

IRANIssue

Canada remains seriously concerned about the human rights situation in Iran, and regularly raises the issue with the Iranian government. Despite international pressure and Iranian claims of an evolution in the internal political climate, there has been little evidence of improvement in the principal areas of concern. The UN Human Rights Commission Special Representative, Maurice Copithorne, has recently expressed the view that the situation may well have deteriorated and there is growing concern about the islamization of higher education, further limits to independence of thought and expression and the extension of the Sharia law. Because of the commitment to reinforcing traditional Shia values, the regime continues to resist the implementation of certain internationally recognized human rights norms. The regime hopes also to preempt developments which could undermine its own authority and the social order which was entrenched as a result of the Khomeini revolution.

Background

Serious individual human rights abuses in Iran are attested to by the UN Special Representative, the UN Special Rapporteurs on Religious Intolerance and on Freedom of Opinion and Expression, Human Rights Watch International, Amnesty International, and various religious bodies such as the international Bahai communities and the pentecostal Assemblies of God. Abuses are occurring with too much regularity.

Individuals who suffer the most persecution, particularly restrictions on rights of free expression and assembly, judicial proceedings, random killings, and ostracism applied to family members in areas such as higher education, often do so because of their affiliation with specific groups or communities. These are thought to present a challenge to the system established by the Islamic revolution or whose historical background elicits aversion from the majority Shia Muslims.

Testimony from sources within Iran suggests that persecution of individuals often appears to be carried out at the local level under the auspices of revolutionary courts, military commanders and religious figures. The excesses witnessed in the years immediately after the revolution with respect to the imposition of the death penalty for political reasons seem to have declined. However, there are real concerns over the fact that the death penalty continues to be imposed for political reasons. Executions are still occurring although the regime appears to have responded to international pleas on several occasions by commuting sentences. Particularly worrying are the apparently random killings of Bahais and evangelical Christians. Perpetrators, when prosecuted, are treated leniently by the courts. Insufficient transparency, fairness and independence of the court system in protecting individual human rights has been noted by the UN Special Representative as a problem needing serious attention.

Rights of free assembly and free expression are constrained, generally taking place within a context or limits designed to maintain the integrity of the Islamic republican system of government. The relatively open political debate which took place during last Spring's