



**United Nations Human Rights Council
Universal Periodic Review
Islamic Republic of Iran**

Submission of Jubilee Campaign USA, Inc.
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Jubilee Campaign promotes the human rights and religious liberty of ethnic and religious minorities; advocates the release of prisoners of conscience; and protects and promotes the freedom and safety of children from bodily harm and sexual exploitation.

A Vital Voice for Those Suffering in Silence

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United Nations Human Rights Council Universal Periodic Review of Member-State Iran

Jubilee Campaign USA, Inc., in special consultative status with ECOSOC, submits this analysis of religious freedom and human rights in Iran as a contribution to the Universal Periodic Review of UNHRC member-state Iran.

Freedom of Religion: Dangers for Apostates and the Plight of the Baha’i

1. Though the Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran provides for religious freedom (Article 23) and protection of certain religious minorities (Article 64), and while the structure of the government allows for five out of 290 seats in the *Majlis* to be reserved for recognized religious minorities, there is in practice no guarantee of a freedom to practice and share one’s religion and the state puts forth constant propaganda against the minority religions.¹ Further, these religious minorities, both recognized and unrecognized are barred from seeking a high office in the government.
2. It is reported that education curriculum in lower grades teaches children “to discriminate against women and minorities, to view non-Muslims with suspicion if not contempt, and to perpetuate the regime’s theocratic ideology.”²
3. Persecution of religious minorities has worsened under President Ahmadinejad. In particular, Christians and Baha’is have been persecuted and threatened by the Iranian government, experiencing arbitrary arrest and detainment on charges with no foundation and with pressure to denounce their religion.
4. In Spring 2008, seven leaders of the Baha’i community were arrested in Tehran and have been detained since. They have never been informed of charges against them and have been denied access to their lawyers. Their trial, which was set for July, 2009 has been postponed. It is reported that the seven will be charged with “espionage for Israel, insulting religious sanctities and propaganda against the Islamic Republic.”³ It is estimated that at least 200 Baha’i leaders have been executed since 1979.

¹ See J.K. Chosky & Nina Shea, National Review Online, *Religious Cleansing in Iran*, <www.nationalreview.com>, Posted 22 July 2009 (discussing the propaganda in grade school curriculum that teaches superiority of Islam and inferiority of minorities).

² United States Commission on International Religious Freedom, *USCIRF Annual Report 2009 – Countries of Particular Concern: Iran*, 1 May 2009, available at <http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/docid/4a4f2735a.html> [accessed 22 July 2009].

³ Baha’i World News, *Trial for Seven Baha’i Leaders Reportedly Delayed*, <<http://news.bahai.org/>>, Posted 13 July 2009.

5. Baha'is are effectively denied property rights. Officials arbitrarily confiscate their homes. Further, they have been denied access to higher education and equal employment.⁴
6. Open Doors' World Watch List ranks Iran third for the worst persecution of Christians. It is reported that President Ahmadinejad has called for the end of the growth of Christianity in Iran.⁵ Tolerance is lent to those who are born into Christian homes, but those who convert from Islam to Christianity are in grave danger.
7. In March, 2009, Maryam Rostampour and Marzieh Amirizadeh Esmaeilabad, two students of English who had converted from Islam to Christianity, were arrested from their home in Tehran and have been held without trial since. They are being charged with "anti-government activity" in accordance with the Islamic Penal Code, Book 4, Chapter 1, which Iran has regularly abused as a basis for arbitrary detainment of religious minorities and political dissidents.⁶ Many international organizations and governments including the European Union, Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch and international media have called for the release of these women, yet they remain in Evin prison.⁷ This is one of hundreds of cases, many of which gain no international attention.
8. Under Islamic law, conversion to Islam is forbidden.⁸ A new proposed version of the Iranian Penal Code which calls for all converts from Islam ("apostates") to be executed.⁹
9. USCIRF reports that "the government of Iran continues to engage in systematic, ongoing, and egregious violations of religious freedom, including prolonged detention, torture, and executions based primarily or entirely upon the religion of the accused."¹⁰
10. The European Union released a "[d]eclaration by the Presidency on behalf of the European Union on the violation of religious freedom in Iran" in May of 2009.¹¹ The declaration revealed concerns over the persecution of minority religions, specifically

⁴ See Chosky & Shea, *supra* note 1.

⁵ See Chosky & Shea, *supra* note 1.

⁶ See Human Rights Watch, *You Can Detain Anyone for Anything*, <www.hrw.org>, Posted 6 January 2008.

⁷ See Declaration by the Presidency on Behalf of the European Union on the Violation of Religious Freedom in Iran, (May 25, 2009), *available at* http://www.eu-un.europa.eu/articles/en/article_8750_en.htm.

⁸ Anuj Chopra, *U.S. News and World Report*, *In Iran, Covert Christian Converts Live With Secrecy and Fear*, <www.usnews.com>, Posted 8 May 2008.

⁹ *Id.*

¹⁰ See United States Commission on International Religious Freedom, *supra* note 2.

¹¹ Declaration by the Presidency on Behalf of the European Union on the Violation of Religious Freedom in Iran, (May 25, 2009), *available at* http://www.eu-un.europa.eu/articles/en/article_8750_en.htm.

members of Christian and Baha'i communities as well as groups of minority Muslim sects. The declaration further condemned the arbitrary detention of individuals of these faiths with suspicion that the aim of the persecution is to suppress these religions.

11. Though the Jewish population has not received the international attention or the depth of persecution suffered by other religious minorities, anti-Semitism is nonetheless on the rise. Jews can be accused of being spies or of aiding Israel.
12. Leaders of the Sufi and Sunni Muslim communities are also harassed and threatened by Iranian officials and discrimination against these groups continues.
13. The challenge for Iran in declaring itself an Islamic Republic is that it naturally creates an atmosphere that fosters discrimination of minority faiths and teaches Islamic supremacy. Leaders in Iran are very vocal about their disdain for non-Muslims. Former Supreme Leader, Ayatollah Khomeini once said that non-Muslims rank between "feces" and "the sweat of a camel that has consumed impure food." Current leader, Ayatollah Ahmad Jannati has referred to non-Muslims publically as "'sinful animals' and 'corrupt.'"¹² The lack of respect and recognition of the humanity of all individuals shows that the current administration does not intend to make religious freedom a reality.
14. Jubilee Campaign calls for the end of the release of all religious prisoners being held on false charges or being held without charges, and for the end of the oppression and discrimination against individuals who associate themselves with minority religions.

Freedom of Expression: Political Oppression

1. Persecution of political dissidents is not a new phenomenon in Iran, however after the recent election, public outcry against the government and the election results have led to thousands of human rights violations which do not show signs of stopping.
2. Thousands of protestors were arrested in June and July and many remain imprisoned without access to legal representation, and without the ability to contact family members.¹³ While the government attempts to show acquiescence to international demands, there is no guarantee for those in prison that they will receive fair treatment.
3. Iranian officials have not allowed media to film the protests, but human rights activists reported that "state security forces used excessive force, including live ammunition, against the demonstrators"¹⁴

¹² See United States Commission on International Religious Freedom, *supra* note 2.

¹³ See Reporters Without Borders, *What is Going on in the Silence of Evin Prison?*, <www.rsf.org>, Posted 27 June 2009.

¹⁴ See Human Rights Watch, *Iran: End Violence Against Peaceful Protestors*, <www.hrw.org>, Posted 15 June 2009.

4. In March 2009, blogger Omid Mirsayafi died while in prison on charges of “propaganda against the state” for his public criticism of religious leaders in Iran.¹⁵ Given the number of political prisoners in Iran, it is likely this fate will fall on others as well.
5. Jubilee has received many personal testimonies of inhumane treatment of the Mujahedin-e Khalq at Camp Ashraf in Iraq. Iran does not offer hope of protection to this group, who renounced terrorism in 2001. In an unjustified attack by Iraqi police in August, 11 individuals were killed, 500 injured and 36 were detained.
6. Jubilee Campaign asserts that physical attacks and illegal detainment of political dissidents are unacceptable and the government of Iran must allow for the free expression of political opinion. Iran must take further action to ensure freedom of conscience.

Women’s Rights: Discrimination in Legislation and in Practice

1. Article 21 of the Iranian Constitution provides for the restoration of women’s rights, however, in practice, women are denied equal opportunity and equal protection of the law.
2. Women were barred from running in the recent presidential election.¹⁶
3. According to Iranian blood money laws, a man’s life is worth twice that of a woman’s.
4. Women are denied rights to their land when their husbands die.
5. While education programs for women have developed, women continue to be discriminated against in employment.¹⁷
6. The value of a woman’s testimony is considered half of the value of a man’s testimony. Clearly, women are not respected by the government or the people as equal to men. With this perspective, women cannot realize the rights that Article 21 suggests they are given.

Rights of Children: Execution of Minors

1. While Iran is a party to the Convention on the Rights of a Child, the country is responsible for more than 80% of juvenile offenses worldwide in the past four years.¹⁸

¹⁵ See United States Commission on International Religious Freedom, *supra* note 2.

¹⁶ Amnesty International, *Iran’s Presidential Election Amid Unrest and Ongoing Human Rights Violations*, <www.amnesty.org>, Posted 5 June 2009.

¹⁷ Report of the Secretary-General on the Situation of Human Rights in the Islamic Republic of Iran at 13, U.N. Doc. A/63/459 (2008).

¹⁸ Human Rights Watch, *Iran Hangs Seventh Juvenile Offender This Year*, <www.hrw.org>, Posted 4 November 2008.

2. These reports are appalling and the government of Iran must call for lesser punishments in juvenile courts and for the ceasing of all punishments not in line with the Convention on the Rights of a Child.

Torture and Sexual Exploitation of Prisoners

1. While Iranian officials say that conditions in prisons, particularly in the capitol of Tehran, are improving, reports from detainees do not verify these testimonies.
2. In an interview with the Jerusalem Post, one former prison guard told of how he would rape young girls before they were executed, but would marry them in prison first so that the violence was legal.¹⁹
3. Unconfirmed reports by the opposition tell of detainees, both male and female reporting brutal rapes while in prison in Iran.²⁰
4. International pressure has been placed on the country of Iran to allow human rights groups and international organizations to intervene, but Iran has chosen to address the atrocities in prisons internally.
5. Iran must accept intervention or supervision in the reformation of the prison system.

Summary of Recommendations

1. Iran must release all prisoners of conscience and take active steps to rid the system of discriminatory practices and inhumane treatment against individuals of minority religions.
2. Iran must take action to protect political dissidents from the violent backlash of officials.
3. Iran must reform its employment laws and property laws to demand more rights for women and individuals of minority groups.
4. Iran must abolish the practice of executing children under the age of 18 and reform the juvenile legal system.
5. Iran must accept international intervention and supervision in the reformation of the prison system to ensure compliance with international standards of treatment of prisoners.

¹⁹ Sabina Amidi, 'I Wed Iranian Girls Before Execution,' <www.jpost.com>, Posted 19 July 2009.

²⁰ CBS News, *Rape Claims Emerge from Iran Prisons*, <www.cbsnews.com>, Posted 10 August 2009.