

Child Soldiers

The use of child soldiers is widespread in the DRC. This is reflected in the charges faced by all the Congolese defendants indicted by the ICC. The DRC has made considerable progress in recent years in releasing child soldiers from the FARDC. But the integration of rebel groups into the FARDC has led to increased numbers of child soldiers in the army. We continue to raise this issue with the DRC authorities.

In 2009, we funded the Congolese children's rights umbrella NGO REJEER to support their lobbying and awareness-raising activities related to the law on child protection, which was passed earlier in the year. We are now focused on pressing for the Ministerial decrees necessary to implement this law.

Freedom of Expression

Journalists continue to face intimidation by local and national authorities. A Radio Okapi journalist was killed in Bukavu in August, the third journalist in three years to be killed. Judicial follow-up in these cases has been either very poor or non-existent. In July, the French broadcaster Radio France Internationale, widely listened to in DRC, had its signal cut by the DRC government who accused the station of demoralising troops fighting in the east. In September, death threats were sent to three female journalists in Bukavu. Revised accreditation letters for international correspondents now state that they are subject to the military penal code, an attempt to limit the circumstances in which they can report on-going military operations. The UK and EU partners, together with the representatives of the US, Canadian and Swiss governments, have formally raised concerns about the security of and working conditions for journalists with the Communications Minister.

Human Rights Defenders

In March, we lobbied for the release of a prominent human rights defenders Floribert Chebeya, from the NGO, "The Voice of the Voiceless". In September, members of the human rights organisation, ASADHO, received multiple threats after publishing a report accusing the Congolese authorities of corruption in Katanga. The president of ASADHO in Katanga was sentenced to one year in prison, in absentia, on 21 September. We continue to follow up on cases of concern.

Iran



It has been a particularly grim year in 2009 for human rights in Iran, largely defined by the government's brutal response to widespread protests after the disputed presidential elections in June. Freedom of assembly was curtailed, and peaceful protestors and political activists were subjected to repeated, well-documented abuses. However, human rights in Iran have been a source of shared concern and widespread criticism for many years, and the post-election crackdown only served to compound these concerns and further illustrate Iran's failure to live up to its international obligations. Iran's people are committed to fighting for the human rights and fundamental freedoms to which their government is committed under international agreements. Yet the reality is that many face harassment and imprisonment for doing so. The international community has a responsibility to speak out in support of these individuals, and to promote human rights wherever violations occur.

Iran is party to four major United Nations human rights treaties: the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination. However, Iran has made a formal reservation to the Convention on the Rights of the Child that it will not apply any of the articles and provisions of the Convention that are incompatible with Islamic law. Iran also has a poor record of cooperation with these treaty bodies; and despite numerous requests, no UN special mandate holder has been granted access to Iran since 2005.

Presidential Elections

The human rights situation in 2009 has been largely defined by the government's response to the disputed result of the presidential elections in June. Intense campaigning between the four rival candidates generated great interest and resulted in a high voting turnout. On 13 June, incumbent President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad was declared the winner by a large margin, sparking allegations of fraud by many Iranians, including three of the four candidates. Massive demonstrations were held across the country in favour of opposition candidate Mir Hossein Moussavi, triggering a disproportionate and brutal reaction from security forces and the



A rally in Tehran following disputed election results in June

government-directed Basij militia. In stark contrast to the excitement and relative openness that had characterised the campaigns, Iran quickly became a scene of violent and systematic human rights violations as police and security forces used excessive force to quell protests and silence dissent. In a televised address to the nation on 19 June, the Supreme Leader called for an end to street protests against the outcome of the election. However, rather than warning security forces to act with restraint and in accordance with the law, he warned that if people continued to take to the streets the consequences would lie with them, seemingly giving the green light to security forces to resort to violence.

Official Iranian government sources say that 35 people were killed during the immediate post-election unrest; others quote much higher figures. In reality the true figure may never be known. The death of 27 year-old Neda Agha-Soltan became the defining image of the protests, after her dying moments, captured on video, were uploaded onto the internet for the world to see.

In the demonstrations that followed, thousands of students, lawyers, journalists, human rights defenders and opposition members were arrested and detained. Most were released without charge, but many of those detained were denied independent legal representation and pressured to make false confessions. The mass trials of approximately 300 individuals were broadcast live on Iranian state television in August, and at least five of the accused were sentenced to death.

Reports of maltreatment and abuse of detainees emerged, and in July, Supreme Leader Ali Khamene'i ordered the closure of Khazirak prison after allegations emerged that some detainees were tortured and raped. To date no transparent and credible investigations have been carried out into any of these allegations, and conditions in detention centres throughout the country remain a source of major concern.

It remains extremely difficult to confirm details about who has been arrested, where they are held, why and

under what circumstances. This uncertainty is partly a consequence of stringent restrictions on freedom of expression and information, including on internet and text-message use. Immediately after the election, access to internet, mobile telephones and text-messaging services was temporarily blocked. Foreign journalists were barred from reporting, and many had their press cards withdrawn or were expelled from the country. These included the BBC's resident correspondent Jon Leyne, effectively closing down the BBC's bureau in Iran. Several Iranian journalists were intimidated, beaten up and arrested, and Canadian-Iranian reporter Maziar Bahari was kept in detention for 118 days, after his camera crew were accused of filming demonstrations. Many reformist newspapers and blogs were closed down, including the *Etemaad-e Melli* newspaper for publishing details of rape and torture allegations. Six months later intimidation by the authorities in all aspects of political life remains prevalent, and sporadic demonstrations continue throughout the capital and other major cities in Iran.

In the worst clashes since the days immediately following the elections, at least 15 protesters were killed and more than 300 arrested on 27 December, when crowds gathered to mark the holy day of Ashura, and mourn the passing of Grand Ayatollah Montazeri. One of those killed was Seyed Ali Moussavi, nephew of defeated election candidate Mir Hossein Moussavi. Accounts of the lack of restraint by the security forces and an excessive use of violence during Ashura, a time of religious commemoration and reflection, are particularly disturbing. As part of further intimidation of the opposition, Emadeddin Baghi, Chairman of the Association for the Defence of the Rights of Political Prisoners, was arrested on 28 December in connection with his human rights activities. Dr Noushin Ebadi, sister of Nobel Peace Prize Laureate Shirin Ebadi, was also arrested in connection with her sister's human rights work. Both arrests constitute unacceptable pressure on two courageous civil society activists, and an attempt to silence the countless individuals in Iran who continue to fight for democracy and respect for fundamental rights.

In attempts to disassociate itself from responsibility, the Iranian regime has repeatedly claimed that the protests and violence were orchestrated by foreign influences. Allegations that protestors were somehow manipulated by Western governments and media are not only without foundation, but an insult to the thousands of Iranians who bravely demanded that their vote be counted in the face of repression. We

have consistently condemned the violence meted out against those who simply ask that their basic freedoms are respected. We have repeatedly made clear our concerns about the deteriorating human rights situation in Iran, and have worked hard alongside partners to ensure a strong response at EU and UN level.

Our concerns about Iran's human rights record remain, as highlighted in last year's report, and the situation has continued to deteriorate in 2009. Many articles in the Iranian Penal Code continue to be used to suppress freedom of expression and association. Extensive use of the death penalty, torture, excessive use of force, unfair trials and legislation, which discriminates against women, remain key areas of international concern.

Death Penalty

Executions in Iran have increased year on year since 2004. Iran executes more people per capita than any other country. An estimated 318 people were put to



Neda Agha-Soltan became the defining image of post-election protests

death in 2009, over 100 of whom were executed in the weeks immediately following the elections. Many basic minimum standards surrounding the application of capital punishment are absent, with prisoners often executed in groups, in public or by inhumane methods, such as stoning. We were deeply shocked to learn of the stoning to death of Vali Azad in March, sentenced to death on charges of adultery.

The UK is concerned that many death sentences are imposed as a result of trials which do not ensure the rights of the accused. Three men, reportedly members of the People's Resistance Movement of Iran (PRMI) were hanged in public in Zahedan on May 30, less than 48 hours after an explosion in a mosque, which the UK condemned. The men were in detention at the time of the bombing; however, officials said they had "confessed" to bringing explosives into the country. Thirteen other reported PRMI members were hanged on 14 July.

Use of the death penalty against persons under 18 at the time of the offense is prohibited by the ICCPR and the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. Iran is a party to these treaties, yet it continues to execute minors. Since 1990, Amnesty International has documented at least 46 juvenile executions in Iran. In many cases, juvenile offenders under sentence of death in Iran are kept in prison until they pass their 18th birthday, after which their executions are scheduled. Upon appeal some have their sentence overturned. Others may be reprieved by the family of the victim and asked to pay compensation, under Sharia law. Some, however, do not benefit from such measures and are consequently executed.

Mola Gol Hassan, executed alongside nine adults on 21 January, was the first of four juvenile offenders to be put to death in 2009. On 1 May, 23 year-old Delara Darabi was hanged after being sentenced to death at the age of 16, and Behnood Shojaee, 17 at the time of his alleged crime, was executed on 10 October, the day recognised by the international community as the World Day against the Death Penalty. Mosleh Zamani was the fourth juvenile offender to be executed in 2009, hanged on 8 December alongside four other unidentified prisoners.

At least seven other minors have been granted temporary stays of execution following international intervention. However, they remain at risk, as do the other 130 minors currently thought to be on death row in Iran.

Women's Rights

According to the latest World Economic Forum Global Gender Gap Report, Iran has dropped from 116 to 128 in the 2009 rankings. The report measures the size of the gender inequality gap in 134 countries, focusing on economic participation, educational attainment, political empowerment, and health and survival. Domestic legislation in Iran remains deeply discriminatory in relation to women. Many articles of the Civil Code discriminate in the areas of marriage, divorce, nationality and custody of children. Under the Penal Code, a woman's testimony is worth half that of a man's, women receive half as much compensation for injury or death, and girls face prosecution as adults at a much younger age than boys.

In 2009, women's groups have become increasingly active in campaigning for change. Various campaigns have been launched by local activists, such as the One Million Signatures Campaign, and the Maydaan Movement, which campaigns for gender equality and an end to stoning. However, as the popularity of both campaigns has increased, so too has repression and harassment of their members. Throughout the course

Delara Darabi: Prisoner of Colours



After six years on death row for a crime many believe she did not commit, Delara Darabi was executed on 1 May at the age of 23. Human rights defenders in Iran and around the world campaigned tirelessly for her release, and Delara quickly became the face

of juvenile offenders on death row in Iran. Her execution was unexpected. Not only had there been no formal notification 48 hours before the hanging, as required under Iranian law, but just a fortnight earlier, Ms Darabi had been granted a two-month stay of execution by the head of the judiciary. News of her execution attracted domestic outrage and widespread international condemnation. We publicly expressed sadness and outrage at Delara's death, and as part of concerted EU action we summoned the Iranian Ambassador to strongly condemn the actions of the Iranian authorities and urge them to abolish the death penalty for minors once and for all. For more information, see: <www.savedelara.com>.



Protestors at the Iranian Embassy in Ankara hold a portrait of executed Kurdish activist Ehsan Fattahian

of 2009, countless women were arrested or prosecuted for non-violent activity to promote women's rights, and women played a courageous and prominent role in the post-election protests. As a result, at least 11 members of the One Million Signatures Campaign were summoned to the Revolutionary Courts for questioning. Many more members of the group have been banned from leaving the country.

Minorities

Repression of Iran's religious minorities has continued in 2009. This can involve persecution, discrimination, restrictions on employment, and expulsion from university and high school.

Last year's report drew attention to seven Bahá'ís arrested in early 2008. Despite concerted international efforts on their behalf, the group remains in detention. They have been formally charged with a range of offences, including "spreading corruption on earth" but have yet to stand trial. In February, the Iranian government declared all Bahá'í administrative arrangements illegal. Christians attempting to proselytise were often arrested, and converts from Islam risked harassment and arrest. In March, two Christians, Marzieh Amirzadeh and Maryam Rostampour, were arrested and detained for 259 days without charge. Despite repeated attempts to force them to recant their faith, the women refused, even when threatened with the death penalty. Two Sunni religious representatives were killed in Kurdistan at the beginning of October, and pressure against

secular religious leaders is on the rise. The religious intolerance of the regime also has an impact on Shiite groups that do not share the official version of Islam promoted by the authorities.

Members of Iran's ethnic minority groups from the Ahwaz, Kurdistan, Khuzestan, Baluchistan and Turkmenistan regions also face increasing intimidation. Large numbers have been detained on charges of endangering national security. The days after the election result saw a series of mass executions in Iran's border regions, viewed by many as a warning sign to the local populations. On 11 November, Ehsan Fattahian was executed after a ten-year sentence to be served in exile was increased to a death sentence by a higher court. We expressed concern at reports that Fattahian was tortured during detention, as well as irregularities during his trial. Many members of minority groups remain on death row accused of terrorism, treason, or acting against national security.

Freedom of Expression

According to Article 19, Iran is believed to have more journalists and bloggers in prison than any other country. It is clear that the Iranian government has failed to fulfill its international obligations to protect the right to freedom of expression. Restrictions on print media, broadcasting and reporting, and arbitrary arrests and harassment of journalists and bloggers continued apace in 2009, worsening significantly after the June elections. Legislation was proposed that would make the creation of blogs promoting

Glimmers of hope in defending human rights

Despite the danger they face, human rights defenders, lawyers and NGOs within Iran are committed to fighting for the fundamental rights and freedoms of all Iranians. While it is difficult to measure the direct impact, they tell us that international pressure does make a difference and can help them to secure a positive outcome in individual cases. To that end we raise our human rights concerns with the Iranian authorities whenever possible. We did so on at least 70 occasions in 2009, either bilaterally, with EU partners or through the UN.

Journalist Roxana Saberi, arrested for purchasing alcohol and subsequently charged with espionage, was released in May on a two-year suspended sentence following international outcry at the eight-year prison sentence initially handed down. Similarly, journalist and film-maker Maziar Bahari, arrested during the post-election demonstrations, was released on humanitarian grounds in October after mounting international pressure on his behalf. In November, juvenile offenders Safar Angoti, Mostafa Naghdi and Amir Khalegi were pardoned and released from death row after years of campaigning led by their families and lawyers. And after months of intensive lobbying by several NGOs and religious groups, Christians Marzieh

Amirizadeh and Maryam Rostampour were released after 259 days in Tehran's Evin prison. In December, the UN General Assembly adopted a resolution on the human rights situation in Iran for the seventh consecutive year. The adoption of this resolution is a clear signal of international concern, and sends a message of hope to the victims of violations and human rights defenders in Iran.

In all of the above cases international pressure from governments and NGOs alike played a key role in supporting the efforts of Iranians on the ground and securing a positive outcome for the individuals concerned. How a state responds to criticism of its human rights record is an important measure of its commitment to human rights, yet Iran refuses to engage constructively on such matters. The Iranian authorities have criticised the UK and the EU for what they perceive as interference in internal affairs. However, we strongly believe that focusing international attention on the human rights situation in Iran is one of the most effective ways to ensure the government is held to account. It is important that both the government and people of Iran know that the international community cares and will continue to speak out in support of universally upheld principles.

"corruption, prostitution and apostasy" punishable by death. The Penal Code already contains a number of vaguely worded articles relating to "national security" which prohibit a range of activities, many connected with journalism or public discourse. Prominent blogger Hossein Derakhshan, referred to in last year's report, remains in detention despite not having been formally charged. Omid Reza Mirsayafi, a 29 year-old blogger serving two and a half years in prison for anti-state propaganda, died in prison in March after he failed to receive medical assistance, under circumstances that remain unclear.

Despite this, Iran's younger generation is politically curious and media-savvy, and the demand for alternative news sources has grown steadily over the years. In 2009, there were an estimated 100,000 blogs in Farsi, and social networking sites, such as Twitter, YouTube and Facebook, played a significant role after the elections, despite regime attempts to block them. The launch of BBC Persian TV in January responded to the strong need for balanced news and

analysis, and created an important forum for dialogue via its interactive programming. Despite attempts to block the service it has attracted a large following, and in a country where restrictions on freedom of expression are far reaching and deeply entrenched, the impact of offering uncensored news, analysis and a forum for dialogue is considerable.

Iraq



In 2009, there were signs of considerable progress in the human rights situation in Iraq, but significant human rights challenges remain. Iraq has had to deal with the legacy of decades of appalling violations under Saddam Hussein's regime, the recent bloodshed, and the attempts by terrorists to trigger a return to widespread sectarian violence.

Despite this, Iraq has consolidated democracy in 2009. The January provincial elections passed peacefully and