

U.S. Sanctions for Human Rights Abuses

On Sept. 29, 2010, the United States imposed the first sanctions on Iran for human rights violations. President Obama signed an executive order that allowed financial and travel restrictions on senior government officials for “sustained and severe violation of human rights” during or after Iran’s 2009 presidential election. The abuses included arrest, killing, torture, beating, blackmail and rape. The United States cited eight security and judicial officials, but noted that it would continue to add names as “credible evidence” became available.

The executive order introduced a new tool for the United States to address human rights issues in the Islamic Republic. The sanctions:

- Bar the eight officials from travel to the United States.
- Block any assets that might be in the United States or in U.S. institutions.
- Prohibit Americans from doing business with them.

The White House statement said, “The United States will always stand with those in Iran who aspire to have their voices heard. We will be a voice for those aspirations that are universal, and we continue to call upon the Iranian government to respect the rights of its people.”

A U.S. fact sheet charged that the officials played a variety of roles:

Mohammad Ali Jafari, commander of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps. “As commander of the IRGC, Jafari controlled the Basij Forces during the June 2009 election. Forces under his command participated in beatings, murder, and arbitrary arrests and detentions of peaceful protestors.”

Sadeq Mahsouli, currently the minister of welfare and social security and former minister of the interior during the 2009 election. “Mahsouli had authority over all police forces and interior ministry security agents. His forces were responsible for attacks on the dormitories of Tehran University on June 15, 2009, during which students were severely beaten and detained. Detained students were tortured and ill-treated in the basement of the Interior Ministry building; other protestors were severely abused at the Kahrizak Detention Center, which was operated by police under Mahsouli’s control.”

Qolam-Hossein Mohseni-Ejei, current prosecutor general of Iran. As minister of intelligence during the 2009 election, Mohseni-Ejei “confirmed that he authorized confrontations with protesters and their arrests... Protesters were detained without formal charges brought against them and during this detention detainees were subjected to beatings, solitary confinement, and a denial of due process rights at the hands of intelligence officers under the direction of Mohseni-Ejei. In addition, political figures were coerced into making false confessions under unbearable interrogations, which included torture, abuse, blackmail, and the threatening of family members.”

Saeed Mortazavi, former Tehran prosecutor general. “He issued a blanket order used for the detention of hundreds of activists, journalists, and students, and was responsible for sending detainees to the Kahrizak Detention Center, where they were tortured and abused, resulting in several deaths.” He was suspended from office in August 2010 after an judicial investigation into role in the death of three detainees.

Heydar Moslehi, minister of intelligence since August 2009. “Under his leadership, the Ministry of Intelligence has continued the practices of widespread arbitrary detention and persecution of protestors and dissidents. The Ministry of Intelligence continues to run Ward 209 of Evin Prison, where many activists are being held for their peaceful activities in opposition to the ruling government; interrogators from the Ministry of Intelligence have subjected prisoners in Ward 209 to beatings, mental abuse, and sexual abuse. In recent months, prisoners in Ward 209 have reported forced confessions and interference by the Ministry of Intelligence in the judicial process; one detainee from the ward was executed after a forced confession and another was executed when torture failed to yield a confession. As the Minister of Intelligence, Moslehi bears responsibility for the ongoing abuses.”

Mostafa Mohammad Najjar, appointed deputy commander of Armed Forces in charge of police forces in November 2009. “He was in charge of the government response to protests on Ashoura, one of the holiest days in Shia Islam, which in 2009 coincided with December 27, 2009. State media reported 37 dead and hundreds arrested. He is currently the minister of interior and, as such, has authority over all police forces, Interior Ministry security agents, and plainclothes agents.”

Ahmad-Reza Radan, deputy chief of Iran’s National Police. He “was responsible for beatings, murder, and arbitrary arrests and detentions against protestors that were committed by the police forces. In addition, several detainees taken to Kahrizak Detention Center, the detention center where at least three protestors lost their lives after being subject to abuses, have alleged that Radan was present in Kahrizak and personally participated in the beatings and ill-treatment of detainees.”

Hossein Taeb, currently deputy Revolutionary Guards commander for intelligence. “As commander of the paramilitary Basij Forces during the 2009 election, forces under Taeb’s command participated in beatings, extrajudicial killings, and arbitrary arrests and detentions of peaceful protestors and other political activists.”