

January 1996

## HUMAN RIGHTS IN IRAN

### ISSUE

Canada remains seriously concerned about the human rights situation in Iran, and regularly raises the issue with the Iranian government. While Tehran has traditionally argued that Western views on human rights are not sufficiently sensitive to cultural and religious diversity, Iran is concerned by its negative image with the international community. As a result, Iran is currently showing more willingness to discuss human rights issues.

### BACKGROUND

Although there are democratic features to the governmental system of the Islamic Republic, including an elected Parliament (*Majlis*) (next elections March 8, 1996) and presidency (next election spring 1997), some political pluralism, an independent judiciary, a reasonably active press, and the state's endorsement of the rule of law, the authoritarian theocratic Shia Muslim concepts underpinning the Islamic Republic can be at great variance with international concepts of universal rights.

Political parties are not at this time permitted in Iran, although there is an active factional system; an unofficial opposition group, the Freedom Movement, is tolerated, but its candidates have not been allowed to register as a party. The regime imposes strict censorship on imported and translated foreign books. The few human rights NGOs usually lack independence and have an official bent in both organization and orientation. The *Majlis* Commission on Human Rights has fallen dormant and was supplemented this year by the creation of an Islamic Human Rights Commission under the control of the judiciary. However, neither has yet become effective in promoting human rights in Iran (and the latter may well direct much of its attention to the rights of Moslem communities outside Iran rather than to domestic concerns).

Despite constitutional guarantees of due process in open courts, closed revolutionary courts continue. The state judicial system is often arbitrary and corrupt, and is seriously lacking in transparency which would permit public scrutiny. The state is currently reorganizing the judiciary along more traditional Islamic lines, where the magistrate acts as both judge and prosecutor, increasing the authoritarian nature of the system.

Forced disappearances are now infrequent, given the state's control of security. However, Iranians are still subject to arbitrary arrest, and relatives are rarely informed about the whereabouts of detainees. It is believed that beatings and other forms of torture are not infrequent, both as punishment and to elicit confessions.

An estimated 130 executions, some politically motivated, took place in Iran in 1995. Most followed sentences by Islamic courts, sometimes for robbery or adultery plus a few high profile corruption cases. Summary executions, while much less frequent than in the years

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