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Iran: New President must deliver on human rights' promises

The victory of Hassan Rouhani, a 64-year-old cleric, in Iran's presidential election, presents a new opportunity to address human rights abuses in the country, Amnesty International said today.

Hassan Rouhani, described as a moderate and a pragmatist, made a number of pledges to improve Iran's dire human rights record during his electoral campaign, for which he must be held accountable in the coming months.

He plans to issue a "civil rights charter" which calls for equality for all citizens without discrimination based on race, religion or sex. It also calls for greater freedom for political parties and minorities, as well as ensuring the right to fair trial, freedom of assembly and legal protection for all.

"The proposed charter – if delivered and implemented - presents the potential for a decisive first step forward for human rights in Iran," said Hassiba Hadj Sahraoui, Amnesty International's Middle East and North Africa Deputy Programme Director.

"However, people don't want empty promises and rhetoric but rather expect concrete measures. It starts with the release of political prisoners, including opposition leaders, Mir Hossein Mousavi and Mehdi Karroubi as Iranians chanted in the streets after the announcement of the results of the election".

"During his first speech today, President-elect Hassan Rouhani said he will never forget the promises he has made to the Iranian people. Amnesty International will be monitoring his actions to make sure he keeps his word."

The President-elect has been critical of gender segregation in educational facilities and has also made several promises to improve women's rights in Iran, including proposing new draft bills on women, establishing the country's first Ministry of Women, and ensuring gender equality, including in relation to job opportunities.

In addition, Hassan Rouhani has emphasized the importance of freedom of expression, including by criticising internet restrictions, and the need to allow government criticism to make way for true progress.

Following Rouhani's election victory, supporters chanted slogans in favour of opposition leaders Mir Hossein Mousavi and Mehdi Karroubi. Both politicians were placed under house arrest by the Iranian authorities after calling for protests in solidarity with anti-government uprisings in Egypt and Tunisia in 2011. Human rights groups and the United Nations have repeatedly called for their release.

"The election of Rouhani represents an opportunity for the authorities to re-assess the importance of adhering to the rule of law. They should release all prisoners of conscience now and end the harassment of rights activists, journalists and their families," Hassiba Hadj Sahraoui said.

“Hassan Rouhani has a chance to make a real difference to the lives of people in Iran but it remains to be seen whether, and to what extent, he can and will deliver on his electoral promises in order to bring in true reforms.”

As a concrete and symbolic step to match promises made, Amnesty International urges Hassan Rouhani and the Iranian authorities to cooperate with the United Nations human rights mechanisms, including by immediately allowing the UN Special Rapporteur on the human rights situation in Iran to visit the country.

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