

OPEN LETTER TO AYATOLLAH KHAMENEI

From the Committee to Protect Journalists, PEN, Index on Censorship, Reporters Sans Frontières,
Canadian Journalists for Free Expression, and the International Publishers Association

February 10, 2010

His Excellency Ayatollah Sayed Ali Khamenei
c/o The Permanent Mission of the Islamic Republic of Iran to the UN
622 Third Avenue, 34th Floor
New York, NY 10017
Fax: (212) 867-7086

Dear Ayatollah Khamenei,

We, the undersigned organizations dedicated to freedom of expression, are writing on the 31st anniversary of the Iranian Revolution to urge you to free all writers, journalists, and editors currently in prison for carrying out their professions in Iran.

During the 1979 Iranian Revolution, Ayatollah Khomeini spoke of building a new society that would protect human rights and celebrate the Iranian people's freedom of expression. In fact, in an interview on November 7, 1978, he pledged that "Our future society will be a free society and all the elements of oppression, cruelty, and force will be destroyed." Sadly, in many of the years since then, and most especially since last year's presidential elections, the world has seen the Iranian government betray these principles, openly suppressing dissent, silencing journalists, writers, and bloggers, and jailing citizens from all walks of life who joined or supported peaceful demonstrations.

As organizations representing journalists, writers, publishers, and free expression advocates around the world, we are especially concerned about the toll these actions have taken on our colleagues in Iran. By our count, at least 60 writers, journalists, and bloggers remain behind bars today in violation of the protections guaranteed in the Islamic Republic of Iran's constitution and in international law. This list constitutes the largest number of our colleagues jailed by any country on earth at one time in over a decade.

On February 15, Iran will come before the United Nation's Human Rights Council as part of the UN's Universal Periodic Review process. The report that your own country submitted to the Human Rights Council notes that Iran's constitution guarantees "human dignity, political and civil rights that include democracy, prohibition of depriving people of their fundamental freedoms, . . . freedom of expression, respect for the privacy of people, freedom of political parties and peaceful assemblies, prohibition of arbitrary arrests," and that "All forms of torture for the purpose of extracting confession or acquiring information are forbidden." Yet the crackdown on free expression in the last eight months, and the dozens of writers, journalists, and bloggers still behind bars in your country, tell quite another story.

We do not ask you to act outside your laws or the ideals of the Iranian revolution. Rather, we entreat you to uphold the pledges of Ayatollah Khomeini and the promises of the Iranian constitution by releasing all writers, journalists, and bloggers currently behind bars for covering the news and expressing their views in Iran.

Sincerely,

Paul Steiger, Board Chairman
Committee to Protect Journalists

Marian Botsford Fraser, Chair
Writers in Prison Committee of International PEN

Kwame Anthony Appiah, President
PEN American Center

Lisa Appignanesi, President
English PEN

John Kampfner, Chief Executive
Index on Censorship

Jean-François Julliard, Secretary General
Reporters Sans Frontières

Annie Game, Executive Director
Canadian Journalists for Free Expression

Jens Bammel, General Secretary
International Publishers Association