

IRAN TODAY

Bulletin of the Committee for the Defence of Iranian People's Rights



Vol. 27, No.2

Autumn 2015

£1 , €1.5, \$2

**For human
and
democratic
rights!**



For trade union rights!



Editorial: 5+1=Hypocrisy

For a long time the prospect of war against Iran has seemed a real possibility. However for now the prospect has receded. Some things have not changed. Iran remains a state run by a theocratic dictatorship, its people are denied basic human rights, its trade unionists, women activists and student leaders are imprisoned without trial and the leaderships policies have impoverished the country. But there is resistance, the democratic aspirations of the Iranian people remain strong and the ruling elite is worried.

Today the US may not want war against Iran. It would rather access its natural resources and the Iranian leadership is eager to find some relief from its crisis, made worse by the economic sanctions initiated by the US and the EU. The US does not have the financial muscle it once had following its so called "victory" in the cold war. Furthermore, its dominance in world politics is no longer taken for granted around the globe. The US needs friends; it can no longer afford to fund alone the military adventures of its trans-national corporations. There is no clearer example than its recent semi-secret talks with the Iranian leadership aiming to squash Iran's nuclear industry. President Obama claimed at the conclusion of the talks, the US had negotiated from a "position of strength". In other words *we have nuclear weapons and Iran doesn't*. It also understands the internal contradictions putting pressure on Iran's leaders. The US has also been able to exploit the fact that the Iranian economy has been a hostage of targeted crippling economic and banking/ monetary sanctions.

In spite of a lack of credible evidence that Iran was developing nuclear weapons capability, the US has been determined to further impoverish Iranian society through economic sanctions and blockade. At the same time the Iranian theocratic dictators have been forced to agree to US demands and an opportunity now exists for international industrial interests to plunder Iranian oil and other resources as well as the country's lucrative markets and strategically important geographical location. The Joint Plan of Action Group, the so called 5+1 has agreed to suspend, not lift or remove, economic sanctions against Iran. In return the Iranian leadership, desperate to try and alleviate the internal pressure it is under, agreed to halt its nuclear enrichment programme and accept almost unlimited inspection criteria.



The US has claimed victory, without the use of force, despite opposition from its ally Israel. It now believes it has Iran where it wants without the risk of war and more wasted billions of dollars and lives. During the whole of this period the Iranian leadership has been facing growing domestic opposition. The economic and social crisis inside Iran continues to intensify and their only answer has been to step up oppression. Arrests and executions of Iranian opposition forces have continued. Strikes and demonstrations by Iranian workers, students and women have been met with dictatorial force. Journalists and political activists arrested without trial. Human rights trampled.

When the 5+1 "agreement" was reached Iranians celebrated, not because they welcomed the decisions but because they knew it represented a further weakening of the regime and its credibility to govern. The US leadership and the Iranian dictatorship have sought to sell the 5+1 as a success to shore up their own position at home and the self-satisfying Obama legacy.

Iranians know better. The forces of opposition and democracy in Iran see through the lies and hypocrisy and see the agreement as a poisoned chalice, it will not stop their struggle for human rights and democratic progress. All those in the West and elsewhere should support this view. Human rights and democratic liberties in Iran should not be a matter of negotiation with the US or anyone else but only with the Iranian people, their trade unions and democratic organisations. That is the right of the Iranian people and they deserve our unqualified solidarity in their struggle.

It is this issue as well as opposition to threats of military aggression which must now be forced onto the agenda of world politics.

Iran's government does not recognise trade unions

Habib Mehrzad,
CODIR's Co-ordinator in Canada

One of the major hurdles to workers in Iran getting organised can be interpretations of the constitution and the laws of the country. For example, the Union of the Metalworkers and Mechanics of Iran (UMMI), which was originally established in 1960 and registered by the Ministry of Labour, recently sent a formal letter to the Ministry asking for a suitable venue in one of the Ministry buildings to hold its 13th General Assembly. In their letter, the board of directors of the UMMI referenced Article 26 of the Constitution of Iran, which declares: *"...No-one could be denied participation in the aforementioned groups [parties, societies, political or professional associations] or be compelled to participate in them."*

One week later the General Manager of the Employers and Workers' Organisations wrote a one sentence letter stating that *"...per the Article 26 of the Constitution and the Article 131 of the Labour Law of the Islamic Republic of Iran, trade organisations may operate, after legal procedures, under the title of 'trade associations' [not unions]"*. With this letter, the Ministry of Labour effectively confirmed that it does not recognise independent trade unions in the country, even if they have been registered with the Ministry for more than half a century!

The fact that such 'registration' means little was reinforced in June 2015 when the Ministry of Labour drafted a Bill with the intention of merging the state authorised labour organizations, namely the Centre for Labour Trade Associations, the Centre of Islamic Labour Councils (ILC) and the Association of the Workers' Representatives. Clearly, independent genuine trade unions were not even recognised by the Ministry.

In one sense this is only to be expected. ILCs are anything but labour organisations to protect the rights of the working people. They are just another element of the state apparatus to violate the union rights of the working people of Iran. The new Bill seeks to align the labour market with the requirements of the IMF and the World Bank as a prerequisite for foreign investments, now that Iran and the West have reached an agreement.

Iran has not signed Conventions 87 and 98 of



the ILO with regard to the freedom of association and the right to organise. The intention of the Rouhani government would appear to be to hinder the formation of genuine independent trade unions, while establishing fake organisations with misleading names that pretend to be labour organisations. The government wants genuine trade unions out of the way so that it can pave the way for foreign investors seeking cheap, unprotected, unorganised labour.

Due to the absence of such trade unions the government of Iran was able to set a minimum wage way below the poverty line, despite all the promises that Rouhani made during his election campaign. In one of his campaign events he said: *"The Article 41 of the Labour Law clearly states that the minimum wage of the workers must be set according to the inflation rate announced by the Central Bank, and it has to be at a level that supports the livelihood of a family of 4."* However, a few months later, with the collaboration of the state-run so-called labour organizations the government set an insulting minimum wage, comparatively worse than the year before. One year later, it did the same thing again. The Islamic Republic of Iran is keen to roll out the red carpet for foreign investors. By using policies to suppress union activists the government aim to offer cheap and unorganised labour.

Only genuine trade unions can protect the rights of working people and help them to have decent jobs, working conditions and earnings. Iranian workers, from oil and mine workers to nurses and teachers, are struggling to realise and protect their rights for decent living and working conditions.

Not recognising unions is part of the struggle in the Islamic Republic of Iran. The government has been following neo-liberal economic policies and confronting grass roots based, popular social movements. Rapprochement between Islamic Republic and the West, on the basis of policies which only benefit the corporations and the religious hierarchy in Iran, would only make this situation worse.

IRAN'S TEACHERS FIGHT FOR THE FUTURE OF EDUCATION

**Dr. Liz Payne
investigates for
Iran Today**



Teachers protesting in Tehran



At the invitation of UNESCO for reports from around the world on progress towards achieving the Education for All (EFA) millennium goals fifteen years on, the Tehran regime submitted "Education for All 2015 National Review Report: Islamic Republic of Iran." It makes depressing reading. In it are clearly set out the fundamental problems facing the education system. The curriculum is rigid and limited, with no inherent potential for change. Teaching methods offer little more than teacher-directed textbook study. Pedagogy is not keeping pace with technological advances, especially in information and communications technology. The quality of education management, administration and of the teaching and learning process is poor. Teachers' wages are low and there are huge disparities in pay between primary and secondary levels and between rural and urban schools making recruitment, especially outside the cities, difficult. Unsurprisingly, "There is job dissatisfaction among teachers".

It is therefore ironic and unacceptable by any international standards that the government which published the above report should clamp down on the Iranian Teachers' Trade Association (ITTA) and

teacher trade unionists for raising these very issues and demanding action on them. Currently, four members of the executive of the ITTA, including its general secretary, Esmail Abdi are in prison, as well as a number of other teacher trade unionists, for no other reason than their trade union activity.

The imprisonment of Abdi follows growing disquiet within the teaching profession and a series of nationwide protests earlier in the year. In January, hundreds of teachers demonstrated outside local education offices in a number of towns and cities calling for greater investment in education, an imperative with inflation running at 25%, and demanding an end to low pay, which has cast teachers into bread-line poverty, equal pay for men and women and decent pensions. April saw protests in twenty cities against poor wages and inadequate living conditions and, despite threats from the security forces ahead of the demonstrations, on 7 May thousands of teachers came out calling for higher salaries. Silent vigils were held in a number of major cities, including Tehran, Tabriz, Shiraz and Isfahan. In the capital, thousands massed outside the parliament, refusing to be intimidated by the huge security presence at the rally.

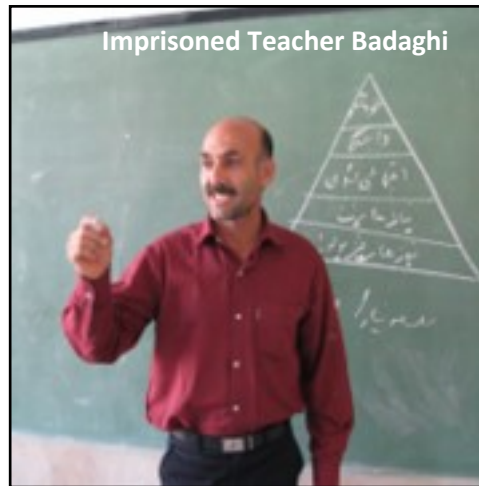
The response of the authorities was not long in coming. Mr Abdi, the general secretary of the ITTA was stopped at the border on 27 June as he attempted to travel to Armenia to obtain a

Iran's Teacher ... Continued/



Esmail Abdi: General Secretary of the Iranian Teachers' Trade Association (ITTA)

visa to attend the 7th World Congress of Education International in Ottawa (21 – 26 July). His passport was confiscated and he was ordered back to Tehran to attend an interview at the prosecutor's office. Despite being escorted by seventy colleagues and supporters who were concerned for his safety, he was arrested and incarcerated. He is now serving a ten-year prison sentence for trade-union activities, which had been imposed after an earlier arrest but suspended. Protests by thousands of teachers calling for Mr Abdi's release in Tehran during July were threatened by riot police on motorbikes, while security forces policed the main transport terminals to intercept those attempting to join the demonstration. Two hundred were arrested. This treatment by the Iranian regime of teacher trade unionists acting solely and legitimately to protect their members' interests has been condemned by unions worldwide. Britain's National Union of Teachers (NUT), the University and College Union (UCU) and UNISON, its largest public sector union, as well as the Canadian Teachers' Federation have written to President Rouhani calling for the immediate release of Esmail Abdi and all other imprisoned teacher trade-unionists. Condemnation in the strongest possible terms has come from Education International (EI) with over 30 million members in 170 countries. Its general secretary, Fred van Leeuwen stated that there was no reason for Mr Abdi's arrest and that it was "unacceptable". Iran is in breach of the UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights, of which it is a signatory, and of ILO conventions 87 (freedom of association) and 98



possible terms to the Iranian regime but has also urged that the UN general secretary, the director general of the ILO and the director general of UNESCO intervene.

The treatment of teacher trade unionists by the government of President Rouhani is especially tragic given the high hopes that he created in 2013. After his election was announced in mid-June that year, he promised to follow a path of "moderation and justice". Ahead of the inauguration on 4 August 2013, Amnesty International's Deputy Director for the Middle East and North Africa, Hassiba Hadj Sahraoui appealed to the Iranian authorities to use the occasion to uphold the rights and freedoms of expression, association and assembly for everyone and for restrictions on trade unions to be revoked. When president Rouhani delivered his inaugural speech its focus was on the government of "wisdom and hope" that he would usher in and the promise to protect all Iranian citizens. "People want change" he said. Two years on and everyone is still waiting! The legacy of education as it was under former president Ahmadinejad still blights the hopes and chances of Iranian children and young people - overcrowded schools, lack of facilities, poor standards, impoverished and disrespected teachers and increasingly unaffordable costs placed on the shoulders of parents as privatisation of every possible aspect of state education takes hold. The answer lies not in silencing teachers and their unions. What is required is genuine change in the system that makes it fit for purpose in a contemporary state, investment in all aspects of education at every level, acknowledgement of the professional status of teachers and recognition of trade unions' rights to organise and represent their members. Only then will the next report to UNESCO on the achievement of EFA millennium goals show any real progress.

(right to collective bargaining), as well as article 27 of its own constitution on freedom of assembly. EI has not only written a letter of protest in the strongest

Cutting through the nuclear smokescreen

The focus upon Iran's nuclear programme in recent years has seen the issue of human rights in the Islamic Republic take second place in the West. Now that a deal on the nuclear issue is on the table, the pressure for domestic political reform in Iran needs to be stepped up.

Jane Green reports.

The protracted negotiations, involving Iran and the P5+1 group of nations, which concluded in Vienna in July, appear to have secured a deal which is both acceptable to the West and the regime in the Islamic Republic. In exchange for closer inspection of Iran's nuclear centrifuge production and limitations on its domestic nuclear energy programme, the West will begin the process of lifting the economic sanctions which are crushing the Iranian economy.

As ever with any deal on such a scale, there is a quid pro quo. The assistance of Iran and the Shia militia it supports in Iraq and Syria has been vital for the West in tackling the rise of Isis. While co-operation between the Islamic Republic and the West has not been formally acknowledged there is considerable evidence to support the reality on the ground. It is clear that such co-operation would be undermined by an Iran buckling under the weight of economic sanctions. The momentum to find a path to a nuclear deal has therefore been accelerated.

While the Iranian regime has been smiling to the West it has been less flexible in its dealings with internal pressures.

In fact, the response to internal dissent has intensified over recent months as trade unionists, political activists and human rights campaigners face increased harassment from the regime.

In May, the Committee for the Defence of the Iranian People's Rights (CODIR) launched an appeal calling for the release of trade unionists jailed in the Islamic Republic of Iran. The appeal took the form of a letter to Iranian president, Hassan Rouhani, who was elected in 2013, on a platform of greater reform and transparency in



Iran.

The CODIR statement was also linked to the demands for economic reform in Iran, calling upon President Rouhani,

“...to fulfil the promises he made during his 2013 election campaign to act on the legitimate demands of Iranian workers for a decent living wage and the right to form, join and belong to a trade union of their choice.”

Since July 2014, large groups of workers, including miners, auto workers, teachers and nurses across Iran, have taken to the streets and demonstrated outside the Iranian Parliament to demand their rights, as set out in international conventions.

Particular attention has been drawn by trade unionists to International Labour Organisation (ILO) conventions 87, guaranteeing freedom of association, and 98 which guarantees the right to collective bargaining. These conventions, and the rights of Iranian workers, are routinely flouted by the government in Iran.

CODIR Assistant General Secretary, Jamshid Ahmadi, underlined the significance of keeping the fate of trade unionists in Iran in the public eye.

“Over the years we have received many reports of workers and trade unionists being arrested, imprisoned, fired and deprived of their livelihood,” he said. “Many trade union activists are serving prison sentences for the sole 'offence' of being trade unionists and campaigning for decent wages and improved

Cutting through ... Continued/



Photo : Ebrahim Noroozi

FARS NEWS AGENCY

working conditions. We hold that no workers should be detained in prison for demanding their internationally accepted rights.”

However, in spite of both internal and international pressure the Iranian regime has sought to suppress not only labour disputes but any news coverage of them by the Iranian media.

ILNA (Iran's Labour News Agency) is the only news agency authorised by the Islamic Republic of Iran to provide limited coverage of labour related news and developments.

However, on 20th June this year, the entire ILNA labour affairs group were sacked on the spot by Chief Executive, Massoud Heydari. Preceding the mass sacking the web site of ILNA had stopped covering labour news for 2 days. There was no official statement by ILNA for this decision. News in the social media sphere within Iran revealed however that there had been major disagreements between ILNA's labour affairs group and the management, especially on editorial interference, gagging orders and pressure for self-censorship.

A letter from the sacked journalists, released by CODIR, substantiated social media claims that management interference in how news was covered was key to the dispute. In particular, the protest by workers from the Farsit Daroud factory on 18th June was characterised by management as being unjustified because the demands were excessive. As the sacked journalists asserted in their letter, “we as the journalists are not in a position to pass judgement on the legitimacy of the workers' trade union protests...our duty is to publish this news”.

The journalists indicated that the most important aspect of their dispute with management concerned the setting up of a

trade union body within ILNA, in order to advance legitimate demands for paid overtime, shift payments and holidays. Two days after management received a letter outlining these demands, signed by all ILNA's journalists, editors and typists, the mass sacking occurred.

Jamshid Ahmadi went on to underline the significance of keeping the fate of trade unionists in Iran in the public eye.

“The ILNA journalists are yet another example of workers taking a legitimate stand in relation to their basic rights only to find themselves sacked for doing so. This is employer intimidation of the worst kind.”

CODIR fears for the fate of a number of trade unionists imprisoned for engaging in nothing more than trade union activity. These include:

- ◆ Esmail Abdi (General Secretary, Teachers' Association),
- ◆ Rassoul Bodaghi (Teachers' Association), Mahmood Bagheri (Teachers' Association),
- ◆ Mohammad Davari (Teachers' Association), Abdulreza Ghanabri (Teachers' Association),
- ◆ Shahrokh Zamani (Painters' and Decorators' Union),
- ◆ Behnam Ebrahimdzadeh (Painters' and Decorators' Union),
- ◆ Mohammad Jarrahi (Painters' and Decorators' Union).

As CODIR has emphasised previously, the action against trade unionists is part of a coordinated policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran, to maximise pressure upon activists, their colleagues and family members in order to silence them and pressurise the trade union movement in Iran.

“Support for Iran's workers,” continued Mr. Ahmadi, “will once again remind the Iranian president that if his supposed reform platform is to be taken seriously, it needs to be translated into action. The eyes of the world are once again upon Iran and its people deserve their basic rights, as citizens and trade unionists.”

It is vital, at this time when the eyes of the world truly are upon Iran, that the success of the negotiation around the nuclear issue is not used as a smokescreen to hide the limitations of the Islamic Republic on the domestic front.

Trade unionists, political activists and human rights campaigners must maintain the pressure upon the Iranian regime and press for the freedoms their colleagues languishing in Iran's prisons deserve.

Time for action on the domestic front

With the nuclear issue now in second gear, the focus inside Iran is increasingly on an expansion of the talks policy of Hassan Rouhani's administration to launch domestic talks among various political groups. Massoud Pezeshkian, a current member of parliament and a former minister of health in Mohammad Khatami's administration, said "We managed to hold talks with our classic enemy and come up with a mutually agreeable deal. A similar approach must sooner or later be used at the domestic national level. Iranian society continues to suffer from multi-faceted factions inside the country. These factions and groups without doubt have far less differences than the differences between the governments of Iran and the US. This should make it much easier for the internal groups to talk to each other. So the essential question is how the experience of the nuclear talks can be applied for a domestic dialogue."

Hossein Marashi, a member of the Kargozaran party (Executives of Construction) said, "We succeeded with dignity. We negotiated with rival states that have a history of animosity with Iran and came to an agreement. But why can't we solve our domestic problems through talks? We therefore ask Mr. Rouhani to pursue talks on domestic issues." Another powerful voice calling for domestic dialogue is that of former reformist president Mohammad Khatami himself. After expressing his congratulations on the nuclear agreement Khatami said, "We can take steps towards common goals and interests through reason and talks over regional and domestic issues as well." He went on to express his hope that Rouhani could accomplish his promises in the same manner as his foreign policy success.

Ibrahim Yazdi, the head of the Iran Liberation Movement also sent an open letter to Rouhani congratulating him on the success in the nuclear talks and stating, "Now is the time to resolve domestic issues and come to national unity. It is the general hope that the government can, through a consensus of the decision makers, facilitate a change in the atmosphere of the domestic political scene..." In recent years Rouhani's administration has cited resolving the nuclear issue for inattention to domestic issues; a failure to consider political demands inside the country; and the avoidance of addressing human rights issues. The existence of foreign sanctions against Iran has been widely seen as an excuse not to address the internal political agenda.

The external threat posed by the nuclear issue and sanctions has resulted in a tougher domestic approach, with limitations on freedom of speech and restrictions on constitutional rights. However, with the nuclear issue now resolved, the period of presenting excuses for inattention to domestic issues is over. Pressure from the opposition within Iran will continue

Free All Political Prisoners in Iran



to grow and demand that President Rouhani deals with what is on his doorstep. That will mean a growing pressure to attend to domestic issues, especially those of political, trade union and human rights.

Some key challenges facing the government!

Inflation: The Government forecast inflation at 20% for 2015/2016. However, this represents a "best" estimate. Iran's currency devaluation, pressures on production and reductions in subsidies on items such as bread could all push the inflation rate higher.

Unemployment: Officially, unemployment runs at around 11%. However, the Iranian government consider anyone who works at least one hour per week as employed. Hidden unemployment is a major concern.

Youth unemployment: Youth unemployment in Iran is currently running at around 25% and has been at this level and higher since 2011.

Human rights abuses: Iran has one of the worst human rights records globally. From January to July 2015, the regime executed more than 700 people. Amnesty International and the UN Commission on Human Rights have gathered huge evidence on the regime's systematic violation of human rights.

Corruption: Corruption remains rife in Iran at all levels of government. It will be a key issue for the administration to tackle.

Brain drain: The IMF in 2009 indicated that Iran tops the list of countries losing their academic elite, with an annual loss of 150,000 to 180,000 specialists. It is equivalent to a capital loss of \$50 billion.

Rouhani and Minorities in Iran

As President Hassan Rouhani enters his third year in office and with the nuclear issue no longer dominating the state agenda, public attention in Iran is shifting to other national issues. Roujan Sarmadi investigates. Iran is a multi-ethnic nation in which large numbers of Azeris, Kurds, Turkmens, Arabs and Baluchis live in the north, north-west, south and south-east of the country. In a country in which the majority of Muslims follow the Shia, rather than Sunni branch of Islam, the issue of the treatment of religious and national minorities is one which is gaining greater prominence. The struggle for national and cultural rights has been a distinct feature of Iranian politics since the 1940s. In fact in the 1940s it was only by brute force that the Shah's imperial army crushed the progressive autonomous republics set up in Azerbaijan and Kurdistan.

After the 1979 revolution the Kurds and Turkmens called for wide-ranging political and cultural autonomy but this was drowned in bloody repression. Subsequently the regime assassinated Abdul Rahman Ghassemlou, General Secretary of the Kurdish Democratic Party of Iran, while he was engaged in secret negotiations with representatives of the Islamic Republic. A number of years later Ghassemlou's successor was also gunned down in Berlin. The German government's official investigation showed that the Iranian regime was involved in these murders. The regime continues to execute Kurdish activists and the reports of clashes between Kurdish activists and the regime's military forces are common.

In March of this year six Sunni Kurds were executed in spite of President Hassan Rouhani's promise to "extend protection to all religious groups and to amend legislation that discriminates against minority groups." One of Iran's most prominent Sunni leaders, Molavi Abdol-Hamid recently criticised the continued "hardline activities" in regions of Iran where the Sunnis are in the majority and said President Rouhani had not lived up to his promises and public expectations.

During his election campaign, Rouhani issued a special statement on the "Ethnic,



Religious and Religious Sect Minorities" and made promises to them, most of which remain unfulfilled. For example, the millions of Sunnis in Tehran still do not have their own mosque. This year, for example, Iranian Kurds held the Eid ul-Fitr celebrations at the end of the Ramadhan fast on 17 July, despite threats, while the government formally announced the event to be on 18 July and expected all Iranians to celebrate it on this day.

President Hassan Rouhani has tried to change the conditions of minorities by appointing Ali Osat Hashemi, a moderate pro-reform personality, as the governor of Baluchistan province. This was welcomed by the Sunnis and supporters of the president, but they have said the administration must "do more than just appoint individuals to improve the lot of the Sunnis, specifically on their rights to practice their religion and even greater participation in the management of the country."

Moderate Kurdish activists have complained that Rouhani has not included Sunnis in senior positions in his government. A former minister of intelligence, Ali Yunesi was appointed as "special advisor" to the president for minority affairs but his remarks on the need to give greater attention to the rights of minorities and implement government programmes in this regard have been sharply criticised by hardliners and conservatives. This has meant that even Yunesi has become relatively silent on the issue.

Sunni activists in Baluchistan and Kurdistan provinces say that nothing has been done, even in the back corridors of power of Rouhani's administration, to provide the Sunnis with their rights or increase their institutional participation in the government.

As the focus of government moves away from the nuclear issue the Iranian regime will be under increasing pressure to address wider issues. The situation of religious and ethnic minorities in Iran will be one of the priorities.

Women's Rights under Rouhani - No Progress

By Linda Sherwood

In August 2014 I wrote in these columns of the disappointment and anger felt by Iranian women at the failure of President Rouhani to implement his pre-election promises to improve the condition of women in Iran. A year on has the situation got any better?

Rouhani obviously thinks so : in April of this year he tweeted "Women must enjoy equal opportunity, equal protection and equal social rights", accompanying photos showed Iranian women doing sport, studying, cheering at a political rally and legislating in parliament. The reality however is very different.

Ghoncheh Ghavami is a British-Iranian student who returned to Iran lured by Rouhani's assurances. In November 2014 she was arrested for protesting at the exclusion of women spectators from a male volleyball match. After 41 days' solitary confinement during which she was subjected to systematic psychological harassment she was released, her case having aroused international fury. Ghoncheh Ghavami is just one of thousands of Iranians who believe that by civil action they will be able to bring about change but a government which has no commitment to human rights will not be moved by the protests of ordinary citizens. With its focus on nuclear policy and the economy, the Islamic Republic is ready to sacrifice individuals for its survival.

Notable human rights activists continue to be pursued by the authorities. **Narges Mohammadi**, deputy leader of the Centre for the Defence of



Human Rights, who has already spent long months in prison and been subjected to constant harassment, was re-arrested in

May and returned to Evin prison to finish her 6 year sentence (she is now accused of being associated with ISIS (Da'esh). The authorities' refusal to let her see her children or even contact them by phone is an example of the regime's complete denial of basic human rights.

In a further sign that the regime does not want to see women progress but would rather push them back into the home, access to contraception has been restricted as supreme leader Ali Khamenei calls for a doubling of Iran's population to 150 million. Single and childless women are likely to be



Iranian women protesting against acid attack against women in various cities

discriminated against in the workplace and the divorce laws (already more favourable to men) tightened. Controls by the 'morals police' are as frequent as ever and according to Ramita Navai, author of "City of Lies: Love, Sex, Death and the Search for Truth in Tehran", parliament has even debated the moral threat posed by women's leggings!

Quotas for women have been introduced on certain university courses (for example engineering, accountancy). With women's unemployment running at over 20% (the overall national rate is 10%), it is easy to see why the government wants women to remain in the home.

In addition little is being done to counter the high incidence of violence against women. In 2014 the country was shocked by a series of acid attacks against women in Isfahan. At least 14 cases were reported, all the attacks were by men claiming they were defending the law of hijab. None has been charged. Campaigners for human rights in Iran argue that "these attacks have taken place in the context of state policies, parliamentary legislation, and official pronouncements by high-level state officials and government-affiliated clerics that have created a climate conducive to such violence". The 'Plan to Promote Virtue and Prevent Vice' is a bill before parliament which reinforces ultraconservative notions of female dress and behaviour and calls for citizen enforcement of the Plan. Human rights bodies recommend that parliament withdraw the bill. They also recommend that the government modifies all other pending legislation related to women's employment, higher education, and family planning to ensure that they do not discriminate against women, that it conforms to Iran's international obligations regarding women's rights and that it consults with women's organisations .

Rouhani must take the lead : until this happens Iranian women have little hope of seeing their lives improve.

Free Women Political Prisoners in Iran!



CODIR calls for a world-wide campaign for the release of women political prisoners in Iran. At least 18 are held in Evin Prison : ten are mothers and four have children under 10. They include Bahareh Hedayat , Narges Mohammadi and Atena Farghadani.

Student activist **Bahareh Hedayat** is serving 10 years on charges which include "insulting the president." She is one of the leaders of the national student body which calls for political reform and opposes human rights violations and is a member of the One Million Signatures campaign to end to legal discrimination against women. Journalist and lawyer **Narges Mohammadi** was arrested at her Tehran home in May charged with "propaganda against the state," "assembly and collusion against national security," and "establishing the 'Step by Step to Stop the Death Penalty' group." which campaigns for the abolition of capital punishment. Narges works closely with Nobel Laureate Shirin Ebadi and is Deputy Director and spokesperson for the **banned Centre for Human Rights Defenders**.

Following a trial which lasted half a day, painter and activist **Atena Farghadani** is serving a sentence of 12 year 9 months for criticising the regime through her art and peaceful activism. In a cartoon Atena used her right to freedom of expression to oppose a government Bill. She associated with the families of political prisoners and posted anti-government messages on Facebook. She was found guilty of charges including assembly, colluding against national security, spreading propaganda against the system and insulting the President, members of parliament and the Supreme Leader.

AFFILIATE TO CODIR

Solidarity with the struggle of the Iranian people for peace, equality, human rights

STARTS HERE!



CODIR supports the campaign for peace, human and democratic rights in Iran. It campaigns for the release of all political prisoners and for trade unions to have freedom to organise and campaign effectively. CODIR supplies news and analysis of events in Iran and related issues from the world.

Affiliation fees:

Local organisations: £20 - £50,
Regional organisations £50,
National organisations: £100 to £250.

For information on CODIR please write to us at: CODIR-B.M.CODIR, London, WC1N 3XX

Visit us on: www.codir.net

ESSENTIAL COVER WHEREVER YOU WORK

From **£1.30** a month

Worried about your job? In these uncertain times there's never been a better time to **join UNISON**.

For as little as £1.30 a month our members get:

- advice, support and help at work
- a helpline that is open until midnight
- legal help for you at work and your family at home
- plus a wide range of exclusive member discounts.

Annual salary	Monthly cost
Up to £2,000	£1.30
£2,001 - £5,000	£3.50
£5,001 - £8,000	£5.30
£8,001 - £11,000	£6.60
£11,001 - £14,000	£7.85
£14,001 - £17,000	£9.70
£17,001 - £20,000	£11.50
£20,001 - £25,000	£14.00
£25,001 - £30,000	£17.25
£30,001 - £35,000	£20.30
over £35,000	£22.50

Join online at joinunison.org or call free on **0800 171 2193**

UNISON essential cover for you



World Trade Unions In solidarity with the Iranian workers

On the eve of May Day 2015, we, the representatives of trade unions around the world, raise our voice again in solidarity with the struggle of Iranian workers and trade unionists for fundamental rights and better pay and working conditions. In pursuit of our call on 1 August 2013 on the eve of the inauguration of the Iranian president, Hassan Rouhani, we once again call on him to fulfil the promises he made during his 2013 election campaign to act on the legitimate demands of Iranian workers for a decent living wage and the right to form, join and belong to a trade union of their choice.

We remind the Iranian president that two years after his election on a platform of undertakings to respond to the demands of Iranian people, unemployment is still high and increasing, inflation is sky high, prices of basic and essential goods are out of the reach of workers, wages are not paid on time and destitution has reached catastrophic levels. Conventions on health and safety are openly flouted. Since last July, large groups of workers - including miners, auto workers, teachers, nurses and others, in all provinces - have taken to the streets and demonstrated outside the Iranian Parliament to demand their legitimate rights. These rights are set out in international conventions such as ILO Conventions 87 and 98. It is only by the President and his government responding to these legitimate demands that working people in Iran and their trade union brothers and sisters across the world can be confident that they can rely on his words.

Over the years we have continuously received verified reports of workers and trade unionists being arrested, imprisoned, fired and deprived of their livelihood. Currently, a number of trade union activists are serving prison sentences for the sole 'offence' of being trade unionists and campaigning for workers' rights, decent wages and improved working conditions. We hold that no workers should be detained in prison for demanding their internationally accepted rights.

The trades unions supporting this May Day Call to Action are united in calling upon the government of the Islamic Republic of Iran to:

- ◆ Release immediately all trade unionists imprisoned for their trade union activities, including Ali-Reza Hashemi (General Secretary, Teachers' Association), Rassoul Bodaghi (Teachers' Association), Mahmood Bagheri (Teachers' Association), Mohammad Davari (Teachers' Association), Abdulreza Ghanabri (Teachers' Association), Shahrokh Zamani (Painters' and Decorators' Union), Behnam



Ebrahimdzadeh (Painters' and Decorators' Union), Mohammad Jarrahi (Painters' and Decorators' Union), Mahmoud Salehi (Kurdish trade unionist), Ebrahim Madadi (the Union of Workers of the Tehran and Suburbs Bus Company- Sherkat-e Vahed) and Davoud Razavi (the Union of Workers of the Tehran and Suburbs Bus Company- Sherkat-e Vahed);

- ◆ Halt the sacking of trade unionists and workers' activists on the basis of their trade union activities and reinstate those who have lost their jobs for campaigning for workers' rights;
- ◆ Remove all obstacles preventing Iranian workers from forming independent trade unions and joining trade unions in accordance with ILO Conventions 87 (freedom of association) and 98 (collective bargaining); and
- ◆ Lift the ban on the right of workers to commemorate and celebrate May Day, organise May Day events and mark 1 May as a national holiday.

Signatories:

- IndustriALL Global Union,
- ICTUR (International Centre for Trade Union Rights),
- TUC,
- Amnesty UK Trade Union Network,
- UNITE,
- NUT,
- UNISON,
- RMT,
- FBU,
- NUJ,
- PEO (Pancyprian Federation of Labour),
- Petrol-Is (Petroleum, Chemical and Rubber Workers' Union, Turkey),
- Tekgıda-Is (Union of Tobacco, Beverage, Food and Related Industry Workers of Turkey),
- TUMTIS (All Transport Workers' Union of Turkey),
- Deriteks (Leather, Weaving and Textile Workers' Union of Turkey),
- Tezkoop-Is (Union of Commerce Education Office and Fine Arts Workers of Turkey),
- Belediye-Is (Municipal and General Workers' Union of Turkey),
- Kristal-Is (Cement, Glass & Soil Industries Workers' Union of Turkey),
- Basın-Is (Printing Publishing Packaging and Graphical Workers' Union of Turkey),
- TGS (Journalists Union of Turkey),
- CODIR (Committee for the Defence of Iranian People's Rights).