



## Iran reviewed under the UPR

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**On the morning of 15 February 2010, Iran appeared before the working group of the universal periodic review (UPR). As the UPR session took place, protesters advocating for human rights, freedom of expression and release of prisoners in Iran were demonstrating outside the UN building.**

Attendance at Iran's UPR was unusually high and included a large media presence and particularly high security. Iran brought a large delegation, headed by Mohammad Javad Larijani, the head of the Iranian High Council for Human Rights, and composed of a number of high-level officials. In his opening statements Mr Larijani emphasised Iran's various human rights initiatives, particularly cooperation with human rights bodies and special procedures. He noted the detrimental effect of economic sanctions on basic human needs. Mr Larijani encouraged the Human Rights Council to join Iran in considering how Islamic values can enrich human rights.

Given the high number of States wishing to speak, a two minute time limit was imposed on each speaker. It was noteworthy that the first speakers included the United States, Canada, France, Australia, the United Kingdom, and other Western States who sharply criticised Iran on civil and political rights violations. They were particularly concerned with increasing rates of arbitrary detention, arbitrary execution, and reports of cruel and unusual treatment and torture since the 2009 presidential elections. Western States recommended that Iran provide free and fair trials to those charged with criminal acts, ratify the Convention against Torture and integrate it into domestic law, allow the Special Rapporteur on torture to visit the country and abolish (or at least limit) use of the death penalty. Western States also criticised Iran's severe restrictions on freedom of expression and targeting of journalists. Finally, they

recommended that Iran take steps to ensure freedom from discrimination and freedom of religion, in light of violations experienced by the Baha'i and Kurd minorities.

Many other countries, including developing States from Latin America, Asia and Africa, expressed a different perspective on human rights in Iran.

They commended Iran on progress fulfilling economic and social rights, particularly the rights to education and health, and raising standards of living through development and poverty eradication. They also praised the rich Iranian heritage, the Iranian constitution, legal processes and human rights institutions. Some States, including Bangladesh, Nicaragua and Lebanon, commented that Iran's unique history and culture may justify different perspectives and approaches on human rights.

The Iranian delegation responded twice during the review commenting on criticisms regarding the enjoyment of civil and political rights but refused to acknowledge extensive violations. Instead, it emphasised the strength of the Iranian judicial system and held that executions and arrests were only employed in cases necessitated by illegal demonstrations and other activity. It also commented on women's improving status in society and extensively on the protections against religious discrimination in the legal system. According to the delegation, any action taken against the Baha'i or other minority groups was a response to criminal behaviour.

In conclusion, Mr Larijani emphasised the importance of establishing a new democratic, social order accountable to the Iranian people and not foreign powers. He also noted that cultural diversity may enrich human rights and that Iran's unique experience with human rights is rooted in cultural and religious values. The session closed with organised clapping.

The Council will adopt the outcome of the review on Wednesday 17 February.