

Reporters Without Borders

<http://www.rsf.org/iran-hope-for-54-imprisoned-journalists-18-06-2013,44814.html>

Middle East/North Africa - Iran

No to dictators!

Hope for 54 imprisoned journalists and netizens?

18 June 2013

The presidential and municipal elections held in Iran on 14 June lacked objective media coverage. The more than 50 million Iranian voters were denied freely reported and independent information when making their choice. Nonetheless, although the media were muzzled, Iranians used the elections to express their views and vote against Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei's policies.

"This election showed yet again that the people's vote for change in June 2009 was stolen by Iran's two predators of press freedom, Ali Khamenei and Mahmoud Ahmadinejad," Reporters Without Borders said. "The two have been responsible for the persecution and arbitrary arrests of more than 300 journalists and netizens, and their torture by the intelligence services."

Hassan Rohani, the moderate conservative candidate who had promised change and was backed by reformers, was declared outright winner in the first round on 15 June with more than 51 per cent of the votes.

"Mr. Rohani, you are now the Islamic Republic's seventh president, elected thanks to massive support from Iranian reformers and progressives. Your election follows Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's eight-year presidency, in which repressive measures and abuses against civil society and journalists were stepped up, especially during his second term.

"Your campaign promises included references to a desire to work for freedom of expression and media freedom, and the release of all political prisoners. These firm undertakings encouraged progressives, especially young people and women, to vote en masse for you. It is now your duty to keep these promises, and to ensure that they are not empty, meaningless words.

"You are now the repository of hope of extricating Iran from the crisis that has paralyzed it for years, guaranteeing free and independent information for the entire people, and respecting the Islamic Republic's international undertakings, especially as regards freedom of information. Your fellow citizens will not feel free until these demands have been met."

On 21 May, Reporters Without Borders wrote to you and the seven other presidential candidates stressing the need to put respect for fundamental freedoms, including freedom of information, at the centre of your presidency. Today, we reiterate these demands to you, the new president:

- Demand the unconditional release of the 54 journalists and netizens currently imprisoned in Iran. Some were arrested following President Ahmadinejad's disputed reelection in June 2009 and are still being held four years later. Their only crime is to have exercised their constitutional right to freedom of information. This right will not be observed in Iran as long as arrests and arbitrary detentions remain a systematic practice by officials bent on muzzling the media and silencing civil society.
- Begin an overhaul of media legislation in order to decriminalize press offences and guarantee freedom of information without discrimination based on language, religion or political opinion. A revision of the 1986 press law (amended in 2000 and 2009 to include online publications) is urgently needed because it allows the authorities to persecute

news providers on charges of “attacking the Islamic Republic,” “insulting the Supreme Leader” and “disseminating false information.” Amendments requiring online publications to be licensed must be repealed.

- Ensure that Iranian citizens have free, uncensored and unmonitored Internet access. The launching of a “Halal Internet” designed to impose a digital apartheid, constitutes a danger for Iran.
- End arbitrary actions and impunity. The murders of dissident journalists must not go unpunished. They include the deaths of **Ebrahim Zalzadeh, Majid Charif, Mohammed Mokhtari, Mohammed Jafar Pouyandeh** and **Pirouz Davani**, all executed by agents of the Ministry of Intelligence and National Security in November and December 1988. They also include the deaths in detention of **Zahra Kazemi** (2003), **Ayfer Serçe** (2006), the young blogger **Omidreza Mirsayafi**, of Iran-e-Farda journalist **Hoda Saber’s**, and women’s rights activist **Haleh Sahabi** (2012) and **Sattar Beheshti** (2012). Those who ordered and carried out these crimes must be brought to justice.

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