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**Promotion and protection of all human rights, civil,
political, economic, social and cultural rights,
including the right to development**

Human rights situations that require the Council's attention

Joint written statement* submitted by Partners For Transparency, Maat for Peace, Development and Human Rights Association, non-governmental organizations 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.

[01 February 2021]

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



Targeting of human rights defenders in the Islamic Republic of Iran

Preamble

Partners for Transparency and Maat for Peace, Development and Human Rights Association (Maat) call on the government of the Islamic Republic of Iran (Iran) to stop targeting human rights activists. We are gravely concerned about the Iranian authorities' disregard for the multiple calls from the United Nations (UN) treaty bodies, the Special Procedures, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, and the Human Rights Council, to improve the human rights situation in Iran as well as to promote transparency. The Iranian authorities have also refused to submit to the scrutiny of independent monitors such as the UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Islamic Republic of Iran. Instead, they have carried out reprisals against individuals for communicating with UN human rights bodies, and intimidated and harassed victims' families seeking truth and justice for their loved ones killed during the November 2019 protests and in the downing of a Ukrainian passenger plane by the Revolutionary Guards in January 2020.

Human rights defenders, activists and media workers are the most targeted by security authorities and are particularly vulnerable to systematic campaigns of torture and arrests. Iranian presidential elections are scheduled to be held in 2021, and, in this light, we are deeply concerned about the continued impunity for these crimes and serious human rights violations, which encourages the Iranian authorities to perpetuate this pattern of repression against activists and human rights defenders, especially since the perpetrators have not been held accountable by the international community. Therefore, we call on the international community to pressure the Iranian authorities to adopt fundamental reforms in the human rights file, and to make tangible improvements in all human rights-related issues, which are constantly violated by the Iranian government.

Targeting women human rights defenders

In light of the current global health crisis and the unprecedented restrictions imposed by the outbreak of the Covid-19, we are concerned about the impact of the emerging pandemic on the situation of the detained women human rights defenders in Iran, who became ineligible for release. The Iranian judiciary, in a statement, ordered the release of 85,000 prisoners, half of them are activists and human rights defenders. However, we believe that the number is exaggerated and inaccurate, and it could be no more than an allegation made by the government. Besides, the number of women human rights defenders and activists who were released or still in detention remains unknown. In mid-March 2020, the 37-year-old Iranian-British dual citizen, Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe, who has been in prison since 2016 and was sentenced to five years, was provisionally released due to the Covid-19 from Evin Prison in Tehran. The period of her release was extended, but - unfortunately - she was forced to wear an ankle bracelet and not move more than 300 meters away from her father's house. After serving 4 years of her sentence, ranged from imprisonment to house arrest, last September, Ratcliffe was informed of a new indictment, and on November 2 she appeared before a judge, amid British fears of sending her back to prison or extending her term, but the court has postponed the hearing.

The European Parliament has adopted a resolution taking stock of the human rights situation in Iran, the text of which was approved by 614 votes in favor, 12 against and 63 abstentions, and they strongly condemned the arbitrary arrest of the Iranian lawyer, Nasrin Sotoudeh, who is also a human rights activist, and the co-winner of the European Parliament's 2012 Sakharov Prize for Freedom of Thought; however, she is still in detention.

Maat has previously called for the release of Narges Mohammadi, the Spokesperson and Vice-President of the Iranian non-governmental organization Defenders of Human Rights Centre (DHRC); however, the journalist and human rights activist is still in prison, serving

a 16-year prison sentence, on baseless and vague charges of "contempt" and "spreading propaganda against the system". In the same context, in June 2020, the human rights defender, Atena Daemi, was also arrested on vaguely worded charges, which is "disturbing public order", and sentenced to five years in prison since 2016. The term, however, was extended in September 2019 by two years and a month for "insulting" and "spreading anti-government propaganda" after she wrote an open letter from prison criticizing the execution of political prisoners in September 2018. On January 9 2020, Saba Kord Afshari was transferred to Qarchak prison. Although the transfer was ordered by the assistant prosecutor, no explanation has been presented to the women's rights defender either in written or oral form. On November 9 2020, Branch 28 of the Supreme Court rejected woman human rights defender Saba Kord Afshari's request for retrial. On September 19 2020, Saba Kord Afshari was returned to Evin prison without receiving required medical treatment. She was transferred to Taleghani hospital the same day after her health seriously deteriorated. On June 1 2020, the lawyer of Saba Kord Afshari was informed that the verdict of the appeals court had been changed and that the woman human rights defender had now received a 15-year prison sentence.

We deeply regret Iran's rejection to the repeated calls made during the Universal Periodic Review sessions, especially the latest review cycle, to protect the rights of human rights defenders, stop harassing them, and release prisoners of conscience, as well as to guarantee the right to freedom of peaceful assembly and the right to form and to join trade unions. And in light of the current global crisis, we call on the Iranian government to extend the temporary release of thousands of detainees to include prisoners of conscience, dual citizens and foreigners who remain behind bars despite the risk of contracting the Covid-19.

Violating workers' rights

Iran's ongoing ban on independent trade unions has sparked a massive wave of peaceful protests and strikes across the country, in protest against non-payment of wages and pensions, poor working conditions and standards of living, and the privatization of public sector companies, which led to substandard employment conditions, among other grievances. In response, the authorities arrested dozens of protesting workers on national security-related charges, and sentenced more than 20 to prison terms and flogging. Dozens of workers have been beaten and arbitrarily arrested by the security forces, including Atefeh Rangriz and Neda Naji, who were sentenced to 5 years imprisonment for their participation in the protests. In September 2019, labor rights activists were sentenced to prison terms for participating in peaceful protests over the unpaid wages in the "Haft Tabah" sugarcane company in Khuzestan province. In September 2019, Sepideh Gholian was sentenced to 18 years in prison and Esmail Bakhshi to 13 and a half years in prison and 74 lashes, in addition forcibly extracting confessions from them under torture. At least 8 teachers were sentenced to 74 lashes in addition to prison sentences for defending teachers' rights and participating in peaceful protests calling for higher salaries for teachers.

Violating the rights of environmental activists

We are gravely concerned about the Iranian authorities' continued crackdown against environmentalists. Since January 2018, authorities have detained environmentalists Houshan Joki, Sam Rajabi, Taher Ghadirian, Morad Tahbaz, Amirhossein Khaleghi, Sepideh Kashani, Niloufar Bayani and Abdolreza Kouhpayeh, all members of a local biodiversity conservation group, on accusations of espionage. Another environmentalist arrested at the time, Kavous Seyed Emami, a Canadian-Iranian professor and environmentalist, died in detention in February 2018. While Iranian authorities claimed that he committed suicide, they have not conducted an impartial investigation into his death and imposed a travel ban on his wife, Maryam Mombeini. During a trial session in February 2019, Niloufar Bayani stated in the courtroom that the detained environmentalists faced psychological torture and were coerced into making false confessions. Authorities have not publicly provided any evidence concerning any of the detained environmentalists' alleged

crimes, while several senior Iranian government officials have said that they did not find any evidence to suggest that the detained activists are spies.

Recommendations

In addition to amending the laws that violate the rights of activists and human rights defenders, we believe that the Islamic Republic of Iran must ensure that all legislations are in full compliance with its international obligations in the field of human rights. We recommend Iran to stop controlling or harassing journalists, human rights defenders, political opposition leaders and other civil society leaders and social media activists; to protect their right to free expression; to consider abolishing the death penalty in the country under all circumstances; to immediately release detained women human rights defenders who were arrested for only exercising their basic rights; to guarantee freedom of expression, especially for human rights defenders and activists; and to release all political prisoners, including labor activists, environmentalists, academics, journalists, lawyers, and those detained for exercising their rights and calling for the improvement of human rights in Iran.
