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Middle East/North Africa - Iran

OPEN LETTER

Open letter to the eight candidates in the Islamic Republic's 11th presidential election

22 May 2013

Reporters Without Borders has written an open letter to the eight approved candidates in the Islamic Republic of Iran's 11th presidential election, requesting that they publicly commit themselves to support freedom of information.

The list of eight approved candidates published yesterday by the Guardian Council – whose members are directly chosen and appointed by Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei – offers little hope that the 14 June election will be conducted in a clear and transparent manner.

In 2009, the presidential was stolen the day after the polling. This year's election is being stolen before the official campaign even starts.

The Iranian regime openly flouts freedom of information, a fundamental freedom that is essential for free and fair elections. During President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's two terms, respect for human rights conditions has declined dramatically in the Islamic Republic.

Over the past eight years, more than 200 newspapers have been shut down and more than 300 journalists and netizens have been arbitrarily arrested, tortured and sentenced to lengthy prison terms.

To ensure that its recommendations do not go unheard and to put the issue of respect for basic rights at the centre of the election campaign, Reporters Without Borders is today issuing a challenge to the candidates.

It is calling on them to undertake to free all imprisoned journalists and netizens and to ensure that Iran observes its international obligations to respect freedom of information. These include the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, which Iran ratified in 1975.

To the Candidates,

The Guardian Council yesterday officially approved your candidacies for the presidency of the Islamic Republic of Iran in the election to be held on 14 June. Reporters Without Borders, an international organization for defence of freedom of information, wishes to call your attention to the intolerable lack of respect for this basic right in your country. Violations include the repression of journalists and netizens, and the complete impunity afforded those responsible.

Reporters Without Borders asks that all presidential candidates pledge openly and unconditionally to respect freedom of information, and to establish the rule of law in Iran. These are demands of the Iranian people, and constitute essential conditions for Iran to emerge from isolation.

Specifically, Reporters Without Borders asks all candidates to commit themselves to the following actions:

- Demand the unconditional release of the 52 journalists and netizens who are today imprisoned in Iran. Some of them were arrested following President Ahmadinejad's

disputed reelection in June 2009 and remain incarcerated four years later. Their only crime is to have exercised their constitutional right to freedom of information. This right will not be observed in Iran as long as arrests and arbitrary detentions remain a systematic practice by Iranian authorities intent on muzzling the media and silencing civil society.

- Begin a fundamental reform of media law, aimed in particular at decriminalizing press law violations and guaranteeing freedom of information without discrimination based on language, religion or political opinion. A revision of the 1986 press law (amended in 2000 and 2009 to include online publications) is urgently needed. The law allows authorities to verify that the media “do not damage the foundation of the Islamic Republic,” “do not insult the Supreme Leader,” and “do not disseminate false information.” Amendments that require online publications to be licensed must be repealed.
- Ensure that Iranian citizens have free, uncensored and unmonitored Internet access. The launching of a “halal Internet” designed to impose a digital apartheid, constitutes a danger for Iran.
- End arbitrary actions and impunity. The murders of dissident journalists must not go unpunished. These cases include the deaths of Ebrahim Zalzadeh, Majid Charif, Mohammed Mokhtari, Mohammed Jafar Pouyandeh and Pirouz Davani, all executed by agents of the Ministry of Intelligence and National Security in November and December 1988. Likewise, the deaths in detention of Zahra Kazemi (2003), Ayfer Serçe (2006), the young blogger Omidreza Mirsayafi and Sattar Beheshti (2012). Those who planned and carried out these crimes must be brought to justice.

As long as these demands go unmet, Iranians will not be able to think of themselves as a free people.

Thank you for your attention to these important matters.

Christophe Deloire
Secretary-General
Reporters Without Borders

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