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AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL

Public Statement

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Khuzestan, Iran: Amnesty International calls for an end to the cycle of violence in Khuzestan and an investigation into the root causes of recent unrest

Amnesty International is today urging Iran's security forces to exercise restraint in its policing of demonstrations in the province of Khuzestan in order to bring a peaceful end to the disturbances which have left at least 31 dead, hundreds reportedly injured and many hundreds more in detention. In this respect, Amnesty International calls on the Iran's security forces to abide to international standards of conduct of law enforcement and, in particular, to respect and protect the right to life, freedom from torture and ill-treatment and freedom from arbitrary arrest.

The cycle of violence in Khuzestan must end to avoid further loss of life, injury; arbitrary arrest and damage to private and state property.

In light of reports that water supplies have been cut in areas where unrest has taken place, Amnesty International urges the Khuzestan authorities to ensure that the cutting off of water supplies has not been used as a form of punishment for the unrest, or on discriminatory grounds. Access to clean water is recognised as a human right by the United Nations Committee on Economic Social and Cultural Rights.

The unrest reportedly began on 15 April in the Shalang Abad (also known as Da'ira) area of central Ahvaz, where around 1000 demonstrators had reportedly assembled to protest at the contents of a letter, reports of which began to circulate on 9 April, allegedly written in 1999 by an advisor in the office of President Khatami. The letter, whose authenticity has been strongly denied by the author and other governmental sources, sets out policies for the reduction of the Arab population of the province of Khuzestan, including their transfer to other regions of Iran; the transfer of non-Arabs, including Persians and Turkic-speaking Azeris to the province; the elimination of Arab place names along with their replacement by Persian names.

According to a report in the 17 April 2005 edition of the government-run Persian-language newspaper Iran, 137 people had been arrested to date in connection with the unrest and at least eight injured. Other reports indicate that up to 250 people may

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have been arrested.

Amnesty International has received unconfirmed information that at least 31 persons have been killed in the disturbances. Ahvazi sources claim that up to 500 people have been injured. There are also reports that the city of Ahvaz has been sealed by the security forces. There have also been reports of excessive use of force, unlawful killing and possibly of extra-judicial executions of protesters following circulation of reports that up to seven police or security officials had been killed by demonstrators and that the security forces are now operating a 'shoot-to-kill' policy.

Amnesty International urges the security forces to conduct its operation in full compliance with relevant international standards, including the United Nations Basic Principles on the Use of Force and Firearms by Law Enforcement Officials, whose provisions include, *inter alia*: (4) that "Law enforcement officials, in carrying out their duty, shall, as far as possible, apply non-violent means before resorting to the use of force and firearms. They may use force and firearms only if other means remain ineffective or without any promise of achieving the intended result"; (9) that "Law enforcement officials shall not use firearms against persons except in self-defence or defence of others against the imminent threat of death or serious injury, to prevent the perpetration of a particularly serious crime involving grave threat to life, to arrest a person presenting such a danger and resisting their authority, or to prevent his or her escape, and only when less extreme means are insufficient to achieve these objectives. In any event, intentional lethal use of firearms may only be made when strictly unavoidable in order to protect life"; and that (11) "Rules and regulations on the use of firearms by law enforcement officials should include guidelines that: ... (e) Provide for warnings to be given, if appropriate, when firearms are to be discharged".

Amnesty International also calls on the Iranian authorities to promptly set up an independent and impartial investigation into the alleged violations of human rights by the Iranian security forces. Officials suspected of responsibility for human rights violations such as unlawful killings/extrajudicial executions should be suspended from active duty during the investigation. Those suspected to be responsible for such human rights violations should be brought to justice in accordance with fair trial procedures.

Amnesty International also urges the office of the Supreme Leader to convene a broad-based commission which could include representatives of the community, local leaders, parliamentarians, government representatives and interested parties to investigate the root causes of the disturbances and how these were dealt with by the security forces.

Such a commission should determine whether there are any explicit or implicit state policies which result in the economic, social or cultural marginalisation or other forms of violations of rights of members of the Ahvazi Arab community in Iran.

Following reports that at least 31 civilians - including two reportedly under the age of 15 and one possibly a mother carrying a child - have been left dead in the course of these disturbances, the commission should be empowered to make recommendations relating to policing methods deployed by the security forces, leading to the development of a code of conduct. Amnesty International made this specific recommendation to the International Affairs office of the Judiciary in October 2002.

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BACKGROUND

The Arab community in Iran is around 3% of the total whereas Persians are said to account for around 50%. The Arab community mainly lives in the Khuzestan region adjoining Iraq. It is the site of much of Iran's oil resources. Members of Iran's Arab community have a long-standing grievance against successive governments that Arabs have been overlooked in terms of the distribution of resources aimed at social development.

A **copy of the letter** which allegedly sparked the unrest, along with an English translation can be found at ; the author's denial, in Persian, that he wrote the letter, calling it a forgery, along with an **explanation about the contents** can be found at . The government and parliament are reportedly commencing enquiries into the unrest.

The unrest reportedly spread to the Kiyan and Malashye areas of Ahvaz and also to Hamidiye, northwest of Ahvaz and Kut 'Abdallah, south of the city. Reports on Sunday 17 April indicate that the security was being re-imposed in the effected areas.

Amnesty International has collected the names of 54 people who it is alleged were killed in the confrontations. Amnesty International is investigating further the information to confirm the exact identity of those killed and further information surrounding the confrontations.

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