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ARTICLE 19

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Iran: Opposition Presidential Candidates Blocked from Equitable Access to the Media

ARTICLE 19 is concerned that opposition candidates, contesting Iran's presidential election on 12 June 2009, are being hampered in their campaigning by the Government's intermittent blocking of social networking sites and closure of independent newspapers.

Mir-Hossein Mousavi had been using the social networking site Facebook as a campaign tool, with over five thousand online supporters, when the Government blocked access to the site within the country in May. Mousavi is a reformist candidate who previously served as Iranian Prime Minister in the 1980s and is considered the main opposition candidate to the conservative incumbent, President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad.

Ahmadinejad's challengers are increasingly turning to new technologies, including blogs, websites and text messaging, to spread their campaign messages and such internet filtering effectively disrupts opposition and silences alternative voices.

Reformist candidates have also protested that they have not been given equitable access to the airwaves for campaigning. The state-run national radio and television network (IRIB) has reportedly offered preferred coverage to conservative candidates. Satellite television is banned in Iran, leaving terrestrial television provided by the IRIB as the only means for accessing televised news.

Furthermore, the Government has repeatedly shut down independent and reformist newspapers, which has also disrupted opposition campaigning. On 16 May, *Yas-e No*, a well-known reformist paper was closed while printing its second issue. The paper was reported to have supported Mousavi's campaign in its first issue.

"ARTICLE 19 calls on the Islamic Republic of Iran to ensure that all political candidates are given access to the print, broadcast and online media in order to run their campaigns," says ARTICLE 19 Executive Director, Dr Agnès Callamard. *"The electorate should be free to access information on all presidential candidates in order to make informed and considered choices at the ballot box".*

ARTICLE 19 also notes that the Republic of Iran has ratified the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, which stipulates the right to freedom of expression. ARTICLE 19 calls on Iran to uphold the principles of the ICCPR and ensure free expression as an integral part of the country's election process.

NOTES TO EDITORS:

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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.