

[Home](#)

Open Letter by Shirin Ebadi to President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad

Sun 7 06 2009

[print version](#) 

Shirin Ebadi, the Chair of the Defenders for Human Rights Center has issued an open letter to President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, requesting the removal of a ban placed on the operation of the DHRC, and an end to security and political pressures on civil, political and human rights activists by governmental bodies and officials in his administration. In this letter, Ebadi has reviewed the pressures imposed on the members of the Defenders of Human Rights Center over the



past six months. She has further asked the President if these actions and pressures, which are all in contradiction to the laws of the Islamic Republic of Iran, are in fact in line with the best national interests of the government and the country. The letter issued by Shirin Ebadi appears below:

The honorable President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad,

As you know, after the victory of the Revolution in February 1979, limitations were placed on female judges and they were disallowed from serving in this position. As such, I was forced to resign from my position as a Judge, in which I took great pride. As an Iranian woman I felt it my duty to work toward the realization of human rights, which is aspiration resulting as a result of continuous human struggle over the past several centuries. As such, with the cooperation and collaboration of a number of social activists and human rights lawyers, I took steps to establish the Society for the Protection of Children's Rights, the Defenders of Human Rights Center, and the Organization for Mine Cleanup.

After receiving the Nobel Peace Prize, and given the critical situation of our country, I felt it my national and religious duty as a human being to work even harder for the realization of human rights in our country, because clearly the receipt of such an award brings with it certain responsibilities.

Of course, I should mention that when I received the Nobel Peace Prize, I did not receive much kindness from officials who were in power at that time. Still I took steps to set up a human rights organization. According to the law no permit is required for the establishment of organizations, irrespective of their focus or activity. Article 26 of the Constitution and the "regulations governing the establishment of political parties and organizations", both state that no permits are required to establish organizations. Clearly this is the case with several organizations and political entities which are active and have seen no reason for requesting a permit for the purpose of their carrying out their activities. These include: the Society of Resisting Clerics, the Society of Qom Seminarians, Abadgaran political party, to name only a few. Still in order to benefit from the advantages of being registered, we requested a permit on February 2004 from the Commission on Article 10 on the Registration of Political Parties [and organizations] within the Ministry of the Interior. In September of 2006, the Political Deputy of the Ministry of the Interior announced that our request for a permit was approved by the Commission.

Despite all this, the Ministry of the Interior has not abided by its duty as defined in Article 9

of the Law on Operations of Political Parties which was adopted as law by the Parliament in 1981 and has to date refused to provide the not provided a permit for the operation of the Defenders of Human Rights Center with a permit for operation. This has taken place despite the fact that the Defenders of Human Rights Center, due to its membership in the International Federation of Human Rights, has been registered as an international human rights entity.

It is worth mentioning that the Defenders of Human Rights Center has been conducting its human rights and civil activities for over 8 years. With the collaboration and cooperation of political, social and cultural activists we have established two important institutions, "the Committee to Defend Free, Fair and Healthy Elections," and "the National Council on Peace." Most recently, in March of this year another important effort to end the execution of minors who commit crimes while still under the age of 18 has been launched by the Defenders of Human Rights Center and aims to work on this issue at the national and international levels. While at the start of the operation of the Defenders of Human Rights Center pressures were imposed on us, from different sectors, but mostly from those associated with the state, still the last four years and especially after the end of the Presidency of George W. Bush in the US and the coming to power of the Democrats and President Obama, I along with my colleagues at the DHRC have come under unprecedented pressures and limitations. It is regretful that the rights of Iranian citizens have turned into a bargaining chip for the political games of the government carried out against foreign powers.

Perhaps you are aware that as human rights defenders we have objected to the aggressive policies of war adopted by the government of George W. Bush with all our might. We have condemned the policies in support of war from all the platforms available to us. Of course this claim has been documented in many important centers and universities, research centers and in the international press. At the same time, we have worked tirelessly to ensure peace and democracy in our country and have taken full advantage of all civil and legal means in doing so.

We invite you to judge based on your conscience whether the actions and activities of the Defenders of Human Rights Center has not work to defend national interests, and are they not more in line with religious and human rights teachings than the actions of some security institutions under your direction which are consistently violating the principles of human rights and in so doing are presenting a bleak picture of the situation of our country at the international level?

With a brief examination of the pressures and limitations placed on myself and the members of the Defenders of Human Rights Center, any objective onlooker will understand the level of pressure your government has placed on the defenders of human rights in Iran and the illegal and inhumane treatment you have imposed on them. These extreme pressures have taken place despite the fact that our government in line with the UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders, voted and adopted by the UN members including Iran in 1999, has committed to cooperate with human rights defenders, and to provide them with immunity from prosecution with respect to their human rights activities.

I would like to only address a portion of the pressures which we as human rights defenders have faced in the past 6 months:

1) On December 21, 2008 security officials shut down the offices of the Defenders of Human Rights Center, without presenting a court order allowing them to do so. It is worth mentioning that on that day the Defenders of Human Rights Center had planned to hold a ceremony in honor of the anniversary of the Universal Declarations on Human Rights.

2) On December 22 and December 29, 2008 my offices were searched by individuals claiming to be from the office of taxation and all my client's case files, computers and CDs in the office as well as my personal writings and documents which were unrelated to my taxes were illegally seized by these officials. While much of the property seized has since been returned, it remains unclear which documents have yet to be returned and which documents still remain in the possession of these security officials.

3) The former secretary of the Defenders of Human Rights Center, Jinous Sobhani, was arrested on January 14, 2009, for no reason. She was released on bail after enduring 55 days in detention.

4) On January 1, 2009, under the pretense of defending the people of Gaza, a mob of basiji students attacked my building where my home and offices are both located. The mob shouted violent slogans against me and wrote similar slogans on the walls outside. Despite the fact that the police were present on the scene, they did nothing to stop the mob, and only watched as the violence unfolded. This occurred despite the fact that the Palestinian Human Rights Organization, which is supported by all Palestinian political groups, had condemned the closure of the offices of the Defenders of Human Rights Center and had invited me to travel to Palestine and the Gaza Strip.

5) By pressuring another secretary who worked for the Defenders of Human Rights Center, security officials have forced her to resign her position. Additionally she has been denied a permit allowing her to carry out her legal internship and clerkship positions as part of her studies to become a lawyer. It is worth mentioning that she was pressured despite the fact that she had passed her bar exam and the only reason she is currently facing pressures and is denied the opportunity to conduct her required legal internships is because she was employed by my offices.

6) The translator working at my offices too has been pressured and as a result was forced to resign her position at my office.

7) In the last few months several members of the Defenders of Human Rights Center, the Committee to Defend Free, Healthy and Fair Elections and the National Council of Peace have been summoned for interrogation. During these interrogations, they have been encouraged to end their cooperation with the mentioned organizations and efforts.

8) The arrest of Mr. Mehdi Mo'tamdi -Mehr, a member of the Committee on Free, Healthy and Fair Elections, is yet another example of these pressures and the violation of human rights during this period.

9) Attempts to prevent the convening of meetings of several efforts affiliated with the Defenders of Human Rights Center, is yet another example of pressures we have faced during this period. Those scheduled to attend these meetings were contacted by security officials and threatened and in the end the meetings were obstructed and prevented from taking place when police arrived on the scene to disperse those present.

10) The official governmental news agency, the Islamic Republic of Iran News Agency, IRNA has accused me and my daughter of being followers of the Bahai faith. By making these false claims they have attempted to damage my image and influence negatively public perceptions of me.

11) In a special news report, IRNA has accused the Deputy Chair of the Defenders of Human Rights Center of "spreading propaganda against the state," despite the fact that no summons in this relation has been received by her from judiciary officials.

12) Several members of the Defenders of Human Rights Center and the National Council of Peace have been illegally barred from travel outside the country. These actions are yet more examples of human rights violations and the pressures placed on the DHRC.

13) The entrance of security officials into the offices of the Defenders of Human Rights

Center and scuttles that arose as a result are yet further examples of the pressures placed on members of the Defenders of Human Rights Center.

Mr. President,

Are the above actions, which are in complete contradiction with the laws of the Islamic Republic, in line with the best national interests of the state and our country?

Another perplexing question which comes to the mind of any unbiased observer is this: You have repeatedly claimed at the international level that "Iran is the freest country in the world" and seeks to bring kindness and justice to the world and wants to impose a justice order on the world, so how is it that at the national level human rights defenders who have committed no crimes but defending the basic rights of the people, are treated in such an abhorrent manner? I ask you, are such actions reflective of kindness, love, respect for human rights or respect for civil rights of Iranians? Aren't such actions against human rights defenders inside the country who are not seeking to gain political power, who are working only to promote human rights based on their commitment to this cause, and who are utilizing lawful means in promoting their cause, in contradiction to the proclamations of the government of the Islamic Republic at the international level to uphold human rights standards? If defense of human rights is indeed a big sin and a crime, which subjects its defenders and promoters to such criminal pursuit, why then did your government apply last year for membership in UN Council on Human Rights?—a request which of course was denied. I will leave it up to the good citizens of Iran and all those who work for freedoms at the international level to pass judgment with respect to these issues and questions.

Mr. President,

In 2010 Iran will be up for a Universal Periodic Review on Human Rights. One of the important issues addressed in the Universal Periodic Review will be the manner in which Iranian officials and governmental institutions have treated human rights defenders. Clearly it will not be in the national interest to have the negative actions of the government on human rights and the treatment of human rights defenders questioned at the international level.

In the end as a citizen, as a human rights activist, and the Chair of the Defenders of Human Rights Center, I urge you to:

- 1) Take necessary actions to re-open the offices of the Defenders of Human Rights Center; and
- 2) Prevent the continued political and security pressures placed on civil, political and human rights activists by institutions under your leadership.

Shirin Ebadi

Chair, Defenders of Human Rights Center

June 6, 2009