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To: Member States of the UN General Assembly

Your Excellency

We, the undersigned human rights and civil society organizations, write to urge your government to vote in favor of Resolution A/RES/69/L on the promotion and protection of human rights in the Islamic Republic of Iran. This vote will take place during the 69th session of the United Nations General Assembly, scheduled to take place in the Third Committee this Tuesday, 18 November 2014.

This resolution provides a crucial opportunity to reiterate ongoing human rights concerns identified by members of the international community and Iranian civil society. Sixteen months into the presidency of Hassan Rouhani, who won the election after promising to improve the human rights situation, those living in Iran continue to suffer violations at the hands of the authorities. Indeed, during last month's Universal Periodic Review (UPR) of Iran at the UN Human Rights Council, several UN member states expressed dismay at Iran's lack of progress over the last four years, including on many of the recommendations Iran had accepted during the first UPR cycle in 2010.

Human rights abuses are deeply rooted in Iran's laws and policies, both of which pose serious obstacles for much-needed rights reforms to take place. On 28 October 2014, the UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Islamic Republic of Iran, Dr. Ahmed Shaheed, reported that human rights in the country "remain of concern" and detailed violations of the rights to life, the rights to freedom from torture and discrimination based on gender, religion, and ethnicity, the rights to education, health, fair trial, freedom of expression, association, assembly, religion and belief, as well as limits on the press. Despite its 2005 standing invitation to the United Nations' Special Procedures, Iran remains unwilling to accept their repeated requests to visit the country. Furthermore, the authorities have systematically worked to undermine the efforts of civil society in the country to promote and protect international human rights standards.

The continued attention of the international community is required if the Islamic Republic of Iran is to end this pattern of abuse and noncooperation. UN member states must continue to express their concern about these abuses. In doing so, member states provide support to civil society as well as to those in the Iranian government who wish to see improvements in the human rights situation. By voting in favour of the resolution, states will encourage Iran's government to prioritize human rights and to advance and protect the rights of Iran's population.

Since the beginning of 2014, Iran has executed at least 600 people. This figure includes juvenile offenders and individuals who may have been executed for peacefully exercising their rights including the rights to freedom of expression, association, and assembly. Death sentences in Iran are often imposed without any regard to internationally prescribed safeguards. Authorities executed Reyhaneh Jabbari on 25 October 2014, despite repeated calls from UN human rights mechanisms, including the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, to stay the execution out of concern that her prosecution had failed to meet international fair trial standards. Moreover, the vast majority of executions in Iran are implemented for offenses, such as drug-related offenses, that do not meet the threshold of the "most serious crimes." Iranian law maintains the death penalty for consensual sexual relations between adults, including for adultery and same-sex relations, and for financial crimes. Iran continues to execute in public despite calls by the UN Secretary-General on authorities to halt the practice.

Executions based on national security-related charges that may be politically motivated appear to be carried out disproportionately against members of Iran's ethnic minority communities, including Ahwazi Arabs, Kurds, and Baluchis. Rights groups are concerned about the situation of 33 Sunni Kurds, most of whom are held in Raha'i Shahr Prison in Karaj and face imminent risk of execution. The men were sentenced to death following grossly unfair trials during which basic safeguards, such as the right to defense, were disregarded, in contravention of international fair trial standards.

The Special Rapporteur and human rights organizations continue to express grave concerns for scores of activists, journalists, human rights defenders, women's rights activists, trade unionists, students, and members of ethnic and religious minorities currently languishing in arbitrary detention. Iranian detainees and prisoners consistently face the risk of torture or other ill-treatment, including prolonged solitary confinement and denial of medical treatment. They are regularly denied access to legal counsel or fair trials. Many detainees are prosecuted under vaguely defined national security charges, which are regularly used to silence peaceful expression, association, assembly, and religious activity. In July 2014, for example, journalist Sajedeh Arabsorkhi began serving a one-year imprisonment sentence on the charge of "spreading propaganda against the system." It appears that the charge is related to her open letters to her father, Feyzollah Arabsorkhi, a former deputy trade minister and a senior member of a reformist political party, during the time he was imprisoned.

Systematic discrimination against women in law and practice also merits serious concern. In the past few years, the authorities have increasingly put in place discriminatory measures aimed at restricting women's access to higher education, including gender quotas, and have adopted new population policies resulting in women's restricted access to sexual health and family planning programs. The authorities continue to persecute those protesting such discriminatory laws and practices, often by accusing them of vaguely worded national security offences. This month, for example, Ghoncheh Ghavami learned of her one-year prison sentence and two-year travel ban by a Tehran court on the charge of "spreading propaganda against the system". She was arrested after she protested a ban on women watching matches at sports stadium during a game played by Iran's national volleyball team.

This resolution on the promotion and protection of human rights in Iran of the 69th UNGA is a vital opportunity for the international community to give expression to human rights concerns. The resolution welcomes recent positive statements by Iranian officials, while effectively drawing attention to the broad range of ongoing violations. Moreover, the resolution calls on authorities to cooperate with all UN Special Procedures, including the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Islamic Republic of Iran.

Substantive cooperation with UN mechanisms and tangible rights improvements in line with Iran's international legal obligations are the real measures of progress. By voting in favor of this resolution on 18 November, the UN General Assembly will send a strong signal to the government and all Iranians that the world is invested in genuine human rights improvements in the country.

Sincerely

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