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To: Permanent representatives of member states of the Human Rights Council

Your Excellency,

We, the undersigned cross-regional group of human rights civil society organizations call on your government to support the resolution renewing the mandate of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Islamic Republic of Iran at the 34th session of the United Nations Human Rights Council. The country mandate has been a vital tool of promotion human rights in Iran since its establishment in 2011. It has proven effective at spotlighting the gravity of the situation in the country and provoking internal debate about some laws and practices that violate international human rights law and standards. Only through continued attention from the international community will these initial achievements translate into measurable reforms of law and practice that substantively improve the rights situation people in Iran face.

Despite diplomatic and trade openings since the implementation of the internationally agreed Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action on Iran's nuclear programme, hopes that human rights improvements would follow have not yet materialized. Core issues of concern outlined by UN treaty bodies, special procedures and the UN Secretary-General remain unaddressed. Iran has failed to co-operate with special procedures, and despite issuing a standing invitation to all Special Rapporteurs in 2002, it has allowed no country visits since 2005. Accordingly, it is essential that the Human Rights Council continues to treat human rights in Iran as a priority concern. Moreover, as Iran has a newly elected parliament, and an upcoming presidential election in May 2017 this is a crucial time for the international community to emphasize its concerns to the government.

Iran has maintained the highest per capita execution rate in the world for several years and, according to the Special Rapporteur, put to death at least 530 people in 2016. In January 2017 alone, the authorities executed at least 72 people. The majority of these executions took place after unfair trials and were for drug-related offences, which do not meet the threshold of the "most serious crimes" to which the use of the death penalty must be restricted under international law. Some others were executed for vaguely worded offences such as "enmity against God". Under Iranian law, activities that should not be criminalized at all, such as adultery, consensual same-sex sexual conduct and "insulting the Prophet", remain punishable by death. In 2016, there were reports of at least two men being sentenced to death for "insulting the Prophet". Iran continues to execute individuals who were under the age of 18 at the time of the crime. In the last two years, authorities executed at least nine juvenile offenders, including at least two in January 2017.

Torture and other ill-treatment of detainees remains common, especially during interrogation. The authorities systematically failed to investigate allegations of torture and other ill-treatment and judges continue to use "confessions" obtained as a result of torture to convict defendants. Authorities frequently deny access to adequate medical care for political prisoners, in many cases as an intentional means of punishing them. Judicial authorities also continue to impose and carry out flogging, blinding, and amputation.

The Iranian authorities severely restrict the exercise of freedom of expression, association, and peaceful assembly. These restrictions include pervasive censorship of the press and internet, the criminalization of many forms of speech, arbitrary restrictions on civil society, and persecution for acts of religious worship by certain religious minorities. The authorities routinely use arbitrary detention to stifle and punish dissent. Those targeted include journalists, lawyers, political activists, student activists, trade unionists, artists, bloggers, and human rights

defenders including women's rights defenders, and LGBT rights activists who have simply been exercising rights protected under international law. In the past year, under the guise of national security offences, courts imposed increasingly harsh prison sentences on these individuals for peaceful acts such as criticism of Iran's human rights record on social media, communication with international human rights mechanisms, or organizing petitions.

Ethnic minority activists, including Arabs, Balochs, Kurds and Azerbaijani Turks, and members of religious minorities, such as Baha'is, Protestant Christians including Christian converts, Sunni Muslims, Sufi Muslims and the Yarsan, also face similar patterns of abuse and restriction of their rights. They remain subject to entrenched discrimination that includes limits on their access to education, employment, adequate housing, political office, and the exercise of other cultural, civil and political rights.

Systematic discrimination and violence against women and girls in law and practice merit serious concern. Women, for example, do not have equal rights with men in marriage, divorce, child custody, inheritance, watching several live sporting events in stadiums, and protection from criminal harm. Married women cannot obtain a passport without the permission of their husband. Moreover, a husband can prevent his spouse pursuing an occupation he deems against family values or harmful to his or her reputation. The legal age of marriage for girls is 13 and fathers can apply for permission to arrange for their daughters to be married at an even younger age.

The authorities have consistently failed to adopt laws criminalizing sexual and other gender-based violence, including early and forced marriage, marital rape and domestic violence. Compulsory "veiling" (*hijab*) laws empower police and other security forces to target women for harassment, violence, and imprisonment, and to deny women equal enjoyment of their economic and social rights, including to education, employment and sports.

Since 2014, the Iranian Parliament has debated eight bills, passing five, that further curtail women's rights by limiting access to health and family planning services and employment.

In the past six years, the Special Rapporteur's actions have helped to trigger calls for reforms from inside the country, particularly with respect to the use of the death penalty for drug offences. The Special Rapporteur has also provided crucial support for the work and protection of Iranian human rights defenders and, in a number of cases, improvements in the treatment of individual detainees.

Renewal of the Special Rapporteur's mandate will send a powerful signal to the Iranian authorities that human rights violations and lack of accountability remain of concern, globally and for the Council, and that the international community expects meaningful and tangible improvements in that matter.

Sincerely,

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Hassan Nayeb Hashem, Representative to the Human Rights Council
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Taimoor Aliassi, UN Representative
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Mansoor Bibak, Co-Director
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Dr. Shirin Ebadi, Founder and President
Center for Supporters of Human Rights

Veronica Yates, Director
Child Rights International Network (CRIN)

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