

Letter of Iranian Civil Society Activists Addressed to Members of the General Assembly regarding the Candidacy of the Islamic Republic of Iran for the Human Rights Council

20 April 2010

Your Excellencies,

The candidacy of the Islamic Republic of Iran for membership in the United Nations Human Rights Council, an international body that has been established after decades of efforts by the human rights community to uphold and protect human rights internationally, is a matter of deep concern to human rights defenders worldwide.

We, the victims who have suffered widespread violations of human rights at the hands of the Iranian government, have continuously tried to convince the Iranian government to abide by its treaty obligations and respect the Iranian people's legitimate rights. Yet each and every time, we have either been met with silence or increased repression.

We believe that the election of Iran to the Human Rights Council would seriously jeopardize the legitimacy of the Human Rights Council, and undermine the efforts of Iranian human rights defenders. It would belittle the sacrifices of those who have given their lives for the cause of human rights.

In considering Iran's candidacy for membership on the Council, we implore you to take the following factors into account regarding the human rights situation in Iran:

- the highest rate of juvenile executions in the world and one of the highest numbers of total executions worldwide;
- the discriminatory laws against women that treat them as second class citizens;
- the workers who are imprisoned and beaten for demanding a just pay and their internationally-guaranteed right to collectively bargain;

- the university students who are routinely banned from education, imprisoned and tortured for pursuing the right to education and academic freedom;
- the ethnic minorities who suffer from systematic political and economic discrimination;
- the religious minorities who are either denied their basic right to practice their religion or routinely harassed;
- the imprisoned journalists whose incarceration has made their country the largest prison for journalists in the world;
- the violent repression of attempts at peaceful gatherings;
- the political activists who are victims of imprisonment, torture and rape;
- the prominent human rights defenders who are imprisoned in large numbers and their organizations shut down simply for reporting and documenting human rights violations;
- the Mourning Mothers who demand accountability and justice for the murder of their children in the streets and prisons, but themselves are attacked, beaten, and detained; and
- the widespread attacks on the freedom of expression and information, including censorship, control of news and information, and the closure of newspapers.

Make no mistake: Iran simply fails to “uphold the highest standards” of human rights or “fully cooperate with the Council,” as required by UN Resolution 60/251 establishing the criteria for membership in the Human Rights Council. Iran’s election to the Human Rights Council will effectively put a seal of approval on its gross and systematic abuses, and allow the Iranian government to claim that its membership on the Council is evidence of its respect for human rights and compliance with international standards.

We believe members of the General Assembly are well-aware of these widespread human rights violations as its resolutions have, year after year, documented Iran’s serious lack of respect for human rights and its dismissive attitude towards the core values upon which the United Nations was established. In light of the aforementioned violations, the General Assembly’s clear position as established in Resolution 64/176 and numerous others, and the Iranian government’s utter failure to cooperate with the body it seeks to join, its election to the Council will undoubtedly result in a serious loss of credibility for both the Council and the General Assembly and further embolden Tehran to continue its shameful behavior towards its own people.

Your vote will have undoubtedly historic implications. In light of the serious consequences that are sure to follow were Iran to gain a seat on the Human Rights Council, we ask that you 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.

Respectfully,

Asieh Amini, Distinguished human rights defender, women's rights activists, and co-founder of Anti-Stoning Campaign.

Parvin Ardalan, Prominent women's rights activist, winner of the Olaf Palme Award, and co-founder of the One Million Signatures Campaign.

Akbar Ganji, Distinguished Iranian political writer and human rights defender. Recipient of several international recognitions including the Martin Ennells Award for human rights defenders. Former prisoner of conscience.

Fereshteh Ghazi, Human rights reporter and former prisoner of conscience.

Fatemeh Haghighatjoo, Former member of the Parliament (2000-2004).

Mehrangiz Kar, Distinguished human rights lawyer, awarded several international recognitions, currently the Eric Abraham Academic Visitor at Cape Town University's Department of Law.

Ali Akbar Khomeini, Former Member of the Parliament (2000-2004) and human rights defender, former prisoner of conscience.

Mohsen Makhmalbaf, Internationally renowned film director.

Omid Memarian, Prominent human rights defender and journalist, former prisoner of conscience, awarded the Human Rights Defenders Award in 2005 by Human Rights Watch.

Roozbeh Mirebrahimi, Journalist and essayist, former prisoner of conscience.

Sohrab Razzaghi, Prominent NGO leader, founder of Iranian Civil Society and Resource Center, former prisoner of conscience

Shadi Sadr, Prominent human rights lawyer and women's rights advocate, former prisoner of conscience