

PROTEST LETTERS

IRAN December 18th - 2000

Newspaper director arrested



EZZATOLLAH
SAHABI

In a letter to the head of the magistracy, Ayatollah Shahroudi, RSF protested the arrest of Ezzatollah Sahabi, a reformist figure and director of the banned monthly Iran-é-Farda. Robert Ménard, the organisation's secretary-general, asked Mr. Shahroudi to release the journalist, as well as eight others who are currently imprisoned. "Iran has become the largest prison for journalists in the Middle-East today," said Robert Ménard, who recalled his "grave concern" about the fate of Hassan Youssefi Echkevari and Khalil Rostamkhani, two journalists accused of being "mohareb" (fighters against god). They face the death penalty.

According to information collected by RSF, on 17 December 2000, Ezzatollah Sahabi, a famous progressive opposition figure, and director of the monthly Iran-é-Farda, was arrested by court order. He is accused of "insulting the Guide [of the Islamic Republic]", Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, and "propaganda against the regime", for statements he made during an address at Amir-Kabir Technical University, in Tehran, on 26 November. Moreover, Ezzatollah Sahabi was previously arrested in June for his participation in the Berlin Conference, held from 7 to 8 April. He was released on bail in August. The conference, which included the participation of many other journalists and intellectuals, was described by authorities of the regime as "anti-Islamic" and "anti-revolutionary".

On 9 November, the prosecutor sought the death penalty against Khalil Rostamkhani, a journalist from the Daily News and Iran Echo. Arrested on 8 May, the journalist is accused, among other things, of "having participated in the organisation of the Berlin Conference, prejudicial to state security". Khalil Rostamkhani was released on bail on 15 November. Hassan Youssefi Echkevari, a journalist from the presently suspended publications Neshat and Iran-é-Farda, also faces the death penalty. Jailed since 5 August, he is accused of "subversive activities against national security" and "defaming the authorities". Furthermore, Massoud Behnoud, a journalist from the daily Adineh, arrested in August, was released on bail on 16 December.