



Monday 12 March 2018

TO: Member states of the United Nations Human Rights Council

Your Excellency,

We, the undersigned Iranian and international human rights organizations, urge your government to support the renewal of the mandate of the Special Rapporteur on human rights in the Islamic Republic of Iran, during the 37th session of the UN Human Rights Council.

The Iranian authorities have consistently failed to take action on vital reforms that would put its laws, policies and practices into conformity with international human rights law and standards. This includes women’s rights, the rights of the child, minority rights, the rights of lesbians, gays, bisexual, transgender and intersex persons, the rights to freedom of association, expression and peaceful assembly, freedom of religion or belief, protection from torture and other ill-treatment, the right to life, due process and fair trial guarantees, as well as economic, social and cultural rights. This is despite the numerous and repeated calls from UN human rights mechanisms, and despite continued popular demand for such reforms in Iran, expressed most recently during the presidential election campaigns of 2017 and the December 2017 and January 2018 protests, when thousands nationwide took to the streets to voice their grievances around poverty, corruption and political repression.

The government’s response to the protests involved excessive and unnecessary use of force, including firearms, against unarmed protesters; and at least 25 deaths reported from during the protests, as well as other violations of the rights to freedom of expression and peaceful assembly, including throttling of Internet traffic and blocking of apps. Several thousand individuals were arrested in the wake of the protests, many of them arbitrarily. Dozens of people arrested during the protests remain in prison according to Iranian officials, and many more are at risk of unfair prosecutions relying on coerced “confessions”. There have also been at least four deaths in custody since December 2017. To date, the authorities have not conducted thorough, independent and impartial investigations into either the deaths in custody or the reports of excessive and lethal use of force during the protests.

Since December 2017, more than 35 women have been arbitrarily arrested in Tehran alone for taking part in ongoing peaceful protests against the discriminatory and abusive practice of compulsory dress code. Enforcement of compulsory dress codes, including mandatory veiling, has violated women’s rights in Iran for decades, including their rights to non-discrimination, freedom of belief and

religion, freedom of expression, and protection from arbitrary arrests and detention, torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment. The authorities have threatened that these women could face up to a decade in prison.

These recent developments illustrate the lack of space for civil society to express peaceful dissent, despite recent government commitments, including the adoption of the Charter of Citizens' Rights in 2016. The Iranian authorities continue to unjustly imprison hundreds of journalists, political dissidents, online media workers, artists, members of religious and ethnic minorities, and human rights defenders, including environmental rights defenders, trade unionists, minority rights activists and aid workers, solely for exercising their rights to freedom of expression, association and peaceful assembly, and religion or belief.

Iran remains amongst the top executioners in the world, executing around 500 persons in 2017. It also continues to use the death penalty against individuals who were under the age of 18 at the time of the crime of which they were convicted, and at a pace that appears to be accelerating. This practice is strictly prohibited under international human rights law and against Iran's obligations under the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. At least five such individuals were executed in 2017, and three more were put to death in January 2018 alone. Scores of juvenile offenders remain on death row in Iran.

In a welcome development, a long-awaited amendment to the country's drug laws came into force in November 2017. While the newly amended law retains the death penalty for a wide range of drug-related offences, which should not attract the death penalty under international human rights law, it increases the quantity of drugs that must be in possession of the accused in order for the court to impose a mandatory death sentence. If implemented properly, this amended legislation could contribute to a considerable drop in the number of executions. The authorities have imposed a temporary moratorium on drug-related executions and indicated that about 15,000 individuals on death row will have their death sentences reviewed under the new legislation. According to human rights monitors, almost no executions for drug-related offences have been registered since mid-November 2017.

In the past year, Iran has failed to seize opportunities to cooperate meaningfully with UN human rights mechanisms in order to address these human rights challenges. The country continues to deny independent monitoring from key human rights experts. Notwithstanding Iran's 2002 standing invitation to the UN Special Procedures, and despite their numerous and repeated requests to visit the country, none of the 10 thematic mandate-holders who have sent a visit request have been allowed to access Iran for the past 12 years. Iran has also denied access to the two successive country rapporteurs appointed by the UN Human Rights Council. This lack of engagement is aggravated by the fact that human rights defenders who have communicated with international and regional human rights mechanisms, including different UN bodies, have faced reprisals from the Iranian authorities.

The mandate of the Special Rapporteur on human rights in Iran has played an important role in shedding light on human rights violations that are routinely committed in the country with complete impunity. It is encouraging to see that the work of the Special Rapporteur is yielding results on issues the mandate has prioritized, such as ending the use of the death penalty for non-violent drug-related offences and halting executions of individuals who were below 18 at the time of the crime that became the subject of urgent interventions. The work of the mandate has contributed to attracting the attention of the international community to the dire situation of human rights in Iran and also to stimulating domestic debate in a country where open discussion on human rights is heavily repressed.

The work carried out by the late Asma Jahangir and her predecessor has shown that the mandate of the Special Rapporteur is critical to amplifying the voices of victims of human rights abuses within the UN system. This work also supports a stifled domestic civil society, stimulates discussions about human rights within Iran, identifies systemic challenges, calls for human rights reforms, and takes action on a large number of individual cases through urgent appeals and other communications, thereby saving or otherwise impacting the lives of many in Iran.

By voting in favour of this resolution, your government will send a strong signal to the Iranian authorities that the international community requires genuine and tangible improvements in the country on core human rights issues, in line with Iran's treaty obligations and repeated commitments. Your vote will also allow the continuation of a mandate that has proved vital for the advancement of human rights in Iran and yielded important gains.

Abdorrahman Boroumand Center

The Advocates for Human Rights

All Human Rights for All in Iran

Amnesty International

Arseh Sevom

Article 18

ARTICLE 19

ASL19

Association for the Human Rights of the Azerbaijani people in Iran (AHRAZ)

Association for Human Rights in Kurdistan of Iran-Geneva (KMMK-G)

Balochistan Human Rights Group

Cairo Institute for Human Rights Studies

Center for Human Rights in Iran

Center for Supporters of Human Rights

Child Rights International Network (CRIN)

CIVICUS – World Alliance for Citizen Participation

Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ)

Conectas Direitos Humanos

Ensemble Contre la Peine de Mort (ECPM)

European Ahwazi Human Rights Organisation (EAHRO)

Freedom from Torture

Freedom House

Freedom Now

Gulf Center for Human Rights

Human Rights Activists in Iran (HRAI)

Human Rights Watch

Impact Iran

International Commission of Jurists (ICJ)

International Lesbian and Gay Association (ILGA)

International Movement Against All Forms of Discrimination and Racism (IMADR)

International Service for Human Rights (ISHR)

Iran Human Rights

Iran Human Rights Documentation Center

Iranian Queer Organization (IRQO)

Justice for Iran

Kurdistan Human Rights Network

Minority Rights Group International

OutRight Action International

Reprieve

Siamak Pourzand Foundation

Small Media

United for Iran

West African Human Rights Defenders' Network

World Coalition Against the Death Penalty

World Organization Against Torture (OMCT)

6Rang – Iranian Lesbian & Transgender Network