

IRAN: LEGALIZING THE MURDER OF CIVIL SOCIETY

Efforts to Legalize Militaristic Measures to Restrict Civil Society Organizations

An Analysis of the Bill: The Establishment and Supervision of NGOs





ABOUT THIS PAPER

The Parliament and the administration, with the collusion of the Ministry of Interior and the Ministry of Intelligence and the full cooperation of the judicial branch, seek to use this bill to legalize militaristic and security-driven interventions into the sphere of civil society. The new law will include the following measures:

- Set-up a new committee to oversee the establishment and the activities of civil society organizations: the *Supreme Committee* will be overseen by the Ministry of Interior and include representatives of groups that are militaristic, security-oriented, and ideological, such as the paramilitary Basij. The Supreme Committee will have ultimate authority over the boards of directors of NGOs and even over local authorities;
- The Supreme Committee will have the authority to provide registration permits as well as to dissolve organizations (both of which run counter to the provisions 584 and 585 of the State Trade Law)**;
- Require that new organizations*** go through a comprehensive process of approval by the Ministry of Intelligence and the Supreme Committee;
- Require that organizations already approved by the State Organization for Registration of Deeds and Properties re-register, forcing them to go through the new, more restrictive approval process. Any organization that does not will have its certification revoked and become officially outlawed by the order of the Supreme Committee;
- Require approval of the Supreme Committee for all phases of participation and cooperation in governmental and nongovernmental projects, cooperation and contact with international organizations, agencies of the United Nations, participation in seminars and conferences, and educational sessions abroad, as well as assembling for marches and demonstrations.



1. OVERVIEW

Arseh Sevom – December 2010. In 2006, just after the election of the Ahmadinejad administration, a new bill, *The Establishment and Supervision of NGOs*, was brought before the Iranian parliament (Majlis-e Shoray-e Islami) to change many aspects of the law surrounding the operation and registration of civil society organizations. This bill proposed many new restrictions. After the contested 2009 elections, however, changes were made to the proposed law in order to further restrict the activities of independent civil society and to legalize the previously illegal acts the government/military had taken against organizations and individuals. Approval of this new law would mean the death of independent civil society and give unprecedented (legal) authority to the military. In fact, a reading of the changes to the bill makes clear that the main objective is to create an extralegal group (Supreme Committee) with the objective of restricting and eliminating independent civil society.

After the brief period of political liberalization under reformist rule in which civil society organizations were able to (cautiously) grow and develop, acting as a check on political power, the more authoritarian administration of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad put increased pressure on civil society organizations. It acted outside the law to hinder their activities, as well as to harass and arrest staff and members. This was particularly the case after the controversial 2009 presidential elections when hundreds of civil society activists, staff, and members were arrested and many organizations were closed.

During the Ahmadinejad administration, a number of organizations were directly attacked and closed down by security forces. Others decreased their activities and effectively became passive before being shut down, still others made efforts to adjust to the existing circumstances and have been able to quietly continue their activities. Many remaining civil society organizations have challenged the government's efforts at control and daily face the struggle to maintain their independence.

On October 16, 2010, in the absence of independent civil society organizations and free press, news of a meeting between NGOs and the representatives of the Ministry of Interior made headlines on Persian websites. The coverage of this meeting by state-run media was succinct and measured. Nevertheless, two basic points emerged from this meeting that deserve further scrutiny:

1. The government is in the process of cataloguing civil society organizations which remain active in the social arena and are – in view of the current administration – capable of complying with the absolutist government.
2. This cataloguing serves to continue the suppression of Iran's civil society movement.

The administration is using this bill, *The Establishment and Supervision of NGOs*, to legally obstruct the activities of all those organizations challenging power. The proposed law has been presented to the Parliament and reviewed by the Parliament's Special Committee on Social Affairs. It is now ready to be presented to the floor for ratification. From an executive point of view, the arrangements for identification, cataloging, and restricting organizations are already taking place through a nationwide census of NGOs and the issuance of national identification numbers by the Ministry of Interior.

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- The Supreme Committee will have the authority to provide registration permits as well as to dissolve organizations (both of which run counter to the provisions 584 and 585 of the State Trade Law)**;
- Require that new organizations** go through a comprehensive process of approval by the Ministry of Intelligence and the Supreme Committee;
- Require that organizations already approved by the State Organization for Registration of Deeds and Properties re-register, forcing them to go through the new, more restrictive approval process. Any organization that does not will have its certification revoked and become officially outlawed by the order of the Supreme Committee;
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The regime is attempting to legalize its policy of suppression and of substitution via this new bill, using “national security” and military measures. This is further evidence of the garrison mentality prevalent in the current administration. From their point of view, the arenas of university, press, publications, political parties, and work environments are currently under the complete control of security forces. They now seek to control and restrict the participation of organizations and individuals in public services and charity. Participation in these services engenders the possibility of the emergence of high-spirited, dynamic, and critical forces. For this reason, the government is acting preemptively to control the social sphere through legal means.

There is no doubt that the security-oriented outlook toward active civil organizations, while posing a challenge to civil society in maintaining its independence, will ultimately drive the government toward confrontation with non-governmental institutions.

Arseh Sevom believes that the public and stakeholders must be informed about this bill, which is in the process of approval. It is crucial to take note of the actions of the government in dealing with NGOs as well as the irreparable consequences of these militaristic actions. This debate must immediately enter the public discourse to prevent ratification.

The laws supervising NGOs should not be restrictive. They should, instead, guarantee basic and fundamental freedoms of the right to assembly and freedom of speech, simplifying to the greatest degree the formation of NGOs so that they can play a central and effective role in the

* The involuntary dissolution of these nongovernmental organizations – previously under the sole authority of legal authorities – will be fully under the authority of the Supreme Committee, legalizing intervention by the military and security forces.

** The State Organization for Registration of Deeds and Properties is prohibited from registering any organization whose duties are related to nongovernmental organizations before going through the various stages of approval by the Supreme Commission

process of sustainable development. The laws governing NGOs should facilitate participation on the international stage in order to share experiences and to cooperate with international peers, rather than restrict that participation. The bill awaiting approval does not guarantee any of these principles and also seeks to destroy nascent civil society organizations in Iran.

It is the duty of the representatives in Parliament to refuse to approve the proposed bill and to pose thoughtful questions. They should work to prevent ratification, instead opting for laws that create opportunities for NGOs to carry out their true functions, i.e. supervising power and pushing the society forward toward sustainable development and democracy. Arseh Sevom asks the international community to intervene in support of Iran's civil society and in opposition to legalizing violations of the freedom of association before the bill is ratified.

In order to enrich this debate at the level of civil society organizations and the representatives of Parliament, Arseh Sevom has critically reviewed the bill and the revisions. In addition, it has analyzed recent statements by government forces at the consultative meeting with NGOs.

2. IRAN: EFFORTS TO LEGALIZE MILITARISTIC MEASURES TO RESTRICT CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANIZATIONS

An Analysis of the Bill: The Establishment and Supervision of NGOs and the Risk of Outlawing Progressive NGOs

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In 2007 and 2008 two drafts for a new law governing NGOs were presented to the Parliament. The 2007 draft was presented by a number of representatives of the Parliament, and the 2008 draft was presented to the Parliament by the Political Studies Research Office of the Parliament. The 2007 draft was considered by the Special Committee on Social Affairs, which made drastic changes to it, incorporating the extralegal actions taken against civil society over the past few years. In a few weeks, this revised law will go to the floor for approval. Changes made by the Committee will bring NGOs under the control of the security and military forces. There are some extremely important points to consider in these two drafts as well as the version amended by the specialized committee of Parliament, which are pointed out in this paper.

A. Committees Supervising NGO Activities

Committees Supervising NGO Activities. In the proposed 2007 draft, Supervisory Committees at three levels were anticipated: citywide, provincial, and national. The number of members of these boards was predicted to be eight, three of whom were to have been representatives of NGOs and the others were to have included city-level officials: representatives of city hall, the police forces, the city council, and the Department of Treasury and Economic Affairs. At the provincial level they were to have been representatives of the governor and the Province's City Council representative. At a national level members were to have been represented the Ministry of Interior and the Supreme Committee of Provinces. "The supervision of the activities of organizations and networks" was the responsibility assigned to Supervisory Committees in the 2007 draft. The original draft included biennial elections for membership on the committees.

The revised bill divides the committees into three groups:

- Supreme Committee: a **legislative** and **decision-making authority** with supervision over the affairs of NGOs and coordination among supervisory resources; decision-making and supervision over the **formation and activities** of NGOs; the power to **revoke** the operating licenses of NGOs; the authority to (dis)approve requests for assembly or demonstrations;**
- Provincial committee;
- City committee.

B. The Supreme Committee

In addition to the five governmental representatives outlined in the 2007 draft, the revised bill specifies a membership made up of representatives of the judiciary, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ministry of Intelligence, Organization of Charity and Devotion, Mosque Affairs, Basij Resistance Forces have been added at the highest level, and the number of representatives of NGOs has been **reduced from three** individuals to **one**. The Supreme Committee is to be presided over by the Ministry of Interior.

If the bill is ratified and becomes law, it will create a Supreme Committee with extralegal power to control the activities of all NGOs in the country.

In addition, to coordinating the supervisory committees and its comprehensive legal authority, the Supreme Committee is tasked with ‘issuing of votes’: “the Supervisory Committee on the Formation and Activities of NGOs **must implement the decisions of the Supreme Committee** at provincial and city levels, supervise the performance of relevant specialized government apparatus, **handle the reports of violations as well as special and public reports** received from NGOs, and issue votes according to the regulations of this law.”^{*} In effect, “issuing votes” gives the Supreme Committee even more *supreme* authority.

As pointed out in the three cases below, decision making over the formation and activities of NGOs, transferring governmental projects, credits and facilities, and any participation at international assemblies must take place with the decision of the Supreme Committee. In fact, the Supreme Committee is superior institute to the NGOs and their networks and can always violate any decision by their board of directors.

As a result, the NGOs could come to have a supreme institute for legislation and decision-making. Instead of having legislative authority, the board of directors and the staff of each NGO will have to comply with the Supreme Committee. It is interesting that the local and provincial Supervisory Committees must also comply with the Supreme Committee: they are executors of their decisions.

C. Resistance is Futile: NGOs Must Comply

In the second chapter dealing with the rights and duties of NGOs, article 4, a number of provisions were added to the 2007 draft specifying that NGOs must fully comply with the

* These are in addition to other legislative responsibilities noted in the fourth chapter of the revised bill, such as legislation for organizing NGOs whose field of work or sphere is unknown.

** Emphasis ours

decisions of the Supreme Committee.

1) **Any membership in international organizations and any involvement in international activities must take place with the permission of the Supreme Committee.** The purpose of any international cooperation and activity is not limited to the execution of contracts and providing financial aid, but participation in conferences and educational trainings abroad must also be approved by the Supreme Committee. These international organizations also include U.N. agencies.

2) Any decision for distribution of credits and facilities to NGOs takes place within the framework of policies and decisions by the Supreme Committee.

3) Issuing permission for registration and authorization for NGOs and networks is the responsibility of the committees supervising the formation and the Supreme Committee.

4) The Supreme Committee receives the power to make decisions about the involuntary dissolution of the organization. To date, only the courts have had this authority.

D. Public Supervision? No Way...

Contrary to article 182 of the Development Plan, approved in 2000 by Parliament, which regarded the “promotion of organized public supervision of government institutions” as one of the duties of NGOs, the bill that will be brought to the floor does not regard this to be a function of NGOs. In addition, according to the preamble written on the bill, the objective of the new law in its entirety is as follows:

- Legal intervention in relations between NGOs and other spheres,
- Control of the relations of NGOs, distancing them from the political arena and from criticism of political power,
- Control of international relationships, intervention in the relations between NGOs and their stakeholders, and ultimately arrogating the final say over the nature of the involvement of stakeholders in decision-making.

The ultimate objective is to transfer the approval of the formation of NGOs and their supervision to security-based judicial and military apparatuses, representatives of the parliament, Basij, and all ideological organizations affiliated with the government. This new law would undermine one of the key duties of any NGO: public scrutiny of government and power. It would also take away the power of the staff, stakeholders, and board or directors to supervise their own organizations. One of the main concerns of the framers of this bill is the sphere of political and international relations of the NGOs. The new law would significantly interfere in self-rule and independent relations, turning NGOs into mere executors of government plans. Contrary to article 182 of 2000 Development Plan Act, no framework is foreseen for the NGOs’ function as a check on power.

A review of the process of changes made since 2007, when the first proposed plan was prepared, illustrates that these changes have been fully directed toward security and military control and the reduction of the power of NGOs. Recent changes represent a continuation of a year and a half of suppressing the development of a public civil rights movement. The experiences of the

security and military forces in suppressing this movement were used to inform changes to the bill.

E. What is an NGO?

Definition of Organization. In the 2007 draft, an NGO was defined in a single paragraph. In the bill about to come to the floor, it is now a complete article. In the new bill, importantly, an NGO is an organization established by observing the following regulations [meaning provisions stated in the proposed law] within the framework of the constitution, and the ideological, and ethical foundations of the Islamic Republic of Iran. This new definition of NGO, in fact, goes

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beyond the constitutional framework by placing the regulations stated in the bill over those of the constitution. It also sets the ethical and social values to those of the Islamic Republic of Iran, which are ill-defined and open to interpretation. In this way, **the law would give free reign to arbitrary interpretations and approvals as well as involuntary dissolutions.**

The Status of “Humanitarian” in an NGO. Provision 4 of the first paragraph of the 2007 draft defined the concept of humanitarian as “the activities that the ‘organization’ carries on without attention to race, religion, gender, age, and occupation, and with the aim of improving living conditions.” The term *humanitarian* was deleted

from the definition of NGOs in the revised bill. **The most important reason for removing this provision was its defense of the equality of religions, ethnicities, and minorities.** In fact, one of the reasons for judicial prosecution of organizations such as the Defenders of Human Rights Center is this center’s defense of the Baha’i. Even with the changes to Article 1 in the definition of organization and emphasis on the ethical values of the Islamic Republic of Iran, the concerns over defending Baha’is and other minorities remain. **With the rising awareness of human rights among Iranians, the rights and defense of Baha’is and other ethnic and religious minorities has entered into the public discourse.** This fact worries the radical forces in the government to such an extent that they have deleted the definition of humanitarian organizations from the bill.

Nonpolitical Nature of NGOs. In defining the nonpolitical nature of NGOs, the 2007 draft defines it as “the absence of political activity as a legal entity ‘organization,’ in such a way as to not be bound by Article 1 of the Law of Political Parties.” Article 1 of the Political Parties Act defines a political party and defines the objective of a political party as gaining political power.* According to the 2007 draft individuals in NGOs are not prohibited from political activity, rather they cannot conduct activities in order to gain political power. They could, however, engage in criticism and analysis, among other activities. This article has been altered to such an extent in the revised bill that it prohibits an NGO from any political activity, going beyond Article 1 of the Political Parties Act: “provision 5 – nonpolitical: defined as neither conducting any activity included in Article 1 of the Political Parties Act, **nor participating in social and political forums as an NGO to influence critical positions and campaign in favor or against individuals and political movements.**”**

* Article 1 of Political Parties Act defines party as “an institute or organization organized within a political structure, which is comprised of real individuals pursuing a similar objective, and it has a specific bylaw and seeks to gain public power while observing the principles of the constitution.”

** The emphasis is from Arseh Sevom

It is quite clear that the primary concern of the framers of these changes is the suppression of activities critical of the administration and to prevent opposition and dissent.

The revised bill contains an additional paragraph which defines “lack of organizational affiliation with political parties, organizations, and groups deemed illegal and hostile by authorities” as a condition for members on the Founding Board and the Board of Directors, as well as the director general, and the inspectors of NGOs.

At the present, **nearly all political organizations and parties have been officially declared illegal** by the Ministry of Interior (which according to law is not authorized to do so, but the Ministry of Information regards the viewpoints of the Ministry of Interior as legal in this context and engages in arrests and interrogations based on their proclamations). Those organizations which have not been declared illegal, such as the Association of Combatant Clerics, have found that their activities are treated as illegal. **This new prohibition on political activities would purge all NGOs of any individual who was at one point affiliated with nearly any political organization.**

The Registration of NGOs. In the 2007 draft, the registration document of these organizations has been defined as follows: “a document issued by the General Department of Corporate Registration and Industrial Ownership by observing the principles of this law for the formation of an ‘organization’ or a ‘network.’” This paragraph was removed in the revised bill, thereby undermining articles 584 and 585 of Iran’s Trade Law. In place of these, two paragraphs were added making it impossible for any NGO to be easily registered under the official laws of the country.

”Any perspective against the government and the governmental apparatus by NGOs is permitted in private meetings, but criticism in the media must take into account some considerations. It is not appropriate to undermine the system through criticism in the media, and such criticism must take into account some considerations so as not to provide ammunition to the enemy.” (Ali Reza Afshar)

In addition, the involuntary revocation order of permits for NGOs can now be carried out at the request of the Supervisory Committees, rather than by court order. In the revised bill, all organizations need to obtain permission in order to initiate their activities.

According to the existing laws of the country, the revocation of permits falls outside the purview of the Ministry of Interior, and at the very least requires a court order. In fact, any NGO could previously begin work and activities after a simple registration. Legally, even if the Ministry of Interior did not issue a permit for the activity of NGOs, organizations could be legally active, but without the privileges of an organization with a permit. By

approving this plan, however, the State Organization for Registration of Deeds and Properties is legally prohibited from registering NGOs prior to approval by the Supervisory Committee, and the initiation of activities is only possible after a permit is issued.* According to the revised bill, any organization which seeks to be registered must first be approved by the Supervisory Committee. The State Organization for Registration of Deeds and Properties is now obligated to register only that group of NGOs with a permit from the Supervisory Committee.

One of the salient points, which implies the control of all active NGOs, is that according to

* In the second added paragraph on the registration and activity of NGOs it is emphasized that” the permission for activity is a permission which is issued for the NGO’s activities to commence after the registration of an NGO through the authorities noted in this law.

chapter 5, all NGOs which were previously registered and are still active must adjust themselves to the framework of this new law. Failure to follow up two months after the approval of the plan will be regarded as a lack of intent to continue activities. The organization's registration number will be revoked upon a request by the Supreme Committee from State Organization for Registration of Deeds and Properties. In this way, **all organizations must either be active within the framework of the new regulations or their activities will become illegal** by the revocation of their registration number.

Not only does this process run contrary to the official State Trade Laws, but it is also in complete opposition to article 26 of the constitution which states that any individual could take action to form an organization which does not oppose the principles of freedom, independence, and the foundation of the Islamic Republic.

Existing NGOs Will No Longer Exist. If this bill becomes law, many of the directors, the staff of the board of directors, or the inspectors of these organizations would be deemed guilty by today's decision makers for having communications with organizations and parties that were recently banned. By redefining what it means for an NGO to be political and by making formerly legal organizations and parties illegal, the framers of the revised bill are paving the way to revoke the permits of most existing NGOs, thus outlawing their existence.

Lack of Immunity of NGOs in Providing Specialized Criticism on the Activities of the Government Apparatus. In the 2007 draft, paragraph J, article 1, a fact-finding mission was anticipated which was to be comprised of representatives of NGOs and their networks. The responsibility of this mission was to pose questions regarding the activities of the government apparatus and public institutions, review the findings, and announce the results to the pertinent groups. The foreseen fact-finding missions were to have been elected by NGOs and their networks and were originally intended to review issues reported by NGOs and inform their stakeholders of the results. The paragraph authorizing their formation was completely removed from the revised bill. This means that the activities of the government apparatus and public institutions must not be questioned by NGOs. The responsibility for investigating violations has been placed in the hands of the new supervisory committees, a clear conflict of interests.

Ali Reza Afshar, first deputy of social and cultural affairs of the Ministry of Interior, in a meeting of NGOs and representatives of the Ministry of Interior, announced that NGOs do not have the right to criticize the government in the media and in public arenas.*

The Financial Resources of NGOs. In the 2007 draft, an NGO could have obtained a maximum of 60% of its annual budget from governmental resources. This was removed (article six of chapter five) from the revised bill. In the revised bill, NGOs could obtain 100% of their financial resources through the government; paving the way for the complete dependency of these organizations on the government. Considering the removal of this limitation in obtaining financial resources alongside the decision-making function of the Supervisory Committees, and the prohibition on execution of contracts with foreign international organizations, it is clear that

* Mr. Afshar said, "Any perspective against the government and the governmental apparatus by NGOs is permitted in private meetings, but criticism in the media must take into account some considerations." He emphasized, "it is not appropriate to undermine the system through criticism in the media, and such criticism must take into account some considerations so as not to provide ammunition to the enemy." <http://www.jamejamonline.ir/newstext.aspx?newsnum=100888509517>

the proposed plan makes NGOs mere tools in service of the government. This accounts for the statement by Ali Reza Afshar at the meeting with NGOs that “Basij and jihadist camps are the greatest public associations.”*

NGOs and Government Relations. In the 2007 draft, chapter five, on the rights and duties of NGOs, articles 13 to 17 reaffirmed the responsibilities of the government to provide unclassified information to NGOs and networks, utilizing the advisory services of these organizations and their related networks, partaking in the process of decision-making and supervision over the performance of governmental and public sectors, and transferring the execution of specialized governmental projects to these organizations. The changes made to the draft are such that it creates no obligation for the government to perform these duties and leaves it as a possibility rather than an obligation. The unavoidable conclusion is that NGOs would have to be compliant to the authoritarian government in order to take part in these processes of decision-making, project management, to receive funding, or to obtain permission from the Supreme Committee or the Supervisory Committee to communicate with other NGOs.

The government’s responsibility in providing unclassified information to NGOs is pointed out in article 13 of the revised bill as “government apparatuses are obliged to cooperate within the framework of principles and regulation.” In articles 14 and 15 of the 2007 draft it was emphasized that the government was responsible to engage NGOs and networks in the process of decision-making, and it was responsible to transfer specialized projects. In the Parliament Specialized Committee Revised Bill, the terms “responsible” and “obligated” turned into “can.”

F. Revised Bill Circumvents International Principles

The Relations of NGOs and International Organizations and the Agencies of the United Nations. In the 2007 draft article 29, it was pointed out that the activities of foreign and international organizations in Iran are the responsibility of the National Committee. At that time, there was no participation by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Intelligence in the structural composition of the National Committee. This paragraph was transformed to paragraph 28 emphasizing that “issuing **permission and supervision over foreign or international NGOs seeking to carry out their activities inside the Islamic Republic of Iran** or the **execution of contracts** with governmental apparatuses, public institutions, and domestic NGOs falls under the **responsibilities of the Supreme Committee** and may take place with the permission of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Intelligence and the specialized governmental apparatus.” In this way, not only are the Ministry of Intelligence and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs involved in the composition of the Supreme Committee for decision-making, but they are also the main sources of inquiry with regard to decision-making for executing contracts with international organizations, which of course includes U.N. agencies. This extends to **participation in conferences and educational training sessions abroad.****

If ratified, the new plan would give full authority to the Supreme Committee, allowing it to

* Ibid

** “Provision 1 – Membership in international organizations and any international cooperation and activity such as executing contracts or agreements, receiving financial help, and participation in conferences and educational sessions abroad is contingent upon receiving permission from the Supreme Committee.”

“Provision 2 – NGOs are responsible to inform the Supreme Committee of all details and receive permission before executing contracts or receiving aid – be it cash or non-cash – from agencies affiliated with the UN and other contributing sources, including real and legal entities.”

“Provision 3 – Upon receiving a request and completing the documentations, and after making inquiries from the Ministry of Intelligence and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Supreme Committee is responsible to declare its decision within a maximum of two months.”

revoke the permit of an organization simply because one of its members has participated in a conference abroad without permission. Mr. Afshar's statements concerning the status of the Basij as a model NGO in the consultative meeting with NGOs confirms that the government seeks to prevent the involvement of independent participants at international meetings and conferences, replacing them with people from NGOs that are affiliated with the government. If this bill is ratified, it would run contrary to all international principles, preventing all independent participation by Iranian NGOs on the international stage. Independent associations at the UN are permitted to receive consultative positions and participate independently. Today, the status of NGOs at international institutions and at the United Nations has been promoted to the same level as that of governments. Preventing the participation of independent Iranian NGOs at the meetings of the United Nations will cause damage that will not be easily reparable.

3. CONCLUSION

This analysis reveals efforts by the hardline government to operate outside the law, silence opposition, and prevent the public of Iran from participating as citizens in their society. If ratified, the new law will create an extralegal committee that damages any pretense at participative government that remained. Arseh Sevom urges members of Parliament to resist this bill and calls for civil society defenders to participate in discussion and debate so that the public can be informed about these changes to the law. We also call for the international community to protest the ratification of the bill entitled *The Establishment and Supervision of NGOs*.



ABOUT ARSEH SEVOM

Arseh Sevom (Third Sphere) is a non-governmental organization established in 2010 in Amsterdam, aiming to promote peace, democracy, and human rights. The organization's objective is to help build the capacity of organizations and encourage the development of a vigorous third sphere of civil activities. Cooperation among civil society organizations is key to building a strong and coherent civil rights movement that can thrive and succeed. Arseh Sevom aims to become a hub for organizations and individuals working together towards the common goal of free, open, and peaceful Persian-speaking communities. Arseh Sevom seeks partnerships with existing organizations and also seeks to increase the vibrancy of civil society by encouraging its development.

Human and civil rights belong to all sectors of society and to all individuals. Arseh Sevom promotes the advancement of rights for people of all beliefs, genders, ethnicities, non-violent political affiliations, and more. A key aim for Arseh Sevom is to work with individuals and organizations to amplify their actions and efforts in the promotion of human and civil rights.

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Human rights organizations and defenders in Iran have found themselves under attack, while abuses of basic human rights have continued. The unrest since the flawed 2009 presidential election has resulted in random and targeted arrests along with a shifting legal landscape that endangers academics and civil society activists in particular by outlawing their contact with international organizations and funding sources. Despite this, we are currently witnessing a transformation of civil society into a growing and creative civil rights movement.

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To make the transition to a more open society, it is important to address the cultural and political roadblocks to the implementation of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Arseh Sevom aims to further the efforts of Iran's civil rights movement by working with its leaders to build capacity and address future needs and developments. The group also plans to develop advocacy tools to address the attitude to human rights among intellectuals, activists, and the general public.

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