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Fact Sheet

Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor
Washington, DC
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The Iranian Regime: Human Rights and Civil Liberties Under Siege

"Let me speak directly to the citizens of Iran: America respects you, and we respect your country. We respect your right to choose your own future and win your freedom. And our nation hopes one day to be the closest of friends with a free democratic Iran."

--President George W. Bush

The Iranian people call out for freedom and respect for their human rights. Courageous voices that speak out risk suppression, imprisonment, and violent government repression. The Iranian regime's record of human rights abuse is among the worst in the world. The United States stands with the Iranian people in their desire for freedom and democracy.

Rule by Unelected Leaders

Iranians cannot freely choose their own leaders. The Guardian Council, an unelected body comprised of six clerics and six jurists, exerts broad control over election procedures and candidates. They ensure that only supporters of the theocratic system are permitted to run for the presidency or parliament.

- In preparation for the December 2006 elections of the Assembly of Experts and municipal councils, the Iranian regime once again disqualified thousands of candidates, including many reformists, on purely ideological grounds. Moreover, the regime continues to crack down on media outlets, blocking Iran's citizens from access to unbiased information and a diversity of thought and opinion.
- Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei remains unaccountable to the citizens of Iran. The position of Supreme Leader, with ultimate authority over Iran's domestic, foreign, and security policies, is selected by the Guardian Council.

Deteriorating Environment for Civil Liberties

Since his election, President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad has installed hard-liners throughout the government - including serious human rights abusers. Iran's Interior and Intelligence ministers have been implicated in human rights abuses, including the 1988 massacre of political prisoners at Evin Prison. In June 2006, Iran sent as its representative to the UN Human Rights Council Saeed Mortazavi, the Tehran Prosecutor General responsible for jailing dozens of journalists and linked to the 2003 arrest, imprisonment, and torture death of an Iranian-Canadian photojournalist. Under Ahmadinejad, censorship has increased and hard-line academic administrators are increasingly 'restricting academic freedom.

Restricted - Freedom of Expression

The Iranian regime severely limits freedom of speech and the press, intrusively monitoring weblogs and blocking access to many Internet sites.

- Citizens who peacefully exercise freedom of expression and voice opinions contrary to the regime's can be prosecuted for instigating crimes against the state.
- Insulting Islam, as interpreted by the regime, can be punishable by death.
- Journalists are often threatened, and many have been jailed. Imprisonment can involve torture or deplorable solitary confinement conditions.
- Since 2000 the regime closed more than 100 reformist newspapers and magazines - sentencing many managers to jail.

Prevented - Right to Assemble

Iranians face severe restrictions on their ability to voice grievances through public assembly. On March 8, 2006 and on June 12, 2006 Iranian security forces dispersed peaceful women's rights assemblies in Tehran, beating and arresting many participants. Nine of the women who participated in the June protests are being tried for "acting against national security by participating in an illegal gathering." Five of those women faced trial on March 4, 2007. Thirty women who gathered outside a courthouse in Tehran to show solidarity with the five on trial were beaten and arrested. Iranian authorities also attacked peaceful women's rights protestors in March at a gathering to mark International Women's Day. These repressive actions by the regime highlight an alarming trend of intolerance toward any expression of independent views by the Iranian people.

Unjust Treatment of Women

Women in Iran are speaking out against inequality and violence against women.

- In the run-up to the December 2006 elections, all women candidates for the Assembly of Experts were disqualified.
- Iranian authorities sentence women to lashings for appearing in public without appropriate covering.
- Iranian authorities have convicted victims of rape as adulterers, a crime punishable by death.
- In December 2006, the UN General Assembly renewed its call for Iran to legally abolish the practice of stoning. There were continued reports in 2006 that judges imposed sentences of stoning for women charged with adultery.

Persecution of Religious and Ethnic Minorities

- The status of religious freedom is extremely poor, particularly for the Baha'i and Sufis. The current regime continues to repress Iran's minority ethnic and religious groups, which also include Ahwazi Arabs, Azeris, Kurds, Zoroastrians, Jews and Christians. Religious and ethnic minorities in Iran face varying but significant degrees of social, economic, or cultural discrimination.
- Such discrimination has captured the attention of the international community. On December 19, 2006, for the fourth year in a row, the UN General Assembly Third Committee passed a resolution on the country's human rights situation, expressing serious concerns about increasing discrimination against religious and ethnic minorities, citing the escalation and increased frequency of violations against Baha'is. It called on the government to implement the 1996 UNSR report of the Commission on Human Rights on religious tolerance, particularly in regard to the Baha'i community.





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