



IRAN DEMOCRACY MONITOR

The American Foreign Policy Council's Review of
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Related Categories: Democracy and Governance; Economic Sanctions; Human Rights and Humanitarian Issues; International Economics and Trade; Islamic Extremism; Corruption; Iran

IRAN'S CENSORSHIP NOOSE TIGHTENS

Internet freedom, already an endangered species within the Islamic Republic, is poised to become even scarcer. Iranian parliament, or *majles*, has put forward a draft bill on "Organizing Social Media Messaging" which - if adopted - would allow the regime to dramatically tighten its grip over basic internet freedoms within the country. The draft measure proposes a "six degree" imprisonment (with terms lasting from six months to two years) and fines of up to \$80 million *rials* (\$1,900) on individuals who distribute tools such as VPNs that enable citizens to bypass state censorship.

The motion also calls for the creation of a new cyber-bureaucracy encompassing such institutions as the country's Cyberspace Center, its ministries of Intelligence, Culture and Islamic Guidance, the Attorney General's Office, the Cultural Commission, state-run radio and television, the national police, and others. Representatives from these agencies and departments will participate in an "organizing committee" to supervise internet usage and content, regulate messaging apps, and investigate infractions. The ultimate goal, observers say, is to make it impossible for Iranians to access "foreign" messaging apps, forcing them instead to rely on domestic variants that are regulated and sanitized by authorities. (*Radio Farda*, August 25, 2020)

RIGHTS WATCHDOG DETAILS DEPTHS OF REGIME BRUTALITY

Sporadic grassroots protests in Iran over the past two years intensified dramatically in November 2019, prompting a massive campaign of repression on the part of the Iranian regime in response. The extent of the excesses perpetrated against Iranian protestors by authorities last Fall have now been documented in damning detail in a new report by human rights watchdog Amnesty International. The Iranian regime's crackdown, the Amnesty report - entitled *Trampling Humanity* - details, resulted in "a campaign of mass repression that led to hundreds of deaths, resulting from the deliberate use of lethal force, and to the arrest of more than 7,000 men, women and children as young as 10 years old within a matter of days."

"Many detainees, including prisoners of conscience, were subjected to incommunicado detention and enforced disappearance for days, weeks or even months while held in undisclosed locations," the study lays out. Additionally, "torture was used to punish, intimidate and humiliate detainees" on a broad scale, including treatment such as "being hooded or blindfolded, punched, kicked, flogged, beaten with sticks, rubber hosepipes, batons and cables, suspended and/or forced into holding painful stress positions for prolonged periods, deprived of sufficient food and potable water, and placed in prolonged solitary confinement, sometimes for weeks or even months."

"Given the gravity of the human rights violations perpetrated and the systematic impunity prevailing in Iran," the report concludes, "Amnesty International renews its call on member states of the UN Human Rights Council to mandate a UN-led inquiry into the widespread and systematic patterns of mass arrests, enforced disappearances, torture and unfair trials of detainees, as well as the unlawful killings of protesters and bystanders, that took place during and in the aftermath of the November 2019 protests with a view to ensuring accountability and guarantees of non-repetition." (Amnesty International, September 2020)

OPPOSITION CALLS FOR STEPPED UP U.S. ASSISTANCE

A prominent Iranian opposition group has urged the Trump administration to provide the resources necessary to sustain Iran's grassroots protests. "Iranian workers' resolve and unity are fierce," the *Farashgard* opposition group has laid out in an open letter to Secretary of State Mike Pompeo that was posted on the Medium platform. "Their already impoverished state, however, is combining with a collapsing economy and the COVID crisis. A great many among them are their family's primary breadwinner but have not received their wages in months. By striking, they know they may lose their jobs, and they know they risk being imprisoned, as countless workers before them have been. Yet they have their eyes on the prize of a dignified life and an accountable government. Their families suffer but support their cause, as does the whole of the Iranian nation."

Here, the group argues, the U.S. can provide material assistance - in the form of an "Iran Strike Fund" that would provide resources and sustenance to the families of striking workers. Such an initiative "would aid the people's movement to overcome the regime that has brutalized them and terrorized the Middle East region and the world for over four decades," the letter lays out. It would also borrow a page from the playbook of Poland's Solidarity Movement, which played a pivotal role in ending communist rule in that country at the tail end of the Cold War. (Medium, August 17, 2020)