges and universities in Iran.

A secret memorandum signed by Iran's Supreme Leader in 1991 established a subtle government policy aimed at essentially grinding the community into non-existence by forcing Baha'i children to have a strong Islamic education, pushing Baha'i adults to the economic periphery and forcing them from all positions of power or influence, and requiring Baha'i youth "be expelled from universities, either in the admission process or during the course of their studies, once it becomes known that they are Baha'is."

In 1998, the Baha'i Institute for Higher Education came under attack from the Iranian government. In a series of sweeping raids, government agents arrested at least 36 members of the BIHE's faculty and staff and confiscated equipment and records located in over 500 homes.

As the New York Times noted, "[t]he materials confiscated were neither political nor religious, and the people arrested were not fighters or organizers. They were lecturers in subjects like accounting and dentistry; the materials seized were textbooks and laboratory equipment."

<http://www.bic-un.bahai.org/pdf/99-0129.pdf>

## POLITICAL OPINION

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Professor Hashem Aghajari was sentenced to death in November 2002 after a philosophical speech in which he rejected demands to "blindly follow" clerical rule.

This speech prompted an outcry from some hard-line clerics in the religious establishment, who claimed that the speech was an attack on the Prophet of Islam and on fundamental Shiite Islamic doctrines. Many Shiite religious authorities contested these charges and Prof. Aghajari himself has repeatedly denied criticizing the Prophet in any way, and apologized for any inadvertent offense his remarks may have caused.

"Prof. Aghajari's criticisms were of hard-line clerical leaders who demand blind obedience from the people. Instead of protecting Aghajari in conducting a crucial philosophical debate about Iranian and Islamic politics, the judiciary will resort to the death sentence to gag him," -Joe Stork, Washington director for the Middle East and North Africa Division at Human Rights Watch.

<http://hrw.org/press/2002/11/iranacademic.htm>