

Iran: Freedom of Expression must be Protected

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Delivered by Andrew Smith, ARTICLE 19

Mr. President,

ARTICLE 19 notes Iran's engagement in the UPR process and encourages the implementation of recommendations to improve freedom of expression.

We note recommendations regarding the death penalty and highlight Australia's recommendation to "guarantee the right to legitimate freedom of expression, association, and assembly, and release political prisoners [...] detained solely for exercising these rights"

Criminal laws are applied to suppress legitimate criticism, through broad provisions. Individuals have been executed under charges of "Moharebeh" (enmity against God), including Mohsen Amir-Aslani, in September 2014. Others face the death sentence including Saman Naseem, for alleged crimes committed when he was only 17 years old.

We welcome the Netherland's recommendation to "guarantee freedom of speech [...] including through the Internet, and stop arrests, prosecution and sanction of individuals for expressing views and opinions"

The Constitution permits surveillance where communications are deemed contrary to domestic laws. The Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps' cyberspace specialist, Mostafa Alizadeh, has admitted that they maintain "intelligence control over all social networks". The chilling effect is seen in the case of Soheil Arabi, who was sentenced to death in August 2014 for insulting the Prophet Muhammad on Facebook.

More than 30 journalists remain in prison including American-Iranian journalist, Jason Rezaian. In light of this, we highlight the USA's call for his release. We also welcome Tunisia's recommendation for a "favourable environment for the activities of journalists, human rights defenders and civil society". The continuing harassment and arrests of human rights defenders such as Nargess Mohammadi, Mahdieh Golrou, and Mohammad Seifzadeh, and increased closure of news outlets demonstrate that the space for freedom of expression is shrinking.

We call on States to increase international scrutiny and efforts to hold Iran accountable. We therefore welcome all those Member States who emphasised the importance of cooperation with the UN's Special Procedures.

Iran must demonstrate through real reform that its commitment to protecting freedom of expression is more than simply rhetoric.

Thank you.