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Human rights situations that require the Council's attention

Written statement* submitted by Freedom Now, a non-governmental organization in special consultative status


The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[13 March 2019]

* Issued as received, in the language(s) of submission only.

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The Islamic Republic of Iran's Judicial Harassment of Labor Activists

We ask the Special Rapporteur on Iran and the Council to take special note of the continued judicial harassment of Iranian labor rights and child rights' activist Behnam Ebrahimzadeh.

As a result of his human rights work, Behnam has been arrested on multiple occasions. When Freedom Now last addressed the Council in March 2017, Behnam was serving a seven year prison sentence for communicating with the former UN Special Rapporteur on the Islamic Republic of Iran. Thankfully, he was released in August 2017 and returned to his activist work.

Behnam's most recent arrest occurred in December 2018. It was related to his support of victims of the 2017 Iran-Iraq earthquake, which left about 70,000 people homeless across 14 Iranian provinces. Behnam was targeted for his criticism of the Iranian government's ineffective assistance to survivors. In January 2019, government officials threatened to arrest Behnam's family if they spoke out about his imprisonment. Behnam was held in Evin Prison until March 2019. He has since been released on bail, but can still be arrested at any moment.

Behnam's arrest is indicative of a larger, disturbing trend in Iran – a widespread crackdown on labor activists. In November 2018, labor activists Esmail Bakhshi and Sepideh Gholian were arrested after attending a peaceful protest of sugar cane factory workers. They were held *incommunicado* and tortured while in detention. After being released on bail, Esmail publicly denounced the torture he suffered. In January 2019, Esmail and Sepideh were arrested again, likely due to the torture allegations they made and calls for an investigation. The same month, Jafar Azimzadeh and Parvin Mohammadi of the Free Union of Iranian Workers were arrested and Jafar remains detained.

Freedom Now urges the Special Rapporteur and the Council to inquire about these cases and ensure that Iran cease its harassment and persecution of labor activists such as Behnam, Esmail, Sepideh, Jafar, and Parvin.
