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<http://www.rsf.org/iran-rights-groups-urge-international-03-02-2012,41804.html>

Middle East/North Africa - Iran

Joint appeal

Rights groups urge international community to press Iran to end violations

3 February 2012

Paris, 3 February 2012 - Reporters Without Borders, the International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH), and the Iranian League for the Defence of Human Rights urge the international community to take a much firmer stance on respect for human rights in Iran by raising this essential issue in the talks currently under way with the country's authorities.

These three human rights organizations also urge the EU and international community to publicly condemn the unacceptable treatment that imprisoned journalists and netizens receive at the hands of the Revolutionary Guards.

Farsnews, an Iranian news agency that is close to the Revolutionary Guards, reported on 29 January that the supreme court had upheld the death sentence that was passed on **Saeed Malekpour**, a computer specialist and Canadian resident. *Farsnews* also published a communiqué by the Centre for the Surveillance of Organized Crime expressing "satisfaction" with the supreme court's decision. Malekpour's execution is believed to be imminent.

Two other netizens, information technology student **Vahid Asghari** and website administrator **Ahmadreza Hashempour** have also had their death sentences confirmed by the supreme court in the past few days.

A fourth netizen, **Mehdi Alizadeh**, a website developer and humorist who was arrested for the second time in March 2011 in connection with his satirical posts, has just learned that he has been sentenced to death by Abolghasem Salevati, the head of a revolutionary court.

"We call on the international community to intercede directly with the Iranian authorities on behalf of these four netizens and to request the acquittal and release of all imprisoned journalists and bloggers," the three human rights organizations said. "The issue of respect for fundamental rights must at the same time be raised during the ongoing economic and scientific discussions."

These four netizens, aged from 25 to 40, are the victims of machinations by the Centre for the Surveillance of Organized Crime, an entity that was created illegally by the Revolutionary Guards in 2008. In March 2009, this centre announced the dismantling of a "malevolent" Internet network and the arrests of several website moderators, whose photos and "confessions" were published a few days later by the Gerdab website and other outlets.

Under torture, they admitted to having links with websites that criticize Islam and the Iranian government and to having intended to "mislead" Iranian youth by distributing pornographic content. They were also forced to confess to participating in a plot backed by the United States and Israel.

The detainees were placed in solitary confinement for long periods – more than a year in some cases – and the confessions obtained under torture were used against them at their trials. Malekpour and Asghari described how they were tortured during interrogation in letters to the judges in charge of their cases. At the same time, their defence lawyers were unable to meet with them or have access to their case files.

The three human rights organizations support the appeal that 39 political prisoners,

journalists and intellectuals issued on 25 January, calling for the release of all prisoners of conscience including the leaders of the protests against President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's disputed reelection.

Mir Hossein Mousavi, the former Prime minister and owner of the closed newspaper *Kalameh Sabaz*, his wife, the bestselling writer and intellectual **Zahra Rahnavard**, and **Mehdi Karoubi**, the former President of Parliament and owner of the closed newspaper *Etemad Melli*, have been under house arrest since 24 February 2011. Karoubi's wife, **Fatemeh Karoubi** (the editor of the magazine *Iran Dokhte*), who was arrested at the same time as him, was finally released in September.

Mousavi, Rahnavard and Mehdi Karoubi have been deprived of all their rights for nearly a year. Their relatives have not been able to visit them for months and are very worried about their state of health.

The Islamic Republic must bring this unacceptable state of affairs to an end. Arbitrary arrest and the holding of political prisoners incommunicado violate international law. Such practices are tantamount to enforced disappearance, yet are widely and frequently used by the authorities.
