
amnesty international

Iran

New government fails to address dire human rights situation

February 2006

Summary

AI Index: MDE 13/010/2006

Six months after Dr Mahmoud Ahmadinejad took up office as the country's new president, the human rights situation in Iran remains dire. Scores of critics and opponents of the government continue to be imprisoned, many following grossly unfair trials, the death penalty is widely used and torture is common. The authorities maintain strict controls on freedom of expression and association, and religious and ethnic minorities are subject to persecution. Women are severely discriminated against in both law and practice and those lawyers, journalists and others who dare speak up in support of human rights - Iran's community of courageous human rights defenders – do so at constant risk of harassment, imprisonment or other abuses by security authorities who are able to act with impunity.

Many hoped that this pattern of abuses, by then already long established, would be alleviated following the election of President Hojjatoleslam val Moslemin Sayed Mohammad Khatami on a pro-reform ticket in 1997, or following his re-election with an increased majority four years later. In practice, however, although his presidency resulted in some lessening of restrictions on human rights, the gains were relatively small due to the political stalemate between President Khatami and even more conservative forces associated with Iran's Supreme Leader, Ayatollah Sayed 'Ali Khamenei. Moreover, President Khatami's last years and months in office saw a renewed deterioration in human rights, marked by arrests, detentions and increasing harassment of critics of the system, especially journalists, bloggers and other human rights defenders.

It was against this background that Dr Ahmadinejad, the former Mayor of Tehran and an erstwhile member of the Revolutionary Guard Special Forces, emerged as the unexpected but convincing victor of Iran's June 2005 presidential election. He had campaigned on a largely economic platform, pledging to end corruption and bring in policies to improve conditions for the poor. His election was seen generally to have

continued the process of consolidating power in the office of the Supreme Leader, Ayatollah Sayed 'Ali Khamenei.

Amnesty International wrote to President Ahmadinejad on the occasion of his inauguration in August 2005, welcoming his commitment to improve economic and social rights and urging him to make human rights a top priority during his time in office. However, the months since Dr Ahmadinejad came to power have seen no improvement in Iran's human rights record. On the contrary, while President Ahmadinejad has courted controversy in connection with Iran's nuclear programme and aroused widespread international criticism on account of his statements relating to the Holocaust and Israel, there have also been signs that Iran is witnessing the start of a further harshening of repression.

This report, therefore, addresses human rights violations which have occurred during the past half year or more and focuses particularly on the steps taken by the Iranian authorities in response to widespread unrest among the country's ethnic minorities, especially Arabs and Kurds; continuing repression of religious minorities, especially the Baha'is; and continuing limitations on the rights to freedom of expression and association which particularly impact on journalists and other human rights defenders. It also addresses the continuing allegations of torture and ill-treatment, and the wide-ranging use of the death penalty, including against some who were children at the time of their alleged offence and it recommends measures that should be taken by the Iranian authorities to address these and other abuses. The report does not seek to be comprehensive but rather to draw attention to the wide-ranging and egregious human rights violations which are occurring in Iran on an almost daily basis. Amnesty International has not had access to Iran for research on the country since shortly after the 1979 Islamic Revolution, but this report nevertheless is based on a wide range of sources from both inside and outside Iran.

This report summarizes a 41-page document (15,006 words): Iran: New government fails to address dire human rights situation (AI Index: MDE 13/010/2006), issued by Amnesty International in February 2006. Anyone wishing further details or to take action on this issue should consult the full document. An extensive range of our materials on this and other subjects is available at <http://www.amnesty.org> and Amnesty International news releases can be received by email:

http://www.amnesty.org/email/email_updates.html

INTERNATIONAL SECRETARIAT, 1 EASTON STREET, LONDON WC1X 0DW, UNITED KINGDOM