



**Economic and Social
Council**

Distr.
GENERAL

E/CN.4/2005/NGO/310
8 March 2005

ENGLISH ONLY

COMMISSION ON HUMAN RIGHTS
Sixty-first session
Item 11 of the provisional agenda

CIVIL AND POLITICAL RIGHTS

**Written statement* submitted by UN Watch,
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.

[15 February 2005]

* This written statement is issued, unedited, in the language(s) received from the submitting non-governmental organization(s).

VIOLATION OF CIVIL AND POLITICAL RIGHTS IN CUBA, IRAN AND ZIMBABWE

UN Watch urges Cuba, Iran and Zimbabwe to respect international law and halt their systematic violations of civil and political rights.

CUBA

Cuba's Repression of Political Freedom and Civil Rights

Cuba must release all wrongfully imprisoned dissidents. In its April 2003 political crackdown, 75 peaceful dissidents were arrested and sentenced to long prison terms, of whom 61 remain incarcerated. The Cuban government continues to restrict freedom of expression, association, assembly, movement and the press. Cuba's widespread jailing of journalists demonstrates a distrust of its own citizens. In this regard, Cuba has the second-worst record in the world, with 23 reporters, writers and editors behind bars.

IRAN

Iran Must End Child Executions

As a State party to the International Convention on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) and the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), Iran has undertaken not to execute anyone for an offence committed when they were under the age of 18. Nevertheless, as documented by Amnesty International, Iran has executed at least 159 people last year, including three child offenders. Amnesty International has recorded ten executions of child offenders in Iran since 1990, including Atefeh Rajabi, reportedly aged 16, who was hanged after a grossly unfair trial where doubts regarding her mental state appeared to have been ignored.

In January 2005, the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child urged Iran to immediately suspend the execution of all death penalties imposed on persons for having committed a crime before the age of 18, and to abolish the death penalty as a sentence imposed on persons for having committed crimes before the age of 18, as required by article 37 of the Convention. It also deplored the fact that such executions continue — including one such execution on the day of the examination of the current report. UN Watch joins Amnesty International's call for Iran to stop executing child offenders and abide by the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), and the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) to which it is a state party; and urges the Iranian authorities to take immediate steps to halt and abolish the imposition of the death penalty for crimes committed by persons under 18.

Iran Obstructs Justice

According to a recent statement by Nobel Peace Prize laureate Shirin Ebadi, Iran's hardline judiciary is doing all it can to prevent human rights lawyers from defending political prisoners. "Judge and lawyer are each one wing of the angel of justice, but one of them has been amputated," said Ebadi, who heads a group of Iranian human rights lawyers. "Lawyers have been in and out of jail. I have also been in prison. They keep summoning me here and there. I have been subject to threats for 10 years." Ebadi recently received a summons and "the judge himself did not know why." Ebadi spent 25 days in solitary confinement in 1999 and was denied access to lawyers, radio and newspapers.

Those detained by the legal authorities face an impossible task in choosing a human rights lawyer to defend them. Roozbeh Mir-Ebrahimi was arrested last autumn in a crackdown on journalists and freed at the end of 2004. His family asked Ebadi and Mohammad Seifzadeh to defend him. However, "I was told in prison that with the charge against me I risked 15 years in prison, and that with these lawyers I would receive 25 years. My interrogator forced me to reject them and said that they were only serving their own interests."

Iran Abuses Journalists and Violates Freedom of Speech

Many Iranian reformist writers and activists have complained of being detained in solitary confinement. Several Iranian journalists recently told a presidential commission that, while in detention, they were tortured into confessing to charges such as insulting Islamic beliefs and endangering national security.

Iranian authorities have arrested activists and "bloggers" (weblog writers) in order to cripple a growing network of non-governmental organizations. Iranian judicial authorities have accused the web writers of spreading propaganda, inciting national unrest and "moral crimes." Hanif Mazrouei, a blogger detained by authorities, said that "My interrogator punched me in the head and stomach and kicked me in the back many times to force me confess to having illegal sex and endangered national security through my writings." Mazrouei spent 66 days in solitary confinement and was blindfolded most of the time. No official charges were brought against him. Tehran prosecutor Saeed Mortazavi has been named by detainees as the main authority behind the torture. UN Watch is extremely concerned for the safety of Iranian journalists who have received death threats from judicial officials since their testimony alleging torture.

Freedom of speech is under constant assault in Iran. This past year, a prominent history professor was sentenced to three years in jail for "insulting Islamic sacred beliefs." Hashem Aghajari, a professor at Tehran's Teachers Training University, has also been deprived of his social rights for five years, meaning he cannot take official posts or compete in elections. The charges stemmed from a June 2002 speech in which Aghajari said clerics' teachings on Islam were considered sacred simply because they were part of history. He has firmly rejected charges that he insulted Islamic tenets. Aghajari said during his trial that he defends "an Islam that brings about freedom and is compatible with democracy and human rights. I've opposed interpretations that justify suppression and dictatorship in the name of Islam." During his trial, Aghajari said he had no hope of justice.

Iran Commits Torture

Iran has increased its suppression of political opposition with an intense campaign of torture and arbitrary arrests. A recent report by Human Rights Watch documents systematic abuses of political detainees in Tehran's Evin Prison and in secret jails around the capital since the government launched its current crackdown in 2000. The maltreatment includes arbitrary arrest, detention without trial, torture to extract confessions, prolonged solitary confinement, and physical and psychological abuse. According to Human Rights Watch, "The Iranian government's use of these harsh techniques has largely squelched the country's political opposition and independent media."

As of June 2004, the Iranian government had closed virtually all independent newspapers, several key journalists and writers had fled the country, many prominent writers and activists had been imprisoned, and scores of student activists were intimidated into abandoning peaceful political activity. Individuals interviewed for the report, including a number of writers and

journalists, described brutal interrogations in which they were blindfolded, physically threatened, and forced to recant their political views. Former detainees also described basement solitary cells where they were left for weeks at a time without any human contact, and threats by judges that if they did not confess, they would be held in solitary confinement indefinitely. The report documents cases of beatings, long confinement in contorted positions, kicking detainees with military boots, hanging them by the arms and legs, and threats of execution if individuals refused to confess.

Iran's Laws Permit Violence Against Women

According to the UN's top official on women's rights, Yakin Erturk, Iran's laws "do not provide protection for victims of domestic violence and make it difficult to escape violence through divorce," and suffering wives face "time-consuming judicial procedures and stigmatization." Moreover, women complaining of rape run the risk of being charged for adultery. "Victims of rape face obstacles in seeking justice, and if they cannot prove they have been raped, they face sentences."

ZIMBABWE

Mugabe Regime Tramples Civil and Political Rights

Over the past year, Zimbabwe has cracked down on press freedom, political dissent and the activities of human rights groups. The Mugabe regime controls all TV and radio stations and every daily newspaper. It also sharply limits campaign activities, and political rallies are routinely disrupted by violence. Supporters of the opposition party have been killed, tortured and falsely accused of crimes.

New laws and policies have substantially increased repression in Zimbabwe. A new press law carries a two-year jail sentence for any journalist working in the country without a state issued license. A second bill has jail sentences of up to 20 years for anyone convicted of publishing or passing on information deemed to be false and prejudicial to the state. Two electoral laws became effective this year that entrench presidential control over all aspects of the parliamentary elections scheduled for March 2005. Mugabe will appoint all members of the electoral commission, which oversees polling. Independent groups are forbidden from conducting voter education. A further bill empowers the regime to close any non-governmental organization. It also bans human rights groups from receiving foreign funding.

Food shortages are becoming more acute, and yet the government prevents large-scale international food relief. It controls virtually all access to food stocks, and opposition supporters are being denied food.

A delegation of South African union officials recently visited Zimbabwe to investigate reports of repression and human rights abuses, and to determine whether it was capable of holding fair elections. Under ordinary circumstances, South African citizens are permitted free access to Zimbabwe. However, the officials were deported moments after their aircraft landed.
