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Iran: New President must deliver on human rights campaign promises

The Iranian authorities must seize the opportunity presented by a change of leadership to fulfil the aspirations of many Iranians and undertake a complete overhaul of human rights in the country, said Amnesty International ahead of the inauguration of the new President this weekend.

Hassan Rouhani, the 64-year old cleric who has been described as a moderate, will be sworn in as President on Sunday 4 August 2013. Amnesty International has published a set of recommendations to the Iranian authorities, setting out a road map to address the abysmal human rights situation in the country.

"For too long Iran has failed to live up to its human rights obligations under domestic and international law. After years of repression and international isolation, the Iranian authorities must stop posturing and acknowledge the severity of human rights violations in the country," said Hassiba Hadj Sahraoui, Amnesty International's Deputy Director for the Middle East and North Africa.

"Hassan Rouhani and the Iranian authorities can no longer ignore people's demands for their rights to be respected. The hopes of Iranians must not be crushed yet again. The inauguration must be used as an opportunity to desist from hateful practices such as discrimination, torture, arbitrary detention and unfair trials which can lead to death sentences".

Amnesty International is calling on the Iranian authorities to uphold the rights to freedom of expression, association, and assembly for everyone. The organization is also calling for provisions of Iran's Penal Code that infringe on such freedoms to be repealed or amended.

"Iranians chanted the names of opposition leaders under house arrest upon the announcement of the election results. As a first step, all prisoners of conscience, jailed solely for peacefully exercising their rights, must be immediately and unconditionally released," said Hassiba Hadj Sahraoui.

Opposition leaders, Mir Hossein Mousavi and Mehdi Karroubi, along with Mousavi's wife, Zahra Rahnavard, herself a political activist, have been held under unofficial house arrest since February 2011 and must also be released.

Undue restrictions on the media, telecommunications services, as well as on the activities of NGOs and trade unions must also be revoked.

During his electoral campaign, Hassan Rouhani made a number of pledges that could improve Iran's dire human rights records. Among these was a plan to issue a "civil rights charter" calling for the equality of all citizens.

Amnesty International is urging the Iranian authorities to amend or abolish all laws and practices that

discriminate on the basis of race, colour, religion, ethnicity, gender or other status.

The incoming President has also made several promises to improve women's rights. Amnesty International is calling for the authorities to repeal or amend all laws that discriminate against women, including any laws that place restrictions on women's access to work or education. A comprehensive law that protects women against all forms of violence must also be introduced.

For many years students have been repressed, imprisoned and denied their right to education. The right to higher education must be based on merit alone without discrimination on grounds of sex, ethnicity, nationality, religious beliefs or any other status. The new administration must take steps to guarantee that all students and lecturers who have been arbitrarily banned from studying or teaching are allowed to resume their previous roles.

Over the past decades, the routine use of torture and other ill-treatment by security forces has been a hallmark of the way the Iranian authorities operate. A clear stance that such abuses will no longer be tolerated is needed. The definition of torture as a criminal offence must be clarified under Iranian law. Iran's revised Islamic Penal Code, which still allows for the application of corporal punishment, including flogging and amputation, as well as stoning for adultery must also be amended.

Iran remains one of the most prolific executioners in the world. The authorities must take concrete steps to abolish the death penalty, in particular, for juvenile offenders

Urgent reforms to the criminal justice system, guaranteeing the independence of the judiciary and ensuring fair trials for all Iranians, must also be prioritised. The use of televised forced "confessions" must end.

All human rights violations must be independently investigated and those responsible held accountable for their actions. As an immediate step to signal a change in policies, Iranian authorities must allow UN human rights experts and NGOs including Amnesty International to visit Iran.

The international community must also assess the human rights impact of sanctions and ensure they are not contributing to violations of the economic and social rights of people in Iran.

"Unless concrete changes are made immediately, the change of leadership will simply be a squandered opportunity," said Hassiba Hadj Sahraoui.