



Iran's Ban on the Media – A Violation of Domestic and International Law

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The Iranian government has sought to stifle the protests—and cover up its abuse of human rights—by cutting off the free exchange of information. Iran's acts not only violate international law but also its own constitution.

Iran Violated its Own Constitution

Article 24 of the Iranian Constitution allows the press to have “freedom of expression” except when “detrimental to the fundamental principles of Islam or the rights of the public.”¹ Furthermore, Article 25 respects the *secrecy of communication* by prohibiting “recording and disclosure of telephone conversations.”² It further prohibits eavesdropping as well as “willful failure to transmit” communications between its citizens.³ By blocking satellite transmissions, internet access, telephone communications, and other forms of communication and reporting, Iran stands in violation of its constitution.

Iran Violated International Law (International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights)

Iran is a State Party to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR). It signed the ICCPR on April 4, 1968 and ratified it on June 24, 1975 without any *declaration or reservation*,⁴ committing to all the obligations under the Covenant.⁵

Article 22 of the ICCPR gives everyone the “right to freedom of association with others” and Article 19 gives the right to freedom of expression, which includes “freedom to seek, receive and impart information and ideas of all kinds, regardless of frontiers, either orally, *in writing or in print*, in the form of art, *or through any other media of his choice*.”⁶

¹ CONST. OF THE ISLAMIC REPUBLIC OF IRAN, ch. III, art. 24.

² CONST. OF THE ISLAMIC REPUBLIC OF IRAN, ch. III, art. 25.

³ *Id.*

⁴ United Nations, *Treaty Series*, vol. 999, p. 171, available at <http://www2.ohchr.org/english/bodies/ratification/4.htm>.

⁵ International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, adopted Dec. 16, 1966, G.A. Res. 2200A (XXI), art. 19(1)-(2), U.N. Doc. A/6316 (*entered into force* Mar. 23, 1976) [hereinafter “ICCPR”].

⁶ *Id.* at art. 19 (emphasis added). Article 19 states:

On June 16, Iranian authorities banned all foreign journalists from leaving their offices to film and report on street protests.⁷ According to Reporters Without Borders, 23 local journalists and bloggers have been arrested since June 15.⁸ Foreign media is working under severe restrictions in Iran. Jon Leyne, a BBC correspondent, was asked to leave the country.⁹ Iran's attempt to hide its abuse of human rights from the international community by blocking journalistic activity and prohibiting foreign press from observing and reporting on events within the country violates the ICCPR.

Iranian authorities have also blocked the communications of Iranian citizens. They have blocked satellite transmissions, internet access, cut phone lines, and closed other telecommunications such as SMS text messaging.¹⁰ Article 17 of the ICCPR outlaws arbitrary interference with correspondence of individuals. It states that "[n]o one shall be subjected to arbitrary or unlawful interference with his privacy, family, or *correspondence* Everyone has the right to the protection of the law against such interference or attacks."¹¹ With no regard for this provision, Iran has blocked satellite transmissions, internet access, telephone communications, and other forms of communicating and reporting.

Iran's actions against the media and prohibiting communication between its citizens further violate the international norms set through the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR). Article 19 of the UDHR provides everyone "the right to freedom of opinion and expression," which includes freedom to "seek, receive and impart information and ideas through *any media* regardless of frontiers."¹² Further, Article 12 of the UDHR outlaws arbitrary interference with correspondence of individuals.¹³ Clearly, Iran has infringed upon these universal norms by putting severe restrictions on the media and blocking communications.

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1. Everyone shall have the right to hold opinions without interference.
 2. Everyone shall have the right to freedom of expression; this right shall include freedom to seek, receive and impart information and ideas of all kinds, regardless of frontiers, either orally, in writing or in print, in the form of art, or through any other media of his choice.

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⁷ *Iran Rules Out Election Annulment Despite Protests*, DAILY TIMES, June 17, 2009, available at http://www.dailytimes.com.pk/default.asp?page=2009\06\18\story_18-6-2009_pg20_1.

⁸ *West 'seeks Iran disintegration'*, BBC NEWS, June 22, 2009, http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/8112036.stm.

⁹ *Id.*

¹⁰ Amnesty Int'l, *Iranian Authorities Must Respect and Nurture Debate*, June 18, 2009, <http://www.amnesty.org/en/news-and-updates/news/iranian-authorities-must-respect-and-nurture-debate-20090618>.

¹¹ ICCPR art. 17 (emphasis added).

¹² Universal Declaration of Human Rights, G.A. Res. 217A, art. 19, U.N. GAOR, 3d Sess., 1st plen. mtg., U.N. Doc A/810 (Dec. 12, 1948) [hereinafter "UDHR"] (emphasis added).

¹³ UDHR art. 12. ("No one shall be subjected to arbitrary interference with his privacy, family, home or correspondence, nor to attacks upon his honour and reputation. Everyone has the right to the protection of the law against such interference or attacks.").