

April 23, 2010

To: Member states of the UN General Assembly
Re: Iran's candidacy to the UN Human Rights Council

Your Excellency,

We are a diverse group of nongovernmental organizations from all parts of the world, working in the field of human rights. We write in opposition to the candidacy of the Islamic Republic of Iran for a seat on the United Nations Human Rights Council, and urge your government not to vote for Iran in the election to be held in the General Assembly on May 13, 2010.

Resolution 60/251 establishing the Human Rights Council was overwhelmingly adopted by the General Assembly in March 2006. The resolution provides that "member States shall take into account the contribution of candidates to the promotion and protection of human rights and their voluntary pledges and commitments made thereto" when electing members of the council. The resolution also requires that council members (1) "uphold the highest standards in the promotion and protection of human rights," and (2) "fully cooperate with the Council." In both its record of gross and systematic violations of human rights, and its record of noncooperation with the human rights mechanisms of the Human Rights Council, the Islamic Republic of Iran entirely fails to meet the standards for council membership set by the General Assembly.

Failure to Uphold the Highest Standards of Human Rights

Rather than "uphold the highest standards" of human rights, Iran has an extremely poor human rights record. Indeed, the General Assembly itself has repeatedly called attention to serious human rights violations in Iran in resolutions adopted at every session since the 40th session in 1985, excepting only the 46th and 57th sessions.

Just four months ago, the General Assembly adopted resolution 64/176 expressing "its deep concern at serious ongoing and recurring human rights violations in the Islamic Republic of Iran," citing:

- Torture and cruel and inhuman punishment, including flogging and amputations;
- High and increasing rate of executions, including public executions and executions of juveniles;
- Stoning as a method of execution;
- Arrests and violent repression of peaceably assembled women, a campaign of intimidation against women's human rights defenders, and continuing discrimination against women;
- Increasing discrimination and other rights violations against religious, ethnic, linguistic, and other minorities;
- Ongoing, systemic and serious restrictions of freedom of peaceful assembly and association and freedom of opinion and expression, including those imposed on the media, internet users, and trade unions;
- Severe limitations and restrictions on freedom of religion and belief;

- Persistent failure to uphold due process of law rights, and violation of the rights of detainees.

Resolution 64/176 went on to express particular concern at the rise in human rights violations since the presidential election of June 12, 2009, including:

- Harassment, intimidation, persecution, arbitrary arrest, detention, or enforced disappearance of opposition members, journalists, bloggers, lawyers, clerics, human rights defenders, academics, and students, resulting in numerous deaths and injuries;
- Violence and intimidation by government-directed militias to disperse Iranian citizens, also resulting in numerous deaths and injuries;
- Holding mass trials and denying defendants access to legal representation, resulting in death sentences and lengthy prison sentences for some individuals;
- Forced confessions and abuse of prisoners including rape and torture;
- Escalation in the rate of executions in the months following the elections;
- Severe restrictions on coverage of public demonstrations and the disruption of telecommunications and internet technology;
- Arbitrary arrest and detention of employees of foreign embassies.

The resolution reiterates and amplifies the criticism expressed by GA resolution 63/191, adopted in plenary session on December 18, 2008, and in previous General Assembly resolutions.

Pursuant to requests from the General Assembly, the Secretary-General has been reporting annually on the human rights situation in Iran, and his reports elaborate on the concerns expressed by the General Assembly. His latest report (A/64/37, issued September 23, 2009) notes “an increase in human rights violations targeting women, university students, teachers, workers, and other activist groups, particularly in the aftermath of the elections.”

Despite the concern repeatedly expressed by the General Assembly for the past quarter-century, the situation of human rights in Iran has gotten worse, not better. Given the standards the General Assembly set for council membership by GA resolution 60/251, and the General Assembly’s own conclusions on the human rights record of Iran, your government should decline to support Iran’s candidacy at this time.

Failure to Cooperate with the Human Rights Council

Rather than “fully cooperate” with the Human Rights Council as is required by the General Assembly resolution, Iran refuses to cooperate with special procedure mandate-holders. Although Iran has issued a “standing invitation,” Iran has in fact failed and refused to allow a single mandate-holder to visit since 2005, with numerous requests and communications remaining unanswered.

The UN General Assembly itself expressed its deep concern with Iran’s failure to cooperate with the mechanisms of the Human Rights Council in resolution 64/176, where it noted Iran’s failure to fulfill any requests to visit the country in four years, and urged Iran “to fully cooperate with the special mechanisms, including facilitating their visits to its territory, so that credible and

independent investigations of all allegations of human rights violations, particularly those arising since 12 June 2009, can be conducted.” Despite this plea by the General Assembly four months ago, still no special procedure visits have taken place, nor have any visits been scheduled.

In opposing Iran’s candidacy, we would be recognizing the pleas of the many prominent Iranians now in exile because of the extreme persecution they would face if they returned to their country. In a letter issued earlier this month, leading Iranian human rights defenders and activists expressed their concern that Iran’s election would “undermine the efforts of Iranian human rights defenders,” and urged UN member states to “cast a ‘No’ vote on Iran—and ‘Yes’ vote to the millions of Iranians and others who look to the United Nations and its Human Rights Council for the promotion and protection of their fundamental human rights.”

We appreciate your consideration regarding this important issue. We urge you to oppose Iran’s candidacy for membership in the Human Rights Council and to decline to write in the name of Iran on your secret ballot at the May 13 election.

Representatives of the coalition are available to meet with you or your staff should you have any questions regarding the concerns we have expressed regarding the candidacy of Iran.

With assurances of our highest respect,

African Centre for Democracy and Human Rights Studies (ACDHRS)
Hannah Forster, Executive Director

African Democracy Forum
Hannah Forster, Chairperson

Albanian Rehabilitation Center of Trauma and Torture
Adrian Kati, Executive Director

Asian Legal Resource Centre (ALRC)
Basil Fernando, Executive Director

Association Green Alternative
Nino Gujaraidze, Executive Director

Centre for Human Rights and Development, Mongolia
Urantsooj Gombosuren, Chairperson

Centre for Human Rights, University of Pretoria
Frans Viljoen, Director

CERVEAU CHRETIEN/RDC
Felly Fwamba, Animateur Principal

CIVICUS: World Alliance for Citizen Participation
Sonia Zilberman, Officer, Civil Society Watch Programme

Committee for the Freedom of the Prisoners of Conscience in Uzbekistan
Bakhtiyor Namozov, Chairman

Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative
Iniyana Ilango, Consultant, Human Rights Initiative

Corporacion Humanas
Lorena Fries, President

Crisis Center for Women
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Democracy Coalition Project
Dokhi Fassihian, Executive Director

Democratic Institutions and Human Rights Social Union (DIHRU)
Elchin Abdullayev, Chairman

Droit Humains Sans Frontieres (Democratic Republic of the Congo)
Franck Kamunga, Executive Director

Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights
Hossam Bahgat, Executive Director

Foundation for Human Rights Initiative (FHRI)
Livingstone Sewanyana, Executive Director

Foundation for the Democratic Pacific Union, Costa Rica
Óscar Álvarez Araya, President

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Human Rights Agenda, Nigeria
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Human Rights Institute of South Africa
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Human Rights Monitoring Institute
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Abdujalil Boymatov, President

Human Rights Watch
Peggy Hicks, Global Advocacy Director

Imparsial, The Indonesian Human Rights Monitor
Poengky Indarti, Managing Director

Indonesia's NGO Coalition for International Human Rights Advocacy (HRWG)
Rafendi Djamin, Executive Director

International Campaign to Stop Killing and Stoning Women (SKSW)
Shadi Sadr

International Commission of Jurists
Dr. Lukas Machon, UN Representative

International Youth Human Rights Movement
Alyona Ob'ezdchikova, Chair of Coordination Council

Interregional Human Rights Association (AGORA)
Dr. Pavel V. Chikov, Chairperson

Kenya Human Rights Commission (KHRC)
L. Muthoni Wanyeki, Executive Director

Latin American and Caribbean Network for Democracy
Carlos Ponce

Les Anges Du Ciel
Phiolmene Mukendi

Mouvement Citoyen Senegal
Ibou Niang

Network of the Committees for Human Rights in Serbia (CHRIS)
Dragan Djordjevic, Network Coordinator

Observancia – Centro Interdisciplinario
Edgar Rivero, Executive Director

O Forum Paranaense da Religiões de Matriz Africana
Ogã Rômulo de Osaguian, Coordenador Administrativo do FPRMA

Open Society Institute, Western Balkans Department
Masa Jovanovic, Program Associate

Partnership for Justice, Nigeria
John Oziegbe, Senior Partner

People in Need
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Physicians for Human Rights
A. Frank Donaghue, CEO

Que Me: Action for Democracy in Vietnam & Vietnam Committee on Human Rights
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Samotalis Coalition of Human Rights
Ibrahim H. Musa, Executive Director

South Africa Litigation Centre
Lloyd Kuvuya, Project Lawyer, Media Defence Programme

The Equal Rights Trust
Dr. Dimitrina Petrova, Executive Director

The Shine – Association for Social Affirmation of People with Mental Disabilities, Croatia
Kristijan Grdjan, Coordinator of the Human Rights Section