

A Special Rapporteur on the Situation of Human Rights in Iran: Still an Urgent Necessity

“The Islamic Republic of Iran has issued a ‘standing invitation’ to the special procedures but has repeatedly failed to respond to my requests that dates for a visit be set, despite an oral exchange during the third session of the Council, several high-level meetings and an extensive correspondence”. Philip Alston, 29 January 2007

We, the members of civil society - located inside and outside of Iran - call upon the members of the UN Human Rights Council to renew and strengthen the mandate of Dr. Ahmed Shaheed, Special Rapporteur on the human rights situation in the Islamic Republic of Iran.

The interim report submitted to the UN General Assembly (A/66/374) and the reports to the Human Rights Council (A/HRC/19/66) submitted by Dr. Shaheed on 19 October 2011 and 12 March 2012, respectively, demonstrate that the international community’s concern about the deteriorating human rights situation in the country is not unwarranted.

At a time when the number of executions, which are frequently summary and at times performed in secret, is soaring in Iran and discrimination and violence against religious, ethnic minorities, women, and lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people amongst other groups is ongoing, monitoring and reporting conducted by an impartial and independent investigator such as the Special Rapporteur on the human rights situation in Iran is urgent and vital.

We draw the attention of the UN Member States to the fact that despite its standing invitation, no Special Procedure has had substantive access to Iran. This history speaks volumes about the government’s willingness to cooperate with the UN human rights machinery, which is according to the former Special Rapporteur Philip Alston necessary to “having a noticeable or durable impact on the human rights situation”.

We call the UN Member States to consider this history of cooperation and do not support a “divide and conquer” strategy that may evolve from Iran’s recent announcement to invite two Special Procedures to the country within a year. By inviting a thematic mandate holder, which lacks the resources for sustained monitoring, Iran may justify a lack of cooperation with the Special Rapporteur appointed to provide for continuous monitoring and reporting of the human rights situation.

We believe that any visit from a thematic mandate holder prior to an initial visit by a country-specific mandate holder establishes a dangerous institutional and political precedent for all Special Procedures; especially for the ten existing country specific mandate holders.

Over the years, the United Nations’ General Assembly has adopted multiple resolutions expressing concerns at “the lack of continuity in the cooperation of the Government with the mechanisms of the Commission on Human Rights”, and the denial of access to the Special Representative (see for example 23 December 1994, 12 December 1997, and 26 February 2002).

The history of the Islamic Republic's relationship with the UN human rights bodies underlines the fact that without the vigilance of the international human rights community, there are no significant improvements of the human rights situation in Iran.

In 1995, the Special Rapporteur on Religious Intolerance visited Iran. Despite the ongoing and increasing persecution of religious minorities in the following years, no thematic mandate holder has been given access to investigate and report since 1995.

In 2003, the Working Group on Arbitrary Detention visited Iran at the invitation of the Iranian government. From December 1st 2007 to November 30th 2008, however, Iran received the highest number of urgent appeals (19) from the Working Group. In the past few years, the crackdown on civil society has led to the imprisonment across the country and flight into exile of hundreds of civil society members.

In 2005, the Special Rapporteur on violence against women visited Iran at the invitation of the government of Iran. In 2007, however, she reported the persecution of "campaigners" collecting signatures "from Iranians demanding the revision and reform of current laws which discriminate against women". The Iranian authorities responded to only 3 of the 18 communications sent to them regarding 70 human rights defenders.

While every effort to encourage and facilitate cooperation with the Special Procedures should be undertaken by all stakeholders, this should not be done at the expense of efforts to ensure cooperation with the country specific mandate holder and meaningful accountability to the human rights mechanisms.

The renewal of the mandate of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Iran is an urgent necessity as the underlying circumstances that warrant the country-specific mechanism remain unchanged. We therefore urge you to renew Dr Ahmed Shaheed's mandate on the human rights situation in the Islamic Republic of Iran.

Dr. Shirin Ebadi, Nobel Peace Prize Laureate

And:

1. Abdorrahman Boroumand Foundation
2. Ahwazi human Rights organization
3. Association for Defense of Azerbaijani Political Prisoners in Iran
4. Baluchistan human rights organization
5. Ensemble Contre la Peine de Mort (ECPM)
6. Education/Tavaana: E-Learning Institute for Iranian Civil Society
7. Human Rights Activists for Democracy in Iran
8. HIVOS (Netherlands)

- 9. Human Rights (Kurdish)**
- 10. International Gay and Lesbian Human Rights Commission**
- 11. International Coalition Against Violence in Iran (ICAVI)**
- 12. International Solidarity with the Mothers of Laleh Park in Iran**
- 13. Iran Human Rights**
- 14. Iran Human Rights Documentation Center**
- 15. Iranian Lesbian Network (6Rang)**
- 16. Justice For Iran (JFI)**
- 17. Madeye 18 (Article 18) - Iranian Christians for Religious Freedom**
- 18. Mothers of Laleh Park in Iran**
- 19. One World (Czech Republic)**
- 20. People in Need (Czech Republic)**
- 21. Persian Gay and Lesbian Organization**
- 22. Stop Child executions (Canada)**
- 23. The Committee for the Defence of Human Rights in Iran-Austria**
- 24. Women's Living Under Muslim Laws**
- 25. Zagros center for democracy and Human Rights**