



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 crackdowns. 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 Guardians’ 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 unelected theocratic rulers are permitted to run for the presidency or parliament.

- All but eight of the 1,014 candidates who registered were excluded in the presidential election.
- 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 clerical council, not elected by the people.

Deteriorating Environment for Civil Liberties

Since his election, President Ahmadi-Nejad 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. For inaugural meetings of the UN Human Rights Council in June 2006, Iran sent as its representative Saeed Mortazavi, the notorious Tehran Prosecutor General, responsible for jailing hundreds of journalists and linked to the 2003 arrest, imprisonment, and death (as a result of torture in Evin Prison) of an Iranian-Canadian photo-journalist. Under Ahmadi-Nejad, censorship has increased and hard-line academic administrators are increasingly exerting control over Iran’s universities, restricting academic freedom.

Restricted — Freedom of Expression

The Iranian regime severely limits freedom of speech and the press, cracking down on 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.
- During the past five years the regime closed more than 70 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. The leader of Tehran’s bus drivers union has been detained without charges since December 2005. In January, a strike by the 17,000 member union to protest his arrest and to demand recognition of the right to organize, was forcibly repressed. On March 9, 2006 and on June 12, 2006 Iranian security forces put down peaceful women’s rights assemblies in Tehran, beating and arresting many participants.

Unjust Treatment of Women

Women in Iran are speaking out against inequality and violence against women is an ongoing concern.

- 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 2005, the UN General Assembly called on Iran to legally abolish the practice of stoning, which can be applied in cases of adultery. There were continued reports in 2005 that judges imposed sentences of stoning for women charged with adultery.

Persecution of Religious and Ethnic Minorities

- Most religious and ethnic minorities face some social, economic, or cultural discrimination.
- The Baha’i faith has been singled out for harsh treatment since before the Iranian revolution. Zabihullah Mahrami, persecuted for his Baha’i religious belief, died in December 2005, after 10 years in prison. His incarceration is not a unique case, and the Baha’i faith lately has become subject to new arrests and state-controlled media harassment.

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