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Human rights groups call on Iran's regime to stop violent repression of gays

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Iranian Revolutionary Guards Corps raid party to end a "homosexual and Satan-worshipping network."

BERLIN – Human rights activists from international organizations ramped up their pressure in a late December letter to Iran's President Hassan Rouhani, calling on him to swiftly end Iran's persecution of its lesbian, bisexual, gay, and transgender community.

The letter cited the Iran Revolutionary Guards Corps arresting gay Iranians at a birthday party in October as one example of a list of violent attacks against LGBT Iranians. According to the letter, 50 members of the Nabi Akram Brigade of the Revolutionary Guards stormed the party in the city of Kermanshah in western Iran. "Armed members of the security forces verbally abused, assaulted, and beat many of the 80 or so people attending the party, as well as waiters and other staff."

Kermanshah Province's Basij Forces – a state-sponsored shock troop – issued a statement that their aim was to end a "homosexual and Satan-worshipping network with dozens of [members]."

The signatories of the letter to Rouhani are from Human Rights Watch, Amnesty International, the International Gay and Lesbian Human Rights Commission, and the Iranian Queer Organization-IRQO.

They slammed Iran for its Islamic Penal Code.

The anti-gay code "criminalizes any freely and mutually agreed same-sex relations, with punishment ranging from 100 lashes for consensual sexual relations between women (Article 239) to the death penalty for consensual sexual intercourse between men (Article 234). The law also criminalizes other acts between members of the same sex, including touching and intimate kissing, which are punishable by up to 74 lashes (Article 237)."

The human rights representatives called on Iran to repeal its anti-LGBT laws. It is unclear whether Rouhani responded to the letter.

"Nothing essential has changed. The structure is still the same. It's a play, a comic and ugly performance. They're relying on the naiveté of people to be able to succeed," said the openly gay Iranian poet Payam Feili last year about Rouhani's tenure.

According to the human rights letter, Rouhani made an election promise to grant greater individual freedoms to Iranians and end the heavy-handed repression of his predecessor, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad. Western indifference to Iran's repression of its LGBT community was the subject on an editorial in a large LGBT publication in Germany. Siegessäule magazine recently asked why the LGBT community in the West ignores the plight of Iran's LGBT community.



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