

The Iran Human Rights Documentation Center Condemns Iran's Presentation at the Universal Periodic Review of its Human Rights Record

Geneva, Switzerland (February 19, 2010). The United Nations Human Rights Council reviewed Iran's human rights record this week in Geneva during the 7th Session of the Universal Periodic Review (UPR). On Monday, during a three hour session, the Iranian delegation not only failed to address many concerns of members of the Council but often lied about the human rights situation in Iran. "At times, the Iranian delegation's presentation was an impressive show of double-talk and obfuscation," said Renee Redman, Executive Director of the Iran Human Rights Documentation Center. "At other times, its representatives crudely lied to the Iranian people and the world."

Mohammad Javad Ardashir Larijani, Secretary General of Iran's High Council for Human Rights, led Iran's delegation. Others in the delegation who addressed the Council were Fatemeh Alia, Member of Parliament; Judge Seyed Ali Raeis Sadati, Deputy Minister of Justice; Abbaszadeh Meshkini, Director General, Ministry of Interior; Yonathan Betkolia, the Christian Member of Parliament, and Mahboubeh Mobasheri, Chancellor of Al-Zahra University.

Judge Sadati said that the judiciary in Iran is "independent." He cited to constitutional provisions including those protecting the right to open-court hearings, the requirement that the crime and punishment be explicitly recognized in law, and the presumption of innocence. He stated that under Iranian law, the police may hold a suspect in custody for 24 hours without charge.

Larijani stated that "there are reasonable conditions for prisoners" that include regular meetings with family members and prohibition of all forms of harassment. He boasted that Iran is making an effort to end the use of solitary confinement or to expand the solitary cells to 11 square meters. He stated that, under Iranian law, death sentences are "permissible in the case of serious crimes." He also noted that torture is forbidden under Iranian law.

Meshkini, reportedly responsible for denying permits for opposition demonstrations last summer, characterized the recent presidential election as an exemplary "exposition of democracy." He summed up the elections by stating that there were thousands of government election observers, and that the candidates had observers as well. He blamed "imperialist powers" for interfering in Iran's domestic affairs, and dismissed the demonstrators as "insurgents and law-breakers" whose cases were "duly addressed in competent courts." He also stated that some of the human rights activists were actually spies and terrorists who were inciting hatred and bigotry. He noted there were some "minor illegal actions" taken against detainees, and assured the Council that all defendants had access to the attorneys of their choice.

In response to concerns expressed by members of the Council about the status of Baha'is in Iran, Judge Sadati admitted that Baha'ism is not a recognized religion in Iran but claimed that Baha'is enjoy "full citizenship rights." He stated that Baha'i students are denied entry to universities because they do not meet the entrance requirements and because they are members of a "cult." Larijani stated that "no Baha'i is prosecuted in Iran because he his Baha'i." He purported to explain that Baha'is sometimes enter into cult like activity that they cannot get out of by "their own free will."

IHRDC condemns this deceptive performance by Iran's delegation and urges the international community to not accept the delegation's representations. At the very least, United Nations human rights experts must immediately investigate Iran's prisons, including allegations of rape, torture, and the detention of people for peacefully exercising their rights to freedoms of expression and assembly.

Many of the Iranian delegation's claims are contradicted by evidence found in IHRDC's reports on prison conditions, treatment of Baha'is, and the post-election suppression of dissent in Iran. For example, while Judge Sadati pointed to due process rights and the prohibition of torture set forth in the Iranian Constitution, he failed to address the fact that the regime does not observe those laws. Larijani and Meshkini simply lied when they told the Council that prisoners are allowed regular visits with their families, counsel of their choice, and that they are free from harassment. Most recently, following the June 12 elections, the regime arrested and detained Iranian citizens based merely on their speech and association. They were, and continue to be, held without charges for weeks and sometimes months, without access to lawyers and families, subjected to lengthy periods of solitary confinement and interrogation, and forced to confess to crimes they did not commit. It is estimated that hundreds, if not thousands, languish in prison.

Larijani's off-hand dismissal of human rights activists as terrorists and spies, even if true, would not justify this treatment. Similarly, the truth of his claim that death sentences are reserved for the "most serious crimes" is doubtful given the huge numbers of people executed in Iran. In any case, the delegation failed to explain why the two men summarily executed in January were guilty of crimes committed in connection with post-election demonstrations, yet were arrested long before June 2009.

On Wednesday, the Human Rights Council voted to accept the report of Iran's responses to recommendations made by member nations. Prior to the vote, several nations noted that Iran had disingenuously rejected the recommendations by some nations that United Nations representatives visit the country but accepted the same recommendations made by other countries. The next step in the process will take place in June when the Council will consider the outcome of the review.

IHRDC is an independent nonprofit organization based in New Haven, Connecticut that was founded in 2004 by a group of human rights scholars, activists, and historians. Its staff of human rights lawyers and researchers produce comprehensive and detailed reports on the human rights situation in Iran since the 1979 revolution. IHRDC's goal is to encourage an informed dialogue among scholars and the general public in both Iran and abroad. Its reports, including its most recent on the human rights situation in Iran following the June 12 presidential elections, are available on its website, www.iranhrdc.org.