

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Contact:

FIDH: Antoine Madelin, (mobile) 33-668226572, Julie Gromellon, (mobile) 41-79-3312450

BIC: Diane Ala'i, (office) 41-22-7985400, (mobile) 41-78-6040100

President Ahmadinejad must redress grave discrimination in Iran

GENEVA, 19 April 2009 – If he desires to lend genuine support to the Durban process, President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad should address the severe forms of discrimination faced by minority groups in his own country when he speaks at the Durban Review Conference here this week, said the Bahá'í International Community (BIC), the Iranian League for the Defense of Human Rights (LDDHI) and the Fédération internationale des ligues des droits de l'homme (FIDH) today.

“By coming to the Durban Review Conference, President Ahmadinejad signals a commitment to the conference’s goals of eliminating all forms of discrimination and intolerance,” said Diane Ala'i, the BIC’s representative to the United Nations in Geneva. “His first move on returning home, then, should be to address the severe discrimination and persecution that have flourished under his tenure.”

Karim Lahidji of LDDHI said: “Human rights have sharply deteriorated in Iran under the presidency of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad. Discrimination against ethnic and religious minorities, as well as against women, are of grave concern. Our hope is that governments, the news media, and other Durban Review Conference participants will hold President Ahmadinejad’s accountable on these points.”

The BIC, LDDHI, and FIDH called particularly on President Ahmadinejad to redress:

Discrimination against ethnic minorities

Repression against activists belonging to ethnic minorities is rising dramatically in Iran. Kurds and other groups are accused of terrorism, attacks on national security or treason, without concrete evidence. The authorities do not seem to make a distinction between peaceful advocacy for the rights of minorities and terrorist attacks by armed groups. Over the past year, members of the Kurdish minority in particular have been severely repressed. At least six Kurdish political activists have been condemned to death. Other ethnic minorities are also targeted, notably the Baluch and the Arab minority of Khuzestan.

Discrimination against women

Gender-based discrimination remains legal in Iran, denying Iranian women their most basic rights. The One Million Signatures Campaign, a grassroots movement launched in August 2006, is raising awareness about discriminatory laws and promoting gender equality. Women’s activists have been arbitrarily arrested, detained and convicted for having engaged in this campaign. Defending women’s rights in Iran is considered a threat to State security.

Discrimination against religious minorities

Religious discrimination is widespread in Iran, affecting Bahá'ís, Christians, Jews, Sufis, Sunni Muslims, and other minorities. Members of the Bahá'í Faith, in particular, face multiple forms of discrimination solely because of their religious beliefs. Over the last four years, more than 200 Bahá'ís have been arbitrarily arrested, detained, intimidated and harassed. When charged with crimes, they face false accusations, such as acting against national security. They are denied a decent livelihood through restrictions on employment and property confiscations. Students are expelled from universities as soon as they are identified as Bahá'ís.

Incitement to hatred condoned

Of particular concern is the manner in which the government controlled news media has vilified adherents of the Bahá'í Faith. Hundreds of articles, radio and television programs, Internet postings, pamphlets containing hate speech have been disseminated in Iran since President Ahmadinejad took power. As well, clerics and officials who publicly incite hatred and violence have been condoned by the authorities – and Iranian Bahá'ís are denied their lawful right of reply. Attacks against Bahá'í homes, businesses and cemeteries are openly encouraged and conducted with impunity.