



American  
Public Health  
Association

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*Protect, Prevent, Live Well*

October 1, 2009

Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon  
United Nations  
First Avenue at 46th Street  
New York, NY 10017

Dear Secretary-General:

On behalf of the American Public Health Association (APHA), the world's oldest and most diverse organization of public health professionals with a long-standing commitment to promoting global health, I write to express our concern about the dire health and human rights situation in Iran. The aftermath of the June elections has been marked by reports from within Iran highlighting horrific human rights violations that are having deleterious impacts on the public health of Iranians. These violations include assaults on human rights activists by government-controlled military and police, the denial of medical care to persons suffering injuries, the removal of deceased protesters from hospitals without family notification and the torture and sexual assault of Iranian prisoners arrested without charge.

APHA urges the United Nations (UN) to condemn this devastating violence, demand restoration of rule of law and take decisive action on insisting the return of human rights protection, including access to needed health care services for all Iranians, as well as for visitors and humanitarian workers throughout the country. On December 10, 1948, Iran and 47 other countries came together to sign the UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR). During this post-election period, Iran has violated many of the basic tenets of this Declaration, including the rights to express opinion and engage in peaceable assembly, the right not to be subjected to cruel and unusual punishment, including torture, and the right to healthcare and well-being.

UDHR articles 19 and 20 outline the right to freedom of opinion, expression and peaceable assembly; the Iranian constitution itself guarantees the right to free assembly. Yet during massive rallies in June, and during continued protests in the months since the election, the Iranian government has used brutal tactics to disperse demonstrators, killing some and injuring many more.

This violence, already damaging to public health, has been compounded by reports of alleged violations of medical neutrality by the Iranian government. The International Campaign for Human Rights in Iran has reported that people seeking medical attention for injuries suffered during demonstrations are being arrested in hospitals, and that doctors are being forced to report

to state security any injuries that appear to be related to protests. This puts doctors in Iran in an ethically untenable and desperate position: to obey the state or care for their patients. Healthcare professionals have an ethical duty to prevent and limit suffering of patients in their care and a duty to practice in a neutral way without fear or favor. As such, the Iranian government must allow health professionals to treat patients regardless of their political leanings and activities.

Finally, Iran is patently disregarding the Declaration on the Protection of All Persons from Being Subjected to Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment adopted by the UN in 1975, as evidenced by the increasing reports of the torture and rape of political detainees in the aftermath of the June elections. Many of Iran's human rights lawyers and journalists have been detained and potentially tortured, creating a chilling effect in all forms of political activity and freedom of expression that must be condemned by the world community. This torture will also create lasting physical and emotional scars in those tortured that Iran's medical community must have access to and freedom to help heal.

The Iranian government's denial of basic human rights protection constitutes a very serious offense that affects not only the health of Iran's citizens, but also the ability and safety of health care workers to provide appropriate care and assistance to those in need.

Representing internationally-recognized voices within the global community, it is APHA's moral responsibility to unify and speak out against such violations that threaten individuals' fundamental health and human rights. Believing the UN has a comparable responsibility, we urge you to condemn the Iranian government's violent acts towards its citizens and commit to taking all steps necessary to meet the health and humanitarian needs of the people of Iran, citizens and humanitarian workers alike.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Georges C. Benjamin". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Georges" and last name "Benjamin" clearly legible.

Georges C. Benjamin, MD, FACP, FACEP (Emeritus)  
Executive Director

cc: Susan Rice, US Ambassador to the UN