

Friday, 21 August 2009

Ayatollah Jannati calls for arrest of opposition leaders Iran cleric urges arrest of post-vote riot leaders



Ayatollah Ahmad Jannati heads the powerful Guardian Council (File)

TEHRAN (Agencies)

A hard-line Iranian cleric urged the judiciary on Friday to arrest the leaders of post-election unrest, in what appeared to be a reference to defeated moderate presidential candidates Mirhossein Mousavi and Mehdi Karoubi, while Iran granted U.N. nuclear inspectors the first access to the Arak site in a year.

Ayatollah Ahmad Jannati, who heads the powerful Guardian Council, did not name Mousavi or Karoubi, but other hardliners have repeatedly accused the two of fomenting post-election street protests in which at least 26 people were killed.

"(Post-vote) riots are our main issue today ... Some people were arrested and some were not. Why weren't the leaders behind the riots arrested? ... Their arrest should be the first thing that the judiciary must do," Jannati told Friday prayer worshippers. The sermon was broadcast live on state radio.

"Healthiest" vote

The opposition says the June 12 poll was rigged to secure the re-election of President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad -- a charge denied by Iran's authorities, including Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, who endorsed the president shortly after the vote.

The authorities say it was the "healthiest" vote the country has had in the past 30 years.

Rights groups say hundreds of people, including senior pro-reform politicians, journalists, activists and lawyers, have been detained in Iran since the election. Many of them are still in jail.

The losing candidates say 69 people were killed in unrest that erupted after the vote, and that some of those detained after the election were abused in prison.

Iran has begun three mass trials of post-election detainees, aimed at uprooting the opposition and putting an end to protests.

Ahmadinejad, sworn in on Aug. 5 submitted the list of his new cabinet to parliament on Wednesday, but he is expected to face a tough battle to win parliament's approval after some lawmakers signaled they were likely to reject several nominees.

The opposition has called Ahmadinejad's new government "illegitimate."

The election and its turbulent aftermath have further strained relations with the West. U.S. President Barack Obama's offer of engagement with Iran if it "unclenched its fist" ran into trouble after Tehran accused the United States and other Western nations of inciting the opposition protests.