



Global Nonviolent Action Database

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Iranian political prisoners fast for prisoners' rights and end to their solitary confinement, 2010

26 July

2010

to: 11 August

2010

Country: Iran

Location City/State/Province: Tehran

Location Description: Evin Prison is located in northwestern Tehran at the base of the Alborz Mountains,

Goals:

The 17 political prisoners wanted:

1. All prisoners' lawful rights to be upheld and granted
2. An end to their personal solitary confinement
3. An increase in the time allowed for telephone calls and family visitation
4. Improved access to medical facilities

Methods

Methods in 1st segment:

- 159. The fast (fast of moral pressure, hunger strike, satyagrahic fast) › 17 prisoners go on a wet hunger strike (only consume liquids)

Methods in 2nd segment:

- 159. The fast (fast of moral pressure, hunger strike, satyagrahic fast) › 17 prisoners continue wet hunger strike

Methods in 3rd segment:

- 002. Letters of opposition or support › Prisoners formally issued a statement with their demands for change in treatment of prisoners.
- 159. The fast (fast of moral pressure, hunger strike, satyagrahic fast) › 17 prisoners continue wet hunger strike
- 159. The fast (fast of moral pressure, hunger strike, satyagrahic fast) › The families of the prisoners go on hunger strike in solidarity with the prisoners after Evin prison guards prevent them from seeing their relatives.

Methods in 4th segment:

- 047. Assemblies of protest or support › Families of the political prisoners gathered outside the General Prosecutor's office to demand access to visit their relatives.

- 159. The fast (fast of moral pressure, hunger strike, satyagrahic fast) › 14 prisoners continue on wet hunger strike; 3 prisoners go on a dry hunger strike (do not consume liquid or solid food/drink)

Methods in 5th segment:

- 006. Group or mass petitions › Families of prisoners sign letter to judiciary requesting that their relatives, who are inmates, are treated well by prison authorities.
- 159. The fast (fast of moral pressure, hunger strike, satyagrahic fast) › Inmates continue with their hunger strike (dry or wet, depending on the person)

Methods in 6th segment:

- 159. The fast (fast of moral pressure, hunger strike, satyagrahic fast) › Inmates continue with their hunger strike (dry or wet, depending on the person)

Classifications

Classification:

Change

Cluster:

Human Rights

Group characterization:

- Journalists
- Political prisoners who were: student activists
- civil society activists
- human rights activists
- political dissidents

Leaders, partners, allies, elites

Leaders:

17 political prisoners: Bahman Ahmadi Amoui, Gholam Hossein Arshi, Ebrahim Babaei, Babak Bordbar, Majid Darri, Jafar Eghdami, Koohyar Goodarzi, Peyman Karimi-Azad, Ali Malihi, Abdollah Momeni, Hamid Reza Mohammadi, Zia Nabavi, Hossein Nouraninejad, Ali Parviz, Keyvan Samimi, Mohammad Hossein Sohrabirad, and Majid Tavakoli

Partners:

The families of the prisoners

External allies:

International Campaign for Human Rights in Iran, Human Rights Watch, Other political prisoners and Green Party members who advocate for their wellbeing and urge them to end the hunger strike for health reasons

Involvement of social elites:

Leader of the Green Movement opposition party, Mir Hussein Moussavi, urged the prisoners to end the hunger strike, along with other figures in the movement such as Ahmad Sadr Haj Seyed Javadi, Mehdi Karroubi, Abdollah Nouri, Habiballah Peyman, Zahra Rahavard, Ezatallah Sahabi, Ebrahim Yazdi, and Ayatollah Bayat Zanjani

Joining/exiting order of social groups

Groups in 1st Segment:

- 17 political prisoners
- International Campaign for Human Rights in Iran

Groups in 2nd Segment:

- Other political prisoners who urge them to end hunger strike for health reasons

Groups in 3rd Segment:

- Families of the prisoners

Groups in 4th Segment:

- Human Rights Watch

Groups in 5th Segment:

Groups in 6th Segment:

Additional notes on joining/exiting order:

The families of the prisoners were supportive of the prisoners throughout the entire hunger strike, but the families themselves engaged in nonviolent direct action during the 3rd, 4th, and 5th segments. It is also unclear when Human Rights Watch and the International Campaign for Human Rights in Iran began following the case, but articles for these organizations date to 6 August 2010 and 4 August 2010, respectively.

Segment Length: 2.67 days

Opponent, Opponent Responses, and Violence

Opponents:

The Evin prison guards and authorities, the Iranian Judiciary and Tehran prosecutor, Jafari Dolatabadi, and the regime of President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad at large

Nonviolent responses of opponent:

Prison authorities prohibited prisoners from phone calls and visitation rights upon the initiation of their hunger strike.

Campaigner violence:

Not known.

Repressive Violence:

Prison authorities acting under the guidance of the state responded violently to the prisoners' hunger strike through both the threat and the use of injurious force. In response to the prisoners' protest of the prison conditions, prison authorities placed them in solitary confinement, which is seen here as being violent because solitary confinement has been shown to have adverse mental health effects, and in Evin prison, being placed in solitary confinement is synonymous with being subjected to physical abuse and/or torture. Though specific instances of torture were not described in the research, such violent repression is likely due to the Evin prison's reputation. Prison authorities also denied the prisoners adequate medical care during their hunger strike, which in this case is seen as a physically violent response because it resulted in declining health condition for several prisoners, many of whom had medical conditions like diabetes and multiple sclerosis that require care.

Success Outcome

Success in achieving specific demands/goals:

1 point out of 6 points

Survival:

1 point out of 1 points

Growth:

2 points out of 3 points

Notes on outcomes:

The campaign did not achieve most of its goals. During the 16 day striking period, one of the prisoners on strike, Babak Bordbar, was released from prison, which the prisoners saw as hope that the Chief Prosecutor would continue to reconsider the treatment of prisoners. On 16 August 2010, however, the head of the prison, Sedagat, threatened to place 5 of the hunger strikers in solitary confinement for 6 months, even though law only permits 20 days. Sedagat also threatened to ban their contact with family. One month later, on 28 September 2010, the government upheld the sentence for another prisoner on strike, Ali Malihi.

Mahmoud Ahmadinejad was re-elected President of Iran on 12 June 2009. The next day, hundreds of thousands of people peacefully protested the results, chanting “Where is my vote?,” because they believed that the election was fraudulent. Most of the protesters joined the Green Movement, a nonviolent pro-democracy group opposed to Ahmadinejad’s leadership and was led by Mir Hossein Mousavi and his spouse, Zahra Rahnava. The Ahmadinejad regime responded violently to the protesters with its Revolutionary Guards, Basij paramilitary units, and Lebas Shakhsi forces. Many were beaten and arrested. The regime sent some of those arrested to Evin prison, located in northwestern Tehran at the base of the Alborz Mountains and known by international human rights workers and Iranian citizens as notorious for housing political prisoners. Prisoners there commonly reported physical and mental abuse.

Seventeen political prisoners housed in Ward 350 at the Evin prison -- Bahman Ahmadi Amoui, Gholam Hossein Arshi, Ebrahim Babaei, Babak Bordbar, Majid Darri, Jafar Eghdami, Koohyar Goodarzi, Peyman Karimi-Azad, Ali Malihi, Abdollah Momeni, Hamid Reza Mohammadi, Zia Nabavi, Hossein Nouraninejad, Ali Parviz, Keyvan Samimi, Mohammad Hossein Sohrabirad, and Majid Tavakoli -- went on a 16-day hunger strike on 26 July 2010 to protest poor living conditions. They demanded that prison authorities (1) fully uphold all of the rights legally guaranteed to Iranian prisoners, (2) give prisoners increased time for phone calls and visitation rights, and (3) provide prisoners improved access to medical care. Specifically, they were striking against the “unsuitable treatment of prisoners and their families by prison authorities and Ward 350 officers on visitation days; lack of health and welfare facilities; as well as suspension of visitation privileges of several prisoners such as Bahman Ahadi Amouee.”

In response to their demands, prison authorities placed the prisoners in solitary confinement in Ward 240. In 2004, the United Nations Working Group on Arbitrary Detention likened Iran’s use of solitary confinement to the Convention Against Torture’s definition of inhuman treatment. The prisoners promptly added their release from solitary confinement to the list of their demands and documented all of these demands in a written statement on 2 August 2010. The prison authorities prohibited the prisoners from making phone calls, visiting with their families, and seeing their lawyers. Each of these policies violated Iranian and international laws, which required authorities to provide basic necessities to prisoners and treat them with respect.

Recognizing the injustices the inmates faced, their families tried to visit them on 2 August 2010, but the prison guards forced them to leave. Some family members then initiated their own hunger strikes in solidarity with their relatives. On 4 August 2010, the families marched to the office of Tehran General Prosecutor, Jafari Dolatabadi, and gathered outside the building. They demanded access to their relatives and their relatives’ release from solitary confinement. Government police beat them, threatened to arrest them for their peaceful protest, threatened to prosecute them if they gave press interviews, and forcibly removed pictures of their loved ones from their hands. Also on 4 August, three of the 17 prisoners on hunger strike, Bahman Ahmadi Amoui, Keyvan Samimi, and Majid Tavakoli, began a dry hunger strike in which they refused to consume solids and liquids. The others continued on wet hunger strikes, in which they consumed only liquids. Several of the 17 hunger strikers had chronic medical conditions, including diabetes, multiple sclerosis, and heart disease, but prison authorities provided little

medical care. Some reported that Majid Tavakoli was unconscious for part of the strike, and others reported that prison authorities temporarily admitted five strikers to the hospital. A family member of one of the prisoners reported that prison authorities humiliated and insulted the hunger strikers.

At this phase of the campaign, human rights organizations, such as Human Rights Watch and the International Campaign for Human Rights in Iran, had begun publishing articles detailing the plight of the prisoners. Meanwhile, other political prisoners, including Issa Saharkhiz and Mahdiyeh Golroo, urged the 17 political prisoners on hunger strike to stop fasting, arguing that the Green Movement needed their leadership.

For unknown reasons, on 7 August 2010, authorities released one of the political prisoners on strike, Babak Bordbar. Kalemeh, the website of the Green Party leader Mir Hussein Moussavi, reported that on 8 August, authorities arrested the father of Ali Parviz, one of the hunger strikers, for going to the Iranian judiciary to submit a letter on behalf of all the inmates' families asking for improved treatment. Then, on 11 August, 15 of the prisoners ended their hunger strikes. They published a letter on Kalemeh explaining that they ended the hunger strike out of respect for leading members of the Green Movement, including Moussavi, Mehdi Karroubi, Ayatollah Bayat Zanjani, Zahra Rahavard, Abdollah Nouri, Ezatallah Sahabi, Ahmad Sadr Haj Seyed Javadi, Habiballah Peyman, Ebrahim Yazdi, and others, who urged them to cease the hunger strike. It is likely that Green Movement leaders wanted the prisoners to end the strike so that the prisoners would be able to provide movement leadership. The prisoners declared that they would continue to fight for the human rights of all prisoners, and hoped that the regime would punish prison officials who violated their human rights. They accepted the release of Babak Bordbar as evidence that the government would likely meet the rest of their demands. One prisoner, Keyvan Samimi, remained on a wet hunger strike and declared he would do so until prison authorities returned himself and his fellow prisoners to the general prison population from solitary confinement. It is unknown the exact length of time Mr. Samimi, age 61, remained on hunger strike because it is unclear how long the prisoners remained in solitary confinement.

BBC News reported that after the hunger strike officially ended, authorities forced the prisoners to remain in solitary confinement, but they indicated no specific timeline. On 15 August 2010, the head of Evin prison, Sedagat, threatened five of the 17 prisoners (Bahman Ahmadi Amoui, Gholam Hossein Arshi, Koohyar Goodarzi, Ali Malihi, and Keyvan Samimi) with six months longer in solitary confinement and an end to contact with their families, and the other 11 prisoners with 20 days longer in solitary confinement. He issued these threats even though the law allowed a maximum of 20 days total in solitary confinement. It is unknown whether authorities followed through on these threats. Also on 15 August, authorities transferred Majid Tavakoli to Rajaeeshahr prison, where prisoners are often sent as punishment for noncompliance with authorities. Many of the others previously on hunger strike remained imprisoned at Evin. For many, this was neither their first nor their last hunger strike in prison.

Research Notes

Influences:

Though not directly influenced by any particular past campaign, hunger striking is a fairly common method of nonviolent action employed by political prisoners in Iran. Some of the prisoners participating in this campaign, including Majid Tavakoli, had participated in hunger strikes against mistreatment of prisoners in the past (1).

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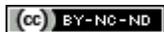
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Name of researcher, and date dd/mm/yyyy:

Meghan Kelly, 25/10/2015

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