

Human Rights Watch

Torture, Former Combatants, Political Prisoners, Terror Suspects, & Terrorists

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The UN Human Rights Council yesterday turned a blind eye to abuses in two among the worlds most repressive countries when it decided to end its scrutiny of Iran and Uzbekistan, Human Rights Watch said today.

The Human Rights Council decision sends exactly the wrong signals to abusive governments around the world, said Peggy Hicks, global advocacy director of Human Rights Watch. The councils action amounts to an endorsement of crackdowns on human rights in Iran and Uzbekistan. It shows utter disregard for the human rights activists who are struggling in these countries.

Iran and Uzbekistan had both been subject to council monitoring under a confidential procedure known as 1503 (after the resolution that created it). Human Rights Watch and other groups had long argued that severe human rights abuses and government intransigence in both countries demanded an effective council response, including that it make public its scrutiny of both situations.

The human rights situations in Uzbekistan and Iran have significantly deteriorated in the past year. But instead of elevating its scrutiny of those two countries, the council decided to drop monitoring of both situations altogether. Twenty-five of the councils 47 members favored ending scrutiny of both Uzbekistan and Iran. Among the 25 states are many that have consistently aimed to shield abusive governments from criticism. But in this case they were joined by virtually the entire Africa group, including Gabon, Ghana, Mali, Mauritius, Nigeria, Senegal, South Africa and Zambia, which had previously supported human rights protections. Surprisingly, Brazil, Ecuador, Japan and South Korea abstained on both votes. Mexico and Switzerland abstained on the decision to discontinue consideration of Iran, while voting to maintain consideration of Uzbekistan. Ukraine abstained on Uzbekistan and voted to keep scrutiny of Iran.

The number of publicly known executions by Iran grew by more than 80 percent last year to 177, and Iran leads the world in the execution of juveniles. These executions often follow secret trials that fail to meet minimum international standards. For example, in July 2006, an Iranian court sentenced 10 men to death following a one-day trial, all of whom have since been executed. The authorities also intensified their harassment of human rights defenders and lawyers in 2006, including declaring illegal the Center for Defense of Human Rights, led by Shirin Ebadi, the 2003 Nobel Peace Prize winner. Iranians detained for peaceful expression of political views have been subjected to torture and ill-treatment, and two prisoners held for their political beliefs died in prison under suspicious circumstances in 2006.

In Uzbekistan, the government continues to deny accountability for the 2005 massacre in Andijan in which security forces killed hundreds of mostly unarmed protesters, and is conducting in a fierce crackdown on civil society. Since the Andijan massacre, it has imprisoned at least 15 human rights defenders on politically motivated charges, with two new arrests just since January. Torture remains rampant, with the government having failed to take any meaningful steps to implement the 2003 recommendations of the UN special rapporteur on torture. Authorities steadfastly refuse to grant access to the country for any of the UN experts who have made long-standing requests for access, including the independent expert appointed under the 1503 procedure. The government has rejected any concerns expressed about its human rights record as unfounded, and has gone to great lengths to mislead the international community about its human rights record.

States that voted yes or abstained on the councils decisions to drop scrutiny of Uzbekistan and Iran have a lot of explaining to do, said Hicks. They must speak out now about abuses in Iran and Uzbekistan, and endorse further action by the council to address the worsening situation in both countries.

For broadcast-quality audio commentaries on the Human Rights Council by Human Rights Watch experts, please see the below interviews.

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