

# ATTACK ON CIVIL SOCIETY IN IRAN



REPORT 2005 - 2010



## ABOUT ARSEH SEVOM

Human rights organizations and defenders in Iran have found themselves under attack, while abuses of basic human rights have continued. The unrest since the flawed 2009 presidential election has resulted in random and targeted arrests along with a shifting legal landscape that endangers academics and civil society activists in particular. Despite this, we are currently witnessing a transformation of civil society into a growing and creative civil rights movement. In order to ensure that the movement can survive and thrive, it is key to offer support and training to individuals and organizations.

Arseh Sevom (Third Sphere, which refers to the role of civil society) is a non-partisan, independent, non-governmental organization established/registered in 2010 in Amsterdam, aiming to promote peace, democracy, and human rights. The organization's objective is to help build the capacity of organizations and encourage the development of a vigorous third sphere of civil activities.

Arseh Sevom believes that cooperation among civil society organizations is key to building a strong and coherent civil rights movement that can thrive and succeed. It aims to become a hub for organizations and individuals working together towards the common goal of free, open, and peaceful communities.

Arseh Sevom promotes the advancement of rights for people of all beliefs, genders, ethnicities, non-violent political affiliations, and more. To make the transition to a more open society, it is important to address the cultural and political roadblocks to the implementation of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Arseh Sevom aims to further the efforts of Iran's civil rights movement by working with its leaders to build capacity and address future needs and developments. The group also plans to develop advocacy tools to address the attitude to human rights, peace, and democracy among intellectuals, activists, and the general public.

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**“I’d always thought our problems were caused by authoritarian government, and that it should be overthrown. You might expect experience of prison to strengthen this belief but, instead, I realized the real problem was the lack of a strong civil society.”<sup>1</sup>**

**-Emad Baghi**

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<sup>1</sup> Emad Baghi quoted in the Financial Times. Smyth, Gareth. FT.com / Middle East - Lone challenger to Iran’s orthodoxy on the death penalty. April 27 2007. Accessed May 2, 2010 <http://bit.ly/dnW0fW>

## 1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Human rights abuses in the Islamic Republic of Iran are happening to individuals, but they are targeted at civil society. This is as true of the mistreatment and torture of those detained for protesting after the 2009 presidential elections as it is of the arbitrary arrests of human rights defenders. The abuses are designed to control an increasingly liberal population and to silence opposition and dissent.

In addition, human rights discourse is marginalized and problematic in the IRI. In the past, many intellectuals have agreed in part with the regime that “human rights” has been used as a tool by the West to punish countries like Iran. The regime prefers to respond to the international conventions on human rights with the notion of undefined and unclear “Islamic human rights.”

**This report looks at the ways in which civil society has been systematically undermined in Iran.**

The report does **not** deal with each individual or organizational case, but looks at the underlying patterns of abuses that are designed to target whole sectors of society through the harassment of individuals and organizations. There are dozens of reports highlighting abuses and individual cases. We attempt to examine the internal situation that has led to the attacks on civil society activists and unravel the larger narrative underlying individual cases.

Our report begins with 2005, the year Mahmoud Ahmadinejad was elected as president of Iran. At the time, civil society in Iran had experienced its first taste of relative freedom, which primarily arose from the tentative opening of society during two four-year terms of reformist president Mohammad Khatami (1997-2005).

In 2005, the new administration took a hostile approach to civil society organizations, which resulted in limitations on their actions because of closures, travel restrictions, and other restrictions. The antagonist position towards civil society was the defining feature of Ahmadinejad’s first term, just as the struggle between societal reform and hardline elements had defined the administration of Khatami.

**In this report we cover the following major topics:**

- The tentative rise of civil society
- Struggle between reform and suppression
- The 2005 elections
- The emergence of a new political class
- Velvet revolution
- Struggle for the soul of Iran
- From green wave to civil rights: post-presidential elections (2009)
- Stifling women’s voices
- Reform is criminalized
- State control of workers
- The attack on human rights defenders
- Basij student movements are the only legitimate ones
- “Iran is the freest country in the world”
- Civil society, civil no more
- Recommendations

## 2. SITUATIONAL ANALYSIS

### 2.1. The Tentative Rise of Civil Society

*Under Khatami, civil society was given the space it needed to develop. Many independent civil society organizations were formed as were many with a high degree of dependence on the state.*

- Civil society grows during the Khatami administration
- Limits stretched and tested
- Transnational cooperation
- Contribution of Internet
- Increase in the number of rights organizations

Under the presidency of Mohammad Khatami (1997-2005), independent forms of civil society expanded. The growth in NGOs began prior to his presidency, but it was tolerated and given space to develop during his term in office. By the end of his term, official statistics reported 6914 registered NGOs in Iran. In a 2007 SWOT analysis of civil society in Iran, the director of ICRTC, Sohrab Razzaghi, wrote:

During the past two decades and after the Iran-Iraq war, easing revolutionary emotions, eclipse of populism, inclination to a non-ideological society and dominance of development discourse, and concurrent with the world's developments and the third wave of democracy, Iran witnessed the re-mergence of the civil society which was rather slow and weak during its first few years, but took momentum by the outcome of the 1997 presidential election that was the beginning of an era of political liberalization.<sup>1</sup>

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Civil society was not new to Iran, but had been restricted since the revolution. When space was provided for individuals to come together for collective actions that contributed to society many civil society organizations were ready to step in. New, independent newspapers were opened and Iranian cinema contributed to a vibrant and developing culture. The limits were stretched and tested during the eight years of reform, but restrictions on free expression and association remained. Newspapers were forced to close, but as each closed, another opened. New papers were often staffed by the same reporters and editors under a new name. Filmmakers were still censored, but they pushed back and created films that pleased the public and the censors.

It is important to note that civil society was diverse in Iran under the Khatami administration. Civil society organizations included the Association of Iranian Journalists, Association of Employers, human rights organizations, environmental groups that used the precepts of Islam to lobby for better protections, runaway and addict services, education initiatives, arts organizations, mine clearance efforts, and groups addressing HIV/AIDS. In addition, the administration worked with the UNDP to build capacity among civil society organizations.

A new development in civil society began in 2003 after the devastating earthquake in historic Bam. For the first time since the revolution, activists and individuals living in diaspora began to accept that independent civil society did indeed exist in Iran. Prior to the earthquake, there was mistrust and even open hostility on the part of diaspora groups towards activists inside Iran,<sup>2</sup> But the earthquake led to cooperation between domestic and international organizations.

The Internet contributed to the ability of transnational groups to form, showcasing a new virtual and supranational facet to domestic civil society, bringing to Iran's fledgling civil society more access to funds

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1 Sohrab Razzaghi. "Analysis of the Status of the Iranian Civil Society: Opportunities, Challenges and Strategies." (2007)

2 Halleh Ghorashi and Kees Boersma. "The 'Iranian Diaspora' and the New Media: From Political Action to Humanitarian Help." *Development and Change* 40, no 4) : 667—691 (2009). Institute of Social Studies 2009.



and expertise, better reporting on human rights, and increased interactions with international civil society actors.<sup>3</sup>

In addition, there was a corresponding growth in domestic human rights-related organizations that continued into the early years of the Ahmadinejad administration (including Defenders of Human Rights Center, The Defense of the Rights of Prisoners, The Council to Defend the Right to Education, and Human Rights Organization of Kurdistan), which contributed more reliable reporting of human rights abuses in Iran. Independent groups continued to advocate for the rights of minors (as defined by international norms, rather than by Sharia law) and made strides to address the alarming rate of child executions. Women's groups began exercising more power and after the election of Ahmadinejad, the Million Signature Campaign began to build grassroots support for equal rights.

After the election of Ahmadinejad, civil society organizations came under pressure. (See "D. Progress Report: The First Round of Representation of the Community-based Organizations at the Central Supervisory Board" on page 47 for the official account of post-Ahmadinejad civil society activities.) Many organizations, such as ICTRC (see "C. Sealing of ICTRC Offices In Tehran by the Islamic Revolutionary Court ICTRC" on page 45), Rahi (the organization of Shadi Sadr), NGOTC (NGO training center) were closed. Others were forced to shut down, some were forced to limit activities, and still others have attempted to adjust their activities to the new reality in Iran. Razzaghi reports that since Ahmadinejad's 2005 election, the State has been working to replace independent civil society with its own "paper" version.<sup>4</sup>

## 2.2. The Struggle Between Reform and Suppression

*The election of reformist Mohammad Khatami served to highlight the struggle between forces of reform and liberalization and suppressive forces seeking to control the social and political spheres of the nation.*

- 1999 serial murders of intellectuals
- Student demands and suppression
- "Rogue" intelligence forces

Mohammad Khatami's eight-year term as president was marked by a struggle between reform and suppression. Internally, this struggle was most dramatic in two cases: the violent crackdown on the student movement in 1999 and the "disappearances" and murders of dissidents by rogue elements in the Intelligence services.<sup>5 6</sup>

In a 1999 article in the journal *Zanan*, Saeed Emami, the main actor in the murders of intellectuals and dissidents, claims responsibility for constructing an argument about the "cultural onslaught" against the Islamic Republic and the threat posed by intellectuals.<sup>7</sup> As we will explain in this paper, this argument is used again and again to justify harsh crackdowns against individuals and organizations. (See "2.5. Velvet Revolution" on page 14 for more information.)

3 Ibid.

4 Sohrab Razzaghi. "Analysis of the Status of the Iranian Civil Society: Opportunities, Challenges and Strategies." *Publication* vol, num (2007).

5 Nahid Mousavi. "A Review of Serial Murders." *Zanan* 58. (Dec. 1999),

6 Niusha Boghrati. "Iran: Prisoners' Rights Activist Arrested and Detained" *Worldpress.org*, (October 16, 2007.) <http://bit.ly/cJ5PzY>

7 Nahid Mousavi. "A Review of Serial Murders." *Zanan* 58. (Dec. 1999).

## 18 Tir: 1999 Crackdown on Students

With the election of a reformist leader and the sense of growing liberalization, students began to be more active in demanding space for individual and associative freedoms. Their activities terrified the most traditional and conservative elements of the regime, causing then-IRGC leader Rahim Safavi to express his concerns to President Khatami: “Liberals have taken over our universities, and our youth are chanting ‘Death to dictatorship’ slogans.”<sup>8</sup>

IRGC commanders, including many who are now seen as too reformed minded to participate in the Ahmadinejad administration, wrote a letter to Khatami about the student movement demanding that it be suppressed.

Esteemed Mr. Khatami, you know well, despite all of our power, we are rendered incapable because of our friends’ Reform-mindedness. Who is the person who does not know that today the hypocrites and opponents are gathering in regiments in the name of the “Students,” and joining this line of battle? And vindictive, short-sighted, and profit-seeking insiders are adding fuel to the fire. They will not refrain from any form of speech or writing in order to incite more [chaos]!

Esteemed Mr. Khatami, how long should we watch with tears and regurgitate our own blood while we practice “democracy,” laden with chaos and insults, and have Revolutionary patience at the cost of our own system? [See “F. Letter of IRGC Commanders to President Khatami (1999)” on page 53 for the full-text of the letter.]

The student movement was brutally suppressed in 1999 by the forces of the IRGC, in tandem with the Basij. The arguments used to repress it echo those attributed to Saeed Emami: “cultural onslaught,” “inculcating sick ideas.” A strengthened and more professional Basij militia, under the control of the IRGC and acting on their behalf, answered the rise of the student movement with a renewed mission to protect the nation against the perceived domestic threat posed by liberalizing influences.

The internal struggles between reform and shadow forces like the “rogue” intelligence operatives would continue throughout the two terms of the Khatami administration and emerge into the light during the Ahmadinejad administration.

### 2.3. The 2005 Elections

*The 2005 elections were the first to include active campaigning by members of Iran’s Basij militia. This resulted in the surprising rise of the former mayor of Tehran, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, the promotion of populist politics, and the ascendance of a new political class.*

- Ahmadinejad as the candidate of the Basij
- Public campaigning by the Basij militia for the first time

Mahmoud Ahmadinejad’s 2005 candidacy marked a new era in Iranian politics: the entry of the IRGC and the Basij forces into politics. Until the election of Khatami, there was no need for basiji campaigners because elections were predictable. The landslide 1997 election of Mohamad Khatami took everyone by surprise. Because of his victory, hardline forces organized to prevent further reform and the 2005 elections were the first to feature active and public politicking from the militia forces. Ahmadinejad was *their* candidate. A *true basiji*.

The candidacy of Ahmadinejad represented much more than the ascendance of a popular personality.

<sup>8</sup> Ali Alfoneh. “The Revolutionary Guards’ Role in Iranian Politics” *Middle East Quarterly*. Fall 2008. <http://bit.ly/c6nIob>. 3-14.

He personified the spirit of the Islamic revolution for many, starting with his opposition to Marxist and communist forces as “Godless,”<sup>9</sup> his participation in the Iran-Iraq war and his simple, direct demeanor.

Ahmadinejad appealed to a particularly hardline faction of the IRGC and Basij, many of whom were aging Iran-Iraq war veterans ready to claim leadership roles in the government. Others saw in Ahmadinejad the spirit of the Basij - volunteerism, selflessness, and adherence to the teachings of Ayatollah Khomeini. In a fatwa, Mesbah Yazdi, who is often described as the the spiritual guide of the Basij forces, openly called for the Basij and IRGC to vote for Ahmadinejad.<sup>10</sup> A spokesman for Yazdi told a journalist for the New Yorker: “I saw that he had a true Basij culture... And that, like Imam Khomeini, he was especially resistant to foreign cultural influences.”<sup>11</sup>

The 2005 election demonstrated that the Basij forces, which had been strengthened after the student protests in the late 90s, had emerged as a coherent, well-organized club that could challenge the clerical establishment.

In addition, the success of Ahmadinejad demonstrated the emergence of a new political group: aging members of the Revolutionary Guard who were, naturally, ready to move from the military into politics.

## 2.4. The Emergence of a New Political Class

*Aging leadership among Iran’s Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC) made retirement from the Corps and transition to politics a logical next step, but individuals did not simply transition into politics - they brought along the elite military apparatus and Basij.*

*The new administration embraced a protective and security-based approach that viewed any disagreement as opposition, seeing itself as the promoter of a governance model that cannot be perfected.*

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- IRGC enter politics
- “Brother-in-law-ocracy”
- Cabinet members tied to mass killings of the 1980s, serial murders, terrorism

### The Cabinet of Mr. Ahmadinejad

The strength of the new political class, most of whom were past and present members of the IRGC, was clearly demonstrated by Ahmadinejad’s first-term cabinet, which included an unprecedented number of IRGC members.<sup>12</sup> By the time the appointments were approved, 17 of the government’s 22 ministers had ties to the IRGC.

Not only had a new political class come into power, breaking down the walls — however thin they may have been — between the military and politics, they had surged into power with a single-mindedness that was relatively new to recent Iranian politics.

The appointments of the new president were of supporters, family members, and friends. It came to be referred to as “Brother-in-law-ocracy” and was widely lambasted by members of parliament, with one MP stating:

“We did not expect such behaviour from a president who emphasized the slogans of justice and

9 In the director’s cut of 444 Days by Mohammad Shirvani, the man behind the initial plan to take the American embassy hostage, Ebrahim Asgharzadeh, claims that Mahmoud Ahmadinejad attended the initial meeting, but disagreed with the choice. He felt the Soviet embassy made a better target because they were “Marxists and Godless.”

10 Ali Gheissari & Seyyed Vali Reza Nasr. “Democracy in Iran: History and the Quest for Liberty.” *Oxford University Press*. (2006.) 155.

11 Jon Lee Anderson. “Understanding The Basij” *The New Yorker*. (June 19, 2009.) <http://nyr.kr/bGcURv>.

12 Islamic Affairs Analyst. “Assessing Ahmadinejad’s closed circle.” *IHS Jane’s Information Services*. (January 26, 2010.)



**Ahmadinejad appealed to a particularly hardline faction of the IRGC and Basij, many of whom were aging Iran-Iraq war veterans ready to claim leadership roles in the government. Others saw in Ahmadinejad the spirit of the Basij - volunteerism, selflessness, and adherence to the teachings of Ayatollah Khomeini. In a fatwa, Mesbah Yazdi, who is often described as the the spiritual guide of the Basij forces, openly called for the Basij and IRGC to vote for Ahmadinejad.**

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the cabinet of 70 million people before and after the election and when the vote of confidence was given to him...It seems that in this appointment [the governor of North Khorason], there are signs of neither 70 million people nor the 17 million votes won by the president in the run off election<sup>13</sup>

Ahmadinejad's government can be seen as a kind of coalition of Revolutionary Guards nominally loyal to the Supreme Leader, but in fact dedicated to their own interpretation of the Islamic state. They are self-named *Principlists*, in a constant state of vigilance against reform of any kind.

From the start, there was no pretense of civil protections or encouragement of civil society. In fact, the opposite is true: Principlists are "civil society phobic," according to Sohrab Razzaghi, the former director of the Iran Civil Society Organization Training and Research Center (ICTRC).

Key members of Ahmadinejad's cabinet have been involved in some of the most notorious incidents of the Islamic Republic's 31-year history. His first Minister of the Interior, Mustafa Pour-Mohammadi, was reportedly involved with the 1988 mass killings of nearly 5,000 prisoners, the 1998 murders of prominent political activists and intellectuals, and has been linked to the assassinations of activists living abroad. The Minister of Information, Gholam Hossein Mohseni Ezhei, led the prosecutorial charge against reformist clerics, limited press freedoms, persecuted journalists, and may have even ordered the killing of a political activist.<sup>14 15</sup> The current defense minister is wanted by Interpol for his role in the 1994 bombing of a Jewish community center in Buenos Aires and has been a member of the Qods Forces, a shadow unit of the Revolutionary Guards.

### The Promotion of the Garrison State

The Principlists have several defining attributes:

- Civil society phobic
- Populist approach (an "us against them" mentality)
- Promotion of the Garrison State
- Security-based routines

They seek to control all aspects of society and to advance the "state of permanent crisis." Serious differences get transformed into crises addressed by further suppression of society. This response is illustrated by the spate of post-election (2009) arrests for "spreading propaganda against the regime." Journalists, economists, politicians, activists, and students sit in prison for expressing a different point of view.

The Principlists thrive on crisis. When there is none, they are compelled to create one. When they confront a predicament that is unmanageable, a new crisis is created to take its place.

The Principlists have sought to control all aspects of creative production. Few independent books were published in the first four years of Ahmadinejad's presidency, and many previously licensed books were refused permission to reprint. The Ahmadinejad government, however, reports that more new titles have been published under their term than by any other administration since the revolution, an example of their determination to control cultural production. Statistics show more books published, but the experience of

13 Interview MP Gerami Moghaddam. BBC Persian Television. (2006, BBC Worldwide Monitoring.) Tehran, Iran,).

14 Human Rights Watch. "Ministers of Murder: Iran's New Security Cabinet." Human Rights Watch Publications. (December 16, 2005.)

15 Journalist Akbar Ganji and activist Emadedden Baghi identified Mostafa Pour Mohammadi and Gholam Hossein Mohseni Ezhei as among the masterminds of serial murders and disappearances. Ganji also claimed that the cleric Mohammad-Taqi Mesbah Yazdi provided the religious justification for the murders. All three would become more prominent in the Ahmadinejad administration. Both Pour Mohammadi and Ezhei served in Mr. Ahmadinejad's first cabinet, (For more information please see "The Cabinet of Mr. Ahmadinejad" on page 11) while the journalist and the activist were charged with "endangering national security" and imprisoned for their efforts. (Iran: Prisoners' Rights Activist Arrested and Detained - Niusha Boghrati- Oct. 16, 2007 Worldpress.org <http://bit.ly/cJ5PzY>)

Iranian publishers and readers claims the opposite.<sup>16</sup>

The Principlists aim to replace independent civil society with their own State-controlled organizations and to cut the ties between civil society activists inside and outside Iran. The closure of the ICRTC can be understood in this light - despite abiding by Iranian law and operating more transparently than law required, the center was shut down and its director arrested in 2007. (See “C. Sealing of ICTRC Offices In Tehran by the Islamic Revolutionary Court ICTRC” on page 45.)

The group around Ahmadinejad has relationships that have been formed through friendship, war, and shared ideology. They have inordinate strength not because of Ahmadinejad’s populism, but because they are unified in their actions and beliefs. And because they have determinedly shown that the clerics have little power over them, they have been a societal juggernaut, acting in a sense as the most revolutionary of Iranian political forces. They are extremely ideological, bucking the trend in all sectors of Iranian society towards a less ideological and more pragmatic future. Interestingly, they seem to have mastered the rhetoric of the anti-Western left, using anti-American, anti-imperialist arguments to gain allies that should shun him.

### Speaking with One United, Anti-Democratic Voice

- Power unified behind the office of the Supreme Leader
- Anti-democratic reading of constitution

Since the 2009 elections, there have been several interesting developments among Iran’s ruling elite. Foremost, there are no more dichotomies between military and politics; civil society and the State; or even a democratic and anti-democratic interpretation of the ambiguous constitution.

State-controlled organizations and institutions are replacing independent civil society. The military is now openly a part of the political machinery: not a cog, but a wheel. The constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran is now read as a fundamentally undemocratic document.

This anti-democratic reading resulted in the mid-April 2010 vote by Iran’s parliament to limit the powers granted to it by the constitution.<sup>17</sup> The parliament voted to relinquish its oversight of regulations made by appointed institutions, specifically The Guardian Council, The National Security Council, The Assembly of Experts, and the Expediency Council. Nazila Fathi of the New York Times reports, “Those bodies’ regulations now will not be subject to parliamentary oversight but will have to go through another committee — the Supreme Council for Revising Laws — made up of several allies of the supreme leader, as well as the speaker of Parliament.” This act could significantly increase the power of the supreme leader and his allies since the appointed institutions are already staffed with his appointees or from a list of candidates vetted by the Guardian Council.<sup>18</sup>

## 2.5. Velvet Revolution

*The Principlists (the party of Ahmadinejad and his cohorts) and other hardliners have long viewed society as ripe for velvet revolution. They see themselves as stalwarts protecting the Islamic regime against the liberalization*

16 Asad Seif “Printing and Publishing in Iran; Two Sides of Reality.” Gozaar: A Forum for Human Rights and Democracy in Iran, (May 20, 2009.) <http://bit.ly/c9dfxN>.

17 Nazila Fathi. “Iran’s Parliament Cedes Powers.” The New York Times. April 14, 2010. (<http://www.nytimes.com/2010/04/15/world/middleeast/15iran.html>)

18 Three members of one family, who are termed “pragmatic conservatives” have been awarded prominent positions in the second-term administration. The three, often called the Larijani brothers, are in influential positions as speaker of parliament, head of the judiciary, and Iran’s representative to the Human Rights Council in Geneva. (Two other brothers have also served in cabinet level positions in Iran’s government.) They are said to be completely loyal to the Supreme Leader and to receive his support in return. The Larijani brothers are often said to be counterweight to the populist excesses of Ahmadinejad. Certainly they have engaged in some public criticism of many of his policies.

At the current moment, power is squarely located in the office of the Supreme Leader. For the time being, the friction that is said to exist between the Larijani brothers and the president has not emerged as a serious threat to either faction.

of its own population.

- Constructing an argument against intellectuals and activists
- Fear of society's liberalization

Years before the Principlists came to power, hardline forces became concerned about the spread of liberalism and worked on constructing “velvet revolution” scenario, or as they called it, the *soft war* or the *soft project*. In the late 90s, the IRGC clearly identified threats to the hegemony of the state from the increasingly liberal society. These threats were most visible to hardliners in the cultural contribution of the arts and in the demands of university students. (Both of these cases were discussed in “18 Tir: 1999 Crackdown on Students” on page 10.)

In 2006, three dual-national academics were arrested: Ramin Jahanbegloo, Haleh Esfandiari, and Kian Tajbaksh. While they were not the first or only arrests of their kind, they are emblematic of the logic used to build a case against a sector of society. They were accused of espionage and eventually released on high bails. In forced confessions, the three acknowledged that they were “duped” by foreign forces and admitted their guilt of attempts to overthrow the State.<sup>19</sup> Hadi Ghaemi then of Human Rights Watch had this to say:

The goal is to create fear among activists and intellectuals in Iran so that they know that even someone like Jahanbegloo — who was not involved in political issues — can be charged with instigating a velvet revolution... They want others to be careful.<sup>20</sup>

After their incarcerations, Esfandiari and Jahanbegloo both left Iran. Tajbaksh remained and in 2009 was rearrested. He was one of the many high profile prisoners involved in the show trials of the summer of 2009.

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Just before the 2009 elections, the fears of a velvet revolution were once again articulated. The Financial Times reported:

Yadollah Javani, head of the political department of the guards, was the first authority to warn against the occurrence of the so-called “velvet revolution” just before the June 12 presidential election. It later became the main allegation against hundreds of political prisoners.

“If Moussavi, Khatami [former president] . . . and [Mehdi] Karroubi [another reformist candidate] are the main elements behind the velvet coup in Iran, which is the case, the judiciary and security and intelligence officials are expected to put off this plot by arresting and putting on trial the main leaders and punishing them,” Mr Javani was quoted as saying by the official news agency, IRNA.<sup>21</sup>

The notion of a well-planned and -organized conspiracy involving Iranian intellectuals and activists, in cahoots with Western universities and governments, led to numerous arrests and the closures of several civil society organizations. Iranians are now forbidden from speaking with foreign news agencies.

In December 2009, the regime leaked a list of approximately sixty organizations believed to be involved in the *soft project* that were now enemies of the State<sup>22</sup>. Almost immediately, MPs announced that Ahmadinejad’s own government was guilty of having contact with many of the organizations on the list.

19 Nazila Fathi. “Iran Again Rejects Deadline on Nuclear Plan” *The New York Times*. (July 3, 2006.)

20 Golnaz Esfandiari. “Iran: Jailed Writer’s ‘Confession’ Worries Activists.” *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*. (August 26, 2006.) <http://bit.ly/97Fazr>

21 Najmeh Bozorgmehr. “Iran’s reformers ‘must face justice’” *Financial Times*. (August 10, 2009.) <http://bit.ly/9z9FgL>

22 . United4Iran. “The Enemies List: Institutions that frighten the regime.” (January 5, 2010.) <http://bit.ly/c8KzvA>

This scenario of soft revolution is the underlying reason for the arrests of women's rights activists, lawyers, civil society activists, academics, and students. While Western observers may (and do) deplore their actions, the Principlists are, in fact, realistic in their assessment that Iranian society is becoming more liberal.

## 2.6. Struggle for the Soul of Iran

*Successive generations in Iran face governments that they view as historical blips and not as representing the national interests of Iran or the will of the people.*

Many Iranians have traditionally viewed their governments with distrust, which rarely seem to represent the interests of the population or the nation.<sup>23</sup> When combined with a population boom that began in the 1950s, the result is consecutive generations coming of age with a government that they do not trust and, more importantly, that does not trust them. As the population of Iran became more literate and pragmatic, hardliners responded with increased crackdowns and by blocking change.

Demographic factors strongly influence Iranian society because the form of government is perennially unstable. For at least a century, many Iranians have questioned their governments and seen them as historical blips rather than long-term solutions to help them build their country. As a result, the youth have a strong influence on the question of governance, which, combined with a long-standing resistance to creating space for reform, change, and new leadership, results in long-term unpredictability and instability.

### A Nation of Literate Women

One of the most striking accomplishments of the past thirty years has been the dramatic rise in literacy, particularly among women. This has led to greater participation of women and girls in society.

- Rise in literacy
- Collaboration between Islamic and secular feminists

One of the most dramatic developments in civil society was the rise of the woman's movement. In 1979, just 38% of Iran's female population was literate. Today, UNICEF figures show that there is a rate of 97% literacy among the female youth of Iran, an incredible accomplishment. An oft-cited reason for the climb in literacy is the entry into the education system of girls from conservative, traditional, and religious families. After the revolution, they were no longer entering a seemingly secular world of cabarets and cafes to get an education, but a religious one in which the hijab was worn by all women. Women became active in society as well, working in Islamic charities and networks as well in other areas. However, one result of the increase of literacy and civic participation was the demand for equal rights. This context formed the breeding ground for a dynamic and creative Islamic women's movement in Iran, one that was eventually able to arrive at common ground with secular feminists.

In addition, the transnational collaboration that began in 2003 with the tragic earthquake created space for collaboration among feminists and feminist organizations inside and outside Iran, both secular and Islamic.

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23 This was as true in the mid 19th century when the French diplomat J.A. de Gobineau wrote of the Persian people: "Full of adoration of the country itself, they do not believe in any means of running it" as it is today.



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**“We cannot have a democratic system without a democratic people. We need to build a democratic society in Iran. That’s why I feel that building civil society is so important in Iran. We need to create a more democratic population.”<sup>1</sup>**

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1 From an interview conducted by Arseh Sevom with a civil society activist.

## 2.7. Where is My Vote becomes I Demand My Rights

*The elections of 2009 gave voice to a public desire for more liberalization and rights, while using the language of the revolution to do so. In the wake of the elections, millions took to the streets. The rallying call of “Where is My Vote?” transformed to a call for civil and human rights.*

The 2009 presidential campaign in Iran caught many by surprise. The visibility of the green movement propelling Mir Hossein Mousavi’s campaign gave many a sense of solidarity they had not felt since Iran qualified for the 2006 World Cup. By the time the polling began on June 12, many were convinced that Mousavi would win. The announcement of an Ahmadinejad landslide brought millions into the streets under the banner “Where is My Vote?”

When it became clear that the Supreme Leader and the ruling elite were not willing to properly engage the public’s concerns about vote rigging and the truth of the election results, the opposition, which was already using the language of rights, transformed from support for any one candidate to a long-term movement for civil rights.

Clerics and ayatollahs have called for equal rights for women and the Baha’i. Former revolutionaries have demanded free speech. The family of Ayatollah Khomeini is now supporting reform and the opposition. “I thought I was the minority and that I would just have to learn to live with oppression,” a young Iranian professional said about the protests in Iran. “Now I know that I am part of the majority, and I feel responsible for a better Iran.”

The regime has used torture, rape, sexual abuse, and random arrests to try to control the population and suppress change.<sup>24</sup>

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24 Iran Human Rights Documentation Center. “Violent Aftermath: The 2009 Election and Suppression of Dissent in Iran.” Iran Human Rights Documentation Center.. <http://bit.ly/bFWDQS>

### 3. ABUSE OF CIVIL SOCIETY

Human and civil rights have always been curtailed in contemporary Iran. No government has given civil society the space to flourish without suspicion and suppression. Still, under the Khatami administration, civil society organizations were given space to develop and not one was shut down. Newspapers, however, were closed but found ways to reopen within days using new names.

Since the Principlists took power, there has been a crackdown on civil society and human rights activists, which is unsurprising if we consider the ideological roots of the Ahmadinejad juggernaut.<sup>25</sup> The spiritual guide of the Basij and the group surrounding the president, Ayatollah Mesbah Yazdi, favors a hardline interpretation of Islamic values that leaves no space for reform and is reported to have sanctioned the use of violence against opponents.

Particularly when there is a perceived conflict with the hardline elements of Iran's regime, civil society in Iran is under increasingly harsh attack. Since Ahmadinejad took power in 2005, civil society activities have been curtailed. Human rights defenders have been under particular threat. Organizations have been closed. Members and staff arrested and detained. Many imprisoned, and often accused of such serious charges as endangering national security.

#### 3.1. Freedom of Association

##### *Article 19*

*Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers.*

19

##### *Article 20*

*(1) Everyone has the right to freedom of peaceful assembly and association.*

*(2) No one may be compelled to belong to an association.*

##### *Article 23*

*(1) Everyone has the right to work, to free choice of employment, to just and favourable conditions of work and to protection against unemployment.*

*(2) Everyone, without any discrimination, has the right to equal pay for equal work.*

*(3) Everyone who works has the right to just and favourable remuneration ensuring for himself and his family an existence worthy of human dignity, and supplemented, if necessary, by other means of social protection.*

*(4) Everyone has the right to form and to join trade unions for the protection of his interests.*

Freedom of association and free expression are key to a healthy civil society. While people in Iran are well-known for being vocal about their individual opinions, the restriction on rights to peaceful assembly and association mean that those opinions remain individual. The liberty to form groups of like-minded associates is one that belongs solely to the hardliners. Even the reformists, who are part of the government, are not given permits to meet.

The lack of political parties and the near-impossibility of receiving permits to gather are long-standing issues that have become worse since the June 2009 election. The state has refused to provide permits for lectures by prominent reformists.

<sup>25</sup> Sohrab Razzaghi. "Analysis of the Status of the Iranian Civil Society: Opportunities, Challenges and Strategies." *Publication* vol, num (2007):

These limitations remain in place for professional associations and labor unions. The State controls the leadership and the boards of these organizations. In addition, it writes and enforces the bylaws of unions and professional associations. The government has set up Basij groups to control the activities of associations and unions, as well as to offer an alternative.

### 3.2. Reform is Criminalized

*The notion of reform, as well as the political ideas of Reformists, is anathema to the Principlists. They view their own ideals as perfected, with no need of change.*

- Political parties do not operate freely

In Iran, reform has been criminalized. This is as true of the notion of reform as it is of the loose political alliances between wide swaths of politicians who seek any modification to the stance of the Principlists.

In an August 1, 2005 speech, his last as president of the Islamic Republic of Iran, Mohammad Khatami stated that none of his ministers had ever been more than a few meters from prison.<sup>26</sup> He was referring to the assassination attempts on and arrests of key Reformists. After the contested 2009 presidential elections, thousands of people were detained, many of them still in prison facing unknown charges. Among them were many prominent Reformists, including the former vice president under Mohammad Khatami, Mohammad Ali Abtahi, who was arrested and beaten, and forced to make false confessions. The campaign managers for the two candidates who questioned the election results, Moussavi and Karroubi, were also arrested. Some were quickly released; others, like Abtahi, found themselves in front of television cameras, stars of the regime's post-election show trials.

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After the Ashura (December 2009) protests, more were detained, including top advisers to Mousavi and Khatami.<sup>27</sup>

Students aligned with the reform movement have also come under scrutiny. Mohammad Amin Valian, a student at Damaghan University and a member of the central council of the [Reformist] Islamic Association, was sentenced to execution on charges of "enmity against God." This occurred after he was attacked in a student Basij publication.<sup>28</sup> In May, after an international campaign protesting the sentence, the sentence of execution was commuted to 3.5 years in prison.

Kayhan has published numerous attacks on reformists, going so far as to accuse them all of treason. In a letter to Ayatollah Khamenei, the Islamic Revolution Mujahadeen [Reformist group] wrote:

This wave of attacks intends to portray reformists as treacherous individuals and agents of the United States. The shamelessness of the new wave of attacks is such that, unlike the past where they attempted to create divisions among reformists by propagating false news about rifts between moderate and radical reformists, in the new wave, and as an example you can refer to Kayhan's editorial on 23 Day of 1386 [April 13, 2007], all reformists are accused of treason and cooperating with the enemy, and reformism is portrayed as essentially an ideology propped up by the enemy.<sup>29</sup>

It isn't only the traditional reformists who are attacked by Kayhan. Over the past year, the newspaper has been attacking conservatives as well. Anyone who disagrees with the Principlists is "carrying out the work of Israel and the U.S."

26 View from [Outside] Iran. "Ch-ch-changes." (August 2, 2005.) <http://bit.ly/8YV3yZ>.

27 Najmeh Bozorgmehr. "Iran divide deepens after arrests." *Financial Times*. (December 28, 2009.) <http://bit.ly/cFp2Ge>

28 International Campaign for Human Rights in Iran. "Moharebeh and Corruption on Earth charges for student activist." (February 4, 2010.) <http://bit.ly/cKtxg4>

29 Arash Sigarchi. "Reformist Group Criticizes Election Process". Roozonline. (January 24, 2008.) <http://bit.ly/bZ1DoH>

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**The group around Ahmadinejad has relationships that have been formed through friendship, war, and shared ideology. They have inordinate strength not because of Ahmadinejad’s populism, but because they are unified in their actions and beliefs. Despite their idealism, they have determinedly shown that the clerics have little power over them. The group has been a societal juggernaut, acting in a sense as the most revolutionary of Iranian political forces. They are extremely ideological, bucking the trend in all sectors of Iranian society towards a less ideological and more pragmatic future.**

21

## No Freely Operating Political Parties

Reformist is a loose term that has often been used to denote the name of a political party. In fact, the reformists are not even given the space to organize and operate like a typical party. Their supporters are harassed and arrested.

After the 1979 Revolution, political parties were immediately identified as a threat to the regime and have not been allowed to function freely.<sup>30</sup> Their various names refer to loose coalitions rather than organized and effective opposing groupings of political thought.

In fact, many argue that the lack of political parties has been filled by news organizations aligned with a particular faction. Observers of Iran may have noted that both candidates Mir Hossein Mousavi and Mehdi Karroubi ran newspapers as well (Kaleme Sabz and Etemad Meli, both now shut down and with staff in prison) and that hardline newspaper Kayhan is aligned with the Office of the Supreme Leader.

Newspapers and other publications aligned with the reformist movement are routinely shut down. Journalists and editors are detained and imprisoned. Travel bans are also used to prevent active reformists and journalists from contacting the outside world.

Reformist sites have also been the targets of cyber attacks and many of the sites have been completely shut down since the 2009 elections.

### TRENDS

- Criminalization of reform
- Travel bans
- Closure of newspapers
- Cyber attacks
- Denial of permits for gatherings

## 3.3 State Control of Workers

*Workers are an extension of the State, which controls the ability to form unions and the bylaws and constitutions of those unions.*

- Independent labor unions/movements suppressed
- State controls the bylaws of all labor councils
- Independent organizers attacked and imprisoned

Efforts to organize people outside government-sanctioned and –controlled structures are met with forceful suppression. This is true in every aspect of civil society in Iran, but is perhaps most obvious for the organization of trade unions. There is one organization authorized to represent workers: Workers' House, which, according to international labor organizations, is simply a means of controlling workers.

Since 1990, however, Iran's labor law has allowed for the establishment of Islamic Labor Councils (Shoraya Eslami) under the umbrella of Workers' House. After an Islamic Labor Council has been established, the law permits no other form of representation. The Ministries of Interior and Labor, plus the Islamic Information Organization, control the constitutions, bylaws, and election procedures of the councils, not the workers.

The law does allow workers to collect signatures in order to discharge the Islamic Labor Council at their place of work in order to organize their own independent union. According to the ILO, these attempts are

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30 Mohammad Paydar. "A Look at Thirty Years of Religious Government in Iran." Gozaar. (February 3, 2010) <http://bit.ly/bfRhV>

rarely successful and are most often met with repression.<sup>31</sup>

The ILO also reports increased numbers of intelligence forces in the workplace,<sup>32</sup> which contributes to workers' inability to organize effectively and the arbitrary workplace arrests of employees and organizers.

Trade unions have always been seen as threats to the Islamic Republic, which is why state control and infiltration by intelligence forces are so important to the state. In 2005, the first serious attack was launched against the founding committee for the Greater Tehran bus drivers' union. On 9 May 2005, at their inaugural meeting, the committee to form the independent union was attacked by members of the company's guards, the Workers' House, Labor Council, and security forces.<sup>33</sup>

In an interview, Mansour Osanlou, a leader of the bus drivers' union, recalled the attack. After calling for calm and admonishing the attackers for destroying Korans that were among the books and documents, he was badly beaten, but even his attackers got scared when they thought that they had beaten him to death. Osanlou has since been attacked since many times, both inside and outside prison, and he is currently incarcerated with dangerous criminals and in failing health. Another leader, Ebrahim Madadi is also in prison.

Mohammad Salehi, who was the leader of the baker's union in Saqez, was arrested in 2004 for organizing a May Day demonstration. He was imprisoned for five years until being released on bail and a suspended sentence in April of 2009. Several of his supporters were harassed and lashed.<sup>34</sup>

The repression faced by all those making independent efforts to organize workers is clear when it comes to the case of the workers at Haft Tapeh Sugar Manufacturing.

### Haft Tapeh Sugar Manufacturing

Haft Tapeh workers had a number of grievances, unpaid salaries foremost among them. In January 2008, they presented 1900 signatures they had collected so they could dismiss the Islamic Labor Council and form a new union. In May, employees went on strike to protest unpaid wages. A few months later, six members of the executive board were arrested and brought before the revolutionary court (Branch 2, Dezful) to face charges of "propaganda against the government," "spreading propaganda against the regime," "relations with the enemy" and "forming an illegal trade union."

Four of the six were released from prison relatively quickly. The other two spent several months in prison. All six were expelled from their jobs. They are currently without work or pay and facing dire economic circumstances. Their lawyer, Mohammad Olyaeifard, was harassed and questioned. (He is now serving time in prison for criticizing the execution of a juvenile.)

"While employers can freely organise,<sup>35</sup> workers who set up their independent organisations are prosecuted and put in jail", said Nejadi in his letter dated 7th November. "Today is the day to support workers who fought in Haft Tappeh for workers' rights, and who were elected by Haft Tappeh workers to represent them

31 "Annual Survey of violations of trade Union Rights 2009." International Trade Union Confederation. <http://bit.ly/9I8taC>

32 "Country Baselines under the 1998 ILO Declaration Annual Review" *International Labor Organization*. (2008) <http://bit.ly/9mlfT>

33 "Mansour Osanloo." International Campaign for Human Rights in Iran (updated 25th January 2009.) <http://www.iranhumanrights.org/2009/01/mansour-osanloo/> and *International Transport Workers' Federation* <http://www.itfglobal.org/urban-transport/urban-transport-1582.cfm>

34 "Annual Survey of violations of trade Union Rights 2009." *International Trade Union Confederation*. <http://bit.ly/9I8taC>

35 Note from the editors: Actually employers are also under pressure and cannot freely organize.

in an independent organisation. No doubt tomorrow and in future when we are out of prison we will do our share in this workers' duty".<sup>36</sup>

Additionally, a journalist and human rights activist who covered the plight of the workers at Haft Tapeh and in the other unions was handed an 11-year sentence in early April 2010.<sup>37</sup> Abolfazl Abedini was pronounced guilty of "spreading propaganda against the regime through interviews with foreign media."

### Teaching Below the Poverty Line

- Teachers' demands for pay parity met with suppression
- Teachers punished for protesting (lashes, imprisonment, pay cuts)

One only has to look at the high rate of literacy in contemporary Iran to realize that Iranian society places a high value on education. The regime, however, does not seem to value the teachers responsible for educating Iran's youth. They are the lowest paid of all government employees and their attempts to organize and demand rights have been met with brutality. Teachers had been protesting for better working conditions and a livable salary for years.

In 2001, parliament drafted a bill called The Pay Parity Bill, which was supposed to bring the salaries of teachers above Iran's poverty line. The Guardian Council blocked implementation of the law and the bill was sent back to parliament for rewriting.

A report from Education International states:

According to the superintendent of the Teaching Profession Centre, Ali Akbar Baghani, the government's recent announcement that they cannot provide the money for heaters for children this winter is an understatement: there are currently 45,000 classrooms in the country that run the risk of ceilings caving in. Teachers do not have desks to work on and children do not have enough benches or chairs. As many as 9 million children take classes in three shifts. Teachers in rural areas have no transportation to go to school and schools often lack the most basic teaching and learning material such as textbooks. While all teachers are aware of the problems, none dare to speak up.<sup>38</sup>

Refusal to implement the Pay Parity Bill caused many teachers to protest for the first time in years. On January 23, 2007, 100 demonstrated outside the parliament. That number grew to 1000 in February. Shortly after teachers all over the country participated in sit-ins. Their number had grown to 3000 by the next time they demonstrated in front of parliament, and they were joined by academics and students.

Those participating in protests against the low pay they receive have been targeted for harassment. In 2007, almost 1000 were detained at one protest. According to UNESCO, 700 teachers had their pay cut, 86 were suspended, and 39 banned from teaching for participating in protests for higher pay.<sup>39</sup> In 2008, the teachers' union collected evidence showing that 286 intelligence files had been opened on individual members.<sup>40</sup> Education International also reports that the leadership of the union was arrested.

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36 "Iran: we must get the jailed sugar cane workers freed." *Kargaran*. (November 16, 2009.) <http://bit.ly/cEeAD9>.

37 "Iranian Journalist Given 'Long Jail Term'" Radio Free Europe / Radio Liberty (April 6, 2010.) <http://bit.ly/avdDNf>

38 "Iran: teachers will hold unprecedented nationwide strike on 6 March to uphold their right to a living wage." *Education International*. March 2, 2007. (2010). <http://bit.ly/dqW8ya>

39 "Education under attack: 2010." *UNESCO*. (2010.) p.200

40 Education International [2008-03-13] Iran: Crackdown on activists. Education International. (March 13, 2008). <http://bit.ly/8XkUb2>



## TRENDS

- Prevention of independent workers' organizations
- Unpaid salaries
- Below poverty line salaries
- Attacks on labor leaders and their supporters
- Arrests and torture of labor activists
- Suspensions and forced retirements
- Unpaid retirement benefits
- Infiltration of workplace by intelligence forces

### 3.4 The Attack on Human Rights Defenders

*Human rights defenders have never had an easy time in Iran. Their work is questioned by intellectuals, who have often seen it as pandering to the West, and attacked by the State.*

- Pressure on human rights defenders
- Arrests
- Outrageous charges

Human rights defenders in Iran never had it easy. Their efforts have been blocked through baseless arrests and other forms of harassment, which have increased with the Principlists' rise to power. They reject all reforms and see the defense of human rights as "threatening the mental health of the nation."

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The last five years presented many hurdles for human rights defenders and civil society activists. The ICRTC was shut down in 2007 despite complying with all Iranian laws, and the president, Sohrab Razzaghi, was arrested. He is out on bail, but is currently charged with a number of serious infractions.<sup>41</sup>

Jaras, an internet based news agency affiliated with the opposition, reported in February 2010 that the IRGC stepped up its arrests and harassment of human rights defenders, with a special emphasis on those who are members of the Defenders of Human Rights Center, Human Rights Activists in Iran, the Committee for Human Rights Reporters, and the One Million Signature Campaign.

According to credible reports, those arrested are under heavy pressure, made to present prepared texts and to make false confessions.

The aim of the IRGC is to prove that human rights activists are collaborating with foreign elements and their security services, hoping that by making the connection, further protests can be prevented.<sup>42</sup>

The report continues by stating that members of the Human Rights Activists in Iran, the Defenders of Human Rights Center, and the Committee of Human Rights Reporters have been accused of being spies for the CIA.

Emad Baghi, an investigative journalist whose time in prison in the early 2000's prompted him to form an organization to protect prisoner's rights, was arrested in December of 2009 and has since been held without charge. Baghi has been continually harassed, called before the courts or to intelligence offices more than 50 times since 1995.<sup>43</sup> In November 2009, he was prevented from traveling to Geneva to receive the Martin

41 "Another Attack on Civil Society" Roozonline (October 28, 2007.) <http://bit.ly/bGXger>

42 Report from Jaras on the targeting of human rights activists by the IRGC. See TK' for a summary translation

43 "Journalist Emad Baghi held in solitary confinement, health deteriorating" IFEX (March 15, 2010.) <http://bit.ly/aiGSBD>.

Ennals award for human rights defenders.<sup>44</sup>

### **Harassment of Human Rights Lawyers**

Materially, human rights lawyers cannot do much to defend their clients because they cannot read the files. The cases against their clients are largely false and trumped up, which makes the defense superfluous. The most important act a human rights lawyers can take is to raise awareness about the cases they take on, bringing them to the attention of the international community and to the public.

Human rights lawyers have increasingly come under investigation during the Ahmadinejad administration. They are often called in for interrogation, arrested, and forced into exile.

“The arrests of human rights lawyers represent an effort to discourage opposition on a general level. On a personal level, they want to punish individuals who expose the shortcomings of the Islamic Republic,” says a source who worked in the human rights office of a Western embassy in Iran.

The source continued, “The IRI is sending the message, don’t defend those we have arrested for political reason. Don’t even mention the term human rights.”

### **CASE: Human Rights Organization of Kurdistan**

Associates of the Human Rights Organization of Kurdistan have been targeted for arrest on a number of occasions. Zeynab Bayzeydi, a member of the organization and also active in the One Million Signatures Campaign, was arrested in 2008. She has been charged with “acting against national security,” “supporting a Kurdish political organization,” “spreading of propaganda against the state,” “conducting interviews with foreign media,” and “membership in an illegal organization.” For these charges, she has been sentenced to serve four years in exile prison, in the city of Zanjan.<sup>45</sup>

Mohammad Sedigh Kaboudvand, editor of Kurdish weekly Paryam-e Mardom and founder of the Human Rights Organization of Kurdistan (HROK), was sentenced to ten years for “acting against national security through HROK,” “widespread propaganda against the system by disseminating news,” “opposing Islamic penal laws by publicizing punishments such as stoning and executions,” and “advocating on behalf of political prisoners.” The International Campaign for Human Rights in Iran reports that he is suffering from failing health and went untreated for a heart attack while in prison.<sup>46</sup>

On February 3, the Committee of Human Rights Reporters announced that rights activist Kaveh Ghassemi Kermanshahi had been arrested. He was also a member of the HROK and was active in the One Million Signatures Campaign. His mother, who was able to visit him briefly on April 8, 2010, reported that he is under pressure to confess to espionage and he “has repeatedly denied the charge and considers all his activities civil, peaceful, and legal.” The charge against Kermanshahi has been announced as “propaganda against the regime.”<sup>47</sup>

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44 “PRESS RELEASE: Iranian Human Rights Defender banned from receiving major human rights award in Geneva.” (November 2, 2009.) <http://bit.ly/bAfEtK>.

45 “Report on the Status of Women Human Rights Defenders.” International Campaign for Human Rights in Iran. (April 2009.) <http://bit.ly/vsfC5>.

46 “Mohammad Sadiq Kaboudvand.” International Campaign for Human Rights in Iran. (January 26, 2009.) <http://bit.ly/brcwSb>

47 “Kaveh Kermanshahi under pressure and torture to confess to espionage.” Committee of Human Rights Reporters. (April 11, 2010). <http://bit.ly/cBPmMH>

## CASE: Defenders of Human Rights Center

Shirin Ebadi, the most well-known human rights defender in Iran, was subjected to regular and sustained harassment. We are highlighting the case of her center because it is indicative of the kind of harassment undergone by human rights defenders. **In addition, it shows how precarious the situation is for lesser known people. This was of special concern to many human rights defenders because it showed that no one was protected from harassment and arrests, not even Iran's most famous woman, Nobel Prize winner Shirin Ebadi.**

In December 2008, it was reported that an Interior Ministry commission said the Center for the Defense of Human Rights was carrying out illegal activities, such as publishing statements, writing letters to international organizations, and holding news conferences.<sup>48</sup>

The semi-official Mehr News Agency reported that the commission accused Ebadi's center of distributing propaganda against the state. The report also cited repeated warnings delivered to the center and said the building had been sealed on the order of Tehran's top prosecutor. The closure was timed to correspond with a planned celebration of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. More than 300 guests who were invited arrived to plainclothes officers videotaping the event.

The police produced no warrant, but they did say that they had a sealed order from Tehran's top prosecutor, Saeed Mortazavi.

Ebadi admitted that the center operated without a permit. The difficulty obtaining an operational permit is one of many problems faced by human rights defenders in Iran.

Kayhan's report of the center's closure hints at the velvet revolution scenario:

Citing "some European newspapers" (without mentioning their names) Kayhan reported "the mission of the newly-founded little group Center for the Defense of Human Rights to undermine the Islamic Republic of Iran," and claimed that "the aforementioned Center was established under the guidance and using a special budget of the U.S. Vice President Dick Cheney."

Kayhan added, "Creating safe haven for those accused of inciting instability, partition and espionage for foreign intelligence services were among the little group's missions..."

"The coordinated response of anti-revolutionary groups with foreign circles connected to foreign intelligence services, while justifying the necessity for shutting down this Center's office, portrays the two-year delay in carrying out this act an indefensible and unjustifiable act."<sup>49</sup>

The center's closure did not end its employees' problems. In May 2009, Narges Mohammadi, the center's vice president and spokeswoman, was prevented from leaving Tehran for an international women's conference in Guatemala. She was traveling with Soraya Aziz Panah, the Executive Director of the Center to Clean Mine Fields, who was also held. An agent of the president's office confiscated their passports and they were summoned to appear in Revolutionary Court.<sup>50</sup>

In January 2009, the former secretary of the center and secretary of the Center to Clean Mine Fields, Jinous Sobhani, a Baha'i, was arrested. She was held in Evin Prison without charge for 55 days before being released

48 Thomas Erdink, "Police Shut Down Iran's Main Human Rights Center." Washington Post. (December 22, 2008.) <http://bit.ly/bPBhwH>

49 "Attack on Human Rights Center." *Defenders of Human Rights Center*. (January 5, 2009.) <http://bit.ly/bAMxaY>

50 "Human Rights Defenders Prevented from Leaving Iran; Women's Rights Advocates Arrested." International Campaign for Human Rights in Iran. (May 11, 2009.) <http://bit.ly/bJZtGf>



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**“The arrests of human rights lawyers represent an effort to discourage opposition on a general level. On a personal level, they want to punish individuals who expose the shortcomings of the Islamic Republic, The IRI is sending the message, don’t defend those we have arrested for political reasons. Don’t even mention the term human rights.”**

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on a 70 million tuman bail (approximately \$70,000).

A lawyer for the center, Abdolfattah Soltani, was detained in June 2009 and held ten weeks. He had already been arrested in 2005 and spent 219 days in detention. In 2006 he was sentenced to five years of imprisonment, four of which were for “disclosing confidential documents” and one year for “propaganda against the system.” In May of 2007, he was acquitted of all charges brought against him since his arrest in July 2005. Since that time, he has been banned from leaving the country.<sup>51</sup>

Mohammad Ali Dadkhah, another lawyer for the center, was arrested in July 2009. He was released on 500 million tuman bail (approximately \$500,000)<sup>52</sup>.

On December 28, 2009, Shirin Ebadi’s sister, a medical lecturer, was arrested. The sole reason for her arrest was to put pressure on Ebadi. In a statement Ebadi wrote:

During the past two months, my sister had been contacted by the elements within the government and told in no uncertain terms to contact me and persuade me to cease my activities as a human rights advocate. It was strongly suggested that she should leave her apartment, which is within the same block as my apartment in Tehran. She was told that her failure to cooperate with them will result in her arrest. I initially did not take this seriously, but I’m sad and upset to see that this was not an empty threat.<sup>53</sup>

Ebadi’s sister was released after 17 days. She was told to cut all ties with her Nobel Prize winning sister and to move from the residential complex they shared. Ebadi’s husband has also been subject to interrogations and pressure. He was even (unsuccessfully) pressured to provide phone numbers and addresses for their children living in Europe.<sup>54</sup>

## TRENDS

- Travel restrictions
- Center closures (those with AND without permits)
- High bails
- Family members intimidated, arrested
- The use of family as a tool to gain cooperation/silence
- Baseless arrests
- Secret evidence
- Pressure to confess
- Imprisonment without charge
- Unannounced changes to sentencing

### 3.5 Disqualification of Lawyers and Physicians

*As with those of workers, professional organizations are controlled by the state.*

Professional organizations for attorneys and physicians are, like the Worker's House, controlled by the State. Lawyers barred from running for the bar association have no recourse to appeal. Qualification is in control of the state.

51 “Document - Iran: Arbitrary arrest/prisoner of conscience: Abdolfattah Soltani (m).” *Amnesty International* (June 19, 2009.) <http://bit.ly/9bX7UV>

52 “Iran: UPDATE - Human rights lawyer, Mohammad Dadkhah, released on heavy bail.” *Frontline Defenders*. (September 14, 2009.) <http://bit.ly/c8FUni>

53 “Declaration by Dr. Shirin Ebadi.” *International Campaign for Human Rights in Iran* (December 29, 2010.) <http://bit.ly/drBPps>

54 “Shirin Ebadi’s Sister Released After 17 Days.” *International Campaign for Human Rights in Iran* (January 10, 2010.) <http://bit.ly/c14Rfv>

In 2009, a long-standing law providing the Iranian Bar Association the power to approve the lawyers' qualifications was changed, instead giving the authority to the Judiciary, which answers to the Supreme Leader. Almost immediately, the Head of the Judiciary changed the bylaws in such a way that human rights defenders and political critics could be barred from practicing law.

Bahman Keshavarz, former chair of the Bar Association, wrote in the daily Etemad that:

We can certainly expect that every lawyer who says too much or accepts undesirable clients can expect to wake up in the morning and find that his license has been revoked. Intellectuals will be punished for their thoughts, and will not be able to retain suitable counsel because all of the lawyers with the courage to work on their cases have been or will be disbarred. Blacklisted politicians will search for independent and courageous lawyers, but will not be able to find them. Even more heart-wrenching is the situation of people who confront serious judicial proceedings but will have no refuge.<sup>55</sup>

Recently nearly half of those running for the management of the Bar Association were disqualified.

In an interview conducted by the International Campaign for Human Rights in Iran, Abdolsamad Khorramshahi, who represented American journalist Roxanna Saberi, had this to say of the 2010 disqualifications:

None of these people have a record anywhere. The law stipulates that those who have criminal records or who have a reputation of corruption or specific cases, [do not qualify]. Therefore I think such issues should have no bearing in the qualification or disqualification of attorneys and colleagues many of whom are my friends, university professors, and reputable lawyers. This, unfortunately, strengthens the suspicion that other issues are involved in the qualification/disqualification decisions.

...Most of these people have defended the rights of political prisoners, but there are also a few who have never been involved with such cases, for example Dr. Tavana, these people have never had a political case or have never defended a political case. There may have been other reasons. It appears that other things, such as political thinking, the attorneys' viewpoints, and issues like this may have been instrumental in the disqualifications. But a disqualification is not because these colleagues may have had moral or financial problems or criminal records. All these lawyers are among the most reputable and distinguished attorneys of the country and it is not clear what would happen to the Board of Directors without these people's participation. To be sure, the power and assertiveness of this Board of Directors will not be the same as the previous Boards of Directors of Iranian Bar Association.

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Legal representation in Iran has become a kind of theater in which the judge determines whether or not a lawyer will even be allowed to defend his client. Lawyers are often kept from visiting clients. In many cases they have not been informed of appeals or even the decision to execute a client. The independent lawyers' association has been marginalized.

### 3.6 Stifling Women's Voices

*With public opinion concerning women's issues becoming more and more progressive, the State suppressed women (and men) who work for women's rights. They are detained, imprisoned, and forbidden from traveling. The longest running women's magazine, Zanan, was shut down and refused a license to publish.*

Although it did not involve any arrests, the February 2008 closure of the long-running feminist magazine, Zanan, after 16 years of publication illustrated how the hardliners dealt with any women's rights issues. The

55 "Quoted in Iran: Halt Moves to Curtail Lawyers." Human Rights Watch (July 26, 2009.) <http://bit.ly/bJqXLC>

56 "Disqualification of Lawyers and the Iranian Bar Association's Demise: An Interview with Abdolsamad Khorramshahi." International Campaign for Human Rights in Iran (March 4, 2010.) <http://bit.ly/bm8Zvp>

publisher and staff of the magazine learned of the magazine's publishing license revocation in the same way as the general public: it was presented in a news item on Farsnews, which is close to Ahmadinejad's administration. "An informed source," it read, stated that the 16-year old magazine would no longer be printed because it was a "threat to the psychological security of the society" and displayed the situation of women in the Islamic Republic in a "somber light." Additionally, it was claimed that the magazine caused "the weakening of military and revolutionary institutions, including the Basij."<sup>57</sup> (See "E. The Attempted Silencing of Zanan" on page 53) Zanan's was just one of many media licenses that was suspended by the Commission for Press Authorization and Surveillance. Dozens of publications' licenses were also suspended.

Members of the One Million Signatures Campaign, a Woman's Rights group that lobbies for changes to the Iranian law, have been arrested in the dozens despite efforts to work within the confines of existing law. One member, Alieh Eghdamdoust, was the first women's rights activist to have a sentence actually implemented.<sup>58</sup> She was arrested along with 70 other protestors during a 2006 protest in Haft-e Tir Square in Tehran.

The One Million Signatures Campaign has been collecting signatures on a petition to change the law in Iran so women will be equal on the scales of justice. For this simple act, many have been detained, imprisoned, and forbidden from travel. They have been subjected to long suspended sentences, which require regular check-ins with Intelligence officers.

If they are released from prison, it is because of bails set at incredibly high amounts, often requiring that families mortgage their homes, which effectively secures their acquiescence to authority.

After the June 2009 elections, the situation for members of the campaign deteriorated and at least fourteen of the members are currently imprisoned.<sup>59</sup> Several others have [temporarily] fled the country.

### TRENDS

- Travel restrictions
- Suspended sentences
- High bails
- Baseless arrests

57 Farideh Farhi. "The Attempted Silencing of Zanan." *Informed Comment: Global Affairs* (February 1, 2008.) <http://bit.ly/at0R1L>

58 "Report on the Status of Women Human Rights Defenders." *International Campaign for Human Rights in Iran* (April 16, 2009.) <http://www.iranhumanrights.org/2009/04/whrdreport/>

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On May 9, 2010 five prisoners were summarily executed without prior announcement.<sup>1</sup> Four of them were Kurdish rights activists who, according to their lawyers, had been denied fair trials. Farzad Kamangar, a Kurdish teacher and prisoner of conscience, had been told that his sentence of execution would be commuted.



**Shirin Alam Hooli** was a young Kurdish woman who was accused of planting a bomb. In her own words, she tells us of her arrest: *“The interrogators were male, and I was tied to a bed with handcuffs. They used their fists, feet, electric batons, and cables to beat my head, face, body, and soles of my feet. At that time I could not even understand and speak Persian. When their questions remained unanswered, they beat me again till I passed out.”* In a letter written just seven days ago, she wrote:

*When I entered this prison my hair was black, now after three (3) years of imprisonment, my hair has started to turn white. I know you have done this not only to me but to all Kurds including Zeynab Jalaliyan and Ronak Safarzadeh... The eyes of Kurdish mothers are full of tears, waiting to see their children. They are in a state of constant worry, in fear that each phone call may bring the news of the execution of their children.*

*Today is May 2, 2010 and once again they took me to Section 209 of the Evin prison for interrogation. They asked me to cooperate with them in order for me to be pardoned and not executed. I don't understand what they mean by cooperation, when I don't have anything more to say than what I have already said.*

**Mehdi Eslamian** was executed a little more than a year after the execution of his brother for allegedly participating in a bombing in Shiraz. He was tortured for 14 days and denied medical care.

**Ali Heidarian** was a Kurdish rights activist accused of participating in armed

<sup>1</sup> Sources:

Neo-resistance. “They EXECUTED Her: Shirin Alam Hooli” (May 9, 2010)

<http://iranfacts.blogspot.com/2010/05/they-executed-her-shirin-alam-hooli.html>

United4Iran: Bios of the 5 Executed Prisoners of Conscience (May 9, 2010) <http://bit.ly/dsUm3S>

Enduring America: Iran: Farzad Kamangar's Last Letter “Is It Possible to Teach and Be Silent?” (May 2010) <http://bit.ly/bSoYO3>

International Campaign for Human Rights in Iran: About Farhad Kamangar” (January 2009)

<http://www.iranhumanrights.org/2009/01/farzad-kamangar/>

Sayeh Hassan. “I am a Hostage: A letter from Political Prisoner Ms. Shirin Alam Hooli” (May 8, 2010)

<http://canadafreepress.com/index.php/article/22918>



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conflict as was **Farhad Vakili**.



**Farzad Kamangar** was a teacher whose cause has become international. Human rights organizations, Iran's teachers' union, and international education groups all joined together to protest his incarceration and sentence of execution. Kamangar wrote recently:

*Is it possible to carry the heavy burden of being a teacher and be responsible for spreading the seeds of knowledge and still be silent? Is it possible to see the lumps in the throats of the students and witness their thin and malnourished faces and keep quiet?*

*Is it possible to be in the year of no justice and fairness and fail to teach the H for Hope and E for Equality, even if such teachings land you in Evin prison or result in your death?*

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Some others in danger of execution:

**Abdolreza Ghanbari**, a school teacher who participated in the December demonstrations on the Shia holiday of Ashura. In September his sentence of execution was commuted.

**Ahmad Danseshpour** is alleged to have sent videos and pictures to the MKO and whose father **Mohsen Daneshpour Moghaddam** has also been sentenced to death.

**Ali Saremi**, member of the MKO, was arrested last year when he attended a memorial for the 1988 mass killings of political prisoners.

**Ali Massouni** is another protester. **Ali Omid Mehrnia** has relatives at Camp Ashraf (MKO camp in Iraq), as does **Alireza Nabavi**.

**Amir Reza Arefi** is accused of having ties with a monarchist group. His sentence is being appealed.

**Aziz Mohammadzadeh** is another Kurdish rights activist sentenced to death.

### 3.7 Academic freedom

#### Article 26

(1) *Everyone has the right to education. Education shall be free, at least in the elementary and fundamental stages. Elementary education shall be compulsory. Technical and professional education shall be made generally available and higher education shall be equally accessible to all on the basis of merit.*

(2) *Education shall be directed to the full development of the human personality and to the strengthening of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. It shall promote understanding, tolerance and friendship among all nations, racial or religious groups, and shall further the activities of the United Nations for the maintenance of peace.*

(3) *Parents have a prior right to choose the kind of education that shall be given to their children.*

The more stars, the better the movie or restaurant or hotel, right? In Iran's universities, the more stars a student has, the more likely she is to be expelled. Iranian educational authorities have implemented a system for rating the political activities of students, making it easy to identify and punish politically active students. Since the start of the Ahmadinejad administration, waves of academic purges have targeted both students and professors. Universities no longer have any autonomy - they are controlled by state, even private universities.

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### 3.8 Basij student movements are the only legitimate ones

*Basij student movements are the only ones with nothing to fear in terms of suppression. Students in reformist movements have been targeted for harassment, expulsion, and arrest.*

- Reform-minded and politically active students threatened

The International Campaign for Human Rights in Iran reports that students have come under increased scrutiny and pressure since Ahmadinejad took office in 2005, and students participating in reformist-affiliated organizations have been hit particularly hard.

More than ten members of the Council to Defend the Right to Education sit in prison as of the writing of this report.<sup>60</sup> At least 180 students arrested since the 2009 presidential elections are still in detention as of April 2010.

The hardline cleric Ayatollah Jannati has come out in favor of the use of execution, including extra-judicial execution, as a means of addressing the unrest. In a sermon at Friday prayers, Jannati said:

I talk to you through the Qur'an. God says according to a tradition which has existed in Islam and before it, three groups, meaning the duplicitous ones, sick people with a sick heart, and rumor mongers, if they persist, I order you to attack them and kill them. Of course, the law must be respected, but there should also be respect for the Qur'an and Islam, the Revolution, and vilayat-e faqih must also be maintained...

We showed weakness after 18 Tir [referring to the student demonstrations of 1998 which were

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60 Report: Members of the Council to Defend the Right to Education Remain in Prison. Persian2English (Accessed March 29, 2010.) <http://bit.ly/b3Sz9U>

suppressed by the police]. We must ask the Judiciary how many people were executed which led to [the protests of] Ashura? I say that if you show weakness, a worse future is awaiting you.<sup>61</sup>

As mentioned earlier in this report, Mohammad Amin Valian was originally sentenced to execution after being attacked in his university's Basiji newspaper. In May, his sentence was reduced to 3.5 years. Others have been given harsh students. Student activist and member of the One Million Signature Campaign, Bahareh Hedayat, for example, has received 16 years. Here is what one student, Zia Nabavi wrote to the head of the judiciary:

I never said anything more than the truth during the interrogations. Even though I was under severe psychological, and at times, physical pressures (sit-ups, kicks, blows to the back of the head, insults, etc.), I never confessed to an offence I did not commit. In fact, due to the transparent nature of the student movement, there is nothing to hide in our activities as students banned from education.

Transparency is no protection. Nabavi was sentenced to 15 years in prison and 74 lashes. He was convicted of "conspiracy and association to act against national security," "propaganda against the regime," "disturbance of public order," "agitation and provocation of the public mind," and "cooperation with Mujahedin-e-Khalq (MKO)."

### Teachers, Professors and Students Expelled

Students and professors have spoken of a "second cultural revolution," a fear that is echoed by teachers of the lower grades. Since the Principlists came to power, there have been waves of university purges, beginning in 2005 when many students and professors were expelled from universities or, in the case of the academics, forced to retire. At Tehran University alone, 45 lecturers were forced into retirement. The chancellor claimed they were past retirement age, even though many were younger than he was. He also claimed that they did not meet the standards necessary for full professorship.

Academics at the largest school for social sciences in Iran, Allameh Tabatabai University, were among the first to be forcibly retired and banned from entering any university campus. In 2009, they were once again targeted after Khamanei called for a "review of the social sciences." Again in April of 2010, another professor at Allameh Tabatabai was among a group forced to retire.

In addition, a rating system for politically active students was introduced. The system rates them according to the presumed threat they pose.

### 3.9 "Freedom of the Press is at It's Highest Level in Iran."

*The Ahmadinejad administration is fond of claiming that Iran is "the freest country in the world," yet there are more than 70 journalists in prison. Filmmakers are denied licenses and have had their films censored and stolen.*

- State controlled media does have influence
- Limitations on free press mean a less democratic society
- Principlists exert control over cultural production

Because of the high number of Iranians defying the prohibition of satellite dishes, as well as using the Internet and social networking, it's easy to assume that State-controlled media has little effect on the population.

61 "Unprecedented Remarks by Ayatollah Jannati for More Protester Execution." International Campaign for Human Rights in Iran (January 31, 2010.) <http://bit.ly/ah4SGo>

However, that it exerts tremendous control over the communication of dissenting viewpoints.<sup>62</sup>

I saw another group that just looks at Iranian media. They make it nice and logical. They show evidence and defend themselves. I have a friend who usually watches VOA and BBC. But in the dorms he only has Iranian media. "I am starting to believe Neda was killed by one of us [the Green movement]," he told me. You don't know, they show the images so many times, and they make a really convincing argument. He said, "I don't know, I am just getting confused."<sup>63</sup>

In line with the efforts of the Principlists to control the production of culture, they have (somewhat successfully) sought to control the medium and the message. They have used filtering, bandwidth restriction, newspaper closures, limiting publication licenses, and satellite jamming.

In 2006, the state launched a massive campaign to confiscate satellite dishes and announced plans for introducing cable.<sup>64</sup> Many in Iran quickly found a way to replace confiscated dishes, but jamming became a serious problem in the latter half of 2009.

The lack of a free press and a free media seriously limits the possibilities for creating a more democratic society.

The self-proclaimed Iranian Cyber Army, which may be an arm of the IRGC, has hacked into domain name records for a number of sites including Twitter and Radio Zamaneh, pointing the sites to new addresses that they control. Opposition and Reformist sites have been blocked with denial of service attacks. The IRGC has used their site to crowdsource the identification of protesters.

## The Associations of Journalists and Writers

In 2005 and 2009, Reporters Without Borders (RSF) called Iran "the world's largest prison for journalists." As of April 2010, more than 70 journalists were in prison in Iran.

In August 2009, The Association of Iranian Journalists, with more than 3,700 members, was shut down<sup>65</sup> with a warrant from Tehran's prosecutor general Saeed Mortazavi, the same prosecutor many hold responsible for the torture and death of Canadian-Iranian photo-journalist, Zahra Kazemi in 2003.<sup>66</sup>

The Iranian Writers Association (IWA), is a long-standing intellectual association, established more than 40 years ago. Prominent independent novelists, poets, translators, and researchers number among its members. The main objective of the IWA has been the guarantee of free expression through opposing censorship. It supports its members when they are faced with persecution and prosecution.

The state has never recognized the IWA: neither before the revolution, nor after. Its offices were officially closed in 1981. It managed to maintain a presence in Iranian society and established a new center in the early 90s.

When the Ahmadinejad administration took office in 2005, the IWA came under increased pressure. The association found that it could no longer protect members from censorship and persecution. Its members

62 Somewhat surprisingly arguments put forth in Kayhan are often unknowingly repeated by those on the left and the right to attack organizations and individuals supporting human and civil rights.

63 From an interview conducted by Arseh Sevom with an Iranian scientist.

64 "The Corrupting Influence of CSI: Miami Must End." Mideast Youth (August 18, 2006.) <http://bit.ly/aGLe9T>

65 "Association of Iranian Journalists Sealed Shut." Roozonline (August 9, 2009.) <http://bit.ly/HbW4a>

66 Mortazavi is notorious for his persecution of the press (and others) in Iran. The Times reports that he ordered the closure of "more than 100 newspapers, journals and websites deemed hostile to the Establishment." He was also the prosecutorial force behind the arrests of 20 bloggers and journalists in 2004. They were held in solitary confinement for months, then pressured into signing false confessions.

were kept from the center by force and prevented from collecting their personal effects. In 2006, an order from the judiciary<sup>67</sup> prevented members of the IWA from meeting and assembling. In April of 2006, for the third time since 2005, more than 80 novelists, poets, translators, and researchers showed up for their general assembly but were met by security forces and forced leave.

In March 2010, the president of the Iranian Writers Association and noted poet Simin Behbahani was forbidden from leaving the country to attend a conference for international women's day.

### Journalists and Bloggers Suffer

Iran severely curtails the free movement of foreign as well as domestic journalists. Foreign journalists are restricted from traveling to regions the government deems "too sensitive," such as Ahwaz and Sistan-Balochistan. Its own journalists and photojournalists are severely punished for reporting on unapproved topics at home.

In 2009, an Iranian blogger, Omid Mirsayafi, died in mysterious circumstances in Evin. He had been sentenced to 2 1/2 years in prison for "insulting religious clerics and opposing the Islamic Republic." Authorities claimed that he was depressed and had killed himself, but his sister, an inmate, his doctor, and his lawyer all contest the claim. RSF claims that since Ahmadinejad's administration took power in 2005, more than 70 bloggers were targeted by authorities.<sup>68</sup>

In 2010, one reporter, Abofazl Abedini, was sentenced to eleven years for "spreading propaganda against the regime through interviews with foreign media." In an open letter to the chief of the judiciary, his mother wrote: "What crime has my son committed that he deserves to be tortured? Is it a crime to defend the rights of workers at the Haft Tapeh Sugarcane Factory, Tehran bus company workers, or the Iranian Teachers Syndicate?"<sup>69</sup>

Economist and journalist, Saeed Laylaz, has been sentenced to six years for "congregation and mutiny against national security, propaganda against the state, disrupting public order, keeping classified documents." His crime? Disagreeing with Ahmadinejad's economic policies.

Journalists from among Iran's ethnic minorities have been the targets of additional scrutiny and punishment. Examples include:

In 2006, Mohammad Hossein Fallahiyazadeh -- an Iranian-Arab working for the Arabic news service, Al Alam, who reported on harsh treatment of Iranian-Arab protesters in Ahwaz -- was arrested and imprisoned. He was sentenced to three years in prison for "spreading propaganda against the Islamic regime" and for "communicating with opposition groups."

Massoud Kurdpour, an Iranian-Kurdish human rights defender, teacher, and freelance journalist, was sentenced for "giving interviews to foreign media concerning treatment of minorities" and "propaganda against the regime."<sup>70</sup>

67 Another order from the notorious Mortazavi. Notably, he is now on trial for his part in post-election 2009 torture.

68 Farangis Najibullah. "Suspicion Cast On Iranian Blogger's Death." Radio Free Europe / Radio Liberty (March 19, 2009.) <http://bit.ly/d92Jlm>

69 "Iranian Journalist Given 'Long Jail Term'" Radio Free Europe / Radio Liberty (April 6, 2010.) <http://bit.ly/avdDNf>

70 "Latest Report on Masoud Kurdpour, Detained Reporter and Teacher." Iran Human Rights Voice (August 21, 2008.) <http://bit.ly/ddWaKw>

## That's Not Funny

The first cultural controversy of the Ahmadinejad administration came over its efforts to cancel the extremely popular television serial “The Nights Of Barareh,” watched by 50 million viewers. An editorial in Kayhan stated that show used state resources to “wage war on the revolution and carry out the evil plot of ‘derevolutionizing.’”<sup>71</sup> Eventually the show was ended.

In 2010, for the first time in many years, state television refused to air a serial by the makers of “The Nights of Barareh.” Despite the fact that the creator, Mehran Modiri, has steered clear of politics, his satirical serials confront societal reality in Iran in a way that threatens the domination of the state.

In 2010, filmmakers Jafar Panahi and Mahmoud Rasoulof joined the many artists and filmmakers already imprisoned. Panahi had been visible in his support for both Mousavi and the Green movement, while Rasoulof produced the documentary, *Head Wind*, which showed how people in Iran find ways to access contraband culture. Both filmmakers have confronted the system of censorship and oppression head on.

Filmmakers join dozens of novelists who have found their works unpublished and unreleased. Award-winning publisher and writer Farkhondeh Hajizadeh stated:

“We have always faced censorship, but before one could go and discuss it logically,..The situation is such that one sometimes becomes desperate. For example, they have sent a book by Samad Behrangi to the Culture Ministry, [and] in one of the copies it says that ‘two years ago the situation was better than now.’ [Officials] have said that [such a passage] should be removed. And there is no way to explain to them that the meaning of ‘two years ago’ is ‘two years ago, 40 years ago,’ when Behrangi was still alive.”<sup>72</sup>

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Publishing in minority languages is particularly restricted. Permits are rare and hard to come by. When Kurdish novelist Shahram Ghavani published his third novel, *Birba*, he was charged with “insulting the state.”<sup>73</sup>

### 3.10 Civil Society, Civil No More

*The State has worked to replace independent civil society with state-controlled organizations. It does this by closing civil society organizations and by forbidding contact with international organizations.*

The official report of the Community-based Organizations at the Central Supervisory Board identified many of the problems faced by NGOs under the Ahmadinejad’s new administration. A change in the approach to the law induced the State to take a security-based approach to civil society. International connections became suspect and anyone with connections to them could find themselves with travel bans imposed, detained, and even imprisoned.

The report points to several rifts in communication and understanding, including the disbelief that anyone would ever want to serve the community for anything other than some form of personal gain. The author states:

We should also teach others and share the culture for voluntary work with our children since they are young, so that they will not have to hear—as we did—accusations questioning the reasons, motives and benefits of the voluntary work, and labeling the hard work as a waste of time and money.

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71 Bill Samli. “Quoted in Iran: Television Controversy Reveals Domestic Political Struggle.” Radio Free Europe / Radio Liberty (February 21, 2006.) <http://bit.ly/adhImR>

72 Golnaz Esfandiari. “Iran: Writers, Publishers Warn Of Industry Clampdown.” Radio Free Europe / Radio Liberty (October 31, 2006.) <http://bit.ly/aayPN4>

73 “ARTICLE 19’s submission to the UN Universal Periodic Review of ISLAMIC REPUBLIC OF IRAN.” Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. (August 28, 2009.) Pg. 2. <http://bit.ly/cV0dn0>

The report claims that during the first year of the Ahmadinejad administration more than ninety NGOs lost their licenses, some of them because “because they lacked one single photo...” It also tells of continual conflict between representatives of civil society and the administration and police.

## 4. RECOMMENDATIONS

1) Civil society as a Social force: In today's world civil society is one of the fundamental aspects of democracy as well as key player in the new geopolitics. Therefore, we recommend that the Islamic Republic of Iran regard civil society as an effective factor in development and democracy, and not as a technocratic concept. The government must refrain from anti-civil society politics. We believe all of the aspects of the civil society must participate in proposal, decision making, execution and evaluation of all the policies, programs, in all fields and layers of the society.

2) Freedom of Association: Freedom of association is one of the main characteristics of stable democracy. Associations are important centers for practicing democracy. Therefore we demand guarantees for the right of founding, acting, assembling, and protesting, according to Article 26 of the constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran, The Charter of the Human Rights, principles of civil-political rights, economic, social, and cultural rights, conventions and ratifications 87 and 98 of the International Labor Standards.

3) Autonomy: Autonomy is a fundamental necessity for longevity of civil society. We demand that according to Article 26 of the constitution, and the treaties of civil rights-political, economic, social and cultural-, conventions and ratifications 87 and 98 of the International Labor Organization, to refrain from interference in their internal affairs that jeopardize the independence of associations.

4) Human Rights: Respecting human rights is the foundation of peace, democracy, and sustained development, and Iran is a signatory to the universal declaration of human rights. Therefore, we demand respect and complete implementation of all articles and clauses in the human rights declarations, and protection and support for all human right activists in Iran.

5) Education of human and civil rights: Continuous and public education about civil and human rights is a necessary condition for having responsible and committed citizens in any society. We demand that the Islamic Republic government provide necessary conditions for teaching human and citizen rights in all layers of the society.

6) Guarantee the Freedom of Press: Newspapers are known as the fourth foundation of democracy. They play an important role in sustaining democracy. Therefore, we demand guarantee and improvement of the freedom of press in Iran.

7) Media Diversity: Multiplicity and diversity of media is representative of freedom of speech and thought. Therefore, we demand policies for diversification and the implementation of a private and non-governmental media sector across society.

8) Freedom of Speech and Thought: We demand guarantees for freedom of speech and thought and the lifting of restrictions from all social and artistic domains.

9) Revision and Reforms in all Rules and Regulations Pertinent to Civil Society: In current situation, the absence of general laws, concentration of current laws, and legal vacuum in some domains and restrictive laws has led to underdevelopment and retardation of this immense social asset. Therefore, we demand corrections and revisions of all laws and rules overseeing the current civil society organizations.



10) Women: We demand revision and reforms of all discriminatory laws and rules, joining the convention on the elimination of all forms of discrimination against women, and implementation of these rules by the Islamic Republic of Iran.

11) The Fundamental Labor Conventions: We demand ratification of conventions for freedom of association and assembly, the right to union formation and negotiation, minimum labor age, and prohibitions on child labor.

12) Revision of Educational Texts: Reform and revision of educational texts according to principles of human rights, civil rights, promotion of collaborative networks, volunteering and civil cultures, is another fundamental recommendation.

13) Supervision of Civil Society Organizations: Groups and organizations of the civil society oversee and reflect the needs and demands of people in different levels, especially those of the marginalized and disenfranchised groups. Therefore, we demand their official right to oversee their own affairs.

14) Social Exchange: Iranian civil society cannot flourish in a greenhouse, and without interactions with the outside world. Therefore, we demand that the government lift obstacles in the way of exchange, dialogue, and transfer of knowledge and experience among those inside and outside Iran.

15) Social Networks: Success and liveliness of social networks along with relations based on trust are key social assets of a society. There is a tight link between social assets and the development and sustainable democracy. Therefore, we demand that the government put aside the politics of destruction that deteriorate the real and virtual social networks.

16) Right to Access and Circulation of Information: To guarantee the right to access and circulate information is an important duty of the government of the Islamic republic of Iran, one of the signatories of the resolution and action plans of the World Summit on Information Society in Geneva (in 2003) and in Tunisia (2005). Therefore, we demand the right to access information and the lifting of the obstacles and broad filters on the transfer of information. Also, we demand the rights and civil freedom of citizens and associations in the virtual domain.

17) Professions and Professionalism: Professional organizations and professionalism are important foundations of a civil society. We demand that the government respect the independence of professional associations and to avoid interfering in their affairs, especially in the formulation and establishment of a code of ethics and conducts.

18) Culture, Language, Ethnicity: Cultural, linguistic and ethnic diversity is a common human heritage. We demand, according to the articles 15 and 19 of the constitution, that cultural, linguistic, and ethnic identities be respected.

19) Accountability to Interest Groups: With attention to considerable growth of unions and social demands, we demand accountability to interest groups, particularly university students, teachers, workers, farmers, nurses, industrialists, employers, lawyers, physicians, journalists and others.

## 5. CONCLUSION

The abuse of human rights in Iran is not a series of individual cases, but rather targeted against the very development of civil society. This is as true of the oppression of ethnic and religious minorities (not covered in this report) as it is of women's rights activists. Healthy civil society is viewed as a threat to the state. This has become particularly true in the previous five years as the Principlists and the Office of the Supreme Leader have become more unified and authoritarian.

Appeals to the Iranian constitution and even to the legal framework have no effect on this group. They read the constitution as fundamentally anti-democratic. The challenge for civil society activists is to find a way to communicate effectively and push the limits of the increasingly shrinking space for activity in the Islamic Republic of Iran.

## 6. APPENDICES

### A. Glossary

**Basij:** A paramilitary militia force affiliated with the Revolutionary Guards. It was formed by Khomeini to protect the country from outside enemies, but has become an internal force since the end of the war with Iraq. Membership in the Basij can begin as young as 12 years old. Members get preferential placement in universities, with some reporting that 40% of university seats are reserved for them. After a certain amount of service, they are exempt from military duty.

**Civil Society:** A sphere of the society in which movements, groups and independent and self-organized social forces work for controlling the political power, as well as defending human rights, citizen rights, and their guild interests.

**Kayhan:** Kayhan is a state-run newspaper, which is under the control of the office of Iran's Supreme Leader.

### B. Report from Jaras on the Targeting of Human Rights Defenders by the IRGC

*Summarized translation ours:*

<http://www.rahesabz.net/print/12869/>

**Jaras.** March 30, 2010

*Beginning in late January to mid-February, security forces began a campaign against human rights activists. It reached its height in March. Security forces claim to be defending the country against a cyber war. Those arrested are in control of the IRGC. They are kept in solitary confinement and tortured mentally and physically. The aim of their jailers is to get them to accept false confessions constructed by the IRGC. The activists have had no contact with their families.*

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According to credible reports, those arrested are under heavy pressure. They are made to present prepared texts and to make false confessions.

The aim of the IRGC is to prove that human rights activists are collaborating with foreign elements and their security services. They hope that by making this connection, they can prevent further protests.

The top prosecutor's office has announced that there is a network with Iran Proxy [sic] of opposition groups in a cyber war against the state. Jafari Dolat-Abadi, Tehran's prosecutor, announced that a trial of those arrested will soon take place. Dolat-Abadi named several said that the perpetrators fell into three categories: people residing abroad, those living inside Iran, and innocents who were duped.

### Propaganda of the Monopolistic State and the IRGC

State media and the IRGC news agencies have launched a propaganda campaign against human rights defenders making baseless claims of connections with foreign elements, and conspiring together on a project of soft revolution.

At the same time that the prosecutor's office announced the charges, the Fars news agency launched another campaign claiming that the One Million-Signature Campaign disturbed the stability of society by increasing the demands of women. Human rights activists in Iran, the Defenders of Human Rights Center, and the Committee of Human Rights Reporters have all been accused of being spies for the CIA.

The newspaper Javan, the press organ of the IRGC, claims that each month \$2 million has been sent into accounts of hr activists.

Kayhan has also launched heavy accusations that include the use of hacker groups to attack state sites and high level regime personnel; the transport of accused political activists abroad; enabling the access of “rioters” to social sites such as Facebook, FriendFeed, and others and the use of the internet for coordination among the rioters.

After these coordinated and baseless accusations sites belonging to the human rights community were blocked, such as HARANA, which developed into an internet source for human rights violations.

The representatives of Iran during the Human Rights Council meeting in Geneva kept repeating that the press in Iran is free. At the same time, the human rights community has announced that the security forces have started widespread and coordinated efforts to arrest members.

### **Activities to Uncover Human Rights Violations**

The prosecutor claims that the Iran Proxy project consists of Human Rights Activists in Iran, the Committee of Human Rights Reporters, and the Defenders of Human Rights Center.

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All three have reaffirmed their independence from foreign governments. They say that these allegations have been fabricated to discredit civil society and human rights defenders.

Despite the pressure and propaganda against them, the groups have vowed to continue reporting as long and as much as they can and even try to increase their activities.

**Human rights activists in Iran** (founded March 2005) formed to defend Iran’s human. The organization is non-partisan. Its aims are to promote community awareness through education and information, with the objective of institutionalizing human rights in Iranian society.

**Committee of Human Rights Reporters** (founded 2005) is an independent organization tasked with collecting documents and reports related to human rights violations in order to improve the human rights situation in Iran.

**Defenders of Human Rights Center** (founded 2002) focuses its activities on the legal defense of prisoners of conscience, as well as issuing statements on obvious cases of human rights violations, and supporting families of political activists detained.

**At least 38,894 human rights violations were recorded during the past eleven months - during which 80 people were killed and 18,000 arrested.** The human rights situation is in crisis in Iran.

### C. Sealing of ICTRC Offices In Tehran by the Islamic Revolutionary Court ICTRC

March 29, 2007

Dear all,

At 1:30 PM, Thursday 15 March, 2007, when members of the board of directors of ICTRC were holding a weekly meeting and most of the staff were present at the ICTRC office, the Intelligence forces (4 persons at first, but 2 other persons showed up later too) came to ICTRC office holding a search warrant issued by the Islamic Republic Revolutionary Court. The warrant said that based on the charges against ICTRC (which were not mentioned) the ICTRC ICT Center should be searched and any items existing in the said office could be confiscated if necessary. They asked every body out, except for me (ICTRC Executive Director) and started searching the place. In spite of my request, they did not provide any reason of legal accusation against ICTRC for their act. One hour later, they sealed ICTRC ICT Center and took me to my home and searched it too (they had a separate warrant for that too). Their thorough search took 4 hours. They took away all kinds of documents (including personal ones such as checkbooks, etc.), personal documents, tapes, CDs, photos, etc. (including books, newsletters, and all my hand-written notes). When they wanted to take my personal properties, I told them that what they were doing was illegal. They answered that I will be informed of the accusations against me later. They did not answer to my other questions either. At 6:30 PM they took me to the ICTRC headquarters where 10 other intelligence people were busy searching the place and confiscating the documents. They finished searching the place by 7:30 PM and sealed the place. During their presence in ICTRC office, they didn't let any of us to make contacts with outside. When I asked them whether I was under arrest, they would not answer me. After they were finished, in response to my question on where I should go for this they told me to go to Mr. Haddad (the Islamic Republic Revolutionary Court Security Deputy). The authorities also blocked the ICTRC's bank accounts and my personal bank account on the same day (as I later realized).

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On Saturday, 17 March, 2007, I talked to my attorney – Ms. Shirin Ebadi – about the subject. They made a formal complaint and submitted that to the Revolutionary Court on Monday, 19 March 2007. Ms. Shirin Ebadi believed that it was completely illegal to seal the office and confiscate the properties without stating clear accusations. We have not received any reply to that complaint or other contacts from the authorities to this moment. The Iranian authorities' timing for sealing the ICTRC offices was perfect. They did that just before the new year holidays so that there is lack of media coverage about it and it is difficult for us to file a complaint and follow that in that regard.

In the past, ICTRC staff (including board members) have been questioned by agents (on the street) or summoned officially by courts. However, no formal accusations have ever been made so far upon ICTRC.

ICTRC (known as Koneshgaran Davtalab within Iran) is a non-for-profit organization, founded in 2002, which works on the capacity-building of Iranian civil society organizations, strengthening free access to information, promoting roles of women and children NGOs in MDGs (Millennium development goals) and raising public awareness and knowledge of citizens about human rights. ICTRC is the focal point for CSOs in West Asia and the Middle East and a member to the CSO Bureau of the World Summit on Information Society (WSIS). ICTRC mainly works with HIVOS (Netherlands), Internews Europe (France), Amazone (Belgium) and UNICEF, Iran.

Sealing the offices of ICTRC is a move against the laws of the country and a clear example of the violation of the human rights. We, hereby, urge all human rights organizations and CSOs (at national and international level) to react to the violation of fundamental freedoms and human rights and the suppression of independent Iranian CSOs and demand the Iranian government to respect the freedoms and rights of people and CSOs

through a large-scale campaign.

2 other Iranian CSOs – *NGO TC* and *Rahi* – were also sealed on the same day, while their executive directors – Mahboubeh Abbasgholizadeh and Shadi Sadr – were still in custody. The two women activists who were bailed out of prison on 19 March were among the 33 women activists who had earlier been arrested on 4 March 2007, while holding a peaceful gathering in front of the Islamic Republic Revolutionary Court in protest to the trial of 5 other women activists. Many Iranian CSOs have so far been suffering from the efforts of the government for their elimination, isolation and limitation.

Thank you all.

**Sohrab Razzaghi**  
**ICTRC Executive Director**

## D. Progress Report: The First Round of Representation of the Community-based Organizations at the Central Supervisory Board

**By: Mohammad Alamooti**  
**06 March 2010**

The following report was distributed on 20 January 2008 among the participants present in the second round of elections of the representatives of the community-based organizations in the Central Supervisory Board. Parts of this report later appeared in issue 29 of *Zendegi (life)* periodical, mouthpiece of the Iranian Hemophilic Association in spring 2009. The full text of the report appears here:

An Analytic Report on the Performance of the Community-based organizations' Representative under the First Supervisory Board (28 January 2005 to 21 January 2008)

Following the elections carried out at the Iranian Interior Ministry on 2 November 2004, the first round of the Central Supervisory Board over Community-based Organizations practically started in January 2005, and officially held its first meeting. The challenges ahead for this neophyte institution caused the reformist government to develop a statute for the establishment and functions of the Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs), through short-term measures. These measures were followed by several reviews, amendments, changes and adjustments in order to achieve this objective. The Board was founded to fulfill one of the most major concerns of the Government and founders of the NGOs alike; i.e. determining a systematic executive mechanism and observing a special law.

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It can be concluded today that the passive approach of the Reformist Government as well as the 6th Majlis [Parliament]. Some who claimed to be reformists played their self-invented tricks; however, they had the least, if not none, understanding of NGOs, be it according to some imported views or their invented notions. These all paved the ground for the 9th Administration [Ahmadinejad's first cabinet] to misinterpret any notions related to the field of NGOs, and subsequently, the NGOs have been making continuous efforts, similar to the past years, to prove that they are not affiliated to the US and the Zionists. The NGOs have also been confronted with unnumbered executive problems; they have been subject to a blocked and security-oriented environment under the pretext of supervision and control; and have spent most of their capacities to carry out legal follow-ups, and make the officials, who have no perception of the NGOs except as religious cults or charities, understand the most basic principles about them. In any case, in the three-year-term of the Central Board of Supervision over the Community-based Organizations, different predilections were imposed upon the social management of the country and the society in Iran. The analysis of each of these predilections can serve as the topic for a priceless and essential research. However, the present work seeks to have a short glance at each of these continuous, though separate courses in line with the Progress Report.

1- The establishment of the Supervisory Board was the result of perseverant and serious efforts made by Mrs. Boroojerdi and Mr. Ne'mati in their roles as the Deputy for Social Affairs and Councils, and Director General of this deputyship, respectively. The enthusiasm and zest of that era can serve as a valuable historical example that deserves to be used as a pattern in many other areas. Despite a number of shortcomings and deficiencies in the general aspect of the work, a correct understanding of this subject and the close entwining of topics such as civil participation, NGOs, good governance, etc. with the perceptions and approaches of the officials was encouraging. As a result of this golden age, thousands of pages of reports, researches, surveys, polls, books, and numerous articles, films and audio-visual programmes were produced—a token of dynamism and influence of this newly introduced arena, all of which stemmed from a powerful and objective management. Since 30 July 2005 to late November the same year, a hectic but productive period started for the Board: 350 NGOs were registered or had received the permit to work. The reasons responsible for this are many, a few of which are mentioned here: Firstly, due to a number of

executive problems and lack of transparency regarding some Terms of References (TORs), making decisions about certain cases had been interrupted or delayed sometimes up to three years. Introducing the new statute helped clarify many of these vague cases. The internal solutions ratified by the Board members served as the framework for action and paved the way for reviewing many of these cases that were already filed and forgotten; secondly, due to the open-minded and comprehensive approaches during this era, there were fewer cases which the Board members rejected. Interested people could present their applications in any field and invest hope in achieving a positive result—an approach that sadly was not practiced later on; thirdly, the significance of information dissemination in a word-of-mouth manner by the people regarding the emergence of a new and attractive ground for public participation in various fields. This, in a way, served as a practice for democracy and accountability for organizational management. It also paved the way for many of the boycotted and humiliated talents and caused different groups of the people with different interests to gush into the Bureau for NGOs. As a result of the public acceptance, accompanied by the formation of the Board, many permits were issued. More than 100 NGOs whose permits had been issued by other sources were compared with the Statute, as a result of which they received permissions signed by the Interior Minister. During the one-year that the author was able to assist Mrs. Boroojerdi, many appeals including pleas by Government departments, cases on inter-organizational disagreements and NGOs were reviewed. To name a few major examples, the case of the Association for Defending the Rights of the Prisoners (ADRP), the Assembly of the Islamic Revolution's Governor-Generals, the NA Association and the internal disagreements within the Communications Network of Women's Organizations of the Islamic Republic of Iran can be mentioned here.

2- In 2005, the reform government was replaced by the Ahmadinejad Administration and changes at managerial levels in the Interior Ministry occurred. Under Dr. Majidi and while Mr. Amini was the Director General, a sudden recession took over—a sign of fundamental change and an absolutely different approach compared to the past. Subsequently, all the permissions issued towards the end of the term for the 8th Administration had to be reviewed. Most of these permissions were invalidated because they violated the Statute. The approaches of the previous managers were examined with suspicion and security-oriented concerns. This caused the newly-arrived officials to take measures in compiling a new statute that best served their own expectations and thoughts. The new statute had no legal authentication; practically, the time for implementing the appendices of the Third Development Plan was over and the Fourth Development Plan did not present any new anticipation in this regard. However, one important issue that should be noted well is the close cooperation of a number of officials who, up to a week prior to the approval of the new Statute claimed to be die-hard reformists. Nevertheless, they were in cahoots with those who handled the compilation of the new Statute with a dogmatist and security-oriented view. Such a pity that the Reforms Movement held many of such fellows in it... Anyway, the persistence of the representative of the NGOs and the encouraging, beneficial and perseverant cooperation of Mr. Mohammadi Jirandeh, distinguished representative of the High Council of the Provinces in the Board, was soon able to break the frost of the recession and meetings were held promptly with a new approach and policy and in accordance with the prevailing environment. During this period that took a little more than a year, 90 previously granted permits which had not been handed over to the owners of the community-based organizations were invalidated. Efforts to change this order were in vain. Some of the files were considered incomplete just because they lacked one single photo, and were annulled.

3- Amidst this era; i.e. in early 2006, the Director General of this department was replaced by Dr. Khatibian who took charge of the Social Affairs, so that the fully factional, polarized, satiated with illusion of conspiracy and suspicious views of the previous manager would not widen the gap between the government and the NGOs further. It was then that the Persian Language Academy coined a phrase to replace the acronym NGO, suggesting a new acronym in Persian, SAMAN, the meaning of which can be translated as community-based organizations. However, SAMAN was not a correct synonym for non-governmental organizations; it was rather synonymous to civil society organizations and related to a more general notion. The most significant activity of this period was challenging verbal disputes with decision-



making officials in this field, whose new views were in contradiction with the notion of SAMANs, and who confined the voluntary activities within the establishment of the charity organizations and nothing else. Months were spent to make them understand that people are free in congregating around whatever cause, and that the existence of various SAMANs is no threat for the traditional establishments of the country. However, unilateral views continued to be imposed through other channels upon the Board. After a few months, we were swamped under applications for charity organizations, and found out that applications for organizations with other causes are neglected under different pretexts at the Registry level.

The omission of the SAMANs from the suggested Statute of the Board was also another challenging issue that brought about discord. Through continuous complaints and perseverant follow-ups, as well as reminding the serious impacts of the propaganda and threats of such decision, and with the sincere cooperation of Dr. Khatibian the issue was taken to the Cabinet again. The final Statute was reviewed and revised. Although the revision did allow the presence of a SAMAN representative, it did not secure any right to vote for this representative. A new series of efforts after six months restored the right to vote for the SAMAN representative. Nonetheless, the request for an increase in the number of the SAMAN representatives in the Board from one to three was still there.

Up until the late November 2006, only 65 permits were issued. Measures were anticipated by the Social Affairs Department to lobby with the individuals and institutions that previously issued permits, to accept to centralize all the required work at the Interior Ministry. This resulted in the opening of many files, in different areas. These cases were frequently mentioned in the Board meetings. However, the Law Enforcement Forces (LEF- the Police) refused to obey the Statute and this caused even more problems.

4- Under Dr. Ayyobi on top of the Social Deputyship of the Interior Ministry, a new chapter of activities and approaches opened. It transformed the "Bureau for NGOs" to the "Department for Community-based Organizations". This invested increasing hope in implementing many of the undiscovered capacities of the Statutes and the Board. During the time that led to Mr. Fouladi's assignment as the first Director General of the Department for Community-based Organizations; i.e. until the end of Dr. Khatibian's assignment, about 170 additional permits were issued. The appearance of the permits changed, too, due to the personal preference of the Minister; the permits were no longer handed over to the applicants through a special ceremony. The authority of the Board practically reduced under Dr. Khatibian and some of the reference work it used to carry out vanished. However, seeing into cases such as the Assembly of the Governor-Generals and the ADRP were still present on the agenda.

5- The establishment of the Department for Community-based Organizations was a positive step in centralization of the work in the Interior Ministry, and also to further influence the issues in this arena; so much that after a short while and owing to the inclusive follow-ups by Mr. Fouladi the process of receiving an application for the permit was carried out correctly and quickly, while all steps were computerized. The new system helped the people and officials alike and reduced the delays caused by waiting. Mr. Fouladi's presence in his role as the Secretary of the Board and also on top of the Department since April 2007, which acted as the Secretariat for the Board as well, was an encouragement for the true SAMANs to invest trust in their ties with this department and hope for true legal supports as mentioned in the Statute. However, lack of correct understanding of the TOR for SAMANs, or rather voluntary work could cause damage. The new management has only been seeking an outstanding and smart management practice. To be fair-minded, it has achieved a lot. But it has engaged itself less with the spirit of the community-based organizations and their meaning, the spirit of voluntary work and those involved in this field. Therefore, this has led to the creation of a deficient image of the SAMANs. It is very difficult for this school of thought to accept that a group would dedicate their belongings and life to serve a certain objective without expecting anything in return and only looking forward to some support by officials. Such an understanding should underline that those who come to the Department for the Community-based Organizations are in fact different from others. They are not after solving their own problems through discrimination and favoritism. They are doing

what they can in order to serve the people, soothe their sufferings and solve their problems.

6- The first term of the Supervisory Board is approaching its end while problems such as: lack of coordination among the institutions that are allowed to issue permits according to different laws and regulations; continuous disagreement of LEF [the Police] with the Social Affairs sector of the Interior Ministry and its disobedience of the Statute and even the decree issued by the Supreme Court of Administrative Justice; lack of conformity at the Department for Registering the Companies and lack of coordination between this department and the Department of Community-based Organizations; lack of a comprehensive solution regarding charity organizations that unfortunately has led to a number of abuses; the need for a correct definition of different activities and related fields at national, provincial and constituencies levels; lack of a clear mechanism for surveying the progress and financial reports and an executive guarantee for implementing the Statute in this regard; interferences made within the social affairs arena and stigmatization of the SAMANs with political and security labels; unprecedented and broad involvement of public sector managers in this field and spreading the public hierarchical management patterns contradictory to the structure of voluntary organizations; lack of accurate inter-organizational understanding of a culture of job-shifts and an elite-flow within the organizations; the emergence of the Governmental Community-based Organizations or SAMANDs [equal to the English G-NGOs]; and last but not the least, making propaganda and inexpert statements against a group of most sincere people and SAMANs of this country only make up a few of the complications these organizations have been dealing with during all these years. The organizations, which have been established by a number of caring and assiduous people in order to identify, address and remove the problems, have not surrendered, despite the fact that they are being labeled to be affiliated to the US or the Zionist regime. Some people, who have shallow understandings, attempted to claim that these organizations are after colorful velvet revolutions. Nonetheless, these organizations are not petrified by such claims and stigmas, and since they are voluntarily engaged, they only want to be considered as the strategic partner for the Government in carrying out the activities in which they are specifically experts. They seek to remove a burden from the shoulders of the Iranian society. The SAMANs are more concerned about the security of society and are far more valued to be engaged in political tricks. The coming years belong to the Community-based organizations. The future decade is the decade for the management of the people over the people in social arenas, in the lights of which many of the social complications will be solved by the capable hands of the people, without imposing astronomical expenditures upon the Government. The administrations in turn will start to appreciate that community-based organizations are in fact opportunities, not threats.

7- The Supervisory Board has held 185 work meetings since 28 January 2005 to 4 January 2009 according to the invitations issued. As a servant to SAMANs at national level, I have participated in all meetings but one and have made efforts every week all through this period to be present and offer consultation and guidance in the procedure of processing the files as a humble member. Reviewing the cases sometimes took hours and days before the meeting was convened. Studying the files of the valued voluntary workers for whom I served as a representative, called for a thorough understanding of each case in order to defend them. This almost turned me to an Interior Ministry employee. I should further underline that a representative of the community-based organizations should dedicate most of his/her time to them as well as the Department for Community-based organizations. Easy access to the SAMANs Representative for all these organizations when they need certain guidance or when they have confronted a problem is another important characteristic. Their Representative should truly be bound to the values of a community-based organization and have the least working and administrative relation with the Government; spend time and energy for his/her work and be accessible without any prior appointments required. I would hereby like to acknowledge special thanks to one of the most efficient supporters of the community-based organizations during this era, distinguished professor, Mr. Mohammadi Jirandeh, Representative of the High Council of Provinces in the Supervisory Board, who served as a unique representative of the SAMANs with his meticulous and expert views and an open mind. While major challenges came up between the Deputy Minister [of Interior] in his capacity as the Government's Representative and me, in my role as SAMAN's representative, his influential and resolute

votes in favor of the community-based organizations was able to break the inflexible views of the Government and open a way in the dead-end. His cooperation deserves to be appreciated by all organizations. The writer has little to say about the magnitude of his efforts...

8- The 185 sessions of the Board led to the issuance of about 500 permits, and 100 comparative permits. These fall within the categories of charity, cultural, social, arts, environmental, addiction [control], the handicapped, special diseases, legal, scientific, etc. During the first term, the Supervisory Board did not entail any special sensitivity or direction regarding any topics and welcomed all the people in various fields of activities with open arms. The author has always believed that we are in the beginning of a difficult path and should go through many difficulties in a historical era. We should be patient and avoid unmeasured and dividing expressions and prepare ourselves for confronting immense and greater problems that emerge following a more profound influence of community-based organizations in society in a more vigorous way. We should learn that presence in the social arena calls for deserving and sometimes even further costs that can sometimes be beyond our capacities. We should learn that accountability and responsibility are truly divine blessings and anyone can demonstrate his/her capacities and talents should s/he be granted the chance to serve. We should also learn that the chance to serve is not a slogan, but when started voluntarily, it will continue sincerely and achieve results in a caring way, and that serving others is not a pretext to gain fame; as if so, it is nothing but a lie. We should also teach others and share the culture for voluntary work with our children since they are young, so that they will not have to hear—as we did—accusations questioning the reasons, motives and benefits of the voluntary work, and labeling the hard work as a waste of time and money.

In the past three years, I have tried to make all possible efforts in line with following up the issues related to the community-based organizations through unnumbered meetings with the officials and special meetings with the people in charge of the related organizations and institutions. I have had constant follow-ups with different sources; have defended the rights and provided guidance, consultation and direct follow-up regarding the establishment of 40 organizations.

The only issue remaining here would be following up the issue of a comprehensive law, which nowadays is as important as creating the culture. It can be concluded that the two issues of short-term and long-term significance are creating public awareness and culture, and the importance of developing a new special law for the community-based organizations. In the grace of God, I have been able to help with the both ambitions, however small my services have been. A good example of my assistance was organizing the Introductory Seminar on the Cooperation of the Government and Community-based Organizations, held on 20 August 2007 in which 250 SAMANs participated. The Seminar made good achievements. However, many of the attractive statements and wishes made in that seminar just remained there; no meetings have been held ever since to boost the cooperation between the government and the community-based organizations. It seems that such wishes, as expressed in the remarks of the Social Deputy of the Interior Ministry during the Seminar may not realize. Nevertheless, this does urge all to follow-up the ratification of a new law, so that all the Community-based organizations would be freed from the confinement that the Interior Ministry has created for them. It is hoped that whoever would take over as the representative for a huge number of the community-based organizations at national, provincial and constituencies levels should truly consider him/herself their servant; make any possible efforts in following-up their related issues and do his/her best in order to develop capacities among the organizations that can truly be considered NGOs, as well as among the officials. It is also hoped that the community-based organizations could discover their immensely important capacities, and with a comprehensive effort, come to believe that the SAMANs' profound impact on the growth and particularly the social development of the country nowadays is among the obvious facts of management and politics alike. They should listen to constructive criticism and improve their management approaches towards establishing powerful and influential organizations; prove their capacities to the officials; set the misunderstandings and disagreements aside and unite in order to solve their problems, and have an outstanding and impressing role in the gatherings, so that these get-togethers would achieve results

from which all benefit. I also hope that the all inclusive presence of the SAMANs in all social arenas would prevent from the unilateral approaches of those managers who seek to control everything and happen to be an obstacle ahead of materialization of the essence of Article 44 of the Constitutional Law. However, this group of managers should also accept the reality and trust the community-based organizations.

I express gratitude to God that during this period, and since my youth granted the opportunity of serving to this humble servant of His, and provided priceless experience ahead of this insignificant subject. I would also like to apologize to all those whom I may have made upset in a way during my assignment and wish that they would pardon me for any shortcomings, Inshallah.

**Mohammad Alamooti**  
**SAMANs Representative in the Supervisory Board**  
**10 January 2009**

## E. The Attempted Silencing of Zanan

Farideh Farhi. "The Attempted Silencing of Zanan." *Informed Comment: Global Affairs* (February 1, 2008.) <http://bit.ly/at0R1L>

A couple of points are worth pondering here. First, according to Zanan's lawyer, the ever-persistent Farideh Gheirat, the news of the action came out one hour after the regular Monday meeting of the Press Advisory Board, as required by law, but only in Farsnews, and not in Iran's official news agency (IRNA) which should be and is the routine venue for government announcements. Furthermore, according to Farsnews, it was relayed by an "informed" and yet unidentified source. This to Gheirat hinted at a spontaneous decision that was taken after the Press Supervisory Board's meeting. As far as I am concerned, it may not have been even the decision of the whole board; rather a maneuver by a member or a couple of members of the board close to Farsnews attempting to place the board in a position of a *fait accompli*.

Second, the informed source in the Farsnews report identified an unknown regulation passed by the National Security Council as the source of the decision. This is while legally all such regulations must be officially announced and available to the members of the press. More importantly, according to Gheirat, the news of revocation came as a total surprise because Zanan had never been given a warning on the basis of the noted (but not explained) regulation.

Finally, the 10-member Press Supervisory Board - a body consisting of the Minister of Culture and Islamic Guidance, or his representative, representatives of the parliament and the Judiciary, a university professor selected by Ministry of Higher Education, representative of Qom religious seminary, and a representative selected by the managing directors in the press - is essentially in charge of examining application for licenses and issuing permits. It is true that since the passage of the new press law by the Fifth Parliament, this board has the power to suspend a publication temporarily for what it deems are violations of the press law but then it has to send the report of the violations to the press court. It is the press court and jury that ultimately have authority to ban a publication and revoke its license.

## F. Letter of IRGC Commanders to President Khatami (1999)

*Complete Text of the Letter of IRGC Commanders to Khatami after the attack by the Basij and the IRGC on Tehran university dormitories in July of 1999.*

Esteemed President of the Republic Hojjatoleslam Mr. Seyed Mohammad Khatami

With wishes of peace and hope for your continued health, we present to you:

Following the recent events, as a group of public servants from the Holy Defense [Iran Iraq War] who defended the esteemed people of Iran, we considered it our duty to present this document to His Excellency the esteemed scholar. We hope that with great tolerance and valuable slogans, coupled with the message that you are advocating (we are willing to listen to every opposition speech and idea) you can address this issue. This issue represents, perhaps, the pain of thousands who have sacrificed for the Revolution, who nowadays - far away from any political line or party - see the problems and events of the Revolution with anxious eyes. And they are astonished and surprised at the silence, negligence, and simplistic views of Iranian officials, who are sitting on their seats with the blessing of the blood of thousands of martyrs.

Esteemed Mr. Khatami, certainly all of us have considered and do consider His Excellency pious, revolutionary, faithful, and possessing deep religious roots in the field of commitment to the Revolution. But your response to the events that we all have witnessed, which brought about the happiness and rejoicing of the enemy, and the priority you give to following up on some of the mistakes and transgressions, making them worse than they really are, compared with the lack of attention and downplaying the significance of

other mistakes, such as law-breaking, desecration of Islam, and other pressures, have caused currents that hate the Revolution to become more confident. In contrast, they have caused defendants of the Revolution to become more conservative, with their apathy coupled with despair. Every day they have been humiliated, and because of this, they have seen blood, and with regret and sorrow, they bite their own fingers.

Esteemed Mr. President, the attack on the University dorms was, just as the honorable and innocent Leader of the Revolution said, an abominable, ugly, and bad event. Despite the fact that the harshest and most critical retaliatory measures were taken against those responsible, the Iranian people, because of the abominable actions that took place, not only accepted these confrontations but endorsed them as well. Yet an important question, remains unclear: in your opinion, was that the only catastrophe?

Only this issue is worth following up, paying attention to, opposing, and taking corrective measures against, such that a few Ministers resigned and the National Security Council organized a meeting and created a Special Research Group. But doesn't the desecration and disparagement of the foundations of the system call for regret and following up? Do you think the sanctity of the Velayat-e Faqih [Guardianship of the Jurisprudent] is less than that of the Tehran University dorms? Is the sanctity of the Imam, that rarefied individual, worth less than effrontery towards one student? Do you think that disrupting the security of the nation for a few days, attacking every faithful and religious Iranian, and starting public fires is not a catastrophe? Do you think bringing the entire Islamic Republic under question, the very legacy of tens of thousands of martyrs, and shouting slogans against it does not constitute a catastrophe?

Esteemed Mr. Khatami, when it was said a few nights ago that a minority were shouting slogans against the Supreme Leader, moving towards the "Shahid Mottahari Collection," our small children looked us in the eyes. It was as if they were asking us where our bravery had gone.

Esteemed Mr. President, today when we saw the face of the Supreme Leader, we wished for God to put us out of our misery. It is because our shoulders have locked up, and with itching eyes and lumps in our throats, we must observe the withering away of the product of 14 centuries of the torment and persecution of Shi'ism and Islam.

Esteemed Mr. Khatami, you know well, despite all of our power, we are rendered incapable because of our friends' Reform-mindedness. Who is the person who does not know that today the hypocrites and opponents are gathering in regiments in the name of the "Students," and joining this line of battle? And vindictive, short-sighted, and profit-seeking insiders are adding fuel to the fire. They will not refrain from any form of speech or writing in order to incite more [chaos]!

Esteemed Mr. Khatami, how long should we watch with tears and regurgitate our own blood while we practice "democracy," laden with chaos and insults, and have Revolutionary patience at the cost of our own system?

Esteemed Mr. President, thousands of families of martyrs and soldiers and militants gave their votes to you, and their votes represent the (Presidential) medal upon your chest. They have the expectation that you will confront these problems judiciously. And today we see the footprint of the enemy in these recent events and hear them drunkenly laughing. Seize control of today for tomorrow will be much too late and your regret will be impossible to eliminate.

Honorable Seyyed, listen to the speech of those who appear to be friends and insiders in the Student movement, do not all of their sayings approve and promote chaos and law breaking?

Was this supposed to be the meaning of the Year of the Imam [1999, the 20th anniversary of the Islamic Revolution]? Do you think that this was the proper way to preserve his grandeur and legacy? And do you

think that the inattention of a small group called “Hezbollah” constitutes permission for [the opposition] to break the head of every religious Iranian and destroying the respect of religion?

Esteemed Mr. Khatami, listen to the periodicals and radio stations of the world, does not the sound of the foreigners’ Daf and Dohol [two particularly upbeat Iranian musical instruments] come to mind?

Esteemed President, if you do not make a Revolutionary decision today and do not fulfill your Islamic and national mission, tomorrow will be so late, and the problems so unsolvable, that it will be unimaginable.

In conclusion, with complete respect and endearment towards His Excellency, we declare that our patience has come to an end, and we will not permit ourselves any more tolerance in the face of your inaction.

Commanders and public servants of the respected people of Iran during the Holy Defense (Iran Iraq War): *Gholamali Rashid, Aziz Jafari, Mohammad Baqer Qalibaf, Ghasem Soleymani, Jafar Asadi, Ahmad Kazemi, Mohammad Kowsari, Asadollah Naseh, Mohammad Bagheri, Gholamreza Mehrabi, Abdolhamid Riufinejad, Noor Ali Shushtari, Dr. Ali Ahmadian, Ahmad Gholampour, Yaghoub Zahedi, Nabiollah Roodaki, Ali Fadavi, Gholamreza Jalali, Amin Shariati, Hossein Hamedani, Esmail Gha’ani, Ali Fazli, Ali Zahedi, Morteza Ghorbani.*

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The abuse of human rights in Iran is not a series of individual cases, but rather targeted against the very development of civil society. This is as true of the oppression of ethnic and religious minorities (not covered in this report) as it is of women's rights activists. Healthy civil society is viewed as a threat to the state. This has become particularly true in the previous five years as the Principlists and the Office of the Supreme Leader have become more unified and authoritarian.

Appeals to the Iranian constitution and even to the legal framework have no effect on this group. They read the constitution as fundamentally anti-democratic.

The challenge for civil society activists is to find a way to communicate effectively and push the limits of the increasingly shrinking space for activity in the Islamic Republic of Iran.

