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PRESS RELEASE

Iran: UN Human Rights Council Reviews Situation for Free Expression

As the United Nations Human Rights Council (HRC) meets today in Geneva to engage in its Universal Periodic Review of Iran, ARTICLE 19 again raises serious concerns about the failure of the Islamic Republic to respect and promote freedom of expression.

ARTICLE 19 made a formal submission to the HRC in September 2009, ahead of the Universal Periodic Review (UPR).

The Iranian Constitution contains a number of restrictions on freedom of expression, as well as harsh interpretations of what might be considered “*detrimental to the fundamental principles of Islam or the rights of [the] public*”. ARTICLE 19 is also expressly concerned about the punitive Press Law which restricts content and uses bureaucratic obligatory licensing procedures to control publishing, media and individual writers. Media legislation is used to silence opposition voices from political dissidents and human rights defenders. There are also particularly harsh penalties for transgressions of these laws, which include imprisonment, flogging and banning.

ARTICLE 19 monitors the arbitrary arrests and harassment of journalists, writers and bloggers, along with travel restrictions placed on those attempting to travel within and outside the country. We note that these practices go against international standards for freedom of expression contained in the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, which Iran has ratified.

ARTICLE 19 criticises the state monopoly on television and radio broadcasting, and the prohibition of private or independent broadcasters as being inconsistent with the right to freedom of expression. In addition, ARTICLE 19 notes that the prohibition on satellite channels restricts incoming foreign news and that there is widespread internet censorship.

ARTICLE 19 condemns these severe violations of freedom of expression in Iran and urges the HRC to call on the Islamic Republic to account for its actions. Dr Agnès Callamard, ARTICLE 19 Executive Director recommends that the HRC advise the Iranian government to: “*repeal Iranian legislation that acts to unfairly restrict freedom of expression; abolish criminal punishment under media legislation and replace these with civil punishment; reform the licensing system for print and*

broadcast media; stop the arbitrary arrests and harassment of journalists and bloggers; and refrain from internet censorship.”

ARTICLE 19 urges the Iranian Government to take immediate action to ensure that the right to freedom of expression and freedom of information is protected, and that writers, journalists, editors, bloggers and activists enjoy the full freedom to express their views and share information.

NOTES TO EDITORS:

- To read a Farsi version of this press release, please visit: <http://www.article19.org/pdfs/press/iran-farsi-un-human-rights-council-reviews-situation-for-free-expression.pdf>
- For the full text of the submission, see <http://www.article19.org/pdfs/submissions/iran-article-19-submission-to-the-universal-periodic-review.pdf>
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- ARTICLE 19 is an independent human rights organisation that works around the world to protect and promote the right to freedom of expression. It takes its name from Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which guarantees free speech.