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Iran bars foreign media from reporting on protests

New York, June 16, 2009--The Committee to Protect Journalists condemns the Iranian government's decision to bar foreign journalists from leaving their offices to report, film, or take photographs--a restriction intended to prevent news coverage of protests over the disputed presidential election.

The announcement of President Mahmoud Ahmedinejad's victory on Saturday ignited demonstrations in different cities across Iran as the defeated reformist candidate, Mir-Hossein Mousavi, and his supporters challenged the results.

The Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance, which accredits foreign media working in Iran, ordered foreign journalists and Iranians working with foreign media not to cover the demonstrations, The Associated Press [reported](http://www.google.com/hostednews/ap/article/ALeqM5jGSJEAPs_r2T2wxsL5G3t4z-jajQD98RP8GO2) (http://www.google.com/hostednews/ap/article/ALeqM5jGSJEAPs_r2T2wxsL5G3t4z-jajQD98RP8GO2).

"Since Friday, Iranian authorities have actively attempted to prevent media from covering news throughout the country," said CPJ Middle East and North Africa Program Coordinator Mohamed Abdel Dayem. "We call on the authorities to immediately stop these acts and guarantee that foreign journalists, who were invited in by the government to cover the election, have unfettered access to the news."

In the past five days, Iranian authorities have increased [control](http://cpj.org/2009/06/iranian-authorities-crack-down-on-media-in-electio.php) (<http://cpj.org/2009/06/iranian-authorities-crack-down-on-media-in-electio.php>) over the flow of information by clamping down on media and harassing journalists, according to news reports.

OpenNet Initiative--a research project on Internet censorship conducted jointly by Harvard, Toronto, Oxford, and Cambridge universities--[reported](http://opennet.net/blog/2009/06/cracking-down-digital-communication-and-political-organizing-iran) (<http://opennet.net/blog/2009/06/cracking-down-digital-communication-and-political-organizing-iran>) yesterday that YouTube, Twitter, DailyMotion and Facebook, along with several Web sites aligned with opposition candidates, have been blocked in Iran in recent days.

Hours before polls opened on Friday, SMS, or short message service, was disrupted in Iran, according to [local](http://www.breakingtweets.com/2009/06/11/sms-system-down-in-iran-just-hours-before-election/) (<http://www.breakingtweets.com/2009/06/11/sms-system-down-in-iran-just-hours-before-election/>) news accounts. Mobile phone service was shut down in Tehran on Saturday, although the service was restored on Sunday. SMS remains inoperable in Tehran, according to OpenNet Initiative.

News groups such as [Reuters](http://www.reuters.com/article/worldNews/idUSTRE55F2S220090616) (<http://www.reuters.com/article/worldNews/idUSTRE55F2S220090616>), [AP](http://www.google.com/hostednews/ap/article/ALeqM5jGSJEAPs_r2T2wxsL5G3t4z-jajQD98RP8GO2) (http://www.google.com/hostednews/ap/article/ALeqM5jGSJEAPs_r2T2wxsL5G3t4z-jajQD98RP8GO2), [BBC](http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/8103269.stm) (http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/8103269.stm), [CBS](http://www.cbsnews.com/blogs/2009/06/16/world/worldwatch/entry5091219.shtml) (<http://www.cbsnews.com/blogs/2009/06/16/world/worldwatch/entry5091219.shtml>), and [Bloomberg](http://www.bloomberg.com/apps/news?pid=20601087&sid=aJpiE35TtLBc) (<http://www.bloomberg.com/apps/news?pid=20601087&sid=aJpiE35TtLBc>), reported that their journalists in Iran have been ordered not to cover protests in Tehran. Press cards have been declared invalid, the BBC [reported](http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/8103577.stm) (http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/8103577.stm).

"No reporting activities should take place without coordination and permission of this office," Bloomberg quoted a faxed statement from the Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance as saying. "Reporters should not take part in news events

that have not been announced by this office."

On Sunday, the BBC [reported \(http://www.bbc.co.uk/blogs/theeditors/2009/06/stop_the_blocking_now.html\)](http://www.bbc.co.uk/blogs/theeditors/2009/06/stop_the_blocking_now.html) that its Farsi-language television and radio signals were being disrupted in Iran and throughout the Middle East and Europe. The BBC concluded that the interference was emanating from Iran.

The Dubai-based pan-Arab Al-Arabiya news channel reported on Sunday that Iranian authorities had [shut down \(http://www.alarabiya.net/articles/2009/06/14/75922.html\)](http://www.alarabiya.net/articles/2009/06/14/75922.html) its Tehran bureau for a week without explanation. An Al-Arabiya correspondent in Tehran "was asked by the Ministry of Information to change a report and then notified that the offices would be closed for a week," the channel reported.

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