



# UNITED NATIONS

## Press Release

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### **UN experts gravely concerned by mass arrests in Iran**

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GENEVA – Six independent United Nations experts\* again call upon the Government of the Islamic Republic of Iran to uphold its international obligations to ensure that the human rights of all individuals are protected following the presidential elections in the country.

"We also encourage Iran to honour its standing invitation to the UN experts to conduct official visits to the country, by accepting the outstanding requests made by several Special Procedures mandate holders to allow international independent scrutiny of the current situation," said the six experts in a joint statement.

Despite recent concerns expressed by five UN experts and those expressed by the High Commissioner for Human Rights, about the possible use of excessive police force and violence employed by some militia members during opposition protests in the past weeks, freedom of expression and peaceful assembly continue to be undermined and the situation of human rights defenders is increasingly precarious.

#### **Freedom of expression and the situation of human rights defenders**

Hundreds of individuals, including human rights defenders, journalists, students, clerics and opposition supporters have been injured and arrested in recent weeks following clashes with security forces and members of the Basij militia. The safety of defenders has deteriorated considerably in the aftermath of the elections, most significantly in reaction to denunciations of human rights abuses reportedly committed by security forces. Interference with broadcasts and online coverage of protests, the expulsion of several foreign journalists as well as restrictions on the freedom of journalists to move and report freely has stifled freedom of expression in the country.

#### **Excessive use of force**

Since 12 June 2009, at least 20 people have been killed and hundreds of others seriously injured in clashes with security forces which allegedly used live ammunition and rubber bullets to disperse protests. The experts recall that the

use of force must be exercised with restraint and only once non-violent means have been exhausted. In addition, the use of firearms by the security forces is prohibited, except in self-defence or defence of others from an imminent threat of death or serious injury. Independent investigations into the actions of the security forces have yet to be carried out.

### **Mass arrests**

The legal basis for the arrests of journalists, human rights defenders, opposition supporters and scores of demonstrators remains unclear, giving rise to concerns of arbitrary detentions of individuals legitimately exercising their right to freedom of expression, opinion and assembly.

The majority of those arrested are reportedly being detained at Tehran's Evin prison, where many are being held incommunicado without charge or access to legal representation or their families. The experts are concerned about the risk of enforced disappearances given that the whereabouts of many of those arrested remain unknown.

The six experts reiterate their grave concern about reports of killings, ongoing arrests, use of excessive police force and the ill-treatment of detainees. The experts strongly urge the Government of Iran to uphold its obligations under international law to protect human rights in the country.

(\*) The six human rights experts are Manuela Carmena Castrillo, Chairperson-Rapporteur of the Working Group on arbitrary detention; Philip Alston, Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions; Frank La Rue, Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of the right to freedom of opinion and expression; Manfred Nowak, Special Rapporteur on torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment; Margaret Sekaggya, Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders; Santiago Corcuera, Chairperson-Rapporteur of the working group on enforced and involuntary disappearances.