

INTERNATIONAL CAMPAIGN FOR HUMAN RIGHTS IN IRAN

Iranian State TV Acts as an Arm of the Intelligence Apparatus

Call for Removal of Head of State-Controlled Radio and TV

Need for Independent Media More Urgent than Ever



Ezzatollah Zarghami,
Head of IRIB

(11 August 2010) The Iranian state-controlled radio and television, *Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting (IRIB)*, has acted as an arm of intelligence and security agencies implicated in gross human rights violations since the disputed presidential election of June 2009, the *International Campaign for Human Rights in Iran* said today.

The *Campaign's* research and investigations into the content of programs produced and broadcast by the IRIB reveal a close working relationship between intelligence and judiciary officials in charge of prosecuting post-election detainees, such as in the

case of Maziar Bahari, a Newsweek journalist who was detained last year.

The IRIB has also aired defamatory programs against well-known political personalities and civil society activists, such as Dr. Shirin Ebadi, Nobel Peace Prize Laureate and Dr. Fatemeh Haghighatjoo, a former member of parliament, in the guise of documentaries. The IRIB has also exerted unlawful coercion on the families of those killed and injured during the past year's protests to make false statements.

The *Campaign* is calling for the removal of Ezzatollah Zarghami, IRIB's director, for his involvement in covering up gross human rights violations and propagating false, slanderous, and unfounded allegations.

"Iranian state television has colluded with intelligence and security agencies in trampling over the rights of detainees and citizens," said Hadi Ghaemi, the *Campaign's* spokesperson.

Interviews with former detainees and the families of protestors killed by security forces, coupled with a detailed review of Iranian TV programs, reveal the notable role of the IRIB as a tool in service of human rights violations.

The *Campaign's* research indicates that IRIB producers worked hand in hand with interrogators, intelligence officials, and judiciary officials to obtain and film false confessions. Through heavily edited segments, scenarios were propagated, promoted by the Intelligence Ministry, to conceal human rights violations and make unfounded allegations against dissidents..

Under Iranian laws, IRIB producers and directors of these programs are guilty of "dissemination of falsehoods," "insult and defamation," "slander," and "disturbing public opinion," and should be prosecuted in a court of law for their libelous programs.

Active Participation in “Show Trials” and Interrogations

Maziar Bahari, an Iranian-Canadian journalist, spent three months in prison after the Iranian election in 2009. Bahari, who made confessions under duress, told the *International Campaign for Human Rights in Iran* that his taped confession was a fabricated show, coordinated by Iranian state television and certain press outlets close to the Iranian government.

“Three teams of reporters came into the prison, Press TV, IRIB’s Persian service, and Fars news Agency...the interrogator said, ‘We will give some of the footage from your confession to be broadcast on the 8:30 program.’ During the confessions, the IRIB team members talked to the interrogators...they were completely coordinated. For example, the interrogator would hand them a piece of paper and would say: make sure you ask this question, too,’” said Bahari.

Bahari told the *Campaign* that when he told his interrogator that he would not be able to remember all the questions and answers he was supposed to repeat before the camera, his interrogator said, “‘In order to make it easier [for you], we will convert the text of your confessions into questions and answers. Therefore, the reporters would ask these questions and you would answer them.’ Therefore each of the three reporters had a set of questions and I gave the answers I was supposed to give. One was a reporter from the IRIB Persian service, one was a reporter from the English language Press TV, and the other was a reporter from Fars News Agency. All three of them and I were reading from a script. The IRIB reporters read the interrogator’s questions. When I made a mistake, just like an interrogator, the reporter would say ‘It’s better if you say it this way.’”

According to Bahari, there was complete coordination between his interrogators and the IRIB team. “The room where I was interviewed by Press TV was the same as my interrogation room. Only that during the taping, a red curtain was put up behind me and my interrogator sat behind the curtain making sure I spoke as they wished,” said Bahari.

On 1 August 2009, Iranian state television broadcast the trial session of over one hundred post-election detainees. Prior to the broadcast, most of the detainees had not had access to their lawyers or their families.

A defendant prosecuted during this trial told the *International Campaign for Human Rights in Iran* that, “confessions which were made on television were completely rehearsed. People whose confessions were broadcast were separated from the others earlier and taken to a large room next door. Necessary coordination was made with them and despite what was shown in court, all confession scenes had been pre-planned. Before the court session I saw one of the defendants who was forced to confess rehearsing a text with the Deputy Prosecutor.”

According to this witness, the IRIB crew cooperated closely with the prosecutors to prepare the stage for the “show trials.”

“The coverage for the trial session was completely different from regular trials. Several hours prior to the session, the camera crew of IRIB’s News unit discussed the details and ways to cover the trial with authorities from the Prosecutor’s Office. One of the defendants was identified by his first initials in court, but was later introduced on television with his full first and family name. Even though the Tehran Prosecutor, Saeed Mortazavi, was not present at the court session, prior to the meeting he met with a man who seemed to be responsible for the coordination between the Prosecutor’s Office and the IRIB Television unit. During the court session, Mortazavi and the Head of *Fars News Agency* watched the court proceedings in the room behind the courtroom through a closed circuit television,” the witness told the *Campaign*.

The IRIB's cooperation with interrogators and prosecutors was not limited to the trial dates but extended throughout the interrogations. A post-election detainee forced to cooperate and make false confessions under severe psychological and physical coercion told the *Campaign* that IRIB's news networks were close to judicial authorities during the prisoner confession sessions. This witness is currently out of prison on bail.

He told the *Campaign*, "In several instances, Saeed Mortazavi, the Tehran Prosecutor, took the post-election detainees to his office while at the same time, a team from IRIB's News Network was also present there. Professional cameras and equipment were set up by the IRIB's News Network team in order to record prisoner confessions which had been scripted and edited in prison earlier, and had been rehearsed in prison numerous times. The text for the confessions was approved by an authority responsible for the interrogation. Some of these confessions were extracted prior to the trial session. The objective of recording the said confessions was to simultaneously broadcast segments of it on the night the trial session was held. For some reason, only some of the recorded confessions, such as those of Messrs. Abtahi, Atrianfar, Maziar Bahari, Amir Hossein Mahdavi, and a few others were broadcast."

Covering Up Murders of Protestors

The IRIB has actively attempted to cover up the murder of protestors by security and Basij forces. It has produced several programs with regards to the death of Neda Agha Soltan, making contradictory claims regarding her death.

Neda's mother, Hajer Rostami, told the *Campaign*, "They [IRIB] have broadcast three films and each time contradicted their earlier claims. As Neda's mother, as far as I know, she went out to protest and was killed by their forces." Regarding the truthfulness of IRIB programs about Neda, her mother said, "No one believes these lies, neither Iranian people nor those abroad."

Rostami added that she is not planning to bring a lawsuit against the IRIB because she believes it will not be properly investigated. "When she was killed I filed a lawsuit which has not been processed at all. Who should I complain to now regarding these films?" she asked.

Addressing Ezzatollah Zarghami, head of the IRIB, Neda's mother told the , "Mr. Zarghami claimed Neda was an actress because she had her eyes open as she passed away. I want to tell him to put himself in my place for a second. His words have had a terrible impact on me. God knows Neda was not an actress, she was a young woman like other youth. Mr. Zarghami, Neda's eyes kept open and will remain open until they reach a conclusion. If she had closed her eyes, maybe it wouldn't have had the same impact. Her open eyes shook the world, shook the Iranian nation."

Massoumeh Chegini, wife of Moharram Chegini, who was killed on 15 June 2009 in Tehran in front of Meghdad Basij Station during a post-election protest, told the *Campaign*, "After my husband was killed, some people came to our house with cameras. They asked me 'Why did your husband go to the street?' 'Was he political?' 'What kinds of activities did he do?' They said that a group of rioters had killed my husband. But they couldn't have killed my husband. Who can go on the roof and shoot bullets on people? I asked them, 'How did a group of rioters know that my husband was on the street and that he had to be killed?' They said 'some people took advantage of the circumstances that day.'"

The father of an individual who was shot in front of the IRIB's offices last summer and currently suffers from severe physical complications told the *Campaign*, "I have been summoned many times and asked to go to IRIB's Channel Two TV station. They want me to be interviewed and say that I condemn the savage behavior of the gangsters and hoodlums. After we talked about this several times and I refused to do this, one day a group came to my home with cameras and equipment without prior appointment. They said we

have come from the TV station to make a documentary film about your child who is a victim of hoodlums' violence. I refused their offer and told them nothing has happened to him to warrant the making of a documentary film by the IRIB.”

Defamation and Slandering of Political Personalities and Activists

In addition to the close cooperation of the IRIB with intelligence agents and interrogators, the IRIB has systematically produced and broadcast television programs aimed to target well-known personalities through attributing undue, libelous, and untrue matters to them. The medium has never shown any accountability for the claims it has made, nor for publishing the responses provided by the subjects who all reside outside the country.

On 26 May 2010, Ezzatollah Zarghami announced plans for broadcasting such programs. [He told a Conference organized by the Political Organization of Isargaran Society](#)^[1], “A documentary has been produced for the anniversary of the election. It explains for viewers the sedition story starting prior to the election, all the way through post-election. The very nature of the sedition is that the public understands the realities of it [only] after it happens; and so, after this sedition is explained, the reality of it becomes more believable.”

The television series which was first broadcast as “Sedition Documents” and later as “Enlightenment,” is accessible through the website of the Young Reporters Club, affiliated with the IRIB.

The program was about the following individuals:

1. Dr. Fatemeh Haghighatjoo, Member of the Sixth Parliament; broadcast on 26 May 2010.
2. Fariba Davoodi Mohajer, women’s rights activist and journalist; broadcast on 30 May 2010.
3. Mohsen Sazegara, political and media activist; broadcast on 6 June 2010.
4. Ataollah Mohajerani, former Minister of Culture and Islamic Guidance, broadcast on 8 June 2010.
5. Ali Afshari, political activist and former member of Daftar-e Tahkim-e Vahdat student organization; broadcast on 13 June 2010.
6. Shirin Ebadi, Nobel Peace Prize Laureate and head of the Defenders of Human Rights Center; broadcast on 10 June 2010.

In the film broadcast about Fariba Davoodi Mohajer, her photographs were manipulated and fabricated information was used. Davoodi Mohajer has denied the authenticity of the used material. “The film which was broadcast about me was completely fabricated and aimed to defame me,” she told the *Campaign*.

For example, throughout the program, it was repeatedly claimed that Davoodi Mohajer had held several government positions. “During the 30 years of the Islamic Republic’s rule, I have never held a government position. I never served as an advisor during the reformist era. I did not hold a position at the Strategic Research Center,” she said. “A bunch of fabricated photographs which had nothing to do with me were used.”

In a similar program broadcast about Dr. Fatemeh Haghighatjoo, it was said that an American organization related to the US Senate had awarded her with a prize. It was also said that she considers “murderers of Iran’s children....among her own circle.” At another point in the program, her speech at Amnesty International, regarded as a “Zionist” and “anti-God” organization, was criticized. There were many other topics raised in the film which Haghighatjoo refers to as “complete lies.” “In the five minute program broadcast about me, there were 15 lies—it means there were three lies every minute,” she told the *Campaign*.

The *International Campaign for Human Rights in Iran* believes that the title of “Sedition” indicates this program’s pivotal role in character assassination and the violation of citizens’ rights through the propagation of slander and libel about Iranian citizens. It further demonstrates that the IRIB has served as the media arm for security and intelligence organizations in disseminating fabricated information against individuals.

Article 175 of the Iranian Constitution explicitly requires the IRIB to respect freedom of expression. Article 22 of the Constitution states that “The dignity, life, property, rights, residence, and occupation of the individual are inviolate, except in cases sanctioned by law.” Furthermore, according to Article 37, “Innocence is the basic principle. No person is considered legally guilty, except in cases where his/her guilt is established in a competent court.”

All of these principles are violated in IRIB programs attacking well-known members of civil society and political activists.

The *Campaign* is calling for the removal of Ezzatollah Zarghami as the head of the IRIB. Furthermore, the *Campaign* believes that the absence of independent Television and Radio broadcasting in Iran is making it impossible for individuals defamed by the IRIB to defend themselves in a court of public opinion. The Iranian Judiciary and Parliament should launch an independent inquiry into violations by the IRIB in broadcasting these programs.

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[1] He told a Conference organized by the Political Organization of Isargaran Society:
<http://isna.ir/ISNA/NewsView.aspx?ID=News-1546640>