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PRESS RELEASE

Iran: Escalation of Attacks and Censorship After Elections

ARTICLE 19 calls on the Islamic Republic of Iran immediately to unblock Iranians' access to international media, to lift bans on local newspapers and websites, and to stop harassing Iranian and foreign journalists in the wake of last Friday's presidential elections.

The Iranian government is using various methods to block the reporting of events following the presidential election on 12 June, including by censoring and suspending newspapers blocking internet news websites and preventing access to international news media.

There have been widespread public protests in major cities across Iran, after the incumbent candidate, President Mahmoud Ahmedinejad, announced a resounding victory over opposition reformist candidates early on Saturday morning.

Staff from several international news organisations, including Belgian, Spanish, Canadian, American, Emirati and Italian newscasters, have had tapes confiscated, been ordered to leave the country, been beaten while covering public protests and even been detained. The BBC English and Persian television and radio services have been interrupted by electronic jamming, apparently from within Iran, which began on Friday and has gradually intensified.

The Iranian print media has been subject to serious censorship. The *Kalam-e Sabz* newspaper, which supports opposition reformist candidate, Mir-Hossein Mousavi, was not printed on Monday 15 June. The intelligence ministry has also reportedly ordered all newspapers not to report anything which questions the legitimacy of the elections.

The government has censored internet sites operating within and outside Iran too, as part of an ongoing pattern of repression. Over the weekend, civilians began posting coverage and images of the post-election violence on sites such as YouTube and Facebook, filling the vacuum left by the failure of other media to report on this. The government responded by blocking social networking sites on Saturday afternoon, along with the official campaign websites of the reformist political candidates.

Several Iranian journalists have been arrested, disappeared or gone into hiding in the last two days.

SMS messaging was blocked on the eve of the elections and the main mobile telephone network for Iran cut its services in Tehran on Saturday. There have been various reports of phone lines not working for hours after the polls closed.

The national state media (IRIB), the only locally licensed television and radio services available in Iran, has refrained from covering any of the clashes between pro-reform supporters and the police.

ARTICLE 19 notes that the Republic of Iran has ratified the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), which guarantees the right to freedom of expression. The attempts by the Iranian authorities to impose a news blackout on reporting on the election and its aftermath are a clear breach of the right to freedom of expression as protected by the ICCPR. ARTICLE 19 calls on Iran to respect its ICCPR obligations and to stop the censorship by unblocking access to all print, broadcast and online media immediately.

NOTES TO EDITORS:

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- ARTICLE 19 is an independent human rights organisation that works around the world to protect and promote the right to freedom of expression. It takes its name from Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which guarantees free speech.