



Human Rights in Iran

Since it seized power in 1979, the government of the Islamic Republic of Iran has been engaged in committing a range of human rights violations against the Iranian people. During and since the violent crackdown surrounding the June 2009 flawed presidential elections, Iran's widespread and systematic pattern of human rights violations has intensified and increased. Iranian authorities admit to arresting more than 4,500 protesters during the crackdown and a death toll of 37. Many protesters were subjected to violations of due process, arbitrary arrest, detention and torture. These and other tactics have been used to silence human rights defenders, political opponents, journalists and lawyers, and to discriminate against women, and religious, ethnic and other minorities.

Freedom of Opinion and Expression

Iran imposes restrictions on the freedom of opinion and expression that constrain the free flow of information, limiting internal and external communication and impeding efforts to document human rights abuses. Government officials reportedly claim to have blocked millions of websites, particularly since June 2009, and in January 2011 formed a cyber police force to further strengthen the government's control of the Internet. In 2011 Iran detained more journalists than any other country in the world, with 42 journalists imprisoned as of December 1, 2011. In addition, fear of repression and persecution has caused at least 150 journalists to flee Iran since the 2009 election. Reporters are frequently banned from journalism; many end up practicing self-censorship.

Freedom of Religion or Belief

Iran has been criticized for discriminating against its citizens on the basis of religion or belief, including the Baha'i, Christian, Sunni Muslim and Jewish minorities. Annually since 1999, the U.S. Department of State has condemned Iran's systematic and egregious violation of freedom of religion by naming Iran a "Country of Particular Concern" under the International Religious

Freedom Act. Iran's constitution denies the Baha'i faith the status of a religion. Baha'is, the largest non-Muslim religious minority, are subjected to arbitrary detention, unfair trials, confiscation and destruction of property, denial of employment and government benefits, and denial of access to higher education. More than 90 Baha'is, including 7 Baha'i leaders, are currently imprisoned.

Since becoming President, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad has called for an end to the development of Christianity in Iran, and Iranian authorities repeatedly target Christians and reported converts to Christianity. Conversion from Islam and apostasy have been penalized with the death penalty, as reported in the case of imprisoned Pastor Youcef Nadarkhani who was arrested in October 2009 for questioning the compulsory Islamic education of his children. He remains detained in Lakan prison in violation of the freedom to practice a religion of his own choice, which contravenes Iran's own laws as well as its international human rights obligations. Approximately 300 Christians have been arbitrarily arrested and detained throughout the country since June 2010.

Iranian authorities discriminate against Sunni Muslims, about 10% of the population, in political participation, employment and imposition of travel bans.

In recent years, official policies promoting anti-Semitism have risen sharply in Iran. Members of the Jewish community have been targeted on the basis of real or perceived ties to Israel, distribution of Hebrew religious texts has been discouraged and education of Jewish children has become increasingly difficult fostering a threatening atmosphere for the approximately 25,000 member Jewish community. President Ahmadinejad, Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei and other top political and clerical leaders actively deny the Holocaust and call for the elimination of Israel, and among other actions, a prominent newspaper that receives subsidies from the Iranian

government held a Holocaust denial cartoon contest, and the Iranian government sponsored a Holocaust denial conference. This state-sponsored Holocaust denial contravenes UN General Assembly Resolution 60/7 rejecting any denial of the Holocaust as an historical event; it has been condemned by numerous world leaders.

Women's Rights

Iran discriminates against women, particularly in the areas of marriage and the family, child custody, criminal punishment, property rights, denial of due process rights and arbitrary detention. Women human rights defenders, particularly members of the Mourning Mothers and One Million Signature Campaign, have been targeted, particularly since the June 2009 crackdown, for their membership in organizations and participation in demonstrations and advocacy activities promoting fair treatment of women. Iranian authorities also attempt to silence women rights advocates through unlawful harassment including, invasion of privacy, threats, and restrictions on freedom of movement and employment.

United Nations Actions

Iran's human rights abuses violate its obligations under international law which stem from the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and Iran's ratification of five core international human rights treaties, including the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. Moreover, many rights guaranteed by these treaties are included in Iran's constitution, yet are repeatedly violated by Iran.

Through a variety of specialized resolutions and mechanisms (including, *inter alia*, the General Assembly, Human Rights Council and its predecessor the Commission on Human Rights, the Secretary-General, High Commissioner for Human Rights, and several Special Rapporteurs), United Nations bodies have expressed concern over or condemned the Islamic Republic of Iran's human rights violations. The December 2011 UN General Assembly resolution passed by a vote of 89 in favor, 30 against, 64 abstentions, and expressed deep concern at the serious ongoing and recurring human rights violations in Iran. In addition, in March 2011 the UN Human Rights Council created a new Special Rapporteur on human rights in Iran, restoring a position that had existed between 1984 and 2002.

Two March 2012 reports, by UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon and UN Special Rapporteur on human

rights in Iran Ahmed Shaheed, expressed deep concern over Iran's violation of fundamental human rights including:

- Restrictions imposed on the freedoms of expression, assembly, association and religion, the equal rights of women, and the right to be elected by and participate in free and fair elections;
- Widespread use of torture and cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment in detention facilities (particularly of those accused of national security-related crimes), arbitrary arrests, detentions, and unfair trials including extensive due process violations in revolutionary courts, and wide application of the death penalty, resulting in the highest per-capita execution rate in the world; and
- Arrest and harassment of media professionals, film makers, human rights defenders, women's rights advocates, lawyers, opposition activists, and ethnic and religious minority groups.

U.S. Responses

Over the past eight years the U.S. government has supported programs on human rights, rule of law and an expansion of the free flow of information to Iran. Beginning in early 2010, and especially since the uprisings started in the Arab world in early 2011, the U.S. has frequently condemned Iran's human rights abuses through official statements, congressional resolutions, support of civil society and political opposition, as well as the issuance of sanctions.

On April 23, 2012 President Obama issued an Executive Order authorizing targeted sanctions against those who commit or facilitate serious human rights abuses in Iran using information technology. In July 2010, President Obama signed into law the Comprehensive Iran Sanctions Accountability and Divestment Act (CISADA), which requires the President to submit to Congress a list of Iranian government officials, or persons acting on their behalf, who are responsible for human rights abuses, bars their entry into the U.S. and freezes their assets. In accordance with CISADA and President Obama's Executive Order 13553, the U.S. has imposed visa and financial sanctions on 13 Iranian officials and three entities for their serious human rights abuses against the Iranian people. Sanctions were placed on senior officials of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps, Ministry of Intelligence, Ministry of Interior, Basij (security militia), Ministry of Defense, National Police, and the Prosecutor-General's office. In July 2011, the

U.S. also imposed visa restrictions under the Immigration and Nationality Act (INA) on more than 50 Iranian government officials and other individuals who are responsible for or participated in human rights abuses, including government ministers, military and law enforcement officers, and judiciary and prison officials.

Additional bills have been introduced in Congress, such as the Iran Human Rights and Democracy Promotion Act of 2011 (S. 879/H.R. 1714), to increase sanctions on Iranian human rights abusers, as well as to create a special representative position at the Department of State to focus on highlighting Iran's human rights abuses and coordinating U.S. and international responses. Furthermore, the proposed Iran Sanctions, Accountability, and Human Rights Act of 2012 (S. 2101) calls for sanctions with respect to information technology likely to be used to commit human rights abuses against the people of Iran, and censorship or related activities limiting or penalizing freedom of expression and assembly; as well as the promotion of internet freedom and access to information in Iran, and the release of prisoners of conscience. In March 2012 the House of Representatives passed a resolution (H.R. 556) condemning Iran's continued persecution and imprisonment of Pastor Youcef Nadarkhani on charges of apostasy, and calling for the immediate and unconditional release of Pastor Nadarkhani and all other individuals imprisoned or charged on account of their religious or political beliefs in Iran. A similar resolution is pending in the Senate (S. 385).

JBI Advocacy

The Jacob Blaustein Institute for the Advancement of Human Rights advocates for investigations by UN bodies, including the new Special Rapporteur on Iran, into human rights violations by the Iranian government and calls for:

1. Public reporting on human rights violations by UN bodies;
2. Accountability of senior Iranian officials for violations of human rights, and sanctioning of Iranian government officials and agencies responsible for violations of human rights;
3. The appointment of a special representative on human rights in Iran at the U.S. Department of State to engage on policy matters affecting human rights in Iran across the U.S. government, and to coordinate U.S. and international responses; and

4. The release of persons unjustly imprisoned in Iran.

The Jacob Blaustein Institute calls for the release of all persons unjustly imprisoned in Iran, including the following individuals currently imprisoned in Iran:

- The seven leaders of the Baha'i faith – Fariba Kamalabadi, Jamaloddin Khanjani, Afif Naemi, Saeid Rezaie, Mahvash Sabet, Behrouz Tavakkoli and Vahid Tizfahm – who were arrested in March and May 2008 and sentenced to 20 years in prison in August 2010. These seven leaders are among the 474 Baha'is who have been arbitrarily arrested for their religious beliefs since August 2004, 97 of whom remain in prison as of April 2012.
- Pastor Youcef Nadarkhani who was arrested in October 2009 for questioning the compulsory Islamic education of his children, and sentenced to death for apostasy in November 2010. Varying reports indicate that Pastor Nadarkhani's case is awaiting an opinion from Supreme Leader Khamenei, and that a provincial court renewed the Pastor's execution order in February 2012. Pastor Nadarkhani remains detained in Lakan prison in violation of the freedom to practice a religion of his own choice.
- Women's rights advocate and lawyer Nasrin Sotoudeh, who advocated for ending discrimination against women, and defended human rights advocates, persons arrested during the June 2009 election crackdown, organizers of the One Million Signatures Campaign, and juveniles facing the death penalty, among others. Sotoudeh was arrested in September 2010 and sentenced by an appeals court in September 2011 to six years in prison, and banned from practicing law or traveling outside Iran for 10 years after the end of the sentence.

Since it was established in 1971, the Jacob Blaustein Institute for the Advancement of Human Rights has aimed to narrow the gap between the promise of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the realization of those rights in practice. JBI works to advance human rights worldwide. E. Robert Goodkind is Chairman of the Institute and Felice Gaer is its Director.

For more information contact the Jacob Blaustein Institute for the Advancement of Human Rights at jbi@ajc.org, (212) 891-1315, or www.jbi-humanrights.org.