



Iran's ruler Ali Khamenei casting his vote in the 2017 presidential election

Prominent Iranians Dismiss Upcoming Elections, Call For A Referendum

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Tens of public figures in Iran have expressed concern in a statement that the upcoming parliamentary elections have been taken hostage by hardliners and security organs.

The statement released Sunday addressed the Iranian nation as "the true owners of this country and its government," and maintained that "the rulers have no special privilege other than representing and serving the people."

The statement has been posted on Telegram messaging app in an account that belongs to Saham News, a media outlet that represented reformist figure Mehdi Karrubi, a former parliamentary speaker and presidential candidate.

The political activists, writers and civil rights defenders stated that the elections in Iran have been hostage to the **"arbitrary supervision" of the Guardian Council**, a body that operates under the direct supervision of Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei and vets the candidates based on their loyalty to him.

They also complained about the intervention of security and intelligence organizations in the election process. According to the statement, the worst examples took place in the 2020 parliamentary elections and the presidential election in 2021 which brought Ebrahim Raisi to power and packed the parliament with hardliners.

The activists also charged that the Assembly of Experts whose members are chosen based on the same kind of vetting by the Guardian Council lacks the independence and capability to supervise the Supreme Leader's performance, as the constitution requires.

Iran's Guardian Council, headed by 97-year-old Ahmad Jannati, a cleric fully loyal to Ali Khamenei.

"The Islamic Republic is overwhelmed by a crisis which is the outcome of distancing itself from the ideals of a republic and democracy and its submission to despotism and dictatorship. During the past 44 years, this has led to multiple political, economic and cultural crises as well as leading to poverty, corruption, repression, violations of the citizens' legitimate rights and freedoms," the statement added.

The activists further said: "As a result of this situation, young Iranians have lost their hope in any improvement in this dreadful situation and see only two options before them: Leave the country or continue living in Iran without dignity under the pressure of humiliation."

In another part of the statement, the signatories pointed out that the Islamic Republic has made hijab enforcement a security issue and by doing so has made the situation even more complicated for women who under the pressure feel further humiliated.

But what was even more notable in the statement was a demand **to change the regime's anti-West foreign policy.**

"The country's independence has been seriously weakened as a result of a foreign policy devoid of dignity and prudence. This situation has made Iran's foreign policy a playground for Russia's aggressive policies," the statement

said, adding that "The Islamic Republic's foreign policy has undermined Iran's national interests and disrupted the balance in its relations with East and West and made the country's progress and development hostage to seriously damaging sanctions."

The activists further pointed out that as a result of this policy despite its anti-imperialistic slogans, the regime has submitted to the humiliating oil for food arrangements and barter trade with underprivileged countries to provide food and medicine.

The signatories to the statement declared that "In such a catastrophic situation that has forced a large part of Iranians and their elites to leave the country for good, holding an election is nothing more than beautifying the regime in a bid to lend it some legitimacy. "We do not believe that such an election is going to lead to any improvement in governance," they insisted.

"What can justify people's participation in the upcoming election in March, is the regime's return to democracy by listening to the people and their elites and bringing about structural reforms in the country. A decision to hold a referendum to change the Constitution is a requirement for that change. Without doing this participation in the election would be a deceit against the country's national interests," the statement concluded.

Centrist politician Faezeh Hashemi, former state TV Chief Mohammad Sarafraz, 1980s militant journalist Isa Saharkhiz, and several cultural figures such as poet Ali Babachahi are among the signatories of the statement.

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