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To: Member States of the United Nations General Assembly

Your Excellency:

We, the undersigned human rights organizations, welcome the decision of the 71st session of the United Nations General Assembly's Third Committee to pass Resolution A/C.3/71/L.25 on the promotion and protection of human rights in the Islamic Republic of Iran. The resolution sends a vital message to all governments and the people of Iran that the human rights situation in the country is of international concern and that reforms are urgently needed.

We hope to see increased support for the resolution when it comes up for a vote again at the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) plenary session and we encourage all member states to vote in favor of it.

Despite recent diplomatic and trade openings that have occurred since the implementation of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, human rights should continue to be a top concern in Iran and for those states seeking expanded diplomatic and economic ties to Iran. The situation in the country remains dire and has deteriorated in several areas. As the government pursues deeper international ties, this is a uniquely opportune time to push for significant improvements in the human rights situation in Iran.

Moreover, as Iran has a newly elected parliament, and an upcoming presidential election in May 2017, this is a crucial moment for the international community to outline its concerns to the government. To that end, while the text of this year's resolution welcomes recent positive steps taken by the government, it also raises the most urgent rights issues in the country.

Iran has maintained the highest per capita execution rate in the world for several years, putting to death over 500 people so far in 2016. The majority of these executions take place after unfair trials and are for crimes that do not constitute the "most serious crimes" under international law, such as drug-related offenses. Executions in Iran have included the execution of child offenders, including at least nine in the last two years; public executions; and the execution of individuals on vaguely worded offenses, such as "enmity against God" (*moharebeh*).

On 2 August 2016, authorities hanged 25 Sunni men, of whom 22 were from Iran's Kurdish minority and three were Iraqi nationals, on charges of *moharebeh*. The Iranian authorities have only announced the execution of 20 men on that date. Our organizations and others observed that all these men had been convicted in proceedings marked by appalling examples of human rights violations, including the use of torture and other ill-treatment; admitting as evidence the use of forced "confessions"; and denial of access to a lawyer throughout the investigation stage. One of these men, all of whom were executed for alleged connections to armed activities, was Shahram Ahmadi, who maintained he had been tortured repeatedly by his interrogators during pre-trial detention which lasted almost three years. He also maintained that he had only been involved in non-violent religious activities.

The Iranian government continues to harshly restrict the peaceful exercise of freedom of expression, association, and assembly. These restrictions include widespread censorship of the press and Internet, the criminalization of peaceful dissent and protests, arbitrary restrictions on civil society, a ban on independent labor activities, and persecution for certain acts of religious worship. The Iranian authorities rely on the systematic use of arbitrary detention against journalists,

lawyers, human rights defenders, political activists, student activists, artists and bloggers for exercising their protected rights. Ethnic minority activists, including Arabs, Baloch, Kurds and Azerbaijani Turks, and members of minority religions, such as Baha'is, Christian converts, Sunni Muslims, Sufi Muslims and the Yarasan, also face similar patterns of abuse and restriction of their rights.

On 26 November 2016, the Special Court for the Clergy in Qom, which is under the direct authority of Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei, issued a six-year prison sentence against Ahmad Montazeri. Montazeri was charged after posting on his official website an audio file of his deceased father, Grand Ayatollah Hosseinali Montazeri, the former Deputy Supreme Leader and one of Iran's most prominent Shia Muslim clerics, harshly criticizing Iranian authorities' mass execution of political prisoners in the 1980s.

Over the past two years, authorities have arrested numerous Iranian dual nationals, accusing them of participating in a "western-led" project to "infiltrate" the country and its core values. Authorities have also prosecuted several journalists, accusing them of being part of an "infiltration network," offering as evidence any real or perceived association with individuals abroad, including family members living outside of Iran, as support for these allegations.

Systematic discrimination and violence against women in law and practice also merits serious concern. Married women, for instance, cannot obtain a passport without the permission of their husband. Moreover, a husband can prevent his spouse obtaining an occupation he deems against family values or harmful to his or her reputation. While women occupy about half of all university student slots, their economic participation in Iran is five times lower than men, according to government figures.

Since 2014, the Iranian Parliament has debated eight bills, passing four, that further curtail women's rights by limiting access to health and family planning services, employment, or undermining protections against gender-based violence. For example one pending bill, the Bill to Increase Fertility Rates and Prevent Population Decline, curbs access to contraception and information about family planning, cuts government family planning programs, and outlaws surgical contraception. The Comprehensive Population and Family Excellence Bill, which is still before the Parliament, mandates employment discrimination against women and unmarried persons, makes divorce more difficult, and discourages police and judicial intervention in family conflicts.

We call on all UN member states to vote in support of Resolution A/C.3/71/L.25 on the situation of human rights in Iran at the UNGA plenary session. Passage of the Resolution will convey to all governments as well as the people of Iran that the international community is genuinely invested in human rights advancement in Iran.

Sincerely,

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