Rights Activists Denounce Iran's Crackdown on May Day Protesters

May 1, 2019

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Voice of America

<https://www.voanews.com/a/rights-activists-denounce-iran-s-crackdown-on-may-day-protesters/4900309.html>

Iranian police have arrested dozens of labor rights activists who rallied peacefully in Tehran to mark International Workers' Day, sparking denunciations from Iranian and global rights activists.

VOA sister network RFE/RL's [Radio Farda](http://bit.ly/2Y6mQsr) said eyewitnesses told it that at least 35 people were arrested outside the Iranian parliament during Wednesday's rally marking the occasion also known as May Day.

The network cited witnesses as saying security agents beat and dragged some protesters on the ground before taking them into custody, and transferred all male detainees to security headquarters in Tehran's western district of Gisha.

The Syndicate of Workers of Tehran and Suburbs Bus Company, an independent trade union, issued a statement on its Telegram channel also accusing Iranian security agents of violently dispersing the rally and detaining one of its prominent members, Reza Shahabi.

The semiofficial Iranian Labor News Agency (ILNA) said thousands of people joined the Tehran rally to demand better working and living conditions, but its online report did not mention any violence.

One video clip of Tehran's May Day rally posted on social media and verified by VOA Persian showed a crowd chanting, "High prices, inflation are destroying people's lives."

Another social media video verified by VOA Persian showed the protesters calling on teachers, other workers and college students to "come together" in fighting for labor rights.

Semiofficial [news agency ISNA](http://bit.ly/2UTrIyL) quoted Tehran provincial official Reza Alikhani as saying the gathering was illegal because its organizers had not requested a permit.

Disputing that contention, ILNA quoted Alireza Mahjoub, a leader of the state-run Workers' House organization in Tehran, as saying labor activists had applied for permits for five years but had been rejected.

"Everyone in this country has a right to march, and workers have a right, too. We are here for this purpose," Mahjoub said.

Article 27 of [Iran's constitution](https://fis-iran.org/en/resources/legaldoc/constitutionislamic) says public gatherings and marches "may be freely held, provided arms are not carried and that they are not detrimental to the fundamental principles of Islam."

In a Labor Week speech posted to his website the day before Wednesday's rally, Iranian President Hassan Rouhani praised the role of Iranian workers in confronting U.S. sanctions.

That drew a rebuke from France-based Iranian political activist Mohammad Javad Akbarin, who wrote in a Wednesday tweet: "Yesterday, Rouhani said our dear workers are on the front line of the fight against the United States. Today, dozens of those 'dear workers' were arrested by government agents because on Labor Day, instead of confronting the U.S., they gathered in front of parliament to demand their rights."

London-based rights group Amnesty International accused Iran of showing "utter contempt" for workers and labor rights.

In a Wednesday statement, Amnesty called on Iranian authorities to release anyone detained solely for peacefully exercising rights to freedom of expression, association and assembly by marking International Workers' Day, as well as anyone else previously detained for advocacy of labor rights.