



March 12, 2014

To: Member States of the Human Rights Council

Your Excellency,

We, the undersigned human rights and civil society groups, are writing to urge your government to support the resolution to renew the mandate of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Islamic Republic of Iran at the ongoing 25th session of the United Nations Human Rights Council (“the Council”).

We also encourage your delegation to participate in the Interactive Dialogue with the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Iran, currently scheduled on March 17, 2014, and to express concern over the patterns of grave human rights violations raised by the Special Rapporteur and in this letter and call for the full cooperation of the Government of Iran with the Special Rapporteur. As one of 47 members of the Council, your government is responsible for ensuring that the human rights situation in Iran remains at the forefront of the global agenda. The Special Rapporteur for human rights in Iran, Dr. Ahmed Shaheed, has issued credible, well-researched reports that have helped focus international attention on the human rights situation in Iran. His recommendations provide clear steps the government of Iran should take if it is to meet its international legal obligations. His post is crucial and should be renewed.

This year, renewal of the Iran mandate will have added significance. Seven months into the term of President Hassan Rouhani, who won the election after promising to improve the human rights situation in Iran, those living in Iran continue to suffer violations of their civil and political rights, as well as economic, social, and cultural rights. This October, Iran is scheduled to participate in its second Universal Periodic Review (“UPR”) during the 20th session of the Council’s UPR Working Group. Extension of Dr. Shaheed’s mandate is vital for the international community to have an independent monitoring mechanism for verification of progress, or lack thereof, made by the Islamic Republic of Iran on its Universal Periodic Review commitments.

Since the beginning of 2014 alone, Iran has executed at least 160 people, including individuals who may have been convicted and sentenced to death for their exercise of rights, including cultural rights. In 2012, possibly up to 544 were executed, some of them in public, according to Amnesty International. In 2013 there was a sharp increase in the numbers of executions as compared to 2012. The UN estimates that at least 500, but possibly up to 687 people were executed in 2013, according to the organization Iran Human Rights. Executions based on national security-related charges that may be politically motivated appear to be disproportionately used against members of Iran’s ethnic minority communities, including Ahwazi Arabs, Kurds, and Baluchis. Responding to recent executions, the UN Special Rapporteurs on Iran, extra-judicial executions, and torture issued a joint statement describing the Islamic Republic’s use of the death penalty as “unquestionably illegal” and demanding the placement of a moratorium on executions, a call that has been repeatedly made by UN processes and human rights organizations. On February 21 of this year, the Office of the High Commissioner on Human Rights stated:

We regret that the new government has not changed its approach to the death penalty and continues to impose capital punishment for a wide range of offences. We urge the government to immediately halt executions and to institute a moratorium.

The Special Rapporteur on Iran has also reported that authorities are arbitrarily detaining hundreds of political prisoners and prisoners of conscience, including human rights defenders, lawyers, journalists, women’s rights advocates, students, and political activists. In his most recent report in October 2013, the Special Rapporteur maintained that there are at least 500 political detainees in Iran’s prisons. Many of these detainees face mistreatment, torture or other ill treatment, denial of adequate medical treatment, as well as lack of fair trial guarantees. Detainees also include members of religious groups and community leaders imprisoned for practicing the Baha’i faith, Christianity,

Sunni Islam, Sufism, the Yarsan faith, or for organizing their community's affairs. Additionally, for more than three years, authorities have held opposition leaders Mehdi Karroubi, Mir Hossein Mousavi, and Zahra Rahnava under extrajudicial house arrest without charges or trial.

Speech and press activity remains strictly curtailed in Iran, with some 35 journalists and bloggers in prison, thus making Iran the second largest jailer of journalists worldwide, according to the Committee to Protect Journalists. Extensive censorship of news and human rights websites continues under the new president. In December 2013, authorities arrested 16 tech-writers and bloggers. On February 18, *Aseman* newspaper was shut down—after publishing only six issues—for publishing an article criticizing Iran's retributive criminal punishments, *qesas*, as "inhumane." Authorities have prevented the operation of the 4,000-member Association of Iranian Journalists since 2009, despite pledges President Hassan Rouhani made during his campaign to reopen it.

Human rights abuses in Iran are deeply rooted in law and practice. In October 2013, Dr. Shaheed reported a "deepening human rights crisis" characterized by violations of the rights to life, education, and health, and the right to freedom of expression, association, assembly, religion, and belief, as well as the rights to freedom from torture and discrimination based on gender and ethnicity.

The UN Secretary-General reported in October 2013 that in Iran, "gender inequalities and violence against women persist in law and practice." For example, women face discriminatory gender quotas or bans from certain fields of university education. Furthermore, there are no female officials appointed to the level of minister in the new government of President Rouhani.

Given the breadth and gravity of human rights violations in Iran, it is critical that the Council's expert remains in place to continue to examine and report on ongoing developments and promote much-needed reforms.

In addition to supporting the resolution, we encourage your government to call on Iran to fully cooperate with the mandate of the Special Rapporteur on Iran and other UN Special Procedures. Since 2005, despite its standing invitation, Iran has ignored repeated requests by Special Procedures to visit the country and has systematically worked to undermine the efforts of civil society in the country to promote and protect international human rights standards. Substantive cooperation with UN mechanisms and tangible rights improvements in line with Iran's international legal obligations must be the real measures of progress.

By voting in favor of this resolution and by contributing to the interactive dialogue with the Special Rapporteur on the situation in Iran, you will be investing in lasting human rights changes in Iran.

Sincerely,

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Said Boumedouha, Deputy Director of Middle East North Africa Programme
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Kamran Ashtary, Executive Director
Arseh Sevom

Thomas Hughes, Executive Director
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Alirza Quluncu, Representative
The Association for Defence of Azerbaijani Political Prisoners in Iran

Taimoor Aliassi, UN Representative
Association pour les Droits Humains au Kurdistan d'Iran-Genève

Mohammad Arbabi, Co-Director
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Joel Simon, Executive Director
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