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Latest updates on Karaj Detainees and imprisoned labour activists in Iran

As of July 19, 2012: Background information: On Friday, 15th of June, 2012, at about 12 noon, 57 members of the "Coordinating Committee to Help Form Workers' Organizations" were arrested by the agents of the intelligence Ministry after security forces and plain clothes officers raided a house in city of Karaj while the annual membership meeting of the "coordinating committee" was underway. These labour activists were brutally beaten by the security forces and transferred to Rajai Shahr prison in Karaj. The majority of detainees, after going through serious interrogations and insults, were released on June 16th exclusive of Ms. Mitra Homayooni, Ms. Reyhaneh Ansari, and Messrs Alireza Asgari, Saeed Marzaban, Cyrus Fathi, Masoud Salimpour, Maziar Mehrpour, Jalil Mohammadi and Faramarz Fetrat Nejad. As of July 12th, with the exception of Alireza Asgari and Jalil Mohammadi the other seven detainees were released on heavy bails.

On Monday July 16, 2012, "Jalil Mohammad" and "Ali Reza Asgari," were taken to the Karaj Trial Court- Branch 6 and then were transferred to "the Central Penitentiary of Karaj". They were transferred to the court with handcuffs and shackle. Even though they were in very high spirits, they seemed unhealthy and in bad shape physically, evidently they have been mistreated while they were in detention. Thus far, there is no confirmed information about the reasons that these two labour activists are held in custody.

In addition to the above workers, well-known and veteran labour activists such as Mahmoud Salehi, Khaled Hosseini, Ghaleb Hosseini, Mohammad Abdipour and Jalal Hosseini were among the approximately sixty people who were arrested and severely beaten. Many of the arrestees sustained serious injuries. Mahmoud Salehi suffered a broken pelvis from the beatings and Khaled Hosseini's hearing has been severely damaged.

We continue to witness many labour activists brutally persecuted and unjustly imprisoned in Iran, like Reza Shahabi, the executive board member and treasurer of the Syndicate of the bus workers of the Municipality of Tehran, who after two years of unjustifiable incarceration has been sentenced to 6 year imprisonment; the appeal court has confirmed his sentence as well. Ali Nejati of Sugarcane workers' union, and other well-known labour activists, including Shahrokh Zamani, Mohmmad Jarahi, Behnam Ebrahimzadeh and Ali Akhavan, continue to be imprisoned.

The raid on a workers' annual meeting is absolutely outrageous and definitely inexcusable; it is a gross violation of the most basic rights of workers which is recognized by international conventions and universal human rights.

IASWI has called for and organized a number of immediate urgent actions in different countries in response to the raid on workers' meeting. Demonstrations took place at Iranian embassies and other locations in Canada, France, England, Sweden, Germany, Denmark, etc. Various trade unions and labour and progressive organizations supported and took part in these solidarity actions. The urgent action on Karaj Raid will continue until the release of Alireza Asgari and Jalil Mohammadi.

We call on all workers and labour organizations internationally to intensify pressures on the government of the Islamic Republic of Iran and demand respect for workers' and human rights in Iran including the right to organize, assemble and freedom of association and expression and to free all jailed labour activists.

Please send your protests letters to:

info@leader.ir, info@judiciary.ir, dr-ahmadinejad@president.ir; iran@un.int; ijpr@iranjudiciary.org, info@dadiran.ir, office@justice.ir, support@irimlsa.ir; info@humanrights-iran.ir; avaei@Dadgostary-tehran.ir; bia.judi@yahoo.com; info@mlsa.ir; CC: info@workers-iran.org

IASWI: www.workers-iran.org / info@workers-iran.org

The sham "Appeals Court" upholds Reza Shahabi's Sentences

The 36th Branch of Appeals Court of Province of Tehran has upheld all the charges against Mr. Reza Shahabi. These include: imprisonment for 6 years, banning from any labour and union activities and a fine of 7,000,000 Tomans (approximately \$ US 3500).

Islamic Republic of Iran's blatant disregard and violation of basic Human Rights is well known to all workers, toilers, liberated women and all freedom lovers in Iran and throughout the world. The Capitalist regime of Islamic Republic has once more demonstrated to the entire world that it has no regards for the recognized basic international standards. Undeniable facts and data on rate of execution, incarceration, and repression of most basic human rights in Iran, have placed Islamic Republic as a major abuser of human rights in the world. Such persistent vile conduct only demonstrates IRI's heights of barbarism and its opposition to humanity and justice. All repressions in Iran are accompanied by authorities' abuse of their political privileges and powers; they divide up society's wealth and resources amongst themselves, followed by constant in-fighting amongst themselves over the spoils.

Meanwhile any attempt to establish workers' civic formations, or in defense of workers' basic rights is considered high crime, and severely punished; thus, labor activists are subject to torture, incarcerated and deprived of their basic social rights.

The incarceration of workers' elected representatives from various workers' organizations and formations including but not limited to : *The Syndicate of Workers of Tehran and Suburbs Vahed Bus Company of Tehran, Sugar Cane Workers' Syndicate of Haft Tapeh, Founding Board of Painters of Tehran, Bakers trade Association of Saghez, Coordinating committee to Help Form Workers' Organizations, Coordinating Committee to Create Workers Organizations, Committee to Pursue Formation of Workers Organizations, Mechanical Steel Workers, Free Trade Union of Iran,..* is another indication of heights of workers' repression by the Islamic Republic of Iran.

These sham courts are fraudulent and the accused have been convicted based on phony charges beforehand. We could ask: what happened to sham courts that were pursuing the Chain Murders of activists back in late-eighties? What about the "legal" proceedings, investigating billions of dollars in financial embezzlements? Has a single individual been convicted in any of these "legal" proceedings? The answer is no, because all individuals involved are regime's own key players. All such cases are treated lackadaisically and subject to "statutes of limitation!" while the theft of financial and natural resources continue vigorously with full speed.

And in face of all this most blatant institutionalized fraud, we have a court of appeals reviewing the case of a labour activist named Reza Shahabi, one of the most trusted labour activists in Iran who is renowned as a symbol of integrity and a force against any type of embezzlement: an individual elected as the Executive Board Members and Treasurer by his fellow workers, and delegated by them to carry out his task. And this sham court upholds phony charges against Mr. Shahabi.

We have had no illusions about this repressive regime and its judiciary system. But such injustices will not push back the labour movement in Iran. Such repressive measures have not been able to keep workers silent in the past, currently or in the future.

IASWI as always condemns these sentences handed down by the Injustice Ministry of Islamic Republic, and demands immediate and unconditional release of all labor activists, students and political prisoners from the regime's dungeons.

Reza Shahabi has not committed any crime, is not guilty of anything, and due to his medical conditions shall immediately and unconditionally be set free.

The International Alliance in Support of Workers in Iran (IASWI)

CUPE calls for immediate release of imprisoned Iranian trade unionists

Iranian government security agents brutalized and arrested approximately 60 trade unionists after raiding the annual meeting of the Coordinating Committee to help Form Workers' Organizations on June 15 in Karaj, Iran. Nine trade unionists remain imprisoned at the Rajai Shahr prison in Karaj.

In response, members of the International Alliance in Support of Workers in Iran (IASWI) in Ottawa organized a demonstration outside the Iranian embassy calling for the immediate release of these political prisoners, for the right to organize independent trade unions and labour associations, the right to free speech, and freedom of assembly and expression in Iran.

CUPE 4772 President and IASWI organizer Farid Partovi helped organize the event and acted as master of ceremonies. CUPE National President Paul Moist spoke at the event.

"We, today, call on the Canadian government to demand the release of these workers, and restore trade union rights for the workers of Iran," said Moist.

"We will never be free trade unionists if any workers around the world have their rights stomped on. And today we stand foursquare with the workers in Iran."

According to Human Rights Watch, the Iranian government is carrying out a campaign to severely weaken civil society by targeting journalists, lawyers, activists, and students. The number of executions has risen sharply since 2010, and authorities tightly restrict access to information. In March 2011, the UN Human Rights Council appointed a Special Rapporteur on Iran in response to the worsening rights situation in Iran, but authorities have so far refused to allow him access to the country.

Workers are unable to exert their right to organize trade unions and associations that are independent of the government and employers without facing violent repression. Iranian authorities have arrested dozens, perhaps hundreds, of trade unionists in recent years and many have experienced harassment, torture and long prison terms.

Working conditions in Iran are tough. Unemployment is as high as 24 per cent. Millions of people live below the poverty line. The International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC) reports that over 70 per cent of Iranian workers are employed on temporary contracts with no job security. Under these economic and social conditions the need for genuine trade union representation is critical. *

Source: <http://cupe.ca/global-justice/calls-immediate-release-imprisoned>

*This rally was co-sponsored with Council in Support of People's Struggles in Iran (Toronto, Canada). In addition to CUPE National, the Canadian Union of Postal Workers supported the protest. Mike Palecek, National Union Representative of CUPW spoke at the rally. Amnesty International-Canada also sent a statement for the rally. Stuart Ryan, a CUPE activists, also spoke on behalf of International League of Peoples Struggles.

Canadian and Iranian media covered the story. Metro Ottawa: <http://metronews.ca/news/ottawa/273807/iran-must-release-imprisoned-union-organizers-say-protestors/>

By Graham Lanktree Metro Ottawa, June 22, 2012: Across from the iron gates of Iran's Ottawa embassy on Friday, a group of protestors called for the country to release seven prisoners held after police cracked down on a labour union in mid June. "The Islamic regime went into a meeting organized by labour activists and arrested 60 people," said Soroosh Hariri, a member of Ottawa's Iranian community. "Their only fault was asking how to organize a labour union and we demand their immediate release from jail."

In the city of Karaj, 60 members of the Coordinating Committee to Help Form Workers' organizations were arrested June 15 by agents of Iran's Intelligence Ministry. All but nine of the prisoners have since been released.

The move came just days after Amnesty International released a report demanding Iran release seven other trade unionists held in the country's prisons.

"We are seriously concerned about repression of workers' rights in Iran," said Farid Partovi, one of the protest organizers and President of CUPE 4772. "Especially at a time when worker's rights are being challenged all around the world."

"We're not demanding anything from the Canadian government," said Hariri. "But we will be here every week until they are freed."

RMT President, Alex Gordon, calls for the release of all jailed workers in Iran

Alex Gordon, RMT president, in his speech at RMT AGM 2012 condemned the crackdown on labour activists and independent workers' organisations by the Islamic Republic of Iran, and the arrest of 60 labour activists at Karaj city.

Alex Gordon called on the Islamic Republic of Iran to release all workers' activists that have been arrested, beaten up and violated by the agents of the Intelligence Ministry. Moreover, he called upon the Islamic Regime of Iran to immediately release Reza Shahabi and all political prisoners in Iran.

Click on link below for RMT President's address including appeal for freedom of Iranian trade unionists:
<http://www.rmtv.org.uk/video/video152/index.html>

The targeting of Afghans in Iran must stop

On June 26, 2012, the IRI's security forces stormed an Afghan neighbourhood of Yazd city after an Iranian 18-year-old girl was killed in the area, allegedly by two men of Afghan origin. Hundreds of Afghans were arrested and scores of homes were set on fire. There are reports that some were severely beaten and some others might have been killed.

Afghan migrants in Iran have been the target of prejudice, intolerant and xenophobic attacks by the security forces of the Islamic Republic of Iran (IRI) and their vigilant supporters including para-military groups for many years. Afghans have been banned from entry to public parks and other community spaces in many provinces throughout Iran. They are constantly targeted, brutalized and blamed for the unemployment and other social ills in Iran. They are stripped of any rights and are almost certainly the most exploited workers of Iran. Their wages are mostly under national minimum wage and often unpaid and stolen by the employers. No human rights or any kind of labour standards protect them. The majority of children of Afghan workers are not entitled to the public education. These children have been facing hardship and denied of any rights throughout their life. A severe discrimination, propagated by the government, weighs on them. A small percentage of Afghan migrants have been granted the status of refugees and given the right of settlement in Iran.

These kinds of violent attacks on a community that have been victimized and violated for many years only benefits the Iranian regime by creating diversions as well as divisions amongst working people and disadvantaged populations. The economic and political situation in Iran is extremely precarious. Poverty and unemployment is skyrocketing. The labour and social justice movements are facing severe repression and are not allowed to organize freely or express their dissatisfaction with the catastrophic situation in Iran. Under such unbearable situation, attacks against Afghan workers are only an attempt to scapegoat a people that had nothing to do with the current crisis in Iran.

We strongly condemn the continued violation of the most basic human rights of Afghans in Iran. We condemn the violent raids on Afghan worker's homes and workplaces by the security forces in Iran. We denounce the prejudiced, intolerant and xenophobic culture perpetuated by the Iranian government against Afghan migrants in Iran. Afghan workers and their families in Iran must have full citizenship rights. We are calling for solidarity of workers' and social justice and human rights' movement in Iran and other parts of the world with Afghan migrants and workers in Iran.

Issued based on a joint statement by International Alliance in Support of Workers in Iran-Canada and Council in Support of People Struggle in Iran-Toronto, Canada

IASWI: www.workers-iran.org / info@workers-iran.org

Support Miners' struggle in Spain

Spanish government has cut subsidies to the mining sector by 63%.

According to the government report, unemployment has reached almost 25% and economy is expected to shrink by 1.7% for 2012.

The mining industry has been one of the hardest hit by the recession, which took hold in the country in 2008. Government subsidies have kept the industry afloat for more than a century; slashing them by nearly two-thirds will probably cost thousands of jobs.

Miners have a long history of playing a lead role in political developments. They had organized strikes during Franco's dictatorship in 1962 and sparking protests throughout the rest of the country.

After two months of discussions with the government, negotiations remain at a standstill. Though the miners were beginning to trickle back home Wednesday, union representatives said they will continue the fight.

International Alliance in Support of Workers in Iran supports the miners' struggle against austerity and capitalist government's attack on miners and workers in Spain.

Mahmoud Salehi: Based on what charges were workers in Karaj attacked and beaten

It had been almost a year since the last General Assembly of Coordinating Committee to Help Form Workers' Organizations, back in March 2011. According to our by-laws General Assembly must be held on an annual basis, so the membership would be able to conduct a review of the steering committee, its activities, inspectors, our financial affairs, and also to elect a new steering committee and inspectors as well. Thus in February 2012 Coordinating Committee sent a formal request to Ministry of Labor requesting one of their auditoriums, to be used for our General Assemblies. But their responses to our repeated requests were negative, and they verbally stated their objection. Hence based on majority of membership's decision we decided to hold our sixth General Assembly on Friday 15 June 2012 at Mehr Shahr city of Karaj Province, and to also simultaneously still pursue our rejected request for space.

I and three other friends Messers *Jamil Rast'khadive*, *Rahman Kardar*, and *Ali Hossaini* had left city of *Saghez* on Thursday afternoon, heading towards *Karaj*. We arrived in *Emamzadeh Taher* around ten thirty at night, and after calling a friend we were picked up by two other friends whom took us to the house in which our meeting was to be held. After my release from jail I realized that neighborhood is called *Aram Boulevard*.

After going up three flights of stairs we arrived at our host's house on the third floor. After knocking on the door, a most respectful young lady opened the door, and introduced herself to us. When we entered I felt as if we were entering a grocery store that sells eggs! All the walls in that house were covered with empty egg boxes. Our host explained that such covering helped to reduce all the sound and noise emanating from the house, so as not to disturb the neighbors. By the next morning most other attendees had arrived, and while we were having our breakfast and casual conversations, perhaps no one was thinking about security forces later attacking our gathering and arresting us.

The sixth annual meeting of Coordination Committee to Help Form Workers' Organizations began at eight in the morning and it was formally initiated by election of a steering committee. After an hour, there were scattered remarks and conversations amongst the attendees about unsuitability of that space for our gathering. When a speaker would start their remarks, they would be asked to lower their voices so as to not bother the neighbors. In face of such obstacles the meeting went on till noon, when all of a sudden the news spread amongst attendees that security forces had surrounded the entire neighborhood. I and a

few others plus our host went to a window to take a look. Right across our house we saw a huge gathering of security forces, but we were told by our host that they were not there for us, and asked to be calm! As we continued our meeting the door bell was rang. The person that opened the door said that someone needed the key to the rooftop.

At exactly 12:20 the attack on us began with shots being fired, and tens of armed security forces in civilian attire, cursing, screaming and insulting, banging on the door and demanding to be let in. Everyone inside that small house was trying to hide where ever they could. As soon as the door was opened up many armed security forces in civilian clothing rushed in, pointing their guns in our faces and mouths and telling us to roll on the floor, faces down. Many times I have seen on television how Israeli forces attack Palestinians and indiscriminately starts beating them up, but these agents attacking us workers in that house were a hundred times worse. All of us were forced to spread on the floor, with their hands behind their backs, and if anyone dared to move they would be attacked by a group of these thugs that were fed and paid by our labor and our toils. The insults they were screaming at us could only be heard from their lips, for I'm truly ashamed to even mention any of it in here. When some of the agents recognized our Kurdish attire, they began attacking us even more insanely and screaming: "You're the ones responsible for killing thousands of Guardian Corps, and what the heck are you doing in this city,..." An agent began walking on my back and started kicking me. One of my fellow workers laying close to me screamed at him: "Don't kick him, he has a kidney problem." The agents reacted by hitting me harder, screaming back: "Let his kidney explode..."

In this massive attack every single one was severely beaten up, while agents kept screaming that we were a bunch of terrorists. There were a lot of terrified people gathered outside of building and asking what was going on, and why they were shooting? Why there were so many people in there? Why they kept beating us up? An officer commanding of agents asked some of the people to follow him inside the room, and a few women followed him inside observing all of us in hand cuffs, spread on the floor, faces down. One of the women asked who we were. Before we could say anything, an agent told her that we were terrorists and that people should be thankful that we were apprehended. If any of us tried to tell the truth to the people we would be attacked by a group of agents. By the time we were evacuated out of the house practically everything inside that house was broken and destroyed, with only a handful of object still intact.

Besides being hand cuffed I was also tied at my feet. I and Hussein Pirooti were the first one to be taken out of the house. As we were exited we were also being videotaped. There was also a group of agents down by the stairs that would beat up, and insult us some more as we passed them. We were forced to enter the cars with our hands tied behind our back. If anyone's head was raised, they would be hit. It took a very long while for them to put all of us in those cars, all along we had to endure that hot, cramped space, hearing all those profanities and disrespect. The handcuffs were so tied that Khalid Hossaini and a few others began protesting, and saying their hands were getting paralyzed. Agents responses were along the lines of: "Shut the hell up. Your hands are getting paralyzed, tough. I wish to god all your hands gets paralyzed." Finally they cars began a long journey towards the prison. Again we were subjected to outrageous disrespect and profanities while exiting the cars. Everyone was blindfolded, and lined up. Slightest sound out of anyone, and they would be hit by a group of agents. We were put in several large halls, and after our shoes and belts were taken away, everyone was divided into two large groups, each in a huge room. At this point we realized we were inside ward 94 of Rajaei Shahr prison of Karaj, which is a high security ward, for political prisoners and managed jointly by Ministry of Information, Armed Forces and Guardians Corps. According to prisoners that were there before us, no one in that ward even had visitation privileges. A prisoner I met in there Mr. Sied Mahmud Dolt'abadi had been incarcerated for 32 months, his case still undecided.

The interrogations began after we were transferred to individual cells. Personally I wasn't disrespected during my interrogations, but I heard account of some that were disrespected and beaten up during their interrogations. Saturday morning at four o'clock we were all told to wake up, and face the wall. All were blind folded again, and told not to make a sound. Everyone was taken out of cells individually, and threatened to sign a piece of paper and take a picture. Initially we though the paper was some kind of finger printing, but soon realized that it were a sort of a recognizance form. Everyone refused to do anything with papers. We were summoned again Saturday morning and forced and threatened that unless we resigned from Coordinating Committee, we would stay in prison. But not a single one broke down, and everybody unanimously defended our Committee. Despite intimidation tactics, insults and violence all of us were in high spirits, and without any fear we were singing our labor anthems. After being arrested for 32 hours, without a single one being told exactly what the charges were, we were freed from prison. Once released, we went back to the neighborhood and met some of the people who had witnessed our arrest. During our conversations we told them we were neither terrorist nor saboteur, but only a group of workers having a labor meeting, and apologized if we had caused them any inconvenience. People told us they had recognized from the first glance that we were decent folks and security forces were lying to them.

This was a brief account of what happened to us on Friday 15 June 2010 in Karaj, when members of Coordinating Committee

were subjected to disrespect, profanities, beating and intimidation without a single charge. There are still nine other members of Committee incarcerated and not released. They are Misses *Mitra Homayoni and Rayhaneh Ansary*, and Messer: *Alireza Askari, Saied Marzban, Mazyar Mehrparvr, Siros Fatehi, Jalil Mohamadi, Faramrz Fetrt'nezhad, Masoud Salim'pour*.

Mahmoud Salehi, 21 June 2012

Source: http://www.khamahangy.com/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=985:based-on-what-charges-were-workers-in-karaj-attacked-and-beaten&catid=11:1389-12-23-23-55-51&Itemid=30

In addition to the above letter by Mahmoud Salehi, numerous other statements have been issued in Iran by members of the Coordinating Committee and other labour organizations in Iran. On July 9, 2012, members of the Coordinating Committee to Help Form Workers' Organizations issued an open letter to the Chief Justice of Islamic Republic of Iran*. The letter included some background information about the formation of the "Coordinating Committee": "Due to lack of and a deficiency of existing independent and self-initiated workers organizations "Coordinating Committee..." was created about seven years ago, based on a call of a founding committee and signatures of more than 4000 workers, petitioning for such a cause.... "We, the members of "Coordinating Committee..." consider it our right to freely create and participate in any type of committee, association or independent formation deemed necessary by us to do so. Based on our founding statement; Coordinating Committee's mission, and its members' task is: to help form workers' organizations through creation of infrastructure and coordination amongst workers."

The letter adds that, "During the past few years our members have been continuously attacked by security forces, and subjected to harassment, arrests, fines, floggings, incarceration, disrespect and beatings. All such repressive measures against us have been illegal, and many of them were carried out through informal and unofficial channels. All such intimidation tactics have only one goal in mind, to dissuade our members from advocating on behalf of workers' rights and demands. This goal of eliminating formations such as our Committee, is to pursue denial of workers' rights, mass layoffs and expulsions, and all other injustices imposed on workers' without any obstacles: without voice of dissent heard from workers: and to basically disarm workers from any capacity to protest all the injustices and inequalities imposed on them. Based on our legal rights, we submitted a formal request for a meeting space, on February 2012, through a letter sent to Ministry of Labor and Welfare, to be used for our annual General Assembly. But the Ministry refused to give us any reply whatsoever. Finally we chose a residential building (which belongs to a relative of one of our members) in city of Karaj, as the site for our annual gathering, and put out a call for all members who could attend the meeting to be present there on Friday June 20th at 8:00 AM. With complete disbelief our peaceful gathering was attacked by security forces, and tens of participants were severely beaten up, and disrespected. About 57 of our members were arrested, and transferred to prison in city of Rajaei. This attack was initiated by security forces with shooting in the air, and was so inhuman and violent that many workers were badly hurt, and had to seek immediate medical attention, right after they were freed from jail. A few had to be hospitalized. Such an extremely violent response from security forces to workers who have just gathered in their annual gathering is rarely seen anywhere in the world....We, the members of Coordinating Committee have not committed any crime, and all of our activities have been nothing but defending our own rights and demands, or that of other workers. We consider arrest and incarceration of our friends attending our annual gathering in Karaj nothing but an act to defend the Capitalists' interests. If those incarcerated are considered guilty, then all of us are guilty as such, and shall be arrested, tried and incarcerated. Because of this, we, the members of Coordinating Committee demand immediate and unconditional freedom of two remaining incarcerated colleagues Messrs; Alireza Asgari and Jalil Mohamadi, and unless our demands are met, we shall continue our protest by assembling in front of Ministry of Justice, courts and prison demanding their freedom."

*It is important to emphasize that labour activists in Iran are under mounting pressures and ever-increasing repression under which any free activities and expressions is attacked and suppressed. The Islamic Republic of Iran (IRI) in more than 32 years of its repressive reign has constantly suppressed Iranian labour movement and their rights, including the right to form their own autonomous workers' organizations. IRI, including its judiciary system, has no commitment whatsoever to international norms and agreements regarding human or labour rights. Only workers' unity and cohesion and independent organizing and continued international worker to worker solidarity can and will push back this repressive regime.

IASWI: www.workers-iran.org / info@workers-iran.org