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ONE YEAR UNDER ROUHANI: IRAN'S ABYSMAL HUMAN RIGHTS RECORD

JOINT HEARING

BEFORE THE

SUBCOMMITTEE ON
THE MIDDLE EAST AND NORTH AFRICA

AND THE

SUBCOMMITTEE ON AFRICA, GLOBAL HEALTH,
GLOBAL HUMAN RIGHTS, AND
INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS

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CONTENTS

Page

WITNESSES

Robert P. George, Ph.D., chairman, U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom 9
Ms. Cler Baheri, member of the Baha'i community 44
Mr. Hossein Alizadeh, regional program coordinator for the Middle East and North Africa, International Gay & Lesbian Human Rights Commission 51
Mr. Amir Hossein Etemadi, former Iranian political prisoner 59

LETTERS, STATEMENTS, ETC., SUBMITTED FOR THE HEARING

Robert P. George, Ph.D.: Prepared statement 12
Ms. Cler Baheri: Prepared statement 47
Mr. Hossein Alizadeh: Prepared statement 53
Mr. Amir Hossein Etemadi: Prepared statement 61

APPENDIX

Hearing notice 82
Hearing minutes 83
The Honorable Christopher H. Smith, a Representative in Congress from the State of New Jersey, and chairman, Subcommittee on Africa, Global Health, Global Human Rights, and International Organizations: Prepared statement 84
The Honorable Gerald E. Connolly, a Representative in Congress from the Commonwealth of Virginia: Prepared statement 87

ONE YEAR UNDER ROUHANI: IRAN'S ABYSMAL HUMAN RIGHTS RECORD

THURSDAY, JUNE 19, 2014

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES,
SUBCOMMITTEE ON THE MIDDLE EAST AND NORTH AFRICA AND
SUBCOMMITTEE ON AFRICA, GLOBAL HEALTH,
COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS,
Washington, DC.

The committees met, pursuant to notice, at 10 o'clock a.m., in room 2172 Rayburn House Office Building, Hon. Ileana Ros-Lehtinen (chairman of the subcommittee) presiding.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. The joint subcommittee will come to order.

After recognizing myself, Chairman Smith, Ranking Member Deutch, and Ranking Member Bass, for 5 minutes each for our opening statements, I will then recognize other members seeking recognition for 1 minute. We will then hear from our witnesses, and, without objection, the witnesses' prepared statements will be made a part of the record.

We thank you all for being here.

And members may have 5 days to insert statements and questions for the record, subject to the length limitations in the rules.

The Chair now recognizes herself for 5 minutes.

It was thought that the human rights situation in Iran couldn't possibly get any worse than it was under the tyranny of Ahmadinejad. During Ahmadinejad's 8 years in office, Iran saw a precipitous increase in the numbers of prisoners of conscience, journalists in jail, executions, and the ethnic and religious minority communities all suffered a great deal.

Of course, we cannot forget the 2009 Green Movement in Iran in which millions took to the streets to protest Ahmadinejad's stay in power calling for reforms. This was an opportunity for the United States to lend its support for a reform movement in Iran, but instead the administration refused to support the Green Movement, and missed a real opportunity to support change in a part of the world that is resistant to peaceful change.

It is, unfortunately, a mistake we have seen with this administration too often, and we are seeing the results of its inaction and indecisiveness now. Then, along came the so-called moderate, Rouhani, and the Western media and the administration all tripped over themselves saying he was a man who could bring reform to Iran.

What they were forgetting, or choosing to willfully be ignorant of, was the fact that this Rouhani was the consummate regime insider,

handpicked by the Supreme Leader to be one of the finalists in the Presidential selection. It bears reminding everyone that no policy—domestic or foreign—gets enacted in Iran without Khamenei's say-so, and that includes the Iranian regime-sanctioned human rights violations.

Yet everyone wanted so badly to believe that Rouhani would be this reformer, and just like he had done when he was Iran's chief nuclear negotiator, he managed to pull the wool over the eyes of many. But what we have seen so far in the 1 year since Rouhani won the June 14, 2013, selection—and I call it a selection because the people of Iran were given a false choice of selecting one of Khamenei's handpicked choices.

Well, according to the most objective analysis, the human rights situation in Iran has not gotten better, and in many areas it has gotten worse. There have been over 670 executions under Rouhani, and over 900 political prisoners remain in jail. According to some human rights groups, Iranian authorities have executed on average more than two people a day in 2014, many of whom have been political prisoners or members of ethnic minority communities.

But the wanton and flagrant human rights abuse practices don't just end there. In Rouhani's Iran, the regime continues to stifle free speech, freedom of the press, right to assembly, jailing bloggers and social media users, and shutting down media organizations, and jailing journalists. Some reports indicate that there are upwards of 40 journalists and bloggers. Iran has the world's second highest number of jailed journalists, 100 human rights defenders, and hundreds of religious minorities unjustly imprisoned in Iran.

One of the most endangered groups are the Baha'is, Iran's largest non-Muslim religious minority, who have seen their community constantly targeted for persecution and imprisonment.

There are over 150 members of the Baha'i community currently in Iran's prisons, including Rozita Vaseghi, who, as part of the Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission's Defending Freedoms Project, I have adopted as my prisoner of conscience.

These prisoners of conscience are being held in Iranian prisons merely for professing and practicing their religious beliefs. And many, like Rozita, have been sentenced to harsh prison sentences of 5 years or more where they are placed in solitary confinement, subjected to cruel conditions, and denied the medical attention they need.

Christians continue to be intimidated, harassed, and detained, including U.S. citizen pastor Saeed Abedini, who was just recently taken from his hospital bed, beaten, and thrown back in jail, and who has suffered a multitude of injuries at the hands of the Iranian authorities.

Then, of course, there is South Florida resident Robert Levinson, who lives in Congressman Deutch's district, and his family lives there, who was abducted in Iran over 2,500 days ago and is now the longest held captive in U.S. history. Despite Iranian promises to aid in the investigation and search for him, they have been less than forthcoming.

The litany of cruel and inhumane human rights abuses that continue to occur under Rouhani is seemingly endless. But Rouhani knows that all he needs to do is smile and Tweet and promise the

U.S. and the West that he will cooperate on the nuclear issue, and his transgressions against the Iranian people will be forgiven or overlooked.

Is that really how we want America to project our foreign policy? It is way past time for the administration to stand up to these thugs and to stand up for the people who cannot stand up for themselves. If we won't do it, who will?

I am pleased to yield to the ranking member, my good friend, Mr. Deutch of Florida.

Mr. DEUTCH. Thank you. Thank you, Madam Chairman, for holding today's really important hearing. And thanks to all of our witnesses for being here today as well.

As the world remains focused on Iran's illicit nuclear program, we must not—we cannot ignore this regime, which is still the world's largest state sponsor of terror, is responsible for the detention of three American citizens, and is one of the world's worst human rights abusers.

Today we will shed light on the continued grotesque human rights violations that take place in Iran. June 14 marks a year since Hassan Rouhani was elected President with the perhaps reluctant support of some of Iran's opposition movement. Unfortunately, despite Rouhani's campaign promises, the human rights situation in Iran remains unchanged. Repression of basic rights and discrimination against minority groups has continued every single day.

Congress has passed, and the administration has enacted, numerous provisions of Iran's sanction laws, both in the 2010 Comprehensive Iran Sanctions Accountability and Divestment Act, and in 2011's Iran Threat Reduction and Syria Human Rights Act, to ban visas, to impose asset freezes and travel bans on those persons and entities responsible for human rights abuses in Iran.

Just last week the U.N. Special Rapporteur on human rights in Iran, whose mandate was renewed by the U.N. Human Rights Council at the end of March, some 8 months into the Rouhani presidency, expressed outrage over the alarming number of executions that have taken place in Iran this year. Per capita, Iran ranks first in the world in terms of executions. According to the Iran Human Rights Documentation Center, more than 500 executions have taken place this year alone, but the Iranian Government has only publicly reported on some 125.

A recent report by Dr. Ahmed Shaheed, the U.N. Special Rapporteur, stated that there are at least 895 prisoners of conscience and political prisoners incarcerated in Iran. This includes political activists, religious minorities, civic activists, students, journalists, and other civil society leaders. Political prisoners face widespread physical, mental, and often sexual abuse.

Iran continues to discriminate and to perpetrate egregious abuses against minorities. The Baha'i, the largest non-Muslim religious group in Iran, numbering somewhere between 300,000 and 500,000, endures denial for jobs and other educational opportunities based on group membership, and faces discrimination throughout the Iranian judicial system.

As of last year, 136 Baha'i were being held in Iranian prison for religious reasons. And since 2005, 49 incidents of arson have been

reported on Baha'i property, without a single arrest being made for these crimes. In 2010, seven Baha'i leaders were arrested and sentenced to 20 years in prison.

Women are rarely afforded equal treatment in the judicial system in Iran. In fact, Iranian courts regard the testimony of a woman to be worth half of that of a man. Earlier this year, an Iranian woman who had been sentenced to death by stoning for adultery was released from prison after the international community seized on her case. This is precisely—precisely why constant pressure from the United States and our allies is so critical.

Iranian women have recently been persecuted for posting pictures of themselves without hijabs as part of the My Stealthy Freedom Movement, established by an Iranian journalist who has since been publicly denounced on TV. Women are subject to fines by the morality police for failing to wear a hijab in public. And, shockingly, there are now calls for a well-known Iranian actress, Leila Hatami, to be publicly flogged after a male director kissed her cheek at the Cannes Film Festival.

In Iran, the LGBT community is all but silenced. Homosexuality is a crime. Iran is one of seven countries where those engaging in consensual same-sex relationships can be punished, and the punishment is death. Just this week, a prominent LGBT poet was arrested. News reports apparently accused him of trying to spread homosexuality, as his work was published by publishing houses outside of Iran, because he is not allowed to freely publish his writing inside his own country.

Free speech and freedom of expression, freedom of the press, are virtually non-existent in Iran. We must not allow Iran to drop an electronic curtain on its people. The internet and all social media in Iran is highly censored, despite the fact that both President Rouhani and Foreign Minister Zarif are quite active on Twitter.

The U.S. has the tools to go after those who engage in this kind of electronic repression, and we must use them. Executive Order 13628, which authorizes the United States Treasury to sanction those who engage in censorship or other activities that limit the freedom of expression or assembly of the Iranian people, must be utilized.

Madam Chairman, we could literally spend all day sharing examples of all of the ways that the people of Iran are deprived of their most basic human rights. The U.S. must continue to speak out in support, as well as to implement policies that bolster education and outreach to Iranian society.

Human rights cannot take a back seat in negotiations with Iran. We must commit ourselves, and we must continue to call on every nation that we call a partner to not ignore what is going on inside of Iran. Any country that values human rights must stand up for those rights everywhere.

I want to thank the witnesses for being here, and I want to thank you for what you do.

And, Madam Chairman, I yield back.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Thank you very much for an excellent statement, Mr. Deutch.

I am now pleased to yield to the chairman of the Subcommittee on Africa, Global Health, Global Human Rights, and International Organizations, Mr. Smith of New Jersey.

Mr. SMITH. Thank you very much, Madam Chair. And I think, again, working together, the two subcommittees, sends a very clear and powerful message on issues, particularly as relates to human rights in Iran. So, again, it is great to work with you and your subcommittee.

Madam Chair, the end of this month will mark 2 years since Pastor Saeed Abedini had seen or hugged his wife, Naghmeh, and his children, Rebecca and Jacob. What started out as a meaningful humanitarian trip to build an orphanage for children suffering in Iran has tragically left Pastor Saeed's young children fatherless for the last few years.

Pastor Saeed has been arrested in Iran before, but he was released and told he could enter and exit the country for humanitarian work if he agreed to cease pastoring house churches. As Pastor Saeed's wife, Naghmeh, testified before our two subcommittees in December, Pastor Saeed accepted the Iranian requirement and turned to building an orphanage instead, but Iran did not uphold its end of the agreement.

Pastor Saeed was arrested in September 2012 and remanded to a prison notorious for housing Iran's worst criminals. He was denied contact with his attorney until just before the trial. The trial was a sham. It was not public. He and his attorney were barred from participating in key portions of the trial, following which a judge sentenced him to 8 years in prison, supposedly undermining the security of Iran—what a cruel joke that is—by sharing his faith and/or practicing Christianity.

A lot of the details are unclear, and discussion is very difficult as the Iranian Government has denied Pastor Saeed Abedini's own lawyers access to the judicial decisions. He has suffered periods of solitary confinement, beatings, internal bleeding, death threats, and continued psychological torture during his 630 days in captivity.

Although Pastor Saeed was finally permitted to be examined this winter by a private physician in Tehran, who determined he needed surgery for internal injuries, he was denied any necessary treatment. Instead, on May 20, just a few weeks ago, Pastor Saeed was brutally beaten at the hospital in front of his Iranian family and then returned to prison.

Unfortunately, Pastor Saeed isn't the only American held under questionable and under dire circumstances by the Iranian Government. Amir Mazeri Hekmati is a 31-year-old former Marine who disappeared while visiting his family in Iran in 2011. He was subsequently tried and sentenced to death on charges of cooperating with an enemy state and accused of moharab, or enmity to God. He has also been accused of being a CIA agent.

Mr. Hekmati has been an Iranian prisoner for more than 1,000 days on these trumped up charges. Meanwhile, his father is dying of brain cancer and may never see his son again in life.

The Iranian Government is also believed to have imprisoned retired Federal FBI agent Robert Levinson. Mr. Levinson traveled to Dubai, then to Iran's Kish Island, and hasn't been seen since. In

March 2011, the administration announced there were indications that Mr. Levinson was being held somewhere in Southeast Asia, but the Iranian Government has not lived up to its promise to fully investigate his disappearance. He has now been in captivity for nearly 2,500 days.

The false imprisonment of American citizens did not change under President Rouhani, and one excuse proffered is that somehow the Iranian legal system is organized differently than the American legal system. Of course we believe that the President has huge power. That said, we know that in the United States the executive branch investigates, prosecutes, and imprisons those convicted of crimes, and the role of the judiciary is limited to the trial of cases and the hearing of appeals.

In Iran, the judicial branch investigates and prosecutes alleged crimes. The judiciary tries the cases, executes the sentences, supervises the prisons, and runs programs that purportedly rehab the prisoners. The Chief Justice is also the official to whom requests for pardons are initially addressed, for it is he who bears the responsibility of making recommendations to the Supreme Leader for both pardoning or reducing the sentences of convicts within the framework of Islamic criteria.

I, therefore, respectfully call on the Chief Justice. We have called on the President many times, and the Foreign Minister. Many of us have conveyed strong views directly to him, but now we call on the Chief Justice to help resolve these cases that have become such a sore point between the United States and Iran.

And, specifically, I ask that the Chief Justice visit or appoint a personal representative to visit Pastor Abedini, Mr. Hekmati, and Mr. Levinson, in the prisons where they are held and that Chief Justice review the integrity of their trial processes and instruct the Prosecutor General to release for public review the full trial and appeal records, including the evidence on which the court relied for each of their cases.

The Chief Justice is also asked to permit representatives of the Swiss Ambassador in Tehran, Giulio Haas, to visit with each of these prisoners and to report back to his government, and to ours, on the state of their health and the conditions of their imprisonment.

My reading of Article 156 of the Iranian Constitution is that it is the judiciary's role to serve as the protector of the rights of individuals and society and I call on the Chief Justice to implement that.

Ironically, Iran wants the world to lift sanctions and trust them with nuclear capabilities, despite continued and violent disregard for fundamental human rights, not just for Americans, but for countless other people, especially indigenous Iranians. Pastor Saeed, Mr. Hekmati, Mr. Levinson, are American citizens, but they have not had their freedom.

U.N. Special Rapporteur for human rights in Iran, Dr. Ahmed Shaheed, warned in March 2014, just a few months ago, that hundreds of individuals reportedly remain in some form of confinement for exercising their fundamental rights, including 179 Baha'i, 98 Sunni Muslims, 48 Christians, and 14 Dervish Muslims.

Let me just note, in final, while I am grateful that the President raised the case of Pastor Saeed in his call to President Rouhani last September, the United States can and must do more to secure his release and that of the other two Americans. Naghmeh Abedini testified before our committee, you will recall, Madam Chair, in December, and she said, "While I am grateful"—this is a quote—"for President Obama's willingness to express concern about my husband and other imprisoned Americans in Iran, during his recent phone conversation with Iran's new President, Rouhani, I was devastated to learn that the administration didn't even ask for my husband's release when seated directly across the table from the leaders of the government that holds him captive." She said that right there sitting at that witness table.

She went on to say, "My husband is suffering because he is a Christian. He is suffering because he is an American. Yet his own government, at least the executive and diplomatic representatives, have abandoned him," according to Naghmeh. "Don't we owe it to him as a nation to stand up for his human rights and for his freedom? We need to redouble our efforts." And, again, with the deadline coming up on July 20, we have a window of opportunity that cannot be squandered.

Yield back.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Thank you very much, Mr. Smith, for a very eloquent statement. I will now recognize members for 1 minute opening remarks, and we will begin with Mr. Connolly of Virginia.

Mr. CONNOLLY. Thank you, Madam Chairman. Imagine for a moment you are a gay woman, Iranian ethnic minority, whose working conditions are deplorable. You would like to take action to improve your life. First, your successful effort to join the workforce is commended, since it is something only 32 percent of Iranian women ever realize. And it is presumed your husband did not object to your employment, because by law he is allowed to. He can legally bar you from the workplace.

Second, you have eluded charges of consensual same-sex sexual activity and have, therefore, avoided possible execution or raids on your home. Third, like most Kurds, Arabs, Azeris, or Baluchis in Iran, you have persevered through a lifetime of government neglect and institutionalized discrimination.

And, finally, despite overcoming these significant obstacles, you are nonetheless arrested for spreading propaganda against the regime and forming socialist groups when you seek to coalesce your workplace around the issue of workplace safety.

The human rights situation in Iran is Medieval and remains bleak, and it is very important we speak out about it.

Thank you, Madam Chairman. And thank you to the ranking member for hosting this hearing.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Thank you, Mr. Connolly. Well put.

Mr. Chabot, our subcommittee chairman, is recognized.

Mr. CHABOT. Thank you, Madam Chair, and I want to commend you and Chairman Smith for continuing this series of hearings on Iran, perhaps the most dangerous regime in the world today.

As we discussed in the markup preceding this hearing, Iran continues to be one of the world's leading abusers of fundamental human rights. The example of the pies is only one of many. The

regime persecutes anybody who dares to speak publicly, or not so publicly, against the regime, and often issues death sentences to Iranians who are charged with insulting Islam.

It has become pretty clear that the so-called moderate Rouhani is just another in a long list of Iranian thugs whose contempt for his own people's fundamental human rights and religious freedom is readily apparent.

I want to thank you for holding this hearing, as I say, and yield back.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Thank you very much, sir.

Mr. Cicilline is recognized.

Mr. CICILLINE. Thank you, Chairman Ros-Lehtinen and Chairman Smith, and Ranking Member Deutch and Ranking Member Bass, for holding today's hearing on this very important issue.

I would like to thank the witnesses for their testimony before the subcommittee this morning, and to say that it is really a great honor to be joined by people who exemplify courage and a deep commitment in the struggle against injustice and human rights abuses.

Even as we continue to closely monitor negotiations regarding Iran's nuclear capability, we also have a responsibility to address other risks such as how Iran threatens universal values of human dignity, equality, and free expression. In a region of the world with a troubling record on civil liberties and human rights, especially for women, girls, and minorities, Iran stands out as particularly egregious.

In addition to reports of suppression of speech, lack of due process, and discrimination against women and religious minorities, I am particularly concerned about the status of sexual and gender minorities in Iran. While nearly 80 countries in the world still criminalize people for simply being lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender, Iran is one of the few countries that has the death penalty as a potential punishment, a position obviously inconsistent with the most basic respect for human rights.

So I thank my colleagues for calling this hearing and look forward to the testimony of our witnesses, and yield back, Madam Chair.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Thank you very much, sir.

And now we will turn to our panel, wonderful witnesses that we have. First, we welcome Dr. Robert George, who is the chairman of the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom. Dr. George is also the McCormick Professor of Jurisprudence and Director of the James Madison Program in American Ideals and Institutions at Princeton University. He has taught at Harvard Law School and is a senior fellow at the Hoover Institution at Stanford University.

Welcome, Dr. George.

Mr. GEORGE. Thank you very much, Madam Chairman.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. And we will just quickly introduce the other panelists, and then we will begin with you, Dr. George.

We also have with us Ms. Cler Baheri, who was born and raised in Iran, where she was denied entrance to universities simply because of her faith. After leaving Iran, she was resettled as a refugee in Canada before moving to the United States.

Thank you so much for being with us, Ms. Baheri, and we look forward to your testimony.

And, third, we are so pleased to welcome Mr. Hossein Alizadeh, who is the Middle East and North Africa Regional Program Coordinator for the International Gay and Lesbian Human Rights Commission. Mr. Alizadeh has worked over the last 15 years in Iran and throughout the region to promote equality and to foster cross-cultural understanding and support for the civil and human rights of all people.

We welcome you, sir.

And, fourth, we welcome Mr. Amir Hossein Etemadi, who is the President of the Foundation for the Advancement of Human Rights, as well as Editor in Chief of a Persian Web site that covers human rights and civil society news in Iran. Because of his role in student protests, Mr. Etemadi was imprisoned for 2 years and in 2010 was forced to leave Iran.

We welcome all of our witnesses. Your statements will be made a part of the record, as I have said. And we will begin with the esteemed Dr. George. Thank you, sir.

STATEMENT OF ROBERT P. GEORGE, PH.D., CHAIRMAN, U.S. COMMISSION ON INTERNATIONAL RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Mr. GEORGE. Thank you very much, Madam Chairman. The beliefs defining Iran's regime remain strongly theocratic. Any Iranian dissenting from the regime's interpretation of Shia Islam may be considered an enemy of the state. Since 1999, the United States annually has designated Iran as a country of particular concern, a CPC, under the International Religious Freedom Act. That means its government ranks among the world's worst religious freedom abusers, subjecting dissenting Iranians of every description to prolonged detention, torture, and even execution.

The regime's human rights and religious freedom record must feature centrally in any assessment of Iran since President Hassan Rouhani took office last August. Madam Chairman, the record, the picture, is bleak. Iran's already dire religious freedom conditions have deteriorated during the Rouhani tenure, particularly for Baha'is, Christians, and Muslims belonging to minority Sufi and Sunni sects.

Even members of Iran's Shia Muslim majority have been targeted, including Ayatollah Boroujerdi, whom I have pictured here, who is a Shia cleric who advocates religious tolerance and respect for the liberty of members of Iran's religious community's minorities.

Dissidents and human rights defenders increasingly have been targeted, and in several cases executed, for the crime of "waging war against God." Many prisoners of conscience remain in Iran's prisons. Some are noted in the appendix that I will provide to my testimony.

Now, here is a snapshot of what we have——

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Without objection, that list will be made a part of the record.

Mr. GEORGE. Thank you, Madam Chairman. Here is a snapshot of what has happened under President Rouhani. at least 135 Baha'is are imprisoned because of their religious beliefs, a doubling

of the number, Madam Chairman, since 2011. This past May marks 6 years of incarceration for seven Baha'i leaders who were imprisoned for following their consciences in matters of faith.

I am sorry. This is the Baha'i seven.

Taking a cue from the regime and media, three Baha'i family members this February sustained knife injuries from a masked assailant's attack, and a local leader was murdered last August. No one has been charged. The crime is committed with impunity against the Baha'is.

Next to the Baha'is, Iran's theocratic government views Protestants as its main competitor for Iranian hearts and minds. As of February 2014, at least 40 were imprisoned, detailed, or awaiting trial. Human rights groups inside Iran reported significant increases in Christians physically assaulted in prison, and that is meant to intimidate those considering Christianity.

Farshid Fathi, a Christian pastor who ran a house church network, was one of those injured. As you can see, he is a young man.

Pastor Saeed Abedini, as several of you have mentioned, an Iranian-born American minister of the gospel, is serving 8 years on the absurd charge of "threatening Iran's national security." Here is Pastor Abedini.

Last November he was transferred to another prison known for its harsh conditions. In March, prison authorities beat him, as was already mentioned. After he was sent to a hospital in May, he reportedly was beaten again and returned to prison.

During the past year, U.S. policy has included public statements, multilateral activity, and imposing unilateral sanctions on Iranian Government officials and entities for human rights violations.

At the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom, we recommend the following, that the U.S. Government should, first, include violations of human rights and religious freedom within multilateral or bilateral discussions with Iran, and work closely with our allies to apply pressure through advocacy, diplomacy, and targeted sanctions.

Number two, continue to designate Iran a country of particular concern, and take appropriate actions as enumerated under the International Religious Freedom Act.

Number three, identify Iranian Government agencies and officials responsible for the severe violations of religious freedom, bar them from entry to the U.S., freeze their assets, and, as per the Comprehensive Iran Sanctions, Accountability, and Divestment Act, take action. Next, enact for multiple years the Lautenberg Amendment, a lifeline for religious minorities.

Finally, U.S. officials should speak out publicly and frequently at the highest levels about human rights and religious freedom abuses, advocate for the release of all prisoners of conscience, and work with the international community to hold authorities accountable. Representatives should join the Defending Freedoms Project and the Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission, as you, Madam Chairman, and the others have done.

Now, in considering how to engage Iran, let us recall Eli Wiesel's pledge to himself as a defender of conscience and human rights. He said, "I swore never to be silent whenever and wherever human beings are suffering humiliation. We must always take sides. Neu-

trality helps the oppressor, never the victim. Silence encourages the tormentor, never the tormented."

Iran's religious minorities are not waging war against God, but the regime's theocratic rulers are waging war against basic human rights of the Iranian people. Their abuses demand our attention and action, especially because negotiations on the nuclear issue really could divert attention from its increasingly egregious human rights and religious freedom violations.

We mustn't let that happen. The U.S. should insist that Iran demonstrate its commitment to peaceful intentions abroad by ceasing its war at home against its own people and their rights.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

[The prepared statement of Mr. George follows:]

TESTIMONY OF

DR. ROBERT P. GEORGE

CHAIRMAN

U.S. COMMISSION ON INTERNATIONAL RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

BEFORE THE

SUBCOMMITTEE ON THE MIDDLE EAST AND NORTH AFRICA

AND THE

SUBCOMMITTEE ON AFRICA, GLOBAL HEALTH, GLOBAL HUMAN RIGHTS, AND INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS

OF THE

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS

ON

ONE YEAR UNDER ROUHANI:
IRAN'S ABYSMAL HUMAN RIGHTS RECORD

JUNE 19, 2014

INTRODUCTION

I want to thank the Members of the House Subcommittees on the Middle East and North Africa and on Africa, Global Health, Global Human Rights, and International Organizations for holding this hearing and inviting me to testify today on behalf of the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF).

Since the start of the Islamic Revolution, any Iranian dissenting from the Iranian government's interpretation of Shi'a Islam may be considered an enemy of the state and a potential target for abuse. From 1979 until today, the regime has used its power to maintain monopoly status in the public square for its own exclusionary ideas and beliefs, while prohibiting or severely restricting alternative views and brutally punishing dissenting groups or individuals. A recent UN report counts almost nine hundred prisoners of conscience and political prisoners, including nearly 300 religious practitioners and minorities, human rights defenders, civil society activists, women's rights advocates, journalists and students.

Because religion matters to Tehran, how the government treats the right to religious freedom is critical to assessing the overall status and direction of human rights in the country. That lens also is necessary to evaluate Iran's president, Hassan Rouhani, who, having taken office last August, soon will mark one year as Iran's President.

How do we evaluate President Rouhani's first year in office, especially given the expectations of change that the supposedly "moderate" Rouhani himself encouraged during his campaign for the presidency? The picture is bleak. President Rouhani has not delivered on his campaign promises of strengthening civil liberties for religious minorities. In fact, the number of Baha'is and Christians in prison for their faith increased over the past year. Physical attacks, harassment, detention, arrests, and imprisonment intensified. Even some of the recognized non-Muslim religious minorities protected under Iran's constitution – Jews, Armenian and Assyrian Christians, and Zoroastrians – face harassment, intimidation, discrimination, arrests, and imprisonment. Majority Shi'a and minority Sunni Muslims, including clerics who dissent, face intimidation and imprisonment. Dissidents and human rights defenders increasingly have been subject to abuse and several were sentenced to death and even executed for the capital crime of "enmity against God."

We must never forget that Iran's government remains a theocratic dictatorship which wages war against its people's fundamental rights. It is for good reason that annually since 1999 the United States has designated Iran a Country of Particular Concern, or CPC, under the International Religious Freedom Act. Its government continues to rank among the world's worst abusers of freedom of religion or belief, engaging in and tolerating systematic, ongoing, and egregious violations of this foundational human right. These violations have ranged from daily acts of discrimination to severe punishments including prolonged detention, torture, and executions based primarily or entirely upon the religion of the accused.

My testimony focuses on the Iranian government's religious freedom abuses, including developments over the past year. I will draw particular attention to the plight of members of religious minorities, such as Baha'is, Sufi Muslims, and Christians, while also noting Iran's persecution of dissenting members of the Shi'a Muslim majority. I also will highlight USCIRF's recommendations to the United States government on how best to respond to the worsening conditions for religious freedom in Iran.

Much of my testimony today inevitably focuses on people. Especially when it comes to Iran, it is almost impossible to read the newspaper, listen to the radio, or go online and not find a report about individuals being detained for who they are, what they believe, and how they have chosen to express their convictions. These prisoners of conscience have been unjustly prevented from enjoying the most fundamental human rights enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, and other international human rights instruments and standards. To help ensure these brave souls are not forgotten, along with my testimony, I request that the list of prisoners of conscience created for the Defending Freedoms Project and those who are listed in USCIRF's Annual Report also be included in the record.

Some of these prisoners of conscience are included in the Defending Freedoms Project. Through this effort, Members of Congress advocate on behalf of prisoners of conscience from around the world. Through these actions, Members stand in solidarity with these imprisoned individuals, raising their cases at the highest levels. All of us want these and other prisoners of conscience to know that they are neither forgotten nor alone. We also want to shine a light on the laws and policies that led to their imprisonment, and we want to hold, in this case, the Iranian government accountable. Ultimately, we want to see these prisoners freed.

BACKGROUND

The beliefs defining the Iranian dictatorship's character remain self-consciously religious and inescapably theocratic. The Islamic Republic of Iran is a constitutional theocratic republic that proclaims the Twelver (Shi'a) Jaafari School of Islam to be the country's official religion. Five seats in the parliament are reserved for recognized religious minorities, two for Armenian Christians, one for Assyrian Christians, and one each for Jews and Zoroastrians. While the constitution recognizes Armenian and Assyrian Christians, Jews, and Zoroastrians as protected religious minorities, it discriminates against its citizens on the basis of religion or belief, as all laws and regulations are based on unique Shi'a Islamic criteria. Since the 1979 revolution, many members of minority religious communities have fled for fear of persecution. Killings, arrests, and physical abuse of detainees have increased in recent years, including for religious minorities and Muslims who dissent or express views perceived as threatening the government's legitimacy. The government continues to use its religious laws to silence reformers, including human rights defenders and journalists, for exercising their internationally-protected rights to freedom of expression and religion or belief.

The Shi'a Muslim Majority

The Iranian government continues to target prominent reformers within the Shi'a Muslim majority, with many receiving harsh prison sentences allegedly for "insulting Islam," criticizing the Islamic Republic, and publishing materials that supposedly deviate from Islamic standards. The government increasingly has manipulated its religious laws to silence dissidents simply for exercising their freedoms of thought and expression, conscience and religion.

The government has expanded its crackdown on Shi'a clerics. Over the years, a number of senior Shi'a religious leaders who have opposed various tenets and practices of the government have been subject to house arrest, detention without charge, trial without due process, torture, and other forms of ill treatment.

Ayatollah Mohammad Kazemeni Boroujerdi, who favors the separation of religion and state and supported the rights of Iran's religious minorities as well as those of its Shi'a Muslim majority, was arrested and imprisoned without charge in October 2006. He remains in prison today. He and 17 of his followers initially were tried by a special court with jurisdiction over Shi'a clerics, and sentenced to death on spurious charges, including "enmity against God" and spreading propaganda against the regime. After an appeal, Boroujerdi was sentenced to 11 years in prison where he has suffered physical and mental abuse. The government has banned him from practicing his clerical duties and confiscated his home and belongings. Representative Keith Ellison (D-MN) has adopted Boroujerdi as part of the Defending Freedoms Project.

Sunni Muslims

In addition to members of the Shi'a majority, Muslim minorities in Iran also face repression. Several of the country's ethnic minorities – Arabs, Baluchis, Kurds, and Turkmen – practice Sunni Islam. These groups are discriminated against on two counts – their ethnic identity and their faith. Sunni leaders regularly are intimidated and harassed by intelligence and security services and report widespread official discrimination. According to the latest UN report on human rights in Iran released earlier this year, some 90 Sunni Muslims are in prison on charges related to their faith. In fact, more than 30 Sunni Muslims currently are on death row after having been convicted of "enmity against God" in unfair judicial proceedings. In addition, the Iranian government discriminates against the Sunni community in government employment, particularly in leadership positions in the executive and judicial branches.

Sunni leaders have reported widespread abuses and restrictions on their religious practice, including detentions and abuse of clerics and bans on Sunni teachings in public schools and Sunni religious literature. The Sunni community remains unable to build a mosque in Tehran and Sunni mosques and literature have been destroyed in parts of eastern Iran. In recent years, dozens of Sunni clerics reportedly were arrested for spreading Sunni teachings in several parts of the country, including Kurdistan, Kermanshah, Baluchistan, West Azerbaijan, Ahvaz, Tavalesh, and Khorassan provinces.

Sufi Muslims

Iran's government also has been stepping up its harassment and arrests of its Sufi Muslim minority, including prominent leaders, while increasing restrictions on places of worship and destroying Sufi prayer centers and *hussainiyas* (or meeting halls). As of February 2014, at least 13 Sufi activists have received long prison sentences for charges such as acting against national security and disrupting public order. Others have cases pending against them. Iranian state television continues to air programs denigrating and demonizing Sufism, particularly the Nematollahi Gonabadi order. Since 2006, Iranian authorities have attacked or demolished several Gonabadi prayer centers, and there have been reports that the government is considering a ban on Sufism

Many of the Sufi Muslims who have been detained are from the Nematollahi Gonabadi order, and have been sentenced to imprisonment, fines, and floggings. In September and October 2011, for example, a Sufi Muslim from the Gonabadi order was killed and several were injured during a government crackdown in southwestern Iran, Fars province, during which the Basij militia arrested at least 60 Sufis. At least seven remain in detention. Four attorneys – Farshid Yadollahi, Amir Eslami, Afshin Karampour, and Omid Behruzi – who defended the dervishes in court also were arrested in September 2011. Three of the four attorneys continue to be held in Evin Prison and were charged in late 2011 with insulting the Supreme Leader, "spreading lies," and membership in a "deviant group." According to human rights groups, the fourth attorney, Amir Eslami, has a serious heart condition and has been sent to the hospital for medical attention.

Non-Muslim Minorities

While Iran's government seriously violates the religious freedom of Shi'a, Sunni, and Sufi Muslims, it continues to treat non-Muslim minorities just as, if not more, harshly. Under Iran's theocratic government, the primacy of Islam and Islamic laws and institutions dramatically diminishes the rights and status of non-Muslims. Members of these communities are subjected to various forms of discrimination, particularly in education, government jobs and services, and the armed services. In addition, their places of worship and photos of religious leadership frequently are defaced with graffiti. Their private schools are administered by Iran's Ministry of Education, which imposes a state-approved religious curriculum. Under Iranian law, non-Muslims may not engage with Muslims in public religious expression or persuasion; some also face restrictions on publishing their religious material in Persian.

Since the June 2009 elections, and again after the election of President Rouhani, Iran's government has conducted a campaign against non-Muslims. A consistent stream of virulent and inflammatory statements by political and religious leaders and an increase in harassment and imprisonment of, and physical attacks against, these groups have returned the nation to levels of oppression not seen since the early 1980s. In 2010 in Qom in central Iran, Iranian Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei publicly stated that "enemies of Islam" are using the spread of Sufism, the Baha'i faith, and Christian house churches to weaken the faith of Iran's young

people in society. Ayatollah Ahmad Jannati, head of the Guardian Council, continues to refer to non-Muslims publicly as "sinful animals" and "corrupt."

In line with promises made by President Rouhani during the presidential campaign to address the human rights concerns of the Iranian people, in November 2013, the government released a draft Citizens' Rights Charter. Nevertheless, Article 1 of the draft Charter, which states that all "Iranian nationals regardless of gender, ethnicity, social class, race or other similar categories" may enjoy "citizens' rights and guarantees" identified in the country's laws and regulations, omits "faith" or "religion" as one of the protected categories. Thus, while Christians, Jews, and Zoroastrians are afforded some rights under Articles 12 and 13 of the constitution, Baha'is continue to be excluded from any legal protections.

Baha'is

Among Iran's religious minority communities, the Baha'i long have been subject to particularly severe religious freedom abuses. The UN Special Rapporteur on human rights in Iran, Ahmed Shaheed, in 2012 cited the Baha'i community as the "most persecuted religious minority in Iran." Iranian authorities view Baha'is, who number at least 300,000, as "heretics" who may be repressed on the grounds of apostasy. According to Iranian law, Baha'i blood is *mobah*, which means members of the Baha'i faith can be killed with impunity. Over the past several years, several articles in the government-controlled newspaper Kayhan, whose managing editor is appointed by Supreme Leader Ayatollah Khamenei, and other media outlets have vilified and demonized the Baha'i faith and community.

Baha'is may not establish places of worship, schools, or any independent religious associations in Iran. Baha'is are barred from the military and denied government jobs and pensions as well as the right to inherit property. Their marriages and divorces also are not recognized, and they have difficulty obtaining death certificates. Baha'i cemeteries, holy places, and community properties often are seized or desecrated, and many of their important religious sites have been destroyed. In fact, Iran's Revolutionary Guards in recent months began excavating a Baha'i cemetery in Shiraz, Iran where 10 women the government hanged in 1983 are buried. They were convicted of "crimes" that included teaching children's classes. The women chose to die rather than renounce their faith.

The Baha'i community also faces additional economic pressures, including denial of jobs in both the public and private sectors and of business licenses. Iranian authorities often pressure employers of Baha'is to dismiss them from employment in the private sector. Since 1979, more than 10,000 have been dismissed from government and university jobs.

Although the Iranian government maintains publicly that Baha'is are free to attend university, reports indicate that the de facto policy of preventing Baha'is from obtaining higher education remains in effect. Of the very few Baha'is who were enrolled in universities in recent years, most were expelled once their religious beliefs became known. Furthermore, during the past few

years, young Baha'i schoolchildren in primary and high schools increasingly have been vilified, pressured to convert to Islam, and in some cases expelled on account of their religion.

Since 1979, authorities have killed more than 200 Baha'i leaders. Emboldened by Iranian law and policy, militant societal actors have physically attacked Baha'is and committed violent acts with impunity, including arson on Baha'i homes and businesses. Since October 2010, dozens of shops have been attacked; in all cases, police claimed they could not find the perpetrators. Dozens of Baha'i homes and businesses have received letters warning that Baha'is will suffer severe consequences for forming friendships with Muslims.

An October 2011 report by the Baha'i International Community, titled *"Inciting Hatred: Iran's Media Campaign to Demonize Baha'is,"* summarized the relentless propaganda against the Baha'is as follows:

> *"They are accused of being agents for various imperialist or colonialist factions; they face continuous but utterly unfounded allegations of immorality; they are branded as social pariahs to be shunned. The propaganda is shocking in its volume and vehemence, its scope and sophistication, cynically calculated to stir up antagonism against a peaceful religious community whose members are striving to contribute to the well-being of their society."*

Taking a cue from the regime and media, an unknown assailant killed a local Baha'i leader, Ataollah Rezvani, in August 2013. Rezvani had received intimidating and threatening phone calls from Iranian authorities in the months before his death. In February 2014, three members of a well-known Baha'i family sustained knife injuries when a masked assailant attacked them in their Tehran home. No one has been charged with the murder or the violent attacks.

A report released in February 2013 by the Baha'i International Community, titled *Violence with Impunity: Acts of Aggression against Iran's Baha'i Community*, notes that more than 660 Baha'is have been arbitrarily arrested since 2005. As of today, at least 135 Baha'is are being held in prison solely due to their religious beliefs, more than 10 times the number incarcerated in 2005 and nearly twice the number imprisoned in 2011. Dozens of Baha'is await trial while others have been sentenced to prison terms ranging from 90 days to several years. All of those convicted reportedly are in the process of appealing the verdicts. According to human rights groups, more than 500 Baha'is continue to have active cases pending against them, despite having been released from detention.

Since 2008, the government has imprisoned seven Baha'i leaders – Fariba Kamalabadi, Jamaloddin Khanjani, Afif Naemi, Saeid Rezaie, Mahvash Sabet, Behrouz Tavakkoli, and Vahid Tizfahm – based on dubious charges ranging from espionage to "corruption on the earth." Representative Suzanne Bonamici (D-OR) has adopted Kamalabadi and Representative Jan Schakowksy (D-IL) has adopted Sabet as part of the Defending Freedoms Project.

In August 2010, the seven were sentenced to 20 years in prison. In September 2010, authorities informed them that their 20-year sentences had been reduced to 10. However, prison authorities told them in March 2011 that their original 20-year sentences had been reinstated. The two women currently are being held in Evin prison while the five men are held in the notorious Gohardasht prison outside Tehran. Attorneys for the seven Baha'is, including Nobel Laureate Shirin Ebadi, have had extremely limited access to their clients and court proceedings and have reiterated that the charges against them are baseless.

In addition to the seven Baha'i leaders, there are now 12 Baha'i educators serving lengthy prison terms: Mahmoud Badavam, Faran Hessami, Noushin Khadem, Foad Moghaddam, Kamran Mortezaie, Amanollah Mostaghim, Shahin Negari, Kamran Rahimian, Kayvan Rahimian, Farhad Sedghi, Ramin Zibaie, and Riaz Sobhani. The last, Riaz Sobhani, is the father-in-law of Ms. Cler Baheri who is testifying today. In May 2011, in at least four different cities, Iranian authorities raided more than 30 homes of Baha'is involved with the Baha'i Institute for Higher Education (BIHE), the community's 25 year-old effort to educate its youth, whom the government bars from undergraduate or graduate studies. Approximately 18 Baha'is were arrested and a number of books, documents, computers, and other materials associated with the BIHE were seized. The 12 teachers and administrators are serving four- or five-year prison terms. In September 2011, prominent human rights defender Abdolfattah Soltani was arrested for preparing a defense for the Baha'i educators. He was arrested and detained for several months in 2005 and 2009 under similar circumstances.

Rozita Vaseghi is another Baha'i imprisoned by the government. Representative Ileana Ros-Lehtinen has adopted Vaseghi as part of the Defending Freedoms Project. Vaseghi was arrested in 2010 and is serving two five year terms, charged with spreading Baha'i teachings and "insulting Islamic sacraments." She initially was kept in solitary confinement for six months and is said to be in bad health. However, prison authorities have denied repeated requests for prison leave to seek medical care. She has lost a significant amount of weight, has low blood pressure, and suffers from gum disease which requires surgery.

The Iranian government stooped to new lows in recent years by incarcerating at least four young infants along with their Baha'i mothers. A five-month-old boy was imprisoned with his mother in Semnan in September 2012. The infant later was hospitalized outside of the prison because of a lung disease caused by unsanitary prison conditions. His mother is serving a 23-month sentence. Another infant, the 10-month-old son of a Semnan woman who is serving a 30-month sentence, contracted an infection and was removed from prison for tests, prescribed medication, and is now back in prison with his mother. On December 17, 2012, another Semnan woman was imprisoned with her one-year-old child and remains jailed today.

Christians

Iran's government also continues to repress Christian converts, particularly Evangelicals and other Protestants, who are subject to harassment, arrests, close surveillance, and imprisonment; many are reported to have fled the country. Even indigenous Assyrian and Armenian Christian

religious leaders also have been targeted periodically. Since the 1979 Revolution, Iran's government has refused to allow the construction of a single new church in the country.

Ethnic Christians frequently face legal discrimination, such as harsher penalties than Muslims in criminal cases, restrictions on marriages with Muslims, the favoring of Muslim family members in inheritance rights, and the setting aside of certain political or judicial leadership positions for Muslims.

While all of Iran's Christians face a regime that restricts their rights, Tehran reserves particularly harsh treatment for Protestant Christians. Next to the Baha'is, the theocratic government views the Protestant church community as the most serious competitor for the hearts and minds of Iranians. Unlike Iran's ethnic Christian population, the vast majority of Iran's Protestants are converts from Islam. While estimates of the number of Iranian Christians, including Protestants, vary widely, none allege that they constitute more than a fraction of one percent of Iran's population of nearly 75 million.

Over the past generation, and particularly in recent years, Iran's Protestants have experienced significant growth in numbers. This growth has been manifested through the proliferation of house churches, which the government refuses to recognize, with services conducted in Persian, in defiance of the regime. According to the October 2013 report of the Special Rapporteur on the Situation of Human Rights in Iran, authorities continue to force licensed Protestant churches to restrict Persian-speaking and Muslim-born Iranians from participating in services.

While the right to change one's religion is a fundamental freedom guaranteed by international law and covenants, including the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Iran's government clearly views conversion from Islam as not only an act against Islam, but against the character of Iran as an Islamic state. Iran's Supreme leader deems it an act of apostasy. While not formally a part of Iran's criminal code, Iranian courts typically treat apostasy as a capital crime, drawing upon Iran's constitution which allows them to invoke Islamic jurisprudence.

While Christians often have been charged with either apostasy or blasphemy as a result of conversion from Islam, the Revolutionary Courts also can charge them with political crimes such as acting against national security or contact with a foreign enemy. Such baseless charges may be triggered by a number of innocent religious activities such as meeting with Christians from other countries, associating with Christian organizations that are based abroad, and attending Christian seminars outside of Iran.

In recent years, hundreds of Christians, mostly Protestants, have been arbitrarily arrested and detained throughout the country. In cases involving offenses based on religious belief, Iranian authorities typically release prisoners, but leave in place the charges against them or their convictions in order to be able to threaten them with re-imprisonment at any future time.

In January 2013, the International Campaign for Human Rights in Iran released an unprecedented report, *The Cost of Faith: Persecution of Christian Protestants and Converts in*

Iran. Through numerous interviews with Iranian converts to Christianity, lawyers, activists, and journalists, the report meticulously documents a pattern of abuse that extends to all Protestants in Iran. The report concluded that Christian converts face severe restrictions on religious practice and association, arbitrary arrests and detentions for practicing their faith, and violations of the right to life through state execution for apostasy and extrajudicial killings.

The UN Special Rapporteur's October 2013 report found that since 2010 more than 300 Christians have been arrested and detained arbitrarily and as of February 2014, nearly 50 Christians either are in prison, detained, or awaiting trial because of their religious beliefs and activities.

In recent weeks, human rights groups inside Iran have reported a significant increase in the number of physical assaults and beatings of Christians in prison. Some activists believe the assaults, which have been directed against converts who are leaders of underground house churches, are meant to intimidate others who may wish to convert to Christianity. On Christmas Eve in December 2013, at least five Christians were arrested during a raid on a private home where they were celebrating Christmas. Authorities also seized computers, books, and other materials. Earlier, in October 2013, at least four Christians were sentenced to 80 lashes for drinking wine during a Holy Communion service. Reportedly, at least one was subsequently flogged.

In a particularly outrageous miscarriage of justice, Saeed Abedini, an Iranian-born American pastor, was sentenced on January 27, 2013 to eight years in prison for "threatening the national security of Iran." Judge Pir-Abassi, a jurist notorious for perpetrating religious freedom violations, presided over his case. Pastor Abedini's "crimes" apparently included his participation since 2000 in Iran's house church movement and his more recent efforts to raise money for an orphanage. Human rights groups have stated that his trial was unfair and the whole legal process deeply flawed. He has spent many weeks in solitary confinement and suffered mental and physical abuse while in Evin prison. In November 2013, Pastor Abedini was transferred to the notorious Gohardasht prison outside Tehran which is known for its harsh and unsanitary conditions. In March 2014, Pastor Abedini was beaten by prison authorities after being transferred to a hospital to receive medical attention. He spent nearly two months at a hospital to receive treatment for the injuries sustained from the beatings. In May 2014, reports alleged that Pastor Abedini was beaten a second time upon release from the hospital and subsequently returned to prison. Representatives Franks (R-AZ), Cassidy (R-LA), Labrador (R-ID) and Waxman (D-CA) have adopted Pastor Abedini as part of the Defending Freedoms Project.

Also imprisoned is Farshid Fathi, a Christian pastor who ran a network of house churches. Detained since December 2010, he is serving a six-year sentence for being a Christian and spreading his faith, with authorities casting his activity as "political offenses," and "actions against national security." He was amongst 30 prisoners at Evin prison who suffered injuries when authorities assaulted inmates in April 2014. Pastor Fathi suffered broken bones in his foot.

Representative Duncan (R-SC) has adopted Pastor Fathi as part of the Defending Freedoms Project.

In 2011, the governor of Tehran, Morteza Tamaddon, publicly referred to detained Christians as "deviant" and "corrupt" and vowed to identify and detain more. He likened Evangelical Christians to the Taliban and accused them of placing "themselves within the religion of Islam like a pest and under the cover of Christianity and with the support of England they have designed a movement." Issuing its first sanction since President Rouhani's election, the U.S. Treasury Department on May 23, 2014 announced sanctions against Tamaddon for being involved in censorship and other activities limiting the freedoms of expression and assembly, the first sanctions the Administration has issued since Rouhani became president.

Zoroastrians and Sabean Mandaeans

Like Christians, members of Iran's Zoroastrian community – numbering between 30,000 and 35,000 people -- are considered protected religious minorities. Nonetheless, in recent years, members of the indigenous Zoroastrian community have experienced increasing repression and discrimination. In August 2011, a Zoroastrian man, Mohsen Sadeghipour, began serving a four-and-a-half year prison term, for propaganda of the Zoroastrian faith. Several of his relatives were convicted and imprisoned in 2010 on blasphemy and other charges. At least four Zoroastrians remain in prison.

Over the past few years, the Sabean Mandaean religious community, whose members, like Baha'is, are unprotected, have been facing intensifying official harassment. There continue to be reports that members, who number between 5,000 and 10,000, experience societal discrimination and pressure to convert to Islam, and are often denied access to higher education. In recent years, hundreds of Sabean Mandaean families reportedly have fled the country.

Jews and Anti-Semitism

While like Christians and Zoroastrians, Jews are considered members of a protected religious minority, official policies promoting anti-Semitism have risen sharply in recently years, and Jews have been targeted on the basis of perceived ties to Israel.

Over the years, top political and religious leaders made public remarks denying the Holocaust and calling for the elimination of the state of Israel. There continues to be officially-sanctioned anti-Semitic propaganda, involving official statements, media outlets, publications, and books. In line with a stepped-up state-sponsored campaign, numerous programs broadcast on state-run television anti-Semitic messages, a prominent newspaper held a Holocaust denial cartoon contest, and the government sponsored a Holocaust denial conference. Anti-Semitic cartoons depicting demonic and stereotypical images of Jews, along with Jewish symbols, also have been published.

Official government discrimination against Jews continues to be pervasive, fostering a threatening atmosphere for the approximately 20,000-25,000 member Jewish community. According to the State Department, despite minimal restrictions on Jewish religious practice, education of Jewish children has become increasingly difficult in recent years, and distribution of Hebrew religious texts is strongly discouraged.

The Role of Sanctions

President Obama signed into law CISADA, the Comprehensive Iran Sanctions, Accountability, and Divestment Act (P.L. 111-195), on July 1, 2010. CISADA highlights Iran's serious human rights violations, including suppression of religious freedom. CISADA requires the President to submit to Congress a list of Iranian government officials or persons acting on their behalf responsible for human rights and religious freedom abuses, bars their entry into the United States, and freezes their assets. President Obama issued an executive order in September 2010 sanctioning eight Iranian officials for having committed serious human rights abuses after the June 2009 elections. Since then, the President has added four more Iranian officials and four Iranian government entities to the list. USCIRF long had called for the U.S. government to identify Iranian officials and entities responsible for severe religious freedom violations and impose travel bans and asset freezes on those individuals, and had specifically identified seven of the officials named in the executive order and an eighth named in June 2011. No previous Iran sanction measures had provisions dealing with human rights violations.

In August 2012, the President signed into law the Iran Threat Reduction and Syria Human Rights Act of 2012 (H.R. 1905 / P.L. 112-239). This law enhances human rights-related provisions of previous Iran sanctions laws such as CISADA. In October 2012, the Administration issued Executive Order 13628, implementing the law by blocking the property of Iranians deemed to have committed censorship or limited free expression in Iran.

These humanitarian sanctions have not yet altered Iran's repression of dissent or its efforts to control the Internet. Nevertheless, the United States needs to vigorously issue such sanctions to sends the signal to the Iranian people that it is standing up for their rights. Importantly, these targeted sanctions do not affect the Iranian people as a whole. Instead, they shine a glaring spotlight on selected Iranian officials who are themselves obstacles to peace. We must remember that targeted sanctions are not an untried idea. Second, those who are targeted are unabashed hardliners historically opposed to diplomacy with the West.

As mentioned above, Washington has named only one abuser since Rouhani's electoral victory in June of 2013. On May 23, 2014, Treasury announced sanctions against Tehran governor Morteza Tamaddon for being involved in censorship and other activities limiting the freedoms of expression and assembly. He also orchestrated a series of coordinated arrests and abuses against Christian converts in 2011.

USCIRF especially welcomes this action given that the European Union has far outpaced the United States in sanctioning violators by naming nearly 90 individuals for serious human rights

abuses. We urge the Administration to move forward on its policy of imposing travel bans and asset freezes on Iranian officials responsible for human rights and religious freedom violations and shine a spotlight on abuses through public statements

Recommendations

During the past year, U.S. policy has included public statements, multilateral activity, and imposing unilateral sanctions on Iranian government officials and entities for human rights violations. Below are selected recommendations for U.S. policy that USCIRF has advanced.

- The United States should continue to work closely with its allies to apply pressure on the Iranian government through a combination of advocacy, diplomacy, and targeted sanctions with the aim of halting the government's human rights and religious freedom violations.

- In response to the systematic, ongoing, and egregious violations of religious freedom, and the repressive policies and practices of the Iranian government, the U.S. government should continue to designate Iran as a "Country of Particular Concern" or CPC, robustly apply the mechanisms included in such laws as the International Religious Freedom Act (IRFA).

- Congress should continue, through legislation and other initiatives, to highlight the status of human rights and religious freedom in Iran, including H. Res. 109 which condemns the government of Iran for its state-sponsored persecution of its Baha'i minority and its continued violation of the International Covenants of Human Rights.

- Congress should reauthorize for multiple years, and the President sign into law, the Lautenberg Amendment, a lifeline for religious minorities in Iran. The Amendment establishes a presumption of eligibility and allows fast track processing to prevent undue backlogs in countries that host their processing. A multiple-year reauthorization would eliminate the disruptions and uncertainties that result from single-year authorizations.

- The United States government should call on the Iranian government to release all prisoners who have been jailed on account of their religion or belief, and drop all charges against those who have cases pending against them. These prisoners range from a Shi'a cleric and his followers, to a number of Sufi Muslim, Baha'i and Christian leaders whose sole crime is exercising their internationally guaranteed right to freedom of religion or belief. Since it is important to highlight these prisoners, some are noted in my testimony and many others are listed in the appendix to this testimony.

  USCIRF encourages Members of Congress to join the Defending Freedoms Project. Through this project, an initiative of the Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission in conjunction with USCIRF and Amnesty International, Members of Congress can adopt prisoners of conscience and advocate on their behalf, while shining a light on the conditions in the country and the government that imprisons them.

As Eli Wiesel once said, "I swore never to be silent whenever and wherever human beings endure suffering and humiliation. We must always take sides. Neutrality helps the oppressor, never the victim. Silence encourages the tormentor, never the tormented."

- The United States government should continue to identify Iranian government agencies and officials (and, where appropriate, their immediate family members) responsible for particularly severe violations of religious freedom, and bar them from entry into the United States and freeze their assets, as per the Comprehensive Iran Sanctions, Accountability, and Divestment Act of 2010 (CISADA).

- The United States government should continue to support an annual UN General Assembly resolution condemning severe violations of human rights, including freedom of religion or belief, in Iran, and calling for officials responsible for such violations to be held accountable; it should press for a resolution condemning severe violations of human rights in Iran, including freedom of religion or belief, at the UNHRC; and it should call on Iran to cooperate fully with the UN Special Rapporteur on the Human Rights Situation in Iran.

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Iran's abuses against religious freedom and its unrelenting crackdown on religious minorities demand the world's attention and action. This attention and action is especially important given that the Iranian government may use efforts to resolve the nuclear issue to divert attention from the increasing mistreatment of its people, including its religious minorities and dissenters from the majority religious community. We cannot let that happen. Washington should insist that Iran demonstrate its commitment to peaceful intentions abroad by ceasing its war at home against its own people and their rights, including the right to religious freedom.

Appendix I

DEFENDING FREEDOMS PRJECT --PRISONERS OF CONSCIENCE: IRAN

Saeed Abedini (adopted by Representatives Franks (R-AZ), Cassidy (R-LA), Labrador (R-ID) and Waxman (R-CA) is a 33-year-old father and husband from Idaho who currently is imprisoned in Evin Prison. Saeed is a dual national of the United States (via naturalization) and Iran (by birth). He has broken no codified Iranian law, but has been sentenced to eight years in prison for practicing his Christian faith. In the last year, he has been arrested, given a sham trial before a notoriously biased judge, threatened with death, beaten, and denied life-saving medical treatment.

Ayatollah Mohammad Kazemeni Boroujerdi (Adopted by Representative Keith Ellison (D-MN) is a Shi'a cleric who advocates for the separation of religion and state and has spoken out on behalf of the rights of Iran's religious minorities as well as those of its Shi'a Muslim majority. In October 2006, he was arrested and imprisoned without charge. He and seventeen of his followers were tried by a special court with jurisdiction over Shi'a clerics and sentenced to death on spurious charges, including "enmity against God" and spreading propaganda against the regime. After an appeal, the death sentence was withdrawn and Ayatollah Boroujerdi was sentenced to eleven years in prison. He currently is serving his prison term, and the government has banned him from practicing his clerical duties and confiscated his home and belongings. He has suffered physical and mental abuse while in prison.

Farshid Fathi (**Adopted by Representative Jeff Duncan (R-SC)**) is a Christian pastor who ran a network of house churches in Tehran. Iranian officials arrested him on December 26, 2010. Pastor Fathi currently is serving a 6-year sentence in Iran's notorious Evin prison. Farshid left Iran to attend seminary in Turkey and then pursued additional training in London with his wife before returning to Iran. Farshid reportedly is imprisoned alongside Saeed Abedini (see above). Though his crime is being a Christian and spreading his faith, Iranian authorities have cast his Christian activity as "political offenses," arguing that his Christian activities were equivalent to "actions against national security." He also was charged with possessing religious propaganda. At trial, the regime offered as evidence that Pastor Fathi had Bibles printed in Farsi, unlawfully distributed them, and possessed Christian literature. The regime also made it difficult for his lawyers to present a defense by denying them full access to the case until just a few days before trial.

Rozita Vaseghi (Adopted by Representative Ros-Lehtinen) is a member of the Baha'i community in Iran. Arrested in March of 2010, she is now serving two five-year sentences in Vakilabad prison in Mashhad and has been banned from leaving the country for 10 years. Rozita has endured months of solitary confinement and was issued new charges while in prison. She is in need of immediate medical attention but the prosecutor for Mashhad, the judge overseeing the prison and the Mashhad branch of the Ministry of Intelligence have opposed this treatment. Rozita has also been denied the right to furlough, despite having now served almost three years of her sentences

THE BAHA'I SEVEN: The Baha'i Seven are former Baha'i leaders in Iran who have been deprived of the rights accorded to prisoners under Iran's own laws and regulations. Prior to their arrests in 2008, the

seven were members of an ad hoc national-level group that attended to the spiritual and social needs of Iran's Baha'i community.

Fariba Kamalabadi (Adopted by Representative Suzanne Bonamici (D-OR)): is a developmental psychologist and mother of three who was arrested twice previously because of her involvement with the Baha'i community. On one of those occasions she was held incommunicado for 10 days. As a youth, Mrs. Kamalabadi was denied the opportunity to study at a public university. In her mid-30s, she embarked on an eight-year period of study and ultimately received an advanced degree from the Baha'i Institute of Higher Education, an alternative institution established by the Baha'i community of Iran to serve young people who were barred from university.

Jamaloddin Khanjani was a successful factory owner who, because he was Baha'i, lost his business after the 1979 Islamic revolution. Khanjani's volunteer service to his religious community included membership on the National Spiritual Assembly of the Baha'is of Iran in 1984, a year in which four of its nine members executed by the government. Khanjani was arrested and imprisoned at least three times before this most recent incarceration in 2008. He has four children and six grandchildren. His wife, Ashraf Sobhani, passed away on March 10, 2010 while Khanjani was still in prison.

Afif Naeimi is an industrialist who was unable to pursue his dream of becoming a doctor because as a Baha'i he was denied access to university. Born in Yazd, he lived part of his youth with relatives in Jordan after the death of his father. He was long active in volunteer Baha'i service, teaching classes for both children and adults and serving as a member of the Auxiliary Board, an appointed position with the function of inspiring, encouraging and promoting learning among Baha'is.

Saeid Rezaie is an agricultural engineer who ran a successful farming equipment business for more than twenty years. During the early 1980's, when persecution of Baha'is was intense, he moved first to northern Iran and worked as a farming manager and then to Kerman to work as a carpenter, in part because of the difficulties Baha'is faced in finding formal employment or operating businesses. His two daughters, both in their twenties, were among a group of fifty-four young Baha'is arrested in Shiraz in 2006 while working on a project helping underprivileged young people. In 2006, before his latest incarceration in 2008, Mr. Rezaie was arrested and detained for a period that included forty days in solitary confinement.

Mahvash Sabet (Adopted by Jan Schakowsky (D-IL)) is a teacher and school principal who was dismissed from public education for being a Baha'i. Before her arrest, she served for 15 years as director of the Baha'i Institute for Higher Education, which provides alternative higher education for Baha'i youth. She began her professional career as a teacher and also worked as a principal at several schools. In her professional role, she also collaborated with the National Literacy Committee of Iran. After the Islamic revolution, like thousands of other Iranian Baha'i educators, she was fired from her job and blocked from working in public education.

Behrouz Tavakkoli was a social worker who lost his government job in the early 1980's because of his Baha'i belief. Prior to his most recent imprisonment, he experienced intermittent detainment and

harassment and three years ago, was jailed for four months without charge, spending most of that time in solitary confinement and developing serious kidney and orthotic problems. Mr. Tavakkoli was elected to the local Baha'i governing council in Mashhad while a student at the university there and later served on a similar council in Sari before such institutions were banned in the early 1980's.

Vahid Tizfahm is an optometrist and owner of an optical shop in Tabriz, where he lived until early 2008 when he moved to Tehran. He was born and spent his youth in the city of Urumiyyih and went to Tabriz at age eighteen to study to become an optician. He later also studied sociology at the Advanced Baha'i Studies Institute, an affiliate of the Baha'i Institute for Higher Education. Since his youth, Mr. Tizfahm has served the Baha'i community in a variety of capacities – for a time as a member of the Baha'i National Youth Committee and later as part of the Auxiliary Board, an advisory group that serves to uplift and inspire Baha'i communities.

Appendix II: IRAN Prisoner list from USCIF's 2014 Annual Report

APPENDIX 7
IRAN PRISONERS LIST

LIST OF CURRENTLY IMPRISONED BAHA'IS IN IRAN (AS OF JANUARY 2014)

From Report of Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Islamic Republic of Iran

http://shaheedoniran.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/03/A-HRC-25-61-updated.pdf

LIST OF CURRENTLY IMPRISONED BAHA'IS IN IRAN (AS OF JANUARY 2014)						
	NAME	AGE WHEN ARRESTED	ARREST DATE	CHARGES	SENTENCE	DATE TRIED/ SENTENCED
1	Mrs. Mahvash Shahriari Sabet	56	5-Mar-08	Three charges on religious grounds ("forming an illegal cult"); three charges related to "espionage" and "acting against national security"	5 years' imprisonment	Trial ended 14-Jun-10
2	Mrs. Fariba Kamalabadi Taefi	46	14-May-08	Three charges on religious grounds ("forming an illegal cult"); three charges related to "espionage" and "acting against national security"	1) 5 years' impris-onment; Sentence upheld and 2 years added on appeal; 2) 5 years' imprisonment on separate charge.	Trial ended 14-Jun-10
3	Mr. Jamaloddin Khanjani	76	14-May-08	Three charges on religious grounds ("forming an illegal cult"); three charges related to "espionage" and "acting against national security"	1) 5 years' impris-onment; Sentence upheld on app eal; 2) 5 years' imprisonment on separate charge	Trial ended 14-Jun-10
4	Mr. Afif Naemi	47	14-May-08	Three charges on religious grounds ("forming an illegal cult"); three charges related to "espionage" and "acting against national security"	4 years' imprisonment	Trial ended 14-Jun-10
5	Mr. Saeid Rezaie Tazangi	50	14-May-08	Three charges on religious grounds ("forming an illegal cult"); three charges related to "espionage" and "acting against national security"	4 years' imprisonment	Trial ended 14-Jun-10
6	Mr. Behrouz Azizi Tavakkoli	57	14-May-08	Three charges on religious grounds ("forming an illegal cult"); three charges related to "espionage" and "acting against national security"	1) 5 years' imprison-ment; 2) Sentence upheld on appeal	Trial ended 14-Jun-10
7	Mr. Vahid Tizfam	36	14-May-08	Three charges on religious grounds ("forming an illegal cult"); three charges related to "espionage" and "acting against national security"	1) 5 years' imprison-ment; 2) Sentence upheld on appeal	Trial ended 14-Jun-10
8	Mr. Mohammad Reza Kandi	54	19 or 25-Apr-09	Posing a threat to the holy regime of the Islamic Republic by teaching Bahaist ideas through communication with the usurper country of Israel	1) 5 years' imprison-ment 2) Sentence upheld on appeal; 3) 5 years' imprisonment	25-Dec-08
9	Mr. Afibakhsh Bazrafkan	58	31-Oct-09	Plotting overthrow, acting against national security and propaganda against the regime	1 year imprisonment and 4 years internal exile to Damghan. Ordered to go to Bijar. Remaining internal exile changed to additional 6 months' imprisonment in Sari.	7-Dec-09
10	Mr. Ighan Shahidi		3-Mar-10			
11	Ms. Rozita Vaseghi	40s	16-Mar-10			1) 25-Oct-09; 2) Appeal - 20-Dec-2010

LIST OF CURRENTLY IMPRISONED BAHA'IS IN IRAN (AS OF JANUARY 2014)						
	NAME	AGE WHEN ARRESTED	ARREST DATE	CHARGES	SENTENCE	DATE TRIED/ SENTENCED
12	Mrs. Nahid Ghadiri	40s	16-Mar-10			1) 25-Oct-09; 2) Appeal
13	Mr. Foad Khanjani		27-Apr-10		4 years' imprisonment	
14	Mr. Afshin Heyratian		3-Jun-10			
15	Mr. Davar Nabilzadeh	Mid 40s	13-Jul-10		1) 2.5 reduced to 2 on appeal; 2) 6.5 years' imprisonment	1) 25-Oct-09; 2) Appeal
16	Mr. Jalayer Vahdat	About 40	24-Oct-10			1) 25-Oct-09; 2) Appeal
17	Mrs. Sima Eshraghi (Aghas-zadeh)		24-Oct-10			1) 25-Oct-09; 2) Appeal
18	Mr. Feizollah Rowshan	61	15-Jan-11			1) 24-Apr-07; 19-Aug-07; 2) Obtained conditional release; began exile 26 Jul-08 in Damghan
19	Mr. Farhad Amri		1-Jan-11		5 years' imprisonment	
20	Mr. Shahin Shafaie		5-Feb-11		4 years' imprisonment	
21	Mr. Badiollah Lohrash		21-Feb-11		4 years' imprisonment	
22	Mr. Peyman Kashfi		13-Feb-11	"Membership in an anti-Islamic group and propaganda against the regime"	4 years' imprisonment	15-Jun-10
23	Mr. Afshin Safaieyan		27-Feb-11		4 years' imprisonment	
24	Mr. Pooya Tebyanian	24	12-Mar-11	1) "Activities against national security" and "membership in illegal groups and assemblies"; 2) 1 year for propaganda against the regime of the Islamic Republic and to 5.5 years for membership in illegal groups in the preliminary court in Simnān (Semnan)	5 years' imprisonment	1) 15-Apr-09[4]; 31-May-09 29-Apr-10; 2) 16-Apr-12; 12 or 16-May-12
25	Mr. Mesbah Monghate		18-Mar-11		4 years' imprisonment	
26	Ms. Sara Mahboubi Mahboubi		9-Apr-11		4 years' imprisonment	
27	Mr. Vesal Mahboubi		25-Apr-11			
28	Mr. Kamran Mortazaie		22-May-11	"Membership of the deviant sect of Baha'ism, with the goal of taking action against the security of the country, in order to further the aims of the deviant sect and those of organizations outside the country".		25-Sep-11; 17-Oct-11
29	Ms. Noushin Khadem		22-May-11	"Membership of the deviant sect of Baha'ism, with the goal of taking action against the security of the country, in order to further the aims of the deviant sect and those of organizations outside the country".		27-Sep-11
30	Mr. Mahmoud Badeyam		22-May-11	"Membership of the deviant sect of Baha'ism, with the goal of taking action against the security of the country, in order to further the aims of the deviant sect and those of organizations outside the country".		27-Sep-11
31	Mr. Ramin Zibaie		22-May-11	"Membership of the deviant sect of Baha'ism, with the goal of taking action against the security of the country, in order to further the aims of the deviant sect and those of organizations outside the country".		

LIST OF CURRENTLY IMPRISONED BAHA'IS IN IRAN (AS OF JANUARY 2014)						
	NAME	AGE WHEN ARRESTED	ARREST DATE	CHARGES	SENTENCE	DATE TRIED/ SENTENCED
32	Mr. Farhad Sedghi		22-May-11	"Membership of the deviant sect of Baha'ism, with the goal of taking action against the security of the country, in order to further the aims of the deviant sect and those of organizations outside the country".		20-Sep-11
33	Mr. Amanollah Mostaghim		22-May-11			16-Jun-12
34	Mr. Riaz Sobhani		14-Jun-11	"Membership of the deviant sect of Baha'ism, with the goal of taking action against the security of the country, in order to further the aims of the deviant sect and those of organizations outside the country".	4 years' imprisonment	
35	Mr. Behfar Khanjani	36	21-Jun-11	1) Forming groups and membership in groups and assemblies with intention to disturb the national security; 2) Activity against national security through propaganda against the regime; 3) Use, possession, and distribution of 63 illegal compact discs containing appalling and offensive material.		1) 17 Jan 07*; 26 Sep 07*; 2) 04-May-10; 6-Feb-12 appeal denied
36	Ms. Sanaz Tafazoli		27-Jun-11		4 years' 3 months' 1 day imprisonment	
37	Mrs. Jila Rezvani (Ghanei)		6-Jul-11		3 years' imprisonment	
38	Mrs. Saideh Foroughi (Negari)		6-Jul-11			
39	Mr. Hajir Septo		11-Jul-11			22-May-11
40	Ms. Samin Ehsani		17-Aug-11			
41	Mr. Emamgholi Behamin		24-Aug-11		4.5 years' imprisonment reduced to 1 year	
42	Mr. Janali Rasteh		24-Aug-11			
43	Mr. Kamran Rahimian		14-Sep-11	Using falsely obtained degrees, illegal counselling, running illegal classes, defrauding the public	4 years' imprisonment sentence upheld in appeals court	
44	Mr. Hassanali Delavar-manesh		4-Sep-11			
45	Mr. Afshin Ighani	28	11-Sep	1) Formation of a group and membership in illegal groups and assemblies with the intention of disturbing national security; 2) Actions against national security through propaganda against the regime (and in support of anti-regime groups), i.e., propaganda for the perverse sect of Bahaism.		05-May-10;
46	Mr. Didar Raoufi		16-Oct-11		6 months' imprisonment	12-Feb-11
47	Mrs. Sousan Badavam (Farhangi)		23-Oct-11 or 24-Oct-11		8 years	
48	Ms. Nadia Asadian (Abdu'l-Hamidi)		23-Oct-11 or 24-Oct-11		6 months' imprisonment	
49	Ms. Shiva Kashani-nejad (Samilian)		23-Oct-11 or 24-Oct-11			
50	Mr. Faramarz (Omid) Firiouzian		16-Jan-12			May-12
51	Mr. Shahnam Golshani		30-Jan-12		1 year's imprisonment under ta'zir law	

LIST OF CURRENTLY IMPRISONED BAHA'IS IN IRAN (AS OF JANUARY 2014)						
	NAME	AGE WHEN ARRESTED	ARREST DATE	CHARGES	SENTENCE	DATE TRIED/ SENTENCED
52	Mr. Shahrokh Taef	56	12-Jan			2) 13-Feb-11; 16-Jan-12 appeal
53	Mr. Payam Taslimi	~45	3-Feb-12			
54	Ms. Semitra Momtazian		5-Feb-12			
55	Ms. Naghmeh Zabihian		17-Feb-12			
56	Mr. Shahram Chiniyan Miandoab	27	15-Jan-12		1) 91 days; 2) 1 year imprisonment	
57	Ms. Negar Malekzadeh		2-Apr-12	Co-organizing junior youth exhibit		
58	Mr. Shahram Mokhtari		24-Apr-12		1) 6 months' imprisonment; 2) 6 years' imprisonment	
59	Mr. Mohammad Hossein Nakhaei	85	13-May-12		1) 6 months' imprisonment; 2) 3 years' imprisonment	
60	Mr. Afrasiyab Sobhani		14-May-12	Propaganda against the regime; Acquitted-membership in Bahá'í administrative institutions.	5 years' imprisonment	21-Aug-12
61	Mrs. Mona Pour Pir Ali		15-May-12		9 months' temporary detention	
62	Mrs. Sholeh Afshari		15-May-12			
63	Mrs. Atiyeh Anvari		20-May-12		6 months' imprisonment	
64	Mr. Saeed Azimi		29-May-12			
65	Ms. Jinous Nourani	22	late May-12		9 months' imprisonment	1) 10-Sep-06; 2) 26-Nov-11
66	Mr. Faran Khan Yaghma		9-Jun-12			
67	Mr. Adel Fanaiyan	49	10-Jun-12	1) Membership in a group; forming and mobilizing a group with intent to disturb the national security; propaganda against the sacred regime of the Islamic Republic of Iran in the interest of anti-regime groups and organizations by promoting the teachings and ideologies of the sect of Bahaism through publishing pamphlets and materials and producing and distributing announcements containing administrative information on the sect of Bahaism and opposing the sacred regime of the Islamic Republic of Iran. 2) Propaganda against the government of the Islamic Republic of Iran;	4 years' imprisonment	1) 12 Apr 06*; 2) 04-Jan-09;3) 08-Oct-11
68	Mr. Taherverdi "Taher" Eskandarian		23-Jun-12			10-Sep-06; 04- Jan -09 (Appeal court)
69	Mr. Azizollah Samandari		7-Jul-12	An active member of the perverse Bahaist sect with the intention to act against the national security	12 years' imprisonment + 5 million rial (~US$500) fine	2) 04-Oct-11
70	Mr. Adel Naimi		10-Jul-12			24-Apr-13
71	Mr. Khashayar Tafazzoli		11-Jul-12		2 years' imprisonment	
72	Mr. Shayan Tafazzoli		11-Jul-12		1 year's imprisonment under Ta'zir law	
73	Mr. Sina Aghdasizadeh		11-Jul-12		5 years' imprisonment + 97,877,000 rial fine (~US$8,000)	
74	Mr. Rahman Vafaie		14-Jul-12			
75	Mr. Hamid Eslami		14-Jul-12			

LIST OF CURRENTLY IMPRISONED BAHA'IS IN IRAN (AS OF JANUARY 2014)						
	NAME	AGE WHEN ARRESTED	ARREST DATE	CHARGES	SENTENCE	DATE TRIED/ SENTENCED
76	Mrs. Faran Hesami (Rahimian)		15-Jul-12	a) Conspiracy and assembly with the intention to act against the national security by membership in perverse Bahaist sect as the primary director of the Department of Psychology at the illegal Bahaist university under the direction of the House of Justice; b) Earning illegal income in the sum of 7,000,000 tuman. (dismissed)		9-May-12
77	Mr. Vahed Kholousi		22-Aug-12	2) "Involvement in subversive political activities against the regime through providing assistance to the earthquake victims" later changed to "distributing contaminated food"	1 year imprisonment under Ta'zir law	
78	Mr. Navid Khanjani	22	22-Aug-12	1) 5 years' imprisonment for "engaging in human rights activities", another 5 for "illegal assembly" (in support of university students deprived of higher education), and additional 2 years for "'disturbance of the general public's opinion". He is also required to pay a fine of five hundred thousand tümän (~ 500 USD). 2) "Involvement in subversive political activities against the regime through providing assistance to the earthquake victims" later changed to "distributing contaminated food"	10 years imprisonment	07-Dec-10; 10-Aug-11 verdict upheld
79	Mr. Shayan Vahdati		22-Aug-12	"Involvement in subversive political activities against the regime through providing assistance to the earthquake victims" later changed to "distributing contaminated food"	5 months' temporary detention	
80	Mrs. Leva Khanjani (Mobasher)	23	3-Jan-10;		5 months' temporary detention	
81	Mr. Payman Hejabian		25-Aug-12	Propaganda against the regime, activity against national security, and insulting the President.		
82	Mr. Kayvan Rahimian		30-Sep-12	Assembly and collusion with intent to commit acts of crime against national security, membership in the perverse sect of Bahaism, and earning illegal income (last charge dismissed).		12-Jun-12
83	Mr. Adib Shoaie		6-Oct-12			
84	Mr. Farzin Shahriari		late Oct-12			
85	Mr. Ramin Shahriari		late Oct-12		5 months' temporary detention	
86	Mr. Erfan Ehsani		30-Oct-12		5 months' temporary detention	
87	Mr. Farhad Fahandej		17-Oct-12	"Forming and managing illegal Bahá'í administration, membership in illegal Bahá'í administration and propaganda against the regime"	5 years' imprisonment	
88	Mr. Farahmand Senaie		17-Oct-12		5 months' temporary detention	
89	Mr. Kamal Kashani		17-Oct-12			
90	Mr. Shahram Jazbani		17-Oct-12			
91	Mr. Navid Moallemi		17-Oct-12		6 months' imprisonment	
92	Mr. Behnam Hassani		17-Oct-12			

LIST OF CURRENTLY IMPRISONED BAHA'IS IN IRAN (AS OF JANUARY 2014)						
	NAME	AGE WHEN ARRESTED	ARREST DATE	CHARGES	SENTENCE	DATE TRIED/ SENTENCED
93	Mr. Afshin Seyyed-Ahmad		8-Nov-12		4 years' imprisonment	
94	Mr. Siamak Sadri		18-Nov-12		5 years' imprisonment under Ta'zir law	
95	Mr. Payam Markazi		18-Nov-12			
96	Mr. Foad Fahandej		18-Nov-12			
97	Mr. Kourosh Ziari		20-Nov-12			
98	Mr. Bahnam Momtazi		11-Dec-12		1) 91 days' imprisonment, suspended for 3 years; 2) 5 years' imprisonment under ta'zir law+ 75 lashes and 2 million tuman cash fine.	
99	Mr. Adnan Rahmat-panah		12-Dec-12			
100	Ms. Neda Majidi (with her infant)		17-Dec-12			
101	Mrs. Nadia Khalili		15-Dec-12		2 years' imprisonment	
102	Mr. Shahin Negari Namaghi		13-Jan-13		6 years' imprisonment	
103	Dr. Foad Moghaddam		late Jan 13		4.5 years' imprisonment	30-Jun-12; ~9-Jul-12
104	Ms. Faranak Ighani		13-Jan-13	Spreading propaganda against the regime through teaching the Bahá'í Faith and holding memorial meetings to recite the Bahá'í prayer for the dead in Bahá'í funerals that were held throughout the city and the province.	8 Months	25-Sep-13
105	Mr. Vousagh Sanaie		20-Jan-13		1 year imprisonment under Ta'zir law	
106	Mr. Sahand Masoumiam		6-Mar-13			
107	Mr. Shamim Ettehadi	25	19-Mar-13	Propagation against the Islamic Republic regime		1) 18-04-2012
108	Mr. Mohammad Hossein Nakhai					
109	Mr. Babak Zeinali		15-Apr-13			
110	Ms. Elham Rouzbahi (with infant child)	29	27-Apr-13	'Collusion and assembly against national security,' to 2.5 years, and on 'propaganda against the regime,' to 6 months, totaling 3 years' imprisonment		Nov/Dec 11; 17 Dec 11 (signed 25-Jan-12)
111	Ms. Nika Kholousi					16-May-13
112	Ms. Nava Kholousi					16-May-13
113	Ms. Mahsa Mahdavi					
114	Mrs. Jinous Rahimi		1-Aug-13			13-Aug
115	Mr. Soroush Garshasbi		bet-ween 24 & 27 Sep 2013			
116	Mr. Faramarz Lotfi		bet-ween 24 & 27 Sep 2013			
117	Mr. Ziya Ghaderi		bet-ween 24 & 27 Sep 2013			
118	Mr. Hassan Bazrafkan		10-Sep-13			
119	Mr. Vahid Taghvajou		10-Sep-13			
120	Mr. Farzin Sadri Dowlatabadi		19-Oct-13		1 year imprisonment and 4 years internal exile to Damghan. Ordered to go to Bijar. Remaining internal exile changed to additional 6 months' imprisonment in Sari.	

LIST OF CURRENTLY IMPRISONED CHRISTIANS IN IRAN (AS OF JANUARY 2014)

From Report of Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Islamic Republic of Iran

http://shaheedoniran.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/03/A-HRC-25-61-updated.pdf

LIST OF CURRENTLY IMPRISONED CHRISTIANS IN IRAN (AS OF JANUARY 2014)									
	NAME	GENDER	DATE OF BIRTH	ARREST DATE	CHARGES	SENTENCE	DATE OF SENTENCING	ACTIVITY	ETHNICITY
1	Rasoul Abdollahi	Male		26-Dec-10	Collusion against the government and evangelism	Three years	Transferred Dec 2, 2013 to serve sentence		
2	Saeed Abedini	Male	1980	26-Sep-12	Assembly and collusion against national security (Clause 610), Membership in organizations that aim to disrupt national security (Clause 499), Undermining national security (Clause 498)	8 years	27-Jan-13		
3	Sevada Aghasar	Male		21-Aug-13	Membership in organizations that aim to disrupt national security (Clause 499), Propaganda against the system (Clause 500)				
4	Davoud Alijani	Male		1-May-13			15-Oct-13	Assemblies of God Church	
5	Sedigheh Amirkhani	Female		2-Aug-13				Christian convert	
6	Farshid Modares Aval	Male		10-Jul-13					
7	Mojtaba Baba-Karami	Male		21-Feb-03					
8	Somayeh Bakhtiyari	Female		24-Apr-13				House-churches	
9	Kamyar Barzegar	Male		29-Aug-13				Christian convert	
10	Sahar Barzegar	Female		29-Aug-13				Christian convert	
11	Ahmad Bazyar	Male		24-Dec-13				Christian convert	
12	Mehdi Chaghakaboudi	Male		21-Feb-13					
13	Amir Ebrahimi	Male		29-Aug-13				Christian convert	
14	Parham Farazmand			9-Aug-13					
15	Mohammad Reza Farid	Male		29-May-13				Our Salvation website	
16	Yashar Farzin-No	Male		11-Jul-13					
17	Farshid Fathi	Male	1978	26-Dec-10	Propaganda against the system (Clause 500), Undermining national security (Clause 498)	6 years	Jan-12	Ilam Organization	
18	Mona Fazli	Female		9-Aug-13					
19	Ebrahim Firoozi	Male	1985	21-Aug-13	Membership in organizations that aim to disrupt national security (Clause 499), Propaganda against the system (Clause 500)	1 year			
20	Hamid Reza Ghadiri	Male		29-May-13				Afghan Christian convert	

LIST OF CURRENTLY IMPRISONED CHRISTIANS IN IRAN (AS OF JANUARY 2014)									
	NAME	GENDER	DATE OF BIRTH	ARREST DATE	CHARGES	SENTENCE	DATE OF SENTENCING	ACTIVITY	ETHNICITY
21	Vahid Hakani	Male		8-Feb-12	Assembly and collusion against national security (Clause 610), Membership in organizations that aim to disrupt national security (Clause 499), Propaganda against the system (Clause 500)	3 years and 8 months			Fars
22	Mohammadreza Hosseini	Male							
23	N/A Hosseini	Male		24-Dec-13				Christian convert	
24	Behnam Irani	Male		Apr-10		1 year and 5 years suspended	Jan-11		
25	Jamshid Jabari			1-Dec-13	Insulting Islam (clause 513)			Journalist/ Blogger	
26	Shahnaz Jeyzan	Female		May-13				Assemblies of God Church	
27	Sedigheh Kiani	Female		9-Aug-13					
28	Shahin Lahooti	Male		12-Oct-12					
29	Sahar Mousavi	Female		24-Oct-11				Christian student activist	
30	Maryam Naghash	Female		15-Jul-13		5 years			
31	Faegheh Nasrollahi	Female		24-Dec-13				Christian convert	
32	Fariba Nazemian	Female		8-Feb-10					Fars
33	Amir-Hossein Nematollahi	Male		24-Dec-13				Christian convert	
34	Mohammad Reza (Kourosh) Partovi	Male		8-Feb-12	Assembly and collusion against national security (Clause 610), Membership in organizations that aim to disrupt national security (Clause 499), Propaganda against the system (Clause 500)	3 years and 8 months			Fars
35	Mohammad Reza Paymani	Male		2-Aug-13				Christian convert	
36	Mohammad Reza Piri	Male		17-Jul-13					
37	Mahnaz Rafiea	Female		2-Aug-13				Christian convert	
38	Mastaneh Rastegari			24-Dec-13				Christian convert	
39	Saeed Safi	Male		29-May-13				Our Salvation website	
40	Hossein (Estifan) Saketi Aramsari			23-Jul-13					
41	Ronak Samayat	Female		24-Apr-13				House-churches	
42	Sara Sardsirian	Female		9-Aug-13					
43	Mojtaba Seyed Alaadin Hosseini	Male		Feb-12	Assembly and collusion against national security (Clause 610), Membership in organizations that aim to disrupt national security (Clause 499)	2 years, 8 months suspended			Fars

LIST OF CURRENTLY IMPRISONED CHRISTIANS IN IRAN (AS OF JANUARY 2014)									
	NAME	GENDER	DATE OF BIRTH	ARREST DATE	CHARGES	SENTENCE	DATE OF SENTENCING	ACTIVITY	ETHNICITY
44	Seyyed Alireza Seyyedian	Male		14-Mar-12	Assembly and collusion against national security (Clause 610), Propaganda against the system (Clause 500)	4 years			
45	Homayoun Shokouhi	Male		7-Feb-13	Assembly and collusion against national security (Clause 610), Membership in organizations that aim to disrupt national security (Clause 499)	3 years and 8 months			
46	Kiavash Sotoudeh			2-Dec-13	Insulting Islam (clause 513)			Journalist/ Blogger	
47	Nasim Zanjani	Female		12-Jul-13					
48	Hamidreza N/A	Male		10-Jul-13				Arrested with Yashar Farzin-No, Mohammad Reza Piri, and Farshid Modares	

LIST OF CURRENTLY IMPRISONED DERVISH MUSLIMS IN IRAN (AS OF JANUARY 2014)

From Report of Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Islamic Republic of Iran

http://shaheedoniran.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/03/A-HRC-25-61-updated.pdf

LIST OF CURRENTLY IMPRISONED DERVISH MUSLIMS IN IRAN (AS OF JANUARY 2014)									
	NAME	GENDER	DATE OF BIRTH	ARREST DATE	CHARGES	SENTENCE	DATE OF SENTENCING	ACTIVITY	ETHNICITY
1	Mostafa Abdi	Male		Aug 2012 and 30 Jan 2013	Membership in organizations that aim to disrupt national security (Clause 499)	3 years			Dervish
2	Ebrahim Bahrami	Male		May-13	Assembly and collusion against national security (Clause 610), Enmity against God [Moharebeh] (Clauses 183 186 and 187), Membership in organizations that aim to disrupt national security (Clause 499)				Dervish
3	Mohammad Ali Dehghan	Male		May-13	Assembly and collusion against national security (Clause 610), Enmity against God [Moharebeh] (Clauses 183 186 and 187), Membership in organizations that aim to disrupt national security (Clause 499)				Dervish
4	Reza Entesari	Male		4-Sep-11	Assembly and collusion against national security (Clause 610), Insulting the Supreme Leader (Clause 514), Membership in organizations that aim to disrupt national security (Clause 499), Propaganda against the system (Clause 500)	8 years and 6 months			Dervish

LIST OF CURRENTLY IMPRISONED DERVISH MUSLIMS IN IRAN (AS OF JANUARY 2014)									
	NAME	GENDER	DATE OF BIRTH	ARREST DATE	CHARGES	SENTENCE	DATE OF SENTENCING	ACTIVITY	ETHNICITY
5	Amir Eslami	Male		4-Sep-11	Assembly and collusion against national security (Clause 610), Propaganda against the system (Clause 500)				Darvish
6	Mohsen Esmaili	Male		May-13	Assembly and collusion against national security (Clause 610), Enmity against God [Moharebeh] (Clauses 183 186 and 187), Membership in organizations that aim to disrupt national security (Clause 499)				Darvish
7	Amir Ali Mehran Nia	Male		25-Dec-13					Kurdish, Darvish
8	Bakhshali Mohammadi	Male		2004	Enmity against God [Moharebeh] (Clauses 183 186 and 187)	15 years and 6 months			Darvish
9	Hamid Reza Moradi Sarvestani	Male		4-Sep-11	Propaganda against the system (Clause 500), Insulting the Supreme Leader (Clause 514), Agitating the public consciousness(clause 698), Disruption of public order (Clause 618)	10 years and 6 months			Darvish
10	Saleh Moradi Sarvestani	Male		6-Sep-11		3 years and 3 years exile to Hormozgan	June/July 2013		Fars, Dervish
11	Ali Mortezai	Male		11-Jan-12					Fars, Dervish
12	Kasra Nouri	Male		14-Mar-13					Darvish
13	Mohammad Ali Sadeghi	Male		May-13	Assembly and collusion against national security (Clause 610), Enmity against God [Moharebeh] (Clauses 183 186 and 187), Membership in organizations that aim to disrupt national security (Clause 499)				Darvish
14	Ali Shafiei	Male		17-Jun-12					Fars, Dervish

LIST OF CURRENTLY IMPRISONED SUNNI MUSLIMS IN IRAN (AS OF JANUARY 2014)

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LIST OF CURRENTLY IMPRISONED SUNNI MUSLIMS IN IRAN (AS OF JANUARY 2014)								
	NAME	GENDER	DATE OF BIRTH	DATE OF ARREST DATE	CHARGES	SENTENCE	DATE OF SENTENCING	ETHNICITY
1	Abdollah Abadian	Male		Mar-12	Enmity against God [Moharebeh] (Clauses 183 186 and 187)			Baluchi
2	Hadi Abadian	Male		Mar-12	Enmity against God [Moharebeh] (Clauses 183 186 and 187)	12 years and exile to Qazvin		Baluchi
3	Jaber Abadian	Male		Mar-12	Enmity against God [Moharebeh] (Clauses 183 186 and 187)	Death		Baluchi
4	Javad Abadian	Male		Mar-12	Enmity against God [Moharebeh] (Clauses 183 186 and 187)	Death		Baluchi
5	Malak Mohammad Abadian	Male		Mar-12	Enmity against God [Moharebeh] (Clauses 183 186 and 187)	Death		Baluchi
6	Nezam Abadian	Male		Mar-12	Enmity against God [Moharebeh] (Clauses 183 186 and 187)	Death		Baluchi
7	Kambiz Abbasi	Male				8 years		Kurdish
8	Ahmad Abdollahi	Male		Jun-10	Enmity against God [Moharebeh] (Clauses 183 186 and 187), Membership in organizations that aim to disrupt national security (Clause 499)	5 years		Kurdish
9	Davood Abdollahi	Male		Feb-10				Kurdish
10	Ghasem Abeste	Male						Kurdish
11	Hekmat Ahmad Sharifi	Male		2010	Undermining national security (Clause 498)Enmity against God [Moharebah] (Clauses 183 186 and 187)		23-Jul-13	Kurdish
12	Hamed Ahmadi	Male	1981	2009	Involvement in Salafi and terrorist groups	Death	June/July 2011	Kurdish
13	Shahram Ahmadi	Male		Jan-10	Enmity against God [Moharebeh] (Clauses 183 186 and 187)	Death		Kurdish
14	Osman Ahsani	Male		Aug-09	Assembly and collusion against national security (Clause 610)	5 years		Kurdish
15	Souran Alipour	Male		Jan-11	Assembly and collusion against national security (Clause 610)	5 years		Kurdish
16	Hejar Alizadeh	Male		Jan-11	Assembly and collusion against national security (Clause 610)	5 years		Kurdish
17	Hossein Amini	Male		21-Feb-11	Assembly and collusion against national security (Clause 610)	5 years		Kurdish
18	Borhan Asgharian	Male			Assembly and collusion against national security (Clause 610), Enmity against God [Moharebeh] (Clauses 183 186 and 187)	5 years	22-Jul-13	Kurdish
19	Fakhrodin Azizi	Male		Aug-10	Assembly and collusion against national security (Clause 610), Membership in organizations that aim to disrupt national security (Clause 499)	7 years		Kurdish
20	Abdollah (Molavi) Baladahi	Male		Mar-12	Enmity against God [Moharebeh] (Clauses 183 186 and 187)			Baluchi
21	Gol-mohammad Baladahi	Male		Mar-12	Enmity against God [Moharebeh] (Clauses 183 186 and 187)	15 years in prison and exiled		Baluchi
22	Mamusta Mohammad Baraei	Male		May/ June 2009	Undermining national security (Clause 498)	11 years		Kurdish
23	Khosro Besharat	Male		8-Feb-10				Kurdish
24	Mohammad Amin Darki	Male		Jan-10	Assembly and collusion against national security (Clause 610), Membership in organizations that aim to disrupt national security (Clause 499)	3 years		Kurdish
25	Jahangir Dehghani	Male	1984	2009	Involvement in Salafi and terrorist groups	Death	June/July 2011	Kurdish
26	Jamshid Dehghani	Male	1981	2009	Involvement in Salafi and terrorist groups	Death	June/July 2011	Kurdish

LIST OF CURRENTLY IMPRISONED SUNNI MUSLIMS IN IRAN (AS OF JANUARY 2014)								
	NAME	GENDER	DATE OF BIRTH	DATE OF ARREST	CHARGES	SENTENCE	DATE OF SENTENCING	ETHNICITY
27	Seyed Shahoo Ebrahimi	Male	1985	12-Apr-10	Enmity against God [Moharebeh] (Clauses 183 186 and 187), Membership in organizations that aim to disrupt national security (Clause 499)	Death		Kurdish
28	(Mamosta) Ayoub Ganji	Male		28-Mar-09	Undermining national security (Clause 498)	10 years and permanent deprivation of cleric garb		Kurdish
29	Hossein Ghaderi	Male		Aug-12	Enmity against God [Moharebeh] (Clauses 183 186 and 187)	2 years	13-Nov-13	Kurdish
30	Jamal Ghaderi	Male		Feb-12	Assembly and collusion against national security (Clause 610), Enmity against God [Moharebeh] (Clauses 183 186 and 187), Membership in organizations that aim to disrupt national security (Clause 499)	8 years		Kurdish
31	Voria Ghaderifard	Male		Jun-10	Assembly and collusion against national security (Clause 610), Enmity against God [Moharebeh] (Clauses 183 186 and 187), Membership in organizations that aim to disrupt national security (Clause 499)	Death		Kurdish
32	Mohammad Gharibi	Male		Jun-10	Enmity against God [Moharebeh] (Clauses 183 186 and 187)	Death		Kurdish
33	Khaled Hajizadeh	Male		Feb-11	Assembly and collusion against national security (Clause 610), Propaganda against the system (Clause 500)	6 years		Kurdish
34	Firooz Hamidi	Male			Enmity against God [Moharebeh] (Clauses 183 186 and 187), Membership in organizations that aim to disrupt national security (Clause 499)	20 years	22-Jul-13	Kurdish
35	Abdoljabbar Hasani	Male		Apr-09		10 years	22-Jul-13	Kurdish
36	Farzad Honerjou	Male		Jun-10	Enmity against God [Moharebeh] (Clauses 183 186 and 187), Membership in organizations that aim to disrupt national security (Clause 499)	Death		Kurdish
37	Seyed Hadi Hosseini	Male	1983	Jun-09	Enmity against God [Moharebeh] (Clauses 183 186 and 187), Membership in organizations that aim to disrupt national security (Clause 499)	Death		Kurdish
38	Hashem Hossein-panahi	Male		3-Dec-13	Enmity against God [Moharebeh] (Clauses 183 186 and 187)	6 months		Kurdish
39	Ali Kalhor	Male		Jan-11		5 years		Kurdish
40	Mulla Ali Karami	Male		Oct-10	Enmity against God [Moharebeh] (Clauses 183 186 and 187), Relations or collaboration with organizations that aim to disrupt national security (Clause 499)	8 years		Kurdish
41	Ramin Karami	Male		Aug-09	Assembly and collusion against national security (Clause 610), Membership in organizations that aim to disrupt national security (Clause 499)	6 years		Kurdish
42	Keyvan Karimi	Male			Assembly and collusion against national security (Clause 610), Membership in organizations that aim to disrupt national security (Clause 499)	Death		Kurdish
43	Mohammad Kazemi	Male		Nov-10	Enmity against God [Moharebeh] (Clauses 183 186 and 187)	4 years		Kurdish
44	Abdolali Kheirshahi	Male	1979	5-Apr-08	Enmity against God [Moharebeh] (Clauses 183 186 and 187), Membership in organizations that aim to disrupt national security (Clause 499)	4 years and 6 months and permanently banned from public speech	11-Feb-09	Baluchi
45	Anvar Khezri	Male		8-Feb-10				Kurdish
46	Abdollah Khosro Zadeh	Male		5-Dec-09		5 years	14-Jun-11	Kurdish

LIST OF CURRENTLY IMPRISONED SUNNI MUSLIMS IN IRAN (AS OF JANUARY 2014)								
	NAME	GENDER	DATE OF BIRTH	DATE OF ARREST	CHARGED	SENTENCE	DATE OF SENTENCING	ETHNICITY
47	Layegh Kordpour	Male		Jan-11	Undermining national security (Clause 498)	5 years		Kurdish
48	Himan Mahmoud Takhti	Male	1987	Jun-09	Assembly and collusion against national security (Clause 610), Membership in organizations that aim to disrupt national security (Clause 499)	5 years		Kurdish
49	Sayed Hassan Majidi	Male			Undermining national security (Clause 498)	11 years		Kurdish
50	Taleb Maleki	Male		Oct-09	Assembly and collusion against national security (Clause 610), Enmity against God [Moharebeh] (Clauses 183 186 and 187), Membership in organizations that aim to disrupt national security (Clause 499)	Death		Kurdish
51	Moslem Marivani	Male	1990	Sep-12	Enmity against God [Moharebeh] (Clauses 183 186 and 187)			Kurdish
52	Aram Mikaili	Male		Nov-10		8 years		Kurdish
53	Hesam Mohammadi	Male		Jun-09	Assembly and collusion against national security (Clause 610), Membership in organizations that aim to disrupt national security (Clause 499), Propaganda against the system (Clause 500)	5 years	5-Dec-10	Kurdish
54	Omid Mohammadi	Male		Jan-11	Undermining national security (Clause 498)	Death		Kurdish
55	Sedigh Mohammadi	Male		Jan-10		Death		Kurdish
56	Kamal Molai	Male	1984	2009	Enmity against God [Moharebeh] (Clauses 183 186 and 187)	Death	June/July 2011	Kurdish
57	Mohammad Esmail Molla Zehi	Male		1-Nov-10	Involvement in Salafi and terrorist groups	6 years and 4 years suspended		Baluchi
58	Keyvan Momenifard	Male	1983	Jun-10	Espionage (clause 501)	Death		Kurdish
59	Namegh Naderi	Male		Feb-11	Enmity against God [Moharebeh] (Clauses 183 186 and 187), Membership in organizations that aim to disrupt national security (Clause 499)	3 years and 6 months		Kurdish
60	Erfan Naderizadeh	Male		Jan-11		8 years		Kurdish
61	Teymoor Naderizadeh	Male		18-Jun-10	Enmity against God [Moharebeh] (Clauses 183 186 and 187), Membership in organizations that aim to disrupt national security (Clause 499)	Death	16-Nov-13	Kurdish
62	Abdolghafar Naghshbandi	Male		14-May-12	Enmity against God [Moharebeh] (Clauses 183 186 and 187), Relations or collaboration with organizations that aim to disrupt national security (Clause 499)	15 years and exile to Ilam		Baluchi
63	Fathi Mohammad (Molavi) Naghshbandi			10-Apr-12	Enmity against God [Moharebeh] (Clauses 183 186 and 187)	15 years and exile to Khalkhal		Baluchi
64	Farshid Naseri	Male	1987	Nov-10	Enmity against God [Moharebeh] (Clauses 183 186 and 187)	Death	16-Nov-13	Kurdish
65	Ahmad Naseri	Male		Apr-11	Enmity against God [Moharebeh] (Clauses 183 186 and 187), Relations or collaboration with organizations that aim to disrupt national security (Clause 499)	Death		Kurdish
66	Barzan Nasrollahzadeh	Male	1-Nov-92	29-May-10	Enmity against God [Moharebeh] (Clauses 183 186 and 187)	Death	23-Jul-13	Kurdish
67	Parviz Osmani	Male		Jun-10	Enmity against God [Moharebeh] (Clauses 183 186 and 187), Relations or collaboration with organizations that aim to disrupt national security (Clause 499)	5 years		Kurdish
68	Omid Peyvand	Male		Jun-10	Assembly and collusion against national security (Clause 610), Membership in organizations that aim to disrupt national security (Clause 499)	Death		Kurdish

LIST OF CURRENTLY IMPRISONED SUNNI MUSLIMS IN IRAN (AS OF JANUARY 2014)								
	NAME	GENDER	DATE OF BIRTH	DATE OF ARREST	CHARGES	SENTENCE	DATE OF SENTENCING	ETHNICITY
69	Mohammad Yavar Rahimi	Male		Jun-10	Enmity against God [Moharebeh] (Clauses 183 186 and 187), Membership in organizations that aim to disrupt national security (Clause 499)	Death		Kurdish
70	Mokhtar Rahimi	Male		16-Oct-09	Assembly and collusion against national security (Clause 610), Propaganda against the system (Clause 500)	Death		Kurdish
71	Masoud Rasouli	Male		Jan-11	Enmity against God [Moharebeh] (Clauses 183 186 and 187), Membership in organizations that aim to disrupt national security (Clause 499)	5 years		Kurdish
72	Foad Rezazadeh	Male			Enmity against God [Moharebeh] (Clauses 183 186 and 187), Membership in organizations that aim to disrupt national security (Clause 499)			
73	Farhad Salimi	Male		8-Feb-10				Kurdish
74	Abdolrahman Sangani	Male				Death		
75	Mohammad Javan Shahbakhsh	Male			Enmity against God [Moharebeh] (Clauses 183 186 and 187)	5 years		Baluchi
76	Behrooz Shahnazari	Male		Jan-11	Assembly and collusion against national security (Clause 610), Enmity against God [Moharebeh] (Clauses 183 186 and 187), Membership in organizations that aim to disrupt national security (Clause 499), Propaganda against the system (Clause 500)	Death		Kurdish
77	Farzad Shahnazari	Male		Jun-10		Death		Kurdish
78	Khosro Sharafipour	Male		Jun-09	Enmity against God [Moharebeh] (Clauses 183 186 and 187), Membership in organizations that aim to disrupt national security (Clause 499)	8 years		Kurdish
79	Mohammad Yaser Sharafipour	Male			Enmity against God [Moharebeh] (Clauses 183 186 and 187), Membership in organizations that aim to disrupt national security (Clause 499)	8 years		Kurdish
80	Vahed Sharafipour	Male		Jun-10	Enmity against God [Moharebeh] (Clauses 183 186 and 187), Membership in organizations that aim to disrupt national security (Clause 499)	8 years		Kurdish
81	Arash Sharifi	Male		Oct-09	Enmity against God [Moharebeh] (Clauses 183 186 and 187), Membership in organizations that aim to disrupt national security (Clause 499)	Death		
82	Kaveh Sharifi	Male		Oct-09	Enmity against God [Moharebeh] (Clauses 183 186 and 187), Relations or collaboration with organizations that aim to disrupt national security (Clause 499)	Death		Kurdish
83	Shovane Sharifi	Male		25-Dec-11	Enmity against God [Moharebeh] (Clauses 183 186 and 187), Membership in organizations that aim to disrupt national security (Clause 499)			
84	Kamran Sheikhe	Male		8-Feb-10				Kurdish
85	Naser Sheikhe	Male		Jan-12		3 years		Kurdish
86	Jamal Soleimani	Male		Apr-10	Assembly and collusion against national security (Clause 610), Propaganda against the system (Clause 500)	11 years		Kurdish
87	Mamusta Kaveh Veisi	Male	1984	11-Jun-09	Assembly and collusion against national security (Clause 610)	Death		Kurdish
88	Foad Yosefi	Male		Jan-11	Enmity against God [Moharebeh] (Clauses 183 186 and 187)	Death		Kurdish

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Thank you so very much, Dr. George.

Ms. Baheri? Thank you.

STATEMENT OF MS. CLER BAHERI, MEMBER OF THE BAHA'I COMMUNITY

Ms. BAHERI. Chairman Ros-Lehtinen, Ranking Member——

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Hold on 1 second. Let us stop the clock. Push the microphone and hold it close to your mouth. Let us start the clock again.

Ms. BAHERI. Got it.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Thank you.

Ms. BAHERI. Chairman Ros-Lehtinen, Ranking Member Deutch, and members of the subcommittee, my name is Cler Baheri. I was born in Tabriz, Iran, and I am a Baha'i. I want to thank you for giving me the opportunity to share my story with you.

I would like to request that my written statement be included in——

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Without objection.

Ms. BAHERI. The Baha'i community of Iran has been the target of systemic and severe state-sponsored persecution since the Islamic Revolution of 1979. My family and my husband's family have experienced this persecution firsthand.

When the revolution began in 1979, I was 12. My father, Mehdi Baheri, had been serving on the local spiritual assembly of Tabriz, the elected governing council of the Baha'i community in that city. As a result, our house was raided five times. And finally, in 1980, my father and several other members of the Tabriz assembly, along with two other local Baha'is, were arrested and imprisoned.

In prison, my father was notified that because he was a Baha'i, his employment as an accountant with the Ministry of Health had been terminated, and salary owed to him was canceled. And his retirement funds, which had accumulated over the course of 24 years in the civil service, were repossessed.

My family and I would visit my father once a week. My brother and I would take our report cards to show to my father. He told us that he was happy that we were doing well in school. Once he wrote us a birthday note on a piece of clothing that was sent to us to be laundered. In the note he said he needed us to understand that he was not in prison for any crime other than his belief in the Baha'i faith, and that he wanted us to fight for him by continuing to do well in school.

A few days before his execution, my father was taken in the middle of the night into a room with one interrogator and a tape recorder. The interrogator fell asleep and my father was expected to continue to answer a list of questions that had been put in front of him. This was his so-called trial.

After their trials, my father and the other Baha'is were sentenced to death and held in solitary confinement for 24 hours. During this time, they were given the choice of Islam or edam, which means Islam or death. This meant that if they recanted their faith and declared themselves to be Muslims, their lives would be spared. All of them refused. Instead, they declared that they were Baha'is, and for this they were killed.

On July 29, '81, at the age of 47, my father, Mehdi Baheri, was executed. And this is a picture of him.

My brother was 9 and I was 15.

When my family was informed of my father's death, one of our relatives went to receive the body. The prison authorities forced them to pay for the bullets that had taken his life. Later that night, the executions were announced on the radio. The announcer stated that my father and the others were convicted of corruption on Earth and warring against God.

I finished high school in Iran in 1983. Though I had one of the highest scores on the provincial exams, I, like many other students across Iran, was denied entrance to university solely because of my faith. The next year I left Iran alone, traveling on the back of a truck through the desert into Pakistan. I was eventually resettled as a refugee in Canada, and I now live in Virginia with my husband, Naim Sobhani.

Naim is also Baha'i, and he is from Tehran. As a young man, he was arrested and detained three times in Iran, twice for playing jazz in private concerts, and once for possessing educational material in his car for Baha'i children. When he was arrested for having the children's material, he was imprisoned for 2 months and was often held in solitary confinement in a small room with no windows. He was 18 at the time.

Naim was also denied admittance to university because he was a Baha'i. Soon after, he left Iran alone, traveling with a tribal guide through the western mountains into Turkey. After being stranded in a mountain village for 5 days during border skirmishes, he crossed the border into Turkey. He was also processed by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and was resettled in Maryland.

Naim's father, Riaz Sobhani, is currently imprisoned in Iran for his efforts to educate Baha'i youth. He had been a successful civil engineer, but soon after the revolution he was terminated from his job for being a Baha'i, and his salary, pension, and savings were seized.

In the years following the revolution, Baha'i students and professors were expelled from universities, and Baha'i youth were denied the right to attend university. In 1987, Riaz, my father-in-law, along with several other Baha'is, most of whom were academics and professionals, who had also lost their jobs after the revolution, came together to form the Baha'i Institute for Higher Learning, known as BIHE.

BIHE is an informal network of classes designed to educate young Baha'is in a range of subjects, such as biology, engineering, psychology, architecture, and law. Materials and funds are donated, and the classes are usually held in homes. BIHE serves as the only viable avenue through which Iran's young Baha'is can obtain higher education.

My father-in-law, Riaz, has been instrumental in BIHE from the beginning, managing administrative work and hosting classes in his home. For over 20 years, he and the other dedicated faculty and staff of BIHE have been giving freely of themselves to ensure that against all odds the next generation of Baha'is has a chance to contribute to society.

In May 2011, there was a series of raids on dozens of homes associated with BIHE. Riaz was arrested, along with several other Baha'is. He and the others were initially held in Tehran's notorious Evin Prison. In October, after a brief show trial, he and six other Baha'i educators were convicted of membership in the deviant Baha'ist sect, with the goal of taking action against the security of the country, in order to further the aims of the deviant sect and those of organizations outside the country. They were each sentenced to 4 to 5 years, with my father-in-law receiving 4 years.

After their sentencing, Riaz and the others were moved to Rajai Shahr Prison in Gohardasht, Iran, where the male prisoners were put in the same ward as the members of seven imprisoned Baha'i leaders known as the Yaran. In the years since then, other BIHE educators have been imprisoned. Thus, there are now 12 individuals who are imprisoned solely because of their efforts to educate Baha'is.

And this is a picture of the 12 currently in Rajai Shahr.

What my husband's family is now living through because of my father-in-law's imprisonment is, unfortunately, nothing new. Their experience with persecution started long before Riaz's current imprisonment. Soon after the revolution, two of Riaz's cousins were executed for being a Baha'i.

When Naim's little brother, Navid, who was 6 years at the time passed away, they buried him in a small Baha'i cemetery. Soon after, the cemetery was bulldozed and turned into an agricultural field. A few years later, Naim's grandmother and aunt were arrested and imprisoned for being Baha'is. They were held in Evin for 1 year, in solitary confinement for part of that time, and they were repeatedly beaten and tortured.

In the last several years, Naim's younger sister, Zhinoos, and her husband, Artin, have both been imprisoned twice. Zhinoos, who was also denied admission to university, completed her studies in law with BIHE and is now working at the Defenders of Human Rights Center, an organization founded by Nobel Laureate Shirin Ebadi, who has since——

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Ms. Baheri, if I could impose——

Ms. BAHERI. Sure.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN [continuing]. A time limit on your statement.

Ms. BAHERI. Okay. Sure.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. So sorry to do so.

Ms. BAHERI. Not a problem. I am almost there. In November 2013, President Rouhani released a draft citizens rights charter. As human rights organizations have noted, it is a restrictive and problematic document that raises very serious concerns. One of these concerns is that the charter states that the rights it enumerates apply only to religious minorities recognized by the Iranian constitution, a group that excludes Baha'is. In recent months, two Baha'i cemeteries were attacked, one in Sanandaj and one in Shiraz.

I would like to thank the House of Representatives for passing on May 28 H.R. 4028, which adds the desecration of cemeteries to religious freedom violations under the International Religious Freedom Act, and I hope that the Senate and the President will agree to this much-needed provision.

[The prepared statement of Ms. Baheri follows:]

BAHÁ'ÍS OF THE UNITED STATES

Cler Baheri
Member of the Bahá'í Community

Thursday, June 19, 2014

Hearing: "One Year Under Rouhani: Iran's Abysmal Human Rights Record"

United States House of Representatives
Committee on Foreign Affairs
Subcommittee on the Middle East and North Africa
Subcommittee on Africa, Global Health, Global Human Rights and International Organizations

Chairman Ros-Lehtinen, Ranking Member Deutch, and Members of the Subcommittee, my name is Cler Baheri. I was born in Tabriz, Iran and I am a Bahá'í. I want to thank you for giving me the opportunity to share my story with you today.

The Bahá'í community of Iran has been the target of systematic and severe state-sponsored persecution since the Islamic Revolution of 1979. My family and my husband's family have experienced this persecution first-hand.

When the Revolution began, I was 12 years old. At the time, my father, Mehdi Baheri, had been serving on the Local Spiritual Assembly of Tabriz, the elected governing council of the Bahá'í community in that city. Because of my father's service to the Bahá'í community in Tabriz, our home was raided by Revolutionary Guards five times from 1979 to 1980. They took Bahá'í books, birthday cards we had received from our relatives abroad, and family pictures.

In 1980, my father and several other members of the Tabriz Assembly, along with two other local Bahá'ís, were arrested and imprisoned together. While he was in prison, my father was notified that, because he was a Bahá'í, his employment as an accountant with the Ministry of Health had been terminated, any salary owed to him was cancelled, and his retirement funds – which he had accumulated over the course of 24 years in the civil service – were repossessed.

My mother, my aunts, my elderly grandmother, my little brother, and I would visit my father once a week. My brother was nine and I was 15. My brother and I would take our report cards to show to my father in prison. He told us that he was happy that we were still doing well in school. Once, he wrote us a birthday note on a piece of his clothing that was sent home to be laundered. In the note, he said he needed us to understand that he was not in prison for any crime other than his belief in the Bahá'í Faith, and that he wanted us to fight for him by continuing to do well in school.

A few days before his execution, my father was taken, in the middle of the night, into a room with one interrogator and a tape recorder. The interrogator fell asleep, and my father was expected to continue to answer a list of questions that had been put in front him. This was his so-called "trial."

After their interrogations, my father and the other imprisoned Bahá'ís were sentenced to death and held in solitary confinement for 24 hours. During this time, they were given the choice of "Islam or edam," which means "Islam or death." This meant that, if they recanted their faith and declared themselves to be Muslims, their lives would be spared. All of them refused to recant. Instead, they declared their belief in the Bahá'í Faith. For this, they were killed.

On July 29, 1981, at the age of 47, my father, Mehdi Baheri was executed. When my family was informed of my father's death, one of my relatives went to receive the body. The prison authorities forced him to pay for the bullets that had taken my father's life. Later that night, the executions were announced on the radio. The announcer stated that my father and the others were convicted of "corruption on earth" and "warring against God."

I finished high school in Iran in 1983. Though I had one of the highest scores on the provincial exams, I, like many other Bahá'í students across Iran, was denied entrance to university solely because of my faith. The next year, I left Iran alone, traveling on the back of a truck through the desert into Pakistan. There, I was processed by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and was resettled in Canada. I now live in Virginia with my husband, Naim Sobhani.

Naim is also a Bahá'í, and he is from Tehran. As a young man, he was arrested and detained three times in Iran – twice for playing jazz music in private concerts, and once for possessing educational materials for Bahá'í children. When he was arrested for having the Bahá'í children's materials, he was imprisoned for two months. He was held in solitary confinement for much of the time, in a small, dark room with no windows.

Naim was also denied admittance to university because he was a Bahá'í. Soon after, he left Iran alone, traveling with a tribal guide through the western mountains into Turkey. After being stranded in a mountain village for five days during border skirmishes, he crossed the border into Turkey. He was also processed by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and was resettled in Maryland.

Naim's father, Riaz Sobhani, is currently imprisoned in Iran for his efforts to educate Bahá'í youth. He had been a successful civil engineer before the Islamic Revolution, but, soon after the Revolution, he was terminated from his job for being a Bahá'í, and his salary, pension, and savings were seized.

In the years following the Revolution, Bahá'í students and professors were expelled from universities, and Bahá'í youth were denied the right to attend university. My father-in-law, Riaz, was deeply affected by this injustice against the Bahá'í youth, who were prevented from receiving an education. Although he himself could not obtain work because he was a Bahá'í, he wanted to use his education to help young Bahá'ís. So, in 1987, he, along with several other Bahá'ís – most of whom were academics and professionals who had also lost their jobs after the Revolution – came together to form the Bahá'í Institute for Higher Education, known as BIHE.

BIHE is an informal network of classes designed to educate young Bahá'ís in a range of subjects, such as biology, engineering, psychology, architecture and law. Materials and funds are donated and the classes are usually held in homes. BIHE, which serves as the only viable avenue through which Iran's young Bahá'ís can obtain higher education, was described by the *New York Times* as "an elaborate act of communal self-preservation."

Riaz has been instrumental in BIHE from the beginning, managing administrative work and hosting classes in his home. For over 20 years, he and the other dedicated faculty and staff of BIHE have been giving freely of themselves to ensure that, against all odds, the next generation of Bahá'ís has a chance to contribute to society.

In May of 2011, there was a series of raids on dozens of homes associated with BIHE. This was not the first time that BIHE had been raided; in fact, it had been subject to sweeping raids in 1998, as well as

attacks in 2001 and 2002. My father-in-law, Riaz, was arrested along with several other Bahá'ís in the May 2011 raid. Riaz was initially held in Tehran's notorious Evin Prison, and was in solitary confinement for at least one month. He is now 69 years old and has suffered from poor health in prison.

The following month, in June 2011, the government declared that BIHE was "illegal," though any reasonable person would of course be moved to ask how BIHE – an unofficial entity through which the Bahá'í community undertakes efforts to educate its own youth, who are otherwise denied university education – could possibly be declared "illegal." Nevertheless, in July of 2011, Riaz and six other BIHE educators were charged with "conspiracy against the Islamic Republic of Iran" by "establishing the illegal Bahá'í Institute for Higher Education."

In September of that year, Mr. Abdolfattah Soltani, the human rights lawyer who had taken on the case of my father-in-law and the other BIHE educators, was detained. He is one of many human rights lawyers who have been imprisoned in Iran for his advocacy on behalf of religious minorities and others who are oppressed by the government. In 2012, Mr. Soltani was sentenced to 13 years in prison and had his law license revoked. He has been awarded the Nuremberg Human Rights Award and the International Bar Association Human Rights Award.

In October 2011, after a brief show trial, my father-in-law and the six other educators were convicted of "membership in the deviant Bahaist sect, with the goal of taking action against the security of the country, in order to further the aims of the deviant sect and those of organizations outside the country." They were each sentenced to four or five year terms, with my father-in-law receiving four years.

After their sentencing, Riaz and the others were moved to Rajai Shahr Prison in Gohardasht, Iran, where the male prisoners were put in the same ward as the male members of the seven imprisoned Bahá'í leaders, known as the Yaran. These seven individuals, who served as the former ad hoc leadership group of the Bahá'í community of Iran, have been in prison since 2008 and are serving 20-year terms, the longest sentences of any prisoner of conscience in Iran.

In the years since Riaz and the other educators were sentenced in October 2011, one BIHE educator has been released, while seven more BIHE educators have been imprisoned. Thus, there are now 12 individuals who are in prison in Iran solely because of their efforts to educate Bahá'í youth. Their plight is part of what a number of human rights organizations have characterized as the Iranian government's assault on academic freedom and what Amnesty International has recently reported as the continuing repression of students and academics in Iran.

What my husband's family is now living through because of my father-in-law's imprisonment is, unfortunately, nothing new. Their experience with persecution started long before Riaz's current imprisonment. In the early years after the Islamic Revolution, two of Riaz's cousins were executed for being Bahá'ís. When Naim's little brother, who was six years old at the time, passed away, they buried him in a small Bahá'í cemetery, and soon after, that Bahá'í cemetery was bulldozed and turned into an agricultural field. A few years later, Naim's grandmother and aunt were arrested and imprisoned for

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Thank you very much. Thank you, Ms. Baheri, for your powerful testimony. We thank you.

Ms. BAHERI. Thank you.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. And now I am pleased to yield to Mr. Alizadeh. Thank you, sir.

STATEMENT OF MR. HOSSEIN ALIZADEH, REGIONAL PROGRAM COORDINATOR FOR THE MIDDLE EAST AND NORTH AFRICA, INTERNATIONAL GAY & LESBIAN HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION

Mr. ALIZADEH. Thank you, Madam Chairman, Ranking Member Deutch, and the distinguished members of the House Committee on Foreign Affairs. Thank you for inviting me to testify today at a hearing on Iran.

Almost 1 year ago, Iranians went to the polls to choose the seventh President of the Islamic Republic of Iran. Few people in Iran had any illusions about a flawed electoral process or the real power of the President in Iran. Over the past three decades, elections in Iran have been filled with allegations of vote rigging, intimidation, threats against candidates, and, more importantly, widespread disqualification of independent and opposition candidates by the electoral monitoring body.

Just last week, on the 1-year anniversary of his election, the Iranian President, Hassan Rouhani, himself openly noted that elections in Iran have the reputation of being a political sham.

Unlike the United States, Iran's constitution allows limited authority to the President of the country. The Office of the President in Iran, for example, has no control over the army, the intelligence, the police, or key foreign policy issues. The real center of power in Iran's politics is the Office of the Supreme Leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, who has the final political, religious, and military say. Furthermore, the Ayatollah's office is exempt from regular checks and balances.

Although these facts may be already known to the distinguished members of the committee, a brief mention of them may help us to set realistic expectations while evaluating the President's performance and his accomplishments. The truth of the matter is, within the political dynamics of the Islamic Republic, the Office of President cannot be an engine of significant change, even at the best of times.

On a bigger scale, it is neither realistic, nor logical, to expect a self-declared theocracy, such as the Islamic Republic of Iran, to function as a secular democracy. Over the past 12 months, the human rights situation in Iran has demonstrated no significant improvement in comparison to the status of human rights under former President Ahmadinejad.

The state has continued to carry out a high number of executions, including the execution of political prisoners. Other instances of human rights violations include extrajudicial arrests, house arrests, juvenile execution, mistreatment and torture of detainees, regular interference in the privacy of citizens, the ban of free speech, and the persecution of individuals based on their religious beliefs and political opinions.

I would like here to specifically highlight the plight of Iranian gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender individuals. Iran's penal code continues to prescribe the death penalty for consensual same-sex relations. The official media and top publications, and top officials, including Iran's Supreme Leader, Ayatollah Khamenei, regularly attack homosexuality as a Western conspiracy and a sign of moral decay.

Individuals suspected of being gay, lesbian, or transgender face systematic acts of violence and discrimination. Newspapers are shut down for publishing opinion pieces about same-sex relations. Security forces raid private parties of suspected LGBT people and subject them to beating, humiliation, and the confiscation of property.

Professors and students are forced to leave universities for organizing academic discussions about gender and sexuality. Even worse, acts of violence against suspected LGBT family members often go unpunished and unnoticed. As a result of those oppressive realities, every year hundreds of LGBT individuals leave their home country and seek asylum in the West, including the United States. I am one of them.

I am of course horrified by the human rights violations occurring in Iran, but I do believe that Rouhani's presidency provides an opportunity for the Iranian people and the international community to successfully demand more freedom for the people of Iran.

Unlike its predecessor, Rouhani seems to believe in less government control, more international trade, and a stronger role for academic and professional communities. No one can or should mistake Rouhani for a champion of human rights. However, he appears willing to make small improvements and seems to have the political and social capital to do so.

The United States Government has a moral obligation to provide opportunities and resources for the Iranian people in order to give them broader access to information about human rights standards and personal freedoms, especially through funding technology to fight internet censorship and to develop informative resources in Persian.

The political opening created by Rouhani's election should be utilized through significant investment in public awareness to counter the notion that human rights are not compatible with Iranian traditions and values. Also, it is very important to keep in mind that the authorities in Iran should take note that the West is not really interested in its bottom line or lucrative oil business.

They need to know that the international community cares about human rights records of Iran and to take action of positive and negative developments in that regard. More importantly, human rights protection should not be a footnote or in the fine print of bilateral and regional negotiations. The United States and the West should speak loudly and clearly about the importance of human rights and make sure to discuss this topic in every conversation.

Thank you.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Alizadeh follows:]

Hossein Alizadeh

Middle East and North Africa Program Coordinator

International Gay and Lesbian Human Rights Commission (IGLHRC)

House Foreign Affairs Committee

One Year under Rouhani: Iran's Abysmal Human Rights Record, June 19, 2014

Introduction

Almost one year ago, Iranians went to the polls to choose the seventh president of the Islamic Republic of Iran. Few people in Iran had any illusions about the flawed electoral process or the real power of the Office of the President in Iran. Over the past three decades, elections in Iran have been filled with allegations of rigged voting, intimidation and threats against candidates, and more importantly, widespread disqualification of independent and opposition candidates by the ultra-conservative electoral monitoring body. Just last week, on the one-year anniversary of his election, the Iranian President Hassan Rouhani himself openly noted that elections in Iran have the reputation of being a political sham.

Unlike the United States, Iran's Constitution allows limited authority to the president of the country. The Office of the President in Iran, for example, has no control over the army, the intelligence, the police, or key foreign policy issues. As such, one can compare the power of Iran's president to that of a governor in the U.S., rather than the U.S. president. The real center of power in Iran's politics is the Office of the Supreme Leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, who has the final political, religious, and military say. Furthermore, the Ayatollah's office is, by legal definition, exempt from regular checks and balances.

Although these facts may already be known to the distinguished members of the Committee, a brief mention of them may help us set realistic expectations while evaluating the President's performance and his accomplishments. The truth of the matter is, within the political dynamics of the Islamic Republic, the office of the president cannot be an engine of significant change, even at the best of times. On a bigger scale, it is neither realistic nor logical to expect a self-declared theocracy, such as the Islamic Republic of Iran, to function as a secular democracy. In Iran, it is clearly stated in the Constitution that Shiite Islam is the guiding principle of the political system and that all affairs concerning political, social, and economic life should comply with this principle, as expressed by the Supreme Leader, who is himself accountable to his peer clergymen.

This constitutional framing has an impact on the protection of human rights. Although Iran has ratified the two main human rights treaties (i.e., the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights), Iranian officials, including the head of the judiciary, have declared that the government will honor its international human rights obligations only to the extent that they are deemed, by the Iranian authorities, to be compatible with Islam.

Human Rights in Iran: One Year Later

Over the past twelve months, the human rights situation in Iran has demonstrated no significant improvement in comparison to the status of human rights under former President Ahmadinejad. The state has continued to carry out a high number of executions, including executions of political prisoners. Other instances of human rights violations that have been reported by multiple international human rights groups, including Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, and the International Campaign for Human Rights in Iran, include extrajudicial arrests; unlawful long-term detention (including house arrest); mistreatment and torture of detainees; regular interference in the privacy of citizens by the morality police and religious militias; the shutdown of newspapers and the ban on free association; and the persecution of individuals based on their religious beliefs, political opinions, or membership of certain groups and associations.

These human rights abuses are happening against the backdrop of President Rouhani's public support for personal freedom, gender equality, and free speech, including his call for open access to the Internet and his pledge to draft a Citizens' Bill of Rights. The discrepancy between Rouhani's statements and the realities of life under his administration is such that some observers have concluded that Rouhani is trying to solidify the power of the ruling establishment in Iran through his attractive, yet empty, oratory.

Other experts, however, believe that President Rouhani is a pragmatic politician who is fully aware of the limitations of his power and the complexity of the system he is tasked with managing. Much like any president, one might say that Rouhani's first priority must be to protect the country's constitution, which takes its guiding principles from Shiite Islam. Within this framework, however, Rouhani does seem to have a liberal understanding of citizens' rights and freedoms within Islam, and appear to believe that Islam is compatible with modern democracy and civil discourse. This liberal reading of Islam almost lost Rouhani the presidential election and has meant that some clerics are against him.

A Glimpse of Hope

I am of course horrified by the human rights violations occurring in Iran, as I am horrified by human rights violations everywhere. That being said, I do believe that Rouhani's Presidency provides an opportunity for the Iranian people and the international community to successfully demand more freedom and rights for the people of Iran. Unlike his predecessor, Rouhani seems to believe in less government control, more international trade, and a stronger role for academic and professional communities. President Rouhani may not be a human rights advocate by American standards, but the vision he expresses of governance and personal freedom would, if implemented, be conducive to a more open and vibrant society.

Rouhani's credential as a clergyman and his proven track record as a "revolutionary" have made it difficult for his opponents to dismiss him as "yet another agent of the West." By positioning himself as a "centrist" politician, President Rouhani seeks to unite forces from both sides of the political spectrum, hoping to gain support from all. As a self-styled "unifier," President Rouhani claims that he hopes to promote a culture of fostering political dialogue and national reconciliation in an Islamic theocracy.

Assessing the broader regional dynamics teaches us an important lesson about the value of moderate politicians who try to bring change from within. Iran's neighboring countries, specifically Iraq, Kuwait, and Afghanistan, certainly have more modern constitutions. Unfortunately though, none can serve as a role model for democracy or a successful promoter of values such as free speech, freedom of religion, and personal rights. More tragically, two of these countries - Iraq and Afghanistan - are nearing civil war, with failed governments that can hardly protect the safety of their citizens or uphold the rule of law.

An Iranian lawyer told me earlier this year that many Iranians are grateful that their country has not turned into another Syria or Iraq. Make no mistake: the political stability that the Islamic regime has offered is oppressive. And no one can, or should, mistake President Rouhani for a champion of human rights. However, he appears willing to make piecemeal improvements and seems to have the political and social capital to do so.

Moreover, he is a clergyman-turned-politician who publicly invites people to denounce violence and hatred, to respect the rights of minorities, and to create more opportunities for women. Rouhani's administration may not succeed in implementing most of his rhetoric, but the President's vision has given hope to many people.

The United States of America should continue to urge the Iranian government to adhere to the norms of international human rights. The United States also has a moral obligation to provide opportunities and resources for the Iranian people in order to give them broader access to information about human rights standards, the rule of law, and personal freedoms. We should also be clear that the population in Iran is no monolith: many tirelessly work to promote values such as tolerance, respect for others, and peaceful coexistence. The political opening created by Rouhani's election should be utilized through significant investment in public awareness and outreach. The United States and other Western countries are in a unique position to make a difference in the future of Iran and in the surrounding region, through supporting programs and campaigns that counter the notion that human rights are incompatible with Iranian traditions and values.

International Partnership to Promote Human Rights

Perhaps a successful example of an effort to promote human rights in Iran is the creation of the Office of the Special Rapporteur for Human Rights on Iran by the United Nations Human Rights Council. This effort was supported by civil society both in and outside of Iran. Since its inception in 2011, the Office of the UN Special Rapporteur on Iran has played a vital role in outlining the systematic abuse of human rights in Iran as well as Iran's obligations under international law. This is especially important, because the Iranian regime, which has a history of dismissing human rights as a "Western political conspiracy," has found it increasingly costly and difficult to ignore or dismiss human rights, as imperatively expressed through the UN Special Rapporteur on Iran, Dr. Ahmad Shaheed. I would like to thank the U.S. government for its unconditional support for the mission of the UN Special Rapporteur on Iran, and I sincerely hope that the distinguished members of the House view the Obama Administration's policy on supporting such international mechanisms as a step in the right direction.

Another area where the international community might successfully engage the government of Iran on the issue of human rights is through bilateral and regional ties. Given that the government of President Rouhani is pursuing expanded political and economic ties with the international community, Western countries, including the United States, can and should make the protection and promotion of human rights a central theme in on-going conversations with Tehran. It is important for the authorities in Tehran to know that the West is not merely interested in its "bottom line" or lucrative oil business. They need to know that the international community cares about the human rights records of Iran and to take notice of positive and negative developments in that regard. More importantly, human rights protection should not be a footnote or in the fine print of bilateral and regional negotiations. The United States and the West should speak loudly and clearly about the importance of human rights and make sure to discuss this topic in every conversation.

Gender, Sexuality and Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender (LGBT) Rights in Iran

Although same-sex practice, cross-dressing, and gender non-conformity have been documented throughout Iran's history, Iranian officials, including former President Ahmadinejad and Iran's current Supreme Leader, deny the existence of lesbian, gay, and bisexual people. The criminal law notes that adult same-sex sexual acts are punishable by death. These legal provisions are based on a reading of religion that considers any sexual act outside heterosexual marriage to be impermissible. The punishment is severe, and this view continues to be expressed in the public spheres of many countries, including the United States. In today's Iran, any open conversation or discussion about sexual rights, gender equality, and homosexuality is met with violent reaction from both the judicial and law enforcement bodies.

The official interpretation of Islam, as reflected in the country's legal codes, codifies a vision of women as inferior to men. According to Iranian laws, women can only inherit half of what their male siblings can, their testimony in a court of law is only granted half as much weight as that of a man, they do not have the right to travel overseas without the permission of a male custodian (usually a husband or father), they must cover themselves with a headscarf when outside their home, and are, by law, not allowed to run for certain positions, including for Cabinet minister, Judge, or the presidency.

Such a narrow reading of gender roles and sexual rights has adversely affected millions of Iranian citizens, regardless of their sexual orientation or gender identity. As such, any engagement on the human rights situation in Iran must pay specific attention to sexual rights and gender equality. No government, including the government of Iran, has the right to monitor or regulate intimate acts between consenting adults or to curtail freedom of expression (including clothing) arbitrarily. The Iranian government's regulations that require men not to wear shorts or women to wear a mandatory headscarf is a direct violation of every citizen's rights to bodily autonomy, freedom of expression, and freedom of thought, religion, and conscience.

Furthermore, the legal discrimination embedded in the Iranian system deepens stereotypes about both men and women and is used as a justification for social discrimination and even violence against women, as legal dress codes label transgressors as criminals or immoral. Every year, many women fall victim to acts of domestic violence, committed by their male relatives in the name of protecting the family's honor. Such so-called "honor crimes" do not only target women. The International Gay and Lesbian Human Rights Commission has documented acts of violence against gay men and trans individuals by immediate family members and neighbors. These crimes are more often than not neither investigated nor prosecuted.

We believe that any meaningful change in the fight for gender equality and sexual rights can only be accomplished through extensive and continuous education and outreach—in Iran and everywhere. Many scholars have argued that damaging stereotypes about the roles of men and women predate Islam and are not inherent to Islam. The decoupling of this narrow understanding of gender from religious and cultural values requires a long-term cultural effort with substantial social investment. The mere transfer of power from one group to another, either through an election or by military force, will not in and of itself result in a change of gendered stereotypes and discrimination.

Freedom of Information

Over the past three decades, the government of Iran has gone to great lengths to limit Iranians' access to free flowing information, attempting to keep the population in the dark about issues that can raise social expectations inside Iran, such as free elections, varied gender expression, and women's equality.

It continues to be a crime to own and watch satellite TV, to listen to any music not authorized by the government, and to publish, distribute, or even own books that are not approved by the censorship office. Internet use is heavily regulated and is subject to wiretapping and restriction by the Iranian government. While access to online social networks is banned or is extremely limited for average Iranians, top government officials – including Iran's Supreme Leader, President, and Foreign Minister – have an extensive presence on these networks and use the Internet's technology as an effective international propaganda tool. Over the past few years, the Iranian police force has formed a dedicated unit to monitor Iranian citizens' online activities, especially on social networks, and to crack down on any online activity that is deemed to be a political threat or in violation of the country's so-called morality laws.

Despite these efforts, many Iranian citizens risk arrest by using circumvention technology that allows them to bypass the government's digital roadblocks. I would especially like here to acknowledge and thank the U.S. government's investment in developing such circumvention technologies.

I hope that the government of the United States continues its investment in more affordable and easy-to-use technologies that would allow individuals anywhere to have unrestricted access to the wealth of information and knowledge available online. The U.S. government, with the help of Congress, can also allocate more resources for content development and dissemination of material in Persian and other languages used by Iranian citizens. In a country in which expression of personal opinion can land journalists in jail and result in the closure of newspapers, access to independent and professional media outlets online with uncensored information and opinion pieces in Persian is essential to the growth of democratic space.

Freedom of Assembly

The Iranian political machinery has shown little interest in protecting the human right to free association. Only groups, associations, and assemblies that pledge their loyalty to the government and its religious ideology are given permission to operate. Membership to unauthorized groups and associations is illegal and can land individuals in jail. Even the formation of professional associations (such as those of journalists, lawyers, and artists) is subject to intense scrutiny and pressure by the police, the Intelligence Ministry, and regulatory bodies such as the Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance. The Ministry of Intelligence has a pronounced role in "regulating" and "licensing" religious associations, hence determining who has the right to worship. Members of religious minority groups, including Sufis, Sunnis, Baha'is, Christian converts, and Shiite groups who do not subscribe to the Supreme Leader's vision of Islam, are banned, having been deemed as "unauthorized groups and associations." Similarly, any social or political group considered a risk to the official religion is outlawed.

As an extreme example, members of the Baha'i faith are frequently subject to harassment, confiscation of property, and exclusion from education and economic opportunities. The Baha'i faith does not allow followers to conceal their religion, making it harder to avoid abuse. Similar restrictions are also imposed on members of the Sufi faith, as well as Sunni Muslims. The law disallows conversion from Islam to other religions, and the state's intelligence forces often harass individuals who have embraced other religions.

The international community can play a constructive role by providing opportunities for members of marginalized groups to gain access to education and to social opportunities outside of Iran. Another meaningful step by the U.S. government can be to provide resources for groups and associations that promote tolerance, civil rights, and equality before the law within Iran.

Cruel and Unusual Punishments

Iran has one of the highest rates of executions worldwide, including the execution of children under eighteen, comparable only to China and Iraq. The Iranian legal system prescribes the death penalty for many infractions, from sex outside marriage (sexual activity between a Muslim woman and a non-Muslim man results in the execution of the non-Muslim man) to consensual same-sex intercourse between two adult men. The Iranian Penal Code also requires the death penalty for those "spreading corruption and immorality in the society." Broadly defined, this pertains to anyone found guilty of repeated theft and to those who use abusive language against sacred figures of the Shiite faith.

The government of Iran regularly imposes the death penalty on those who are involved in trafficking drugs, as well as political activists who are seen to be a threat to the establishment, using the vague provisions in the law as cover. Although Iranian authorities frequently have denied the execution of political prisoners, human rights activists have documented cases of execution of political activists who have been arrested based on their political beliefs, their peaceful expression of opinions, and/or their membership in banned groups.

Due to the opaque nature of Iran's court system, the frequent use of unlawful and extrajudicial arrests, the routine confiscation of property by law-enforcement officers and the Basiji religious militia, the widespread use of cruel, inhumane, or other degrading treatment to obtain confessions from detainees, the lack of access to lawyers during criminal trials for many defendants, and the blanket refusal of the Iranian Judiciary to allow independent observers to attend trials, it is often impossible to verify decisions of the court regarding the guilt or innocence of defendants.

The Iranian Penal Code continues to recommend cruel, inhumane, and degrading types of punishments, including stoning (for adultery), amputation of fingers, arms, and legs (for robbery), lashing (for same-sex relations among women, pimping, and accusing someone of committing adultery and/or sodomy), and crucifixion (for armed robbery and drug trafficking). Iran's judiciary has argued that these forms of punishment are meant to protect the society and preserve social order. Although many groups and activists, including ones within Iran, have voiced their opposition to the punishments mandated in the Penal Code, sources close to Iran's Supreme Leader portray these regulations as part of Islamic law and accuse opponents of insulting the religious beliefs of the population. President Rouhani's voice has been largely absent in this public debate, which falsely pits protected moral order against lawlessness.

Based on my conversations with lawyers and legal professionals in Iran, I believe that only a non-politicized approach to the issue of legal reform in Iran can bring about desirable outcomes. The need for legal reform in Iran should not be portrayed as a choice between religious beliefs and the rule of law, nor should it be linked to the level of diplomatic ties between Tehran and Western capitals. Instead, dialogue should include information about the judicial guarantees that are part of the human rights obligations accepted by the Iranian state. Protecting society does not require the deployment of violent and extrajudicial methods, regular violations of inmates' rights, or brutal punishments for acts that can accurately be described as the exercise of human rights.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Thank you very much, sir.

And now, pleased to yield to Mr. Etemadi. Thank you.

STATEMENT OF MR. AMIR HOSSEIN ETEMADI, FORMER IRANIAN POLITICAL PRISONER

Mr. ETEMADI. Madam Chairman, Ranking Member Deutch——

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Hold on a second. We will stop the clock, and we will put that mike right in front of you. Thank you.

Mr. ETEMADI. Thank you. Madam Chairman, Ranking Member Deutch, and members of the subcommittee, thank you for this opportunity to testify before you today.

I am Amir Hossein Etemadi, a former Iranian political prisoner and the current spokesman of Iranian Liberal Students and Graduates.

What motivated me to speak at this hearing is the continuation of the systematic and widespread violation of human rights and suppression of basic freedom of Iranian people, along with the efforts of the international community to prevent the Iranian regime from achieving nuclear weapons.

Today, the Islamic Republic of Iran, under pressure of the sanctions, has been forced to inevitably submit to parts of the international community's requests on its nuclear case. It would not be off the mark to claim that the election of Hassan Rouhani in June 2013 was due to this pressure. On the contrary, the noteworthy silence of the international community in the face of human rights violations in Iran has encouraged the Islamic Republic to further expand and aggravate violation of the Iranian people's rights.

According to a report by human rights watchers, since Hassan Rouhani's election, at least 750 people, including 38 political prisoners, have been executed. Almost all of them were deprived of their rights to due process and a fair trial. In the past year, arrests, issuance, and enforcement of prison sentences for religious minorities, including Baha'is, Christian converts, Sufis, and Sunni Muslims, have been continued.

Rouhani's government, like its predecessors, does not recognize followers of the Baha'i faith as a religious minority, and they are still banned from attending universities. On the other hand, despite all his promises during the Presidential campaign to release the political prisoners, especially Mehdi Karroubi, Mir Hossein Moussavi, and Zahra Rahnavard, the Green Movement leaders have been under house arrest since February 2011. Not only Mr. Rouhani did nothing for them, even more journalists and bloggers, human rights defenders, labor and civic activists, students, cyber activists, and dissidents have been arrested in the past year.

Moreover, while Facebook and Twitter continue to be blocked, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, the Supreme Leader, and Hassan Rouhani, along with other members of the government, such as Foreign Minister Javad Zarif, are active on these social networks.

Iran State TV, which has a monopoly on visual audio media in Iran, still has an important role in censorship and false propaganda of the Iranian regime against its opponents. Terrestrial jamming of satellite signals by transmitting rogue and strong electromagnetic frequencies have been intensified since the new govern-

ment has taken office to an extent that their possible health hazard and link to cancer have been discussed in Iranian local media.

Ladies and gentlemen, at such time, I, as individual who has experienced detention, torture, and harassment by the Iranian regime for my peaceful political activities, ask you to place the Islamic Republic's human rights dossier on the nuclear negotiation table, and tie the final resolution of the latter to settling of Iran's human rights file.

I believe that the U.S. and its allies at least could ask Iranian authorities to be committed to their international obligations on these specific cases. One, agreeing to a trip to Iran by Mr. Ahmed Shaheed, United Nations Special Rapporteur, on the situation of human rights in Iran, and granting him the permission to freely meet with the victims of human rights violations.

Two, ending transmission of rogue frequency aimed at jamming satellite signals, in accordance with Iran's obligations as a member of International Communication Associations. Three, commitment to free elections, in accordance with Declaration on Free and Fair Elections passed by Inter-Parliamentary Union in 1994 to which Iran is a signatory.

I would also like to ask you to, firstly, ensure full adherence of the U.S. Government to the existing sanctions against violators of human rights and those individuals involved in crackdown and suppression of the dissidents. Secondly, place Ayatollah Khamenei, Islamic Republic Supreme Leader, and all the financial and military organizations under his control, as the main responsible party and orchestrator of human rights violations in Iran, on the list of the sanctions.

Keeping The Execution of Imam Khomeini's Order, EIKO, and the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps, IRGC, and their subsidiaries on the list would have two results. It ensures that the release of frozen Iranian funds, which belong to Iranian people, would not be controlled by oppressive organizations, and also it would intensify the pressure on the violators of human rights.

Thank you.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Etemadi follows:]

Testimony of

Amir Hossein Etemadi

Former Iranian Political Prisoner

Spokesman of Iranian Liberal Students and Graduates (ILSG)

Before the Subcommittee on the Middle East and

North Africa, House Foreign Affairs Committee

One Year Under Rouhani: Iran's Abysmal Human Rights Record

June 19, 2014

Chairman Ros-Lehtinen, Ranking Member Deutch, and members of the Subcommittee,

Thank you for this opportunity to testify before you today. I am AmirHossein Etemadi, a former Iranian political prisoner, and the current spokesman of Iranian Liberal Students and Graduates.

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According to the reports by human rights watchers, since Hassan Rouhani's election, at least 750 people including 38 political prisoners have been executed; almost all of them were deprived of the right to due process and fair trial. In the past year, arrests, issuance and enforcement of prison sentences for religious minorities, including Baha'is, Christian converts, Sufis and Sunni Muslims have been continued. Rouhani's government, like its predecessors, does not recognize followers of Baha'i faith as a religious minority, and they are still banned from attending universities. On the other hand, despite of his promises during the presidential campaign, to release the political prisoners, specially, Mehdi Karroubi, MirHossein Moussavi and Zahra Rahnavard, the green movement leaders have been under house arrest since February 2011, not only Mr. Rouhani did nothing for them, even more journalists and bloggers, human rights defenders, labor and civil activists, students, cyber activists, and dissidents have been arrested in past year.

Moreover, while Facebook and Twitter continue to be blocked, Ali Khamenei and Hassan Rouhani along with other members of the government such as Foreign Minister JavadZarif, are active on these social networks. Iran State TV which has a monopoly on visual and audio media in Iran still has an important role in censorship and false propaganda of Iranian regime against its opponents. Terrestrial jamming of satellite signals by transmitting rogue and strong electromagnetic frequencies have been intensified since the new government has taken office to an extent that their possible health hazard and link to cancer have been discussed in Iranian local media.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

At such time, I, as individual who have experienced detention, torture, and harassment by Iranian regime for my peaceful political activities, ask you to place Islamic Republic's human rights dossier on the nuclear negotiation table, and tie the final resolution of the latter to settling of Iran's human rights' file.

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I would also like to ask you to firstly, ensure full adherence of the US Government to the existing sanctions against violators of human rights and those individuals involved in crackdown and suppression of the dissidents. Secondly, place Ayatollah Khamenei, IR supreme leader and all the financial and military organizations under his control, as the main responsible party and orchestrator of human rights violation in Iran, on the list of the sanctions. Keeping "The Execution of Imam Khomeini's Order" (EIKO), and the "Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps" (IRGC) and their subsidiaries on the list would have two results:

It ensures that the release of frozen Iranian funds, which belong to Iranian people, would not be controlled by oppressive organizations, and also it would intensify the pressure on the violators of human rights.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Thank you very much, all of you, for powerful testimony.

I will begin the question and answer period. We have heard the harsh realities of the human rights situation in Iran. Dr. George, sadly, Iran is not alone. Part of your Commission's mandate by law is to review the ongoing facts and circumstances of violations of religious freedom around the world, present that in your annual review, make policy recommendations to the President, to the Secretary of State, and to us in Congress, with respect to matters relating to international religious freedom.

How many countries are currently listed by the State Department as a country of particular concern due to their ongoing and systematic violations of religious freedom? How many did your Commission recommend to be listed? When was the last time a new country was designated as a country for particular concern by the State Department?

And why does the administration repeatedly overrule your Commission's recommendations? Is this symptomatic of the larger problem that the United States is dropping advocating for religious freedom and human rights so low on our foreign policy agenda? Have we been using all of the tools available to us—namely, sanctions—to promote religious freedom and human rights?

And let me just ask the questions, and we will have all of you respond. And, Ms. Baheri, thank you, again, for your testimony, telling your story, a story that unfortunately is not unique to just you as a member of the Baha'i community.

In your testimony, you talked about Rouhani's Citizen Rights Charter, and this was part of his so-called reform agenda. But, as you note, it raises very serious concerns, the least of which that it still does not recognize the Baha'i as a religious minority. Do you believe Rouhani has ushered in an era of reform and moderation, or is he really just another man in part of the inner circle of the Supreme Leader who has managed to fool so many with his smooth talking and empty promises, the so-called window of reform?

And, Mr. Etemadi, you have been a political prisoner of the Iranian regime. In your testimony, you say that the silence of the international communities, in the face of ongoing human rights violations in Iran, has actually encouraged Rouhani and the regime to even further expand these abuses and curtail the rights of his people.

Has the rush by the media in the West to anoint Rouhani as a reformer, a moderate, blinded us to his real nature because we want to believe that he can change Iran? And the administration's push for a nuclear deal without pursuing the human rights track as well, has emboldened the Iranian regime to continue committing these atrocities without repercussions.

And we will begin with Dr. George, if you could be brief in your remarks.

Mr. GEORGE. Thank you, again, Madam Chairman. I want to address one of the points you made well into your question, and that is this question of silence, international silence, silence sometimes from those of us here in the United States.

As I said in recent testimony to Chairman Smith's committee, there is a time and place for quiet diplomacy, yes. I can tell you

some examples from our own experience at the Commission where that time and place have existed, but most of the time staying quiet simply encourages the human rights abusers to continue the human rights abuses. Most of the time what we need are vocal forms of resistance, criticism of these abusive regimes, and that is certainly true here with Iran.

Madam Chairman, currently the State Department designates eight countries as countries of particular concern, the worst religious freedom abusers. These are Burma, China, Eritrea, Iran, North Korea, Saudi Arabia, Sudan, and Uzbekistan.

We currently are recommending eight additional countries. Some of them have been our recommendations for several years, but, as you noted, those recommendations haven't always been taken. The countries that we are recommending but have not been designated as countries of particular concern are Egypt, Iraq, Nigeria, Pakistan, Syria, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Vietnam. We list Pakistan at the very top of our list of offending nations, which have not yet been designated as countries of particular concern. If there is one country at the top of the list that should be so designated, as I have recently testified, that is Pakistan because of the horrific abuses that take place there, including abuses, again, against the Baha'i community.

The last designations by the State Department were in 2011, I believe. We strongly advocate annual designations. If annual designations aren't made, the designations become, in the words of my colleague, the vice chairman of our Commission, Katrina Lantos Swett, the daughter of the great Tom Lantos, the human rights activist and Congressman, as she says, these recommendations become part of the wallpaper and nobody notices them anymore.

We really need the annual designations, and we are pressing our leadership. Whether it is a Republican administration or a Democratic administration, doesn't matter.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Thank you.

Mr. GEORGE. We want them to make these designations on an annual basis.

Now, as far as why our recommendation——

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. And I am going to just stop you a second, because I asked too many questions, but I am going to give a chance to——

Mr. GEORGE. Oh, sure.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN [continuing]. Ms. Baheri to respond, and Mr. Etemadi.

Ms. BAHERI. Thank you. As you mentioned, with respect to the Baha'is in particular, the rights discussed in the charter apply only to religious minorities officially recognized by the Irani constitution, which excludes Baha'is.

As to Mr. Rouhani's moderate practices, as an Iranian, I have been hopeful. And, as a Baha'i, we are strictly non-violent and obedient to the government we live in. We participate in non-partisan politics.

We have noticed that in the last year, since Mr. Rouhani's presidency, we have had cemeteries that have been desecrated, we have had Mr. Rezvani killed, and a family stabbed in their home in Feb-

ruary 2014, and there has been no progress in the investigation of their case.

Just as of yesterday, there was a report from the Baha'i International News that in January this was the catalogued anti-Baha'i articles that were on Web sites, and so forth. In January, there was 55; in February, there was 72; in March, there was 93; April, 285; and, in May, there were 366 anti-Baha'i. So——

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Thank you very much.

Ms. BAHERI. Yes.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. And Mr. Etemadi?

Mr. ETEMADI. Thank you. Actually, the real problem in Iran is under the hand of Ali Khamenei, Supreme Leader. And, as I said, the election of Hassan Rouhani was the result of international pressure to decrease this pressure.

Actually, Rouhani doesn't have enough power to change the situation of human rights in Iran, and I don't think, though, even if he had, he would change anything here, because he is not reformist. As we know, he is very close to Mr. Khamenei, and actually I think it is to show—the regime to show him as a reformist.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Thank you very much. Thank you.

Pleased to yield to the ranking member, Mr. Deutch, for his question and answer period.

Mr. DEUTCH. Thank you, Madam Chairman.

Thanks to the witnesses for being here. It is almost overwhelming. It is—the breadth of abuses in Iran is almost too difficult for us to get our arms around. So I would like to try to approach it a different way.

Dr. George, I know you focus on religious freedom, and I appreciate what you do. Let me start with the other witnesses——

Mr. GEORGE. Sure.

Mr. DEUTCH [continuing]. Though. We are viewing all of this as a human rights issue. But I would like you to speak to the Americans, the American people, to help us understand, help them understand what it means in each specific area. Ms. Baheri, what would you say to the religious community in our country to help them understand—help them feel the type of persecution that the Baha'i undergo in Iran.

Ms. BAHERI. Well, it is simple. It has been nothing except wanting to practice our basic rights, to be able to be married as Baha'is, to be able to go to school, to be able to continue education, and all for the sake of really just being Baha'i and refusing to recant your faith. Simple.

Mr. DEUTCH. Mr. Alizadeh, to the LGBT community in America who are engaged, to the leaders, help them understand the relevance of what is happening to the community in Iran.

Mr. ALIZADEH. I just want to emphasize that the issue is not specific to LGBT community. It is a broader issue and goes back to——

Mr. DEUTCH. Mr. Alizadeh, I understand that, and I appreciate it. And my point is, it is so broad——

Mr. ALIZADEH. Right.

Mr. DEUTCH [continuing]. That for those of us who spend a lot of time thinking about human rights issues and how to uphold human rights, and universal human rights around the world, that

is how we approach it. I am trying to personalize this for people who may not think much about Iran, perhaps don't think much about foreign policy, but absolutely understand and focus on their own community.

Mr. ALIZADEH. It is as easy as this. As a person, your individuality, your privacy, is constantly being violated and scrutinized by the government. The government decides how much rights you have based on who you are, what sexual orientation or gender identity you have, even what gender you have.

As Congressman Smith pointed out, there is a difference between the rights of men and women in Iran. So everything has been categorized. And depending on which category you belong to, your right differs. So for the LGBT community, they do not exist—as former President Ahmadinejad put it, they don't exist. The official narrative is that they don't exist; therefore, they have no rights.

And so the government continues to violate the rights of LGBT people on the basis that this is a form of perversion. This is not a human behavior that can be recognized.

And I just want to point out something else. Just last week the Parliament of Iran issued a formerly classified report by the Minister of Education that shows almost 20 percent of students in Iran have homosexual tendency. So we are talking about a sizeable portion of population whose right is being violated on a daily basis.

Mr. DEUTCH. I appreciate that.

Mr. Etemadi, for students in America who are engaged in politics, for civic leaders, for community leaders, people who just want to express themselves, can you talk about the type of persecution they would experience in Iran?

Mr. ETEMADI. I want to introduce my friend, Maryam Shafipour. She is a student—actually, she is banned from going to university after Green Movement protest in 2009. And after Rouhani's election, she was arrested by Intelligence Ministry just because she was active in the Presidential campaign. And she was sentenced to 7 years jail, and since last July she is in jail, and she should be in jail for another 3 years.

Maryam Shafipour is just one of my friends. Majid Tavakoli has been in jail since 2009. Hamid Babai has been in jail since 2009, and many more of my friends are in jail at the moment, and they will be in jail just because their peaceful political activities.

Mr. DEUTCH. I appreciate it. Mr. Etemadi, just to finish, as I said before, a lot of us talk about human rights. But to look at those rights that are being violated, Ms. Baheri, to—for Americans to understand—America, with freedom of religion—to understand the type of persecution that the Baha'i—and, Dr. George, as you pointed out, other religious groups face in Iran.

And, Mr. Alizadeh, to think that—for Americans to stop for a moment to think about what it would be like to be persecuted, to be subject to death, frankly, because of your sexual orientation; and, Mr. Etemadi, for you to help us understand, for students, for people who take views that are in opposition to the government, the threats, the possibility of going to jail, the persecution that they face, that is I think how we need to think about it here. These are tremendous violations of universal human rights.

And, finally, to journalists who face the same thing in Iran, to journalists in this country, I would suggest the same thing. Think about what it would be like for you in Iran, and let all of us be guided by those notions of how our own lives could be turned upside-down because of what we believe, who we are, the way we voice our opinions.

I am so grateful for your being here today to help shed light on that for us. It is very moving testimony that I hope moves all of us, not just on the committee, but as a nation.

Mr. Chairman, I yield back.

Mr. SMITH. Thank you very much, Mr. Deutch.

Mr. Etemadi, thank you for underscoring the importance of human rights being on the table when discussions of issues of nuclear weaponry are at hand. How do you trust a totalitarian regime on fissile material, on enrichment issues, whether or not they have a bomb or plan on making bombs—it is plural, not singular—when they so maltreat and torture and murder their own people as well as three Americans who are being held unjustly.

You know, Naghmeh Abedini testified at our hearing that we had here in December, and before that at a Frank Wolf hearing as part of the Lantos Commission, and at the Wolf hearing, shockingly, the administration told Naghmeh that there was "nothing we can do" to help her. Astounding.

Thankfully, Secretary Kerry, when he heard that, did reverse course at the State Department. But, frankly, it still is not part of the negotiating. It may be somewhere on the periphery, but far off the periphery it would seem to me.

Yesterday I chaired a hearing on human rights in North Korea. We heard from Ambassador-at-Large from the Republic of Korea, Ambassador Lee, who talked about a grand mobilization on behalf of the North Koreans who are being decimated by the newest Kim, Jong-un, and talked about the gulags and really just laid out how horrific the mistreatment really is.

Andrew Natsios, Special Envoy to Sudan, formerly USAID Administrator and now co-chair of a North Korean human rights effort, talked about the abject failure of the nuclear talks and the delinking of human rights to those and how human rights had grossly deteriorated because they were not even on the table and people were not subjected to relief that they might have gotten.

The same issue is being replayed with Iran. We have done it on trade issues with China. We are doing it on trade issues with Vietnam and many others. But the North Korea and the Iranian situations absolutely are appropriate parallels, and it is very, very discouraging that it is not there front and center. Again, how do you trust a regime that butchers its own people?

I would say to Ms. Baheri, in 1983, I joined President Reagan at the White House when they had a mobilization and President Reagan spoke out boldly how alarmed and dismayed we were at the persecution of Baha'i in Iran. And he talked about the 150 men and women who had been hanged or shot since Khomeini had come in. One of those was your Dad, obviously, and my greatest sympathy, from all of us on behalf of the committee, for your enormous loss.

Not surprisingly, just like the Chinese, they made your family pay for the bullets that murdered your father. Again, underscoring why human rights have to be front and center and not on the peripheral negotiations, if they are that.

So thank you for being here and bearing witness.

Dr. George, on the CPC issue, which you spoke so eloquently to when you were here testifying before my subcommittee just a few weeks ago, I think members have to realize since 2011 not a single CPC designation has been made. That is also Frank Wolf legislation, the International Religious Freedom Act and it called for annual designations, and frankly, like you said, wallpaper.

We don't have those designations and a robust enforcement, there are some 18 prescribed sanctions that were meant to be utilized when a country showed indifference or, worse, would double down and make things even worse. You talked about how things have gotten worse under Rouhani. Not even a designation since 2011.

So I make a call again to President Obama. Designate CPC countries. Do it now. And as you have recommended, there are many more that ought to be added to the current list, again, which are just languishing and there has been nothing done. We don't even have an Ambassador-at-Large.

I say to my colleagues, I chaired the hearings and marked up the bill for the International Religious Freedom Act in this room back in 1998. This is not what we envisioned, a non-enforcement of that very important piece of human rights legislation.

So, Dr. George,I would like to ask you, you pointed out in your testimony that official policies promoting anti-Semitism have risen sharply in recent years, and Jews have been targeted on the basis of perceived ties to Israel. Could you elaborate on that?

You point out the issue of sanctions. You know, I wrote the Belarus Democracy Act. We worked very closely with the Europeans on who we sanctioned in the Lukashenka regime in Minsk. The people on both sides that are sanctioned, it is almost the same people, if not identical. You point out that the European Union has 90 people that have been sanctioned to our one, and you are encouraged that there is at least one, the Mayor of Tehran, but where are the others? We have the law in place to do it. Ninety to one. If it was a World Cup score, it would be a blowout. We need to update and add to that list.

Mr. GEORGE. Yes, thank you, Congressman Smith. I will take a moment to address the particular issues that you wanted me to talk about. We have noticed—our staff has noticed that since Rouhani assumed the presidency, there has been a toning down of the anti-Jewish rhetoric that we had seen from government officials during the Ahmadinejad period.

But what we haven't seen is any corresponding diminution of the pressure against the Jewish community as there are still 20,000 Jews remaining in Iran, a fraction of what was once a flourishing and large community there.

So, yes, there has been a toning down of the rhetoric, but no real action to make things any better, any different for the Jewish community. Like all the religious minority communities in Iran, they are third-class citizens or worse, and always subject to harassment

of all sorts. So we don't have any good news to report beyond the rhetorical side for the Jewish community in Iran.

Were you asking me particularly about the Jewish community in Iran? Because before your committee, of course, I talked about——

Mr. SMITH. You testified it has gotten worse.

Mr. GEORGE [continuing]. Anti-Semitism globally.

Mr. SMITH. But also about the sanctions regime and its——

Mr. GEORGE. Yes. We need those annual designations. We really do. You are right to urge the administration. We urge the administration to do that. We urge every administration—doesn't matter whether it is Republican or Democrat—to make those annual designations, to call attention to the offenses, and then to use those sanctions that are available under the Act, which was passed by Congress, signed into law in the 1990s by President Clinton. They are there to be used. They are effective tools when they are used.

We saw this about a decade ago when the tools were used very effectively against Vietnam when it was a very gross abuser of religious freedom. We saw some real benefits for persecuted religious people, Buddhists and Christians alike, in Vietnam. We then removed them from the CPC list to encourage the good behavior we had seen, to reward the progress that had been made, and, unfortunately, they slipped right back into their old patterns of behavior and became an abuser again.

And so we find ourselves in 2014 recommending that Vietnam, for example, again be shifted over to CPC status. That is another designation that we would like to have made. But we need to follow the law here. We really need to make those designations. They need to be annual. We need to bring pressure on these regimes.

Mr. SMITH. And, again, on the sanctions enforcement with regard to holding individual violators, like we have done with Belarus, Magnitsky Act, we have it now——

Mr. GEORGE. Exactly right. The tools are there in the legislation to put travel restrictions on people, officials who are responsible for the brutality and for the abuses, to freeze assets. Those tools are available as well. You know, make the people who are responsible for these human rights abuses, whether they are actually committing the abuses, or whether they are tolerating them and letting them occur with impunity, make them pay a cost, make them suffer a cost.

The tools are there right in the legislation. Let us use it.

Mr. SMITH. Again, just before I yield back, Andrew Natsios is one of the finest public servants I have known. Yesterday, as I said, he talked about North Korea and the abject failure of delinking human rights from the Six-Party Talks. We have delinked human rights from the talks on nuclear issues vis-à-vis Iran. It is a mistake.

My hope is it is never too late to relook at that, and I would encourage the administration, especially with the deadline coming up with the three Americans, but also on behalf of those Iranians who are suffering daily indignities and torture, to put human rights on the table and be bold about it, have names and lists.

One of the things that Reagan did so excellently throughout his entire time when he was President, and Shultz, when he was Secretary of State, wherever they went, especially to the Soviet Union,

before they met with Soviet officials, they met with the dissidents and they proffered a list and said, "We want progress on that, because it is linked to everything else we do."

Mr. CONNOLLY. Would my colleague yield for just a question on that?

Mr. SMITH. Sure.

Mr. CONNOLLY. Does my colleague agree that—because we just passed, as you know, the North Korean sanctions legislation. Does my colleague agree that there is a clear link between sanctions and the elevation of the issues he so eloquently has just described?

Mr. SMITH. Well, definitely.

Mr. CONNOLLY. I am sorry?

Mr. SMITH. Sanctions I think, when they are judiciously applied, effectively—and I think targeted sanctions are the best, and I think our witnesses have pointed that out, you know, we don't want to hurt the Iranian people. We stand with the oppressed, not the oppressor.

Mr. CONNOLLY. Yes. I was just picking up on the North Korea thing.

Mr. SMITH. Sure.

Mr. CONNOLLY. Yes. Thank you so much.

Mr. SMITH. Thank you.

Thank you. And I recognize I guess—Mr. Cicilline, were you next, or over here? Oh, Mr. Connolly is recognized. I am sorry.

Mr. CONNOLLY. I thank the chair, and I welcome our panel.

Dr. George, you are on the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom. But listening to your testimony and your answer to questions, I am assuming you agree that we can't cherrypick which groups we advocate for or which groups we say deserve special protection.

It is the whole panoply of human rights and human rights violations that we need to be concerned about. Would that be an accurate statement on my part?

Mr. GEORGE. Well, I am here today——

Mr. CONNOLLY. I know. That is why I read your——

Mr. GEORGE [continuing]. On behalf of the Commission on Religious Freedom, so I am constrained by the legislative mandate that we have to stay within those boundary lines. So what I can talk about are religious freedom abuses.

Now, very often religious freedom abuses are linked to other abuses, for example abuses of freedom of speech and association, and so forth, with respect to religious minorities. And so in those circumstances our Commission feels as though it is within our mandate to call attention to those abuses because they bear on religious freedom abuses.

Mr. CONNOLLY. Right.

Mr. GEORGE. But there are nine of us. We represent a range of viewpoints on a wide range of issues. We are united on the basic commitment to religious liberty. But in order to avoid anyone—any member of the Commission, including the chairman, speaking out of turn, offering his own personal opinions, which might not be shared by the other commissioners, we, in our capacity as commissioners, and I in my capacity as chairman, stay within the lines.

Mr. CONNOLLY. Yes. But—all right. Let us stay within your rubric. Would it be advisable if the Congress and the administration were to decide what we are going to focus on this year is the persecution of Roman Catholics in Iran. Therefore, we are not going to be talking about the Baha'is or Jews or any other religious group, because we are pretty much focused on that one. What would that do to your mandate, and what do you think—what kind of message would that send to Iran?

Mr. GEORGE. Well, our mandate is to advocate on behalf of the religious freedom rights of all people.

Mr. CONNOLLY. Thank you.

Mr. GEORGE. So we don't distinguish——

Mr. CONNOLLY. Right. That is my point. We don't cherrypick. And although your mandate has to do with religious freedom, you might take the point, by extension, that we don't want to be cherrypicking human rights either, just as we don't within your purview.

Mr. GEORGE. I am sure that is true, and of course there are many important philosophical and political debates about the nature of rights, the contours of rights, whether such and so is in fact a right or is not a right. Those are disputes that you have in the Congress and that we have among the American people.

Mr. CONNOLLY. How do you deal with sort of the cultural barriers? So, for example, I mean, America was founded by some pretty passionate founders who wanted to make sure that there were careful boundaries—in fact, Jefferson referred to them I believe as firewalls—between the state and religion. And some of them actually professionally cut their teeth on exactly that.

Madison spent his early professional career in my home state of Virginia fighting against the established church of Virginia. He wanted religious liberty for other non-establishment groups, especially the Anabaptists.

And so to what extent—to what extent is it a cultural issue? Iran doesn't have that tradition. Iran is an overwhelmingly unitary denomination, and you could—one could understand—not justify, but one can understand, therefore, there is going to be tension when people are sort of outside the norm religiously.

How do you, in your mandate, and to what extent does the United States, have to understand the difference between, you know, you are crossing a boundary that we cannot accept, and that is persecution and not justified, versus cultural identity that we have to try to respect and work with.

Mr. GEORGE. Well, that is an excellent question, Representative Connolly. You are right. Iran is different from the United States in that we do have the separation—what we call the separation of church and state. That is not a phrase that exists in our constitution, but it describes the basic theory of the relationship of the institutions of religion and the institutions of government under our constitutional system, and especially, of course, under the First Amendment. They don't have that. They don't have that state-church separation.

But our state-church separation should not be interpreted to mean a separation of religion from public life. Religion has always played a very important role in our public life. George Washington, in his farewell address, noted that religion and morality are essen-

tial the flourishing of any community of freedom, any political order that aspires to be a set of free institutions.

John Adams said that our constitution is for a moral and religious people and will serve well no other. So we can understand the relationship between religion and state in other societies, including in Iran where religion is an important part of the picture, because religion is an important part of the picture in the United States.

And we don't see it as something separate. We don't say Martin Luther King should not have spoken in terms of the Bible or the brotherhood of all men and attacking racial injustice and segregation. So we don't have the Laicite system, for example, of France and some other European jurisdictions. We don't treat religion as the enemy of politics or something that is purely private and should never be brought into the public square.

Culturally, we value the role of religion in public life.

Mr. CONNOLLY. Stipulated.

Mr. GEORGE. So the big difference of course is, do we respect the right of everyone, irrespective of faith, including those who have no faith, those who are atheists, who are unbelievers, to follow their consciences precisely in matters of faith. We believe in that very strongly. We did from the beginning in the United States. It is written into our Constitution.

Even before we had a First Amendment, our Constitution has a prohibition of religious tests for public offices. Anybody of any faith can hold any office under the United States. And we have committed ourselves, as have many other nations, including Iran, to international human rights standards with respect to religious freedom.

So we are really simply asking Iran to live up to those standards. We are not saying disestablished religion. That is not our plan. We understand you can have a different system from ours. We are just saying respect the equal rights of freedom of religion for the Baha'is, for the Jewish community, for the Christian community, for the minority Muslim communities, whether they are Sunni or Sufi or whatever they are. That is really all we are asking.

We are not trying to be cultural imperialists and impose the American system. We understand they have a different system. That is okay. We are not trying to force them into a Jeffersonian constitution. But we do say live up to the requirements that you yourselves have signed on to in international documents by respecting the religious freedom of the minorities.

Mr. CONNOLLY. I think that is a very important statement and distinction.

Mr. Chairman, if I can just ask one more question, different topic. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Alizadeh, you said—am I pronouncing that correctly?

Mr. ALIZADEH. Yes. Yes.

Mr. CONNOLLY. You said, "I want to highlight LGBT persecution." And I wanted to kind of come back to the theme I was asking Dr. George in his lane about you can't cherrypick which denomination you are going to protect. It is the whole thing.

I am a little concerned that sometimes some of my colleagues want to highlight certain human rights abuses, and never talk

about others. And it seems to me that if we are going to be consistent, and we are going to hold somebody to a norm, every group is entitled in a society to human rights protection, whether they be Baha'is, whether it be women, whether they be gay and lesbian brothers and sisters.

Could you talk to us a little bit about that? Because I am really worried that if some of our human rights advocates here in the Congress kind of conspicuously never talk about that, we send a signal unintentionally to the regime that is not a signal we want to send. But maybe I am wrong. What is your sense of that?

Mr. ALIZADEH. Mr. Congressman, I just want to thank you very much for highlighting the cultural problems. The root of the issue in Iran is cultural issues, and I think that that needs to be acknowledged and highlighted.

We talk about a region that has seen a number of rounds of regime changes and revolutions in neighboring countries, and one after another we see that the situation is getting worse in terms of the rise of minorities and respect for human rights in neighboring Iraq and Afghanistan, in Egypt, in Syria. In all of those countries we see that a simple regime change does not result in improvement of human rights.

I just want to acknowledge that this is a social problem, and we need to deal with it as a social phenomenon. As such, we have to invest in the society. We just can't hope for a regime change or the change of the President's approach to fix the issues.

But going back to your question, I want to mention that we really think that this is not about LGBT people. It is about sexual rights, about autonomy over your body, about the rights of individuals to decide who they want to love, and about equal rights between men and women. So this is a broader issue. We are not really talking about a specific segment of the society.

I am very aware that when we talk about Iran we are talking about a society where heterosexuals don't have rights. If you are walking down the street with your boyfriend, you know, as a woman, you can be arrested. And any form of sexual encounter outside marriage, heterosexual marriage, is a crime.

So this is outrageous. So when we talk about LGBT issues, I want to emphasize that we really hope the right will be provided to all Iranian citizens, regardless of their sexual orientation and gender identity. This is about the right of individuals to decide what they want to do with their body, regardless of the interference of the government. The government does not have the right to tell people what to do in the privacy of their houses.

People can decide what they want to do with their body and talk about the issues that they are interested in. And a lot of issues when we talk about LGBT issues are also related to general rights, such as right of freedom of speech, right of freedom of assembly. So we are not really talking about a very specific segment of the society or a very specific subcategory of rights. We are talking about the general rights that everybody in the society is entitled to.

Mr. CONNOLLY. Thank you.

Mr. Chairman, thank you for your graciousness.

Mr. DESANTIS. No problem. The gentleman's time has expired.

The Chair now recognizes himself for a period of 5 minutes. I appreciate you guys coming. You know, I think this issue of Iran is very important. And I would just like to say before I ask my questions, I was really alarmed this weekend when I was hearing rumblings, not just from the administration, but from members of my own party, that the way to deal with what is going on in Iraq is to work with Iran. And I think that that has died down a little bit, and I think rightfully so.

We do not have mutual interests with Iran. They are diametrically opposed, and they are a mortal enemy of the United States. And I think that the imposition of a Sunni Sharia state in the Levant is contrary to our national interest, but I also think we have to recognize Iran is a mature terror state and a mature Sharia state. So aligning to them would not serve our national interest.

And I would just say, given that, I am concerned about the administration's decision to continue to send money to this unity government with the Palestinian authority. They may have a veneer of technocratic leadership, but Hamas is a part of that government. That money is going to end up going to Hamas in one way or another, given that money is fungible. And guess who that aligns us with. That aligns us with Iran, because they send money and they fund Hamas.

And so I am going to be working with some of my colleagues to stop that money while Hamas is a part of that government. And I think that is very important.

Professor George, I appreciated what you said, and I think you described kind of our history with religious liberty and establishments very ably. But I wonder, in terms of viewing Iran—and I think you said, look, they are going to have their own system. Maybe they have an established church or whatnot, but it is more than just that.

I mean, these Ayatollahs, their version, you know, how they want to have a Sharia society, it is much more than just religion. It is a whole kind of sociopolitical, totalitarian ideology.

And so you could look at, like, the United States. Even after the Constitution, we had states like Connecticut that had established churches still, but they were not active in that way. So I guess this idea of Sharia being so broad seems to me to be more than just about whatever religion you believe in, because there are millions and millions of people who are Muslims who do not subscribe to the overall political ideology that comes with that.

Mr. GEORGE. Yes. That is absolutely right. You can have an established religion. In the United States, we prefer not to have that. We disestablished our churches in the States. I think the last ones died out in the 1830s. But Britain has the Anglican Church. It has an established religion. But it is respectful of the rights of religious minorities.

I lived in Britain myself for 5 years, so when I was a graduate student, and as a visiting scholar, I was not a member of the established church, but I was entirely free to practice my own religion. So we wouldn't want to say to the British, "Well, you have an obligation under human rights to disestablish the Anglican Church." They might for their own reasons wish——

Mr. DESANTIS. But that, and when you lived there, the Anglican Church did not permeate society to the detriment of other people, right?

Mr. GEORGE. That is exactly right.

Mr. CONNOLLY. Although they do discriminate against our Catholic people on who can be on the throne.

Mr. GEORGE. Yes. I think that is still true. Yes, I believe that is still true. But you have put your finger on the real problem. It is not that there is an official religion as such; it is that in the name of this theocratic rule, a kind of totalitarianism is imposed. All dimensions of life are under control of the theocratic rulers.

No one else's rights are respected. No one who is not a member of the faith. And even those who have dissenting opinions about politics within the Shia faith are persecuted. I mentioned one of the Ayatollahs showed a picture of—I will do it again here—Ayatollah Boroujerdi, who himself is a Shia, but is, nevertheless, persecuted because he speaks out on behalf of the rights of non-Shia Muslims and non-Muslims.

Mr. DESANTIS. And just to kind of flesh that out, and maybe, Mr. Etemadi, you can speak, so in Iran, if you convert away from Islam, that is a crime, correct?

Mr. ETEMADI. Yes.

Mr. DESANTIS. And what type of punishment could you get? You could potentially be put to death for that?

Mr. ETEMADI. Yes. Exactly.

Mr. DESANTIS. And I have been following this. I think during the Easter season the government raided Christian churches. That would be something that would be par for the course there?

Mr. ETEMADI. Yes.

Mr. DESANTIS. You can be convicted of a crime if you insult Islamic sensibilities, is that correct?

Mr. ETEMADI. Yes.

Mr. DESANTIS. And Iran still imposes severe punishments, such as stonings and mutilation, under their law, correct?

Mr. ETEMADI. Yes.

Mr. DESANTIS. And is that something that is called for by Sharia law, or where do they come from, these punishments? How are those developed?

Mr. ETEMADI. It comes from Sharia.

Mr. DESANTIS. Okay.

Mr. ETEMADI. Yeah.

Mr. DESANTIS. And it was interesting, because I was—I read that the Ayatollah Khamenei was speaking about freedom, and he says, "Iran, we have freedom unlike any other country in the world," and then he pointed to Europe and he says, "You know, they talk about freedom of speech, but go ask them about the Holocaust. They are not free to deny the Holocaust." Like we don't know whether—he says, "We don't know whether it existed or not."

And so, in his mind, he thinks that because we don't have these grand debates about something that is obvious, if you study history, that somehow we don't have freedom of speech, but I think what his freedom—and this is somehow, we talk past folks in the Middle East when we say, "Well, why wouldn't they want Free-

dom?" Some people, such as these Ayatollahs, for them freedom is freedom to live under Sharia, correct?

Mr. ETEMADI. Yes.

Mr. DESANTIS. And so when we say "freedom," they view the freedom differently than we do. But I think that what you guys have testified about his very important. I am 100 percent the people in Iran are struggling for freedom. I think the tragedy of this Islamic revolution is that, you know, it has really served to snuff out a lot of the vitality that you had seen historically throughout Persian society.

And I know that there are a lot of people in Iran who are suffering under the yoke of this dictatorship, who would be like-minded with folks, not just in the United States but throughout the West. So I commend you guys for speaking out, and I commend the chairman for holding this committee.

And with that, my time has expired, and I will recognize the gentleman from Rhode Island for a period of 5 minutes.

Mr. CICILLINE. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Thank you, again, to our witnesses for this very compelling testimony. I hope that it will cause this committee and this Congress to focus more energy on the issue of international human rights. I would like to begin with you, Mr. Alizadeh. Did I pronounce that correctly?

Mr. ALIZADEH. Yes.

Mr. CICILLINE. You didn't even know I was talking about you it was so badly pronounced. [Laughter]

I want to ask you, first, I know that the journalist who responded to former President Ahmadinejad, who made the claim that there were no gay or lesbian people in Iran, was imprisoned. And I wondered, what is the status of that individual today? Is he still in prison?

Mr. ALIZADEH. Yes. There were a couple of cases that happened since then. So there was a journalist who used to work for the Iranian News Agency, and he had a personal blog. And basically on his blog he started to talk about issues including, you know, the existence of homosexuality in Iran. And that was later listed as one of the charges against him by the Revolutionary Court, and he ended up in jail.

As late as last month, there was another case, a newspaper published an article. This is basically a reformist newspaper that is running on a daily basis in Tehran. They pushed an editorial about homosexuality, and the next day it was shut down by the court, because they were promoting basically homosexuality in the country. So any conversation about this issue is considered to be propaganda against Islam, and so it is banned basically.

Mr. CICILLINE. Okay. And the laws, the discriminatory laws that criminalize homosexuality in Iran, they were renewed as recently as 2013, right before Rouhani became President. So what is the likelihood that we will see any progress or any movement on this issue if, as you say, the Supreme Leader is the one who sets policy? And, you know, is there any reason for us to be hopeful?

And what can we do as a country to increase the likelihood that there will be basic human rights accorded to all individuals regardless of sexual orientation in Iran, and in other places in the world?

Do we have any ability to impact what is clearly a horrific, discriminatory, unsafe environment for people who are gay and lesbian?

Mr. ALIZADEH. Congressman, I really think that the issue here is not the government. The government is hopeless. They are not really going to change. What I am really hoping, both for LGBT people and also for religious minorities, and about political activists, is to promote tolerance within the society. And the United States can play a very critical role in this game.

I will just mention one example. We started a program about 2 years ago to basically talk to journalists about the language that they use to talk about LGBT issues, that this is not a sexual issue, this is a human rights issue. And in 2 years you can see that society's approach has changed. Even though the outside media are banned inside Iran, but people are hungry for information. They want a new country. They want to understand what is going on, because nobody believes the government propaganda. And this is a good thing.

So we have a lot of resources at our disposal. We have the biggest basically broadcast operation on the planet called VOA, just, you know, a few miles from here. So we can really do a lot with our resources in order to communicate with the Iranian people, to teach them the values of tolerance in civil society in coexistence.

And I think that that is the kind of long-term investment that we need to see in Iran and in other countries, and I am really hoping that the new generation would not buy that stereotypes and kind of narrow-mindedness that the government is defending as part of their ideology on a daily basis.

Mr. CICILLINE. And hopefully our continuing to raise this issue in hearings like this and in other settings will help to advance that as well.

Ms. Baheri, thank you for being here today. It was—you know, I am from a state that prides itself on having been founded by Roger Williams on the principle of religious freedom. And so the idea that people would be not only denied the ability to practice their own religious traditions, but that they would face imprisonment and execution is such an anathema to I think all Americans and to all civilized people in the world. And I am sorry that you had the experience that you did and that there are thousands and thousands of others who have had the same experience all over the world.

And my question really is, what can we do as a country, what can we do as a Congress, that would have some positive impact on the ability of religious minorities in places like Iran to exercise their religious freedoms and to be able to do so without facing harassment, discrimination, and imprisonment?

What are the—and I ask, actually, any of the panelists who have something to contribute. What can we do? You know, we hear this testimony, which I think most Americans would find horrifying and disturbing, and recognize that there has to be some action we can take, some steps we should take to respond to this, to have some impact.

So I would start with you, Ms. Baheri, and anyone else who might——

Ms. BAHERI. Well, as a country, I think we can definitely make sure that Iran is on notice that it is being watched. So anything the State Department has done, and will continue hopefully to do, would definitely be appreciated and helpful on all accounts of human rights, for all of people of Iran.

Also, there is a House Resolution 109 that is in front of this committee. So if—I believe 130 Congressman have passed it so far. So if anyone has not, they are encouraged to do so, and that would be, again, a stance that Iran is being watched, and it would definitely be more than helpful.

Mr. CICILLINE. Dr. George, you look like you——

Mr. GEORGE. Yes. One concrete thing to do, Congressman, is at the moment the Lautenberg Amendment has to be readopted every year. Why not go ahead and adopt it for a period of several years. It is a tremendous tool. It enables people who are persecuted to have the protection of refugee status. It enables them to transit through other countries to get to the United States when they are being persecuted.

It would be not only substantively very valuable in terms of assisting people who are under severe persecution or threat of persecution. Symbolically, I think it would also be sending an important message. It is a very concrete thing Congress can do.

Mr. CICILLINE. Thank you.

Mr. ALIZADEH. Congressman, I just want to reiterate, in my opinion, people like Rouhani and Ahmadinejad come and go. The problem is the darkness that this regime has been promoting for three decades, and we have to counter it with knowledge and information and education.

And I think that the Congress can play a very key role by funding resources and allow basically the societies to talk to each other, and people inside Iran to have access to information. The government is actually trying—the Government of Iran denies their access to free information, and I think by allowing them to learn about themselves, their rights, their existence, and how the international community and this—basically the West functions, I think we can inspire them to create a better society for themselves.

Mr. ETEMADI. What you can do for human rights issues in Iran, in one word—pressure. If pressure works on the nuclear issue, it will work on the human rights issue. And maybe you remember Iranian people in—during Green Movement asked President Obama. "Obama, Obama, be with us, or with the government." And, unfortunately, President Obama ignored that, and Iranian people have a positive view about United States. If you want to change this view, so ignore the human rights.

Mr. CICILLINE. Thank you.

I thank the chairman for the indulgence.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Thank you. No. Thank you very much, Mr. Cicilline.

Thank you to the witnesses for sharing their personal stories with us, their bravery and the suffering that they have endured. Ms. Baheri, losing family members; and, Mr. Etemadi, being in jail. And thank you, Mr. Alizadeh, for bringing so much awareness to us; and, Dr. George, for holding up the photographs of real victims of the persecution that is going on daily in Iran. Thank you for the

brave work of your Commission. We look forward to adopting their recommendations very soon.

And to our audience, thanks for being here today with us.

And, with that, the subcommittee is adjourned.

[Whereupon, at 12:04 p.m., the subcommittee was adjourned.]

APPENDIX

Material Submitted for the Record

JOINT SUBCOMMITTEE HEARING NOTICE
COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS
U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
WASHINGTON, DC 20515-6128

Subcommittee on the Middle East and North Africa
Ileana Ros-Lehtinen (R-FL), Chairman

Subcommittee on Africa, Global Health, Global Human Rights, and International Organizations
Christopher H. Smith (R-NJ), Chairman

June 17, 2014

TO: MEMBERS OF THE COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS

You are respectfully requested to attend an OPEN hearing of the Committee on Foreign Affairs, to be held jointly by the Subcommittee on the Middle East and North Africa and the Subcommittee on Africa, Global Health, Global Human Rights, and International Organizations in Room 2172 of the Rayburn House Office Building (and available live on the Committee website at http://www.ForeignAffairs.house.gov):

DATE: Thursday, June 19, 2014

TIME: 10:00 a.m.

SUBJECT: One Year Under Rouhani: Iran's Abysmal Human Rights Record

WITNESSES: Robert P. George, Ph.D.
Chairman
U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom

Ms. Cler Baheri
Member of the Baha'i Community

Mr. Hossein Alizadeh
Regional Program Coordinator for the Middle East and North Africa
International Gay & Lesbian Human Rights Commission

Mr. Amir Hossein Etemadi
Former Iranian political prisoner

By Direction of the Chairman

The Committee on Foreign Affairs seeks to make its facilities accessible to persons with disabilities. If you are in need of special accommodations, please call 202/225-5021 at least four business days in advance of the event, whenever practicable. Questions with regard to special accommodations in general (including availability of Committee materials in alternative formats and assistive listening devices) may be directed to the Committee.

COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS

MINUTES OF SUBCOMMITTEE ON *MENA and AGH* HEARING

Day *Thursday* Date *06/19/14* Room *2172*

Starting Time *10:00 a.m.* Ending Time *12:04 p.m.*

Recesses [ ] (____to ____) (____to ____) (____to ____) (____to ____) (____to ____) (____to ____)

Presiding Member(s)

Chairman Ros-Lehtinen and Rep. DeSantis

Check all of the following that apply:

Open Session [✓]
Executive (closed) Session [ ]
Televised [✓]

Electronically Recorded (taped) [✓]
Stenographic Record [✓]

TITLE OF HEARING:

One Year Under Rouhani: Iran's Abysmal Human Rights Record

SUBCOMMITTEE MEMBERS PRESENT:

Chairman Ros-Lehtinen, Chairman Smith, Ranking Member Deutch, Reps. Chabot, Kinzinger, Cotton, Weber, Yoho, Duffy, Stockman, Connolly, Higgins, Cicilline, Vargas, Kennedy and Bass.

NON-SUBCOMMITTEE MEMBERS PRESENT: *(Mark with an * if they are not members of full committee.)*

None

HEARING WITNESSES: Same as meeting notice attached? Yes [✓] No [ ]
(If "no", please list below and include title, agency, department, or organization.)

STATEMENTS FOR THE RECORD: *(List any statements submitted for the record.)*

SFR - Rep. Connolly
SFR - Rep. Smith

TIME SCHEDULED TO RECONVENE _____
or
TIME ADJOURNED *12:14 p.m.*

Subcommittee Staff Director

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CONSTITUENT SERVICE CENTERS:

MONMOUTH
112 Village Center Drive
Freehold, NJ 07728-2510
(732) 780-3035

OCEAN
405 Route 539
Plumsted, NJ 08514-2303
(609) 298-2571; (732) 350-2300

MERCER
4573 South Broad Street
Hamilton, NJ 08620-2215
(609) 585-7878

2373 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515-3004
(202) 225-3765

http://chrissmith.house.gov

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CO-CHAIRMAN, CONGRESSIONAL-EXECUTIVE COMMISSION ON CHINA

DEAN, NEW JERSEY DELEGATION

Iran's Persecution of Pastor Abedini Worsens

Subcommittee on Africa, Global Health,
Global Human Rights and International Organizations &
Subcommittee on Middle East and North Africa
Rep. Chris Smith, Chairman
June 19, 2014

The end of this month will mark two years since Pastor Saeed Abedini has seen or hugged his wife, Nagmeh and children, Rebecca and Jacob. What started as an uneventful humanitarian trip to build an orphanage for children suffering in Iran has, tragically, left Pastor Saeed's young children fatherless for the last few years.

Pastor Saeed had been arrested in Iran before, but he was released and told he could enter and exit the country for humanitarian aid work if he agreed to cease pastoring house churches.

As Pastor Saeed's wife, Nagmeh, testified before these same subcommittees in December, Pastor Saeed accepted the Iranian requirement and turned to building an orphanage instead – but Iran did not uphold its end of the agreement.

Pastor Saeed was arrested in September 2012 and returned to a prison notorious for housing Iran's worst criminals. He was denied contact with his attorney until just before the trial.

The trial was not public, and he and his attorney were barred from participating in key portions of the trial—following which a judge sentenced him to 8 years in prison for supposedly undermining the security of Iran by sharing his faith and/or practicing Christianity.

A lot of the details are unclear and discussion is very difficult as the Iranian government has denied Pastor Saeed's own lawyers access to the judicial decisions. He has suffered periods of solitary confinement, beatings, internal bleeding, death threats, and continued psychological torture during his 630 days in prison.

Chairman of the following member organizations: Task Force on Alzheimer's Disease • Bi-Partisan Coalition for Combating Anti-Semitism • Lyme Disease Caucus
Coalition for Autism Research and Education • Global Internet Freedom Caucus • Bi-Partisan Congressional Pro-Life Caucus • Bosnia Caucus • Poland Caucus
Ad Hoc Congressional Committee for Irish Affairs • Congressional Caucus on Human Trafficking • Vietnam Caucus • Congressional Heart and Stroke Coalition

PRINTED ON RECYCLED PAPER

Although Pastor Saeed was finally permitted to be examined this winter by private physicians in Tehran—who determined he needed surgery for internal injuries—he was denied any necessary treatment. Instead, on May 20, 2014, Pastor Saeed was brutally beaten—at the hospital in front of his Iranian family and returned to prison.

Unfortunately, Pastor Saeed isn't the only American held under questionable circumstances by the Iranian government. Amir Mirzaei Hekmati is a 31-year-old former Marine who disappeared while visiting family in Iran in 2011. He was subsequently tried and sentenced to death on charges of "cooperating with an enemy state" and accused of "moharebeh" or enmity toward God. He also has been accused of being a Central Intelligence Agency agent. Mr. Hekmati has been an Iranian prisoner for more than 1,000 days on these trumped-up charges. Meanwhile, his father is dying of brain cancer and may never see his son again in life.

The Iranian government also is believed to have imprisoned retired Federal Bureau of Investigations agent Robert Levinson. Levinson travelled from Dubai to Iran's Kish Island and hasn't been seen since. In March of 2011, the Administration announced that there were indications that Levinson was being held somewhere in southwest Asia, but the Iranian government has not lived up to its promise to fully investigate his disappearance. He has now been in captivity for nearly 2,500 days.

The false imprisonment of American citizens did not change under President Hassan Rouhani. While we believe that President Rouhani has significant power that can and should be used for the release of these Americans, we recognize that the Iranian legal system is organized differently than the American legal system and that the judicial branch also bears responsibility. In the United States, the executive branch investigates, prosecutes, and imprisons those convicted of crimes, and the role of the judiciary is limited to the trial of cases and the hearing of appeals.

In Iran, the judicial branch investigates and prosecutes alleged crimes. The judiciary tries the cases, executes the sentences, supervises the prisons, and runs programs for the rehabilitation of prisoners. The Chief Justice is also the official to whom requests for pardons are initially addressed, as he bears the responsibility of making recommendations to the Supreme Leader for "[p]ardoning or reducing the sentences of convicts, within the framework of Islamic criteria". (Article 110 §8).

I therefore respectfully call upon the Chief Justice as we have called on Iran's Foreign Minister and President to help resolve the cases that have become such a sore point between the United States and Iran. Specifically, I ask that:

1. The Chief Justice visit or appoint a personal representative to visit Pastor Abedini, Amir Hekmati, and Robert Levinson in the prisons in which they are held;

2. The Chief Justice review the integrity of their trial processes, and instruct the Prosecutor General to release for public review the full trial and appeal records (including the evidence on which the court relied) for each of their cases; and that

3. The Chief Justice permit representatives of the Swiss Ambassador in Tehran, H.E. Guilio Haas, to visit with each of these prisoners and to report back to his government, and to ours, on the state of their health and the conditions of their imprisonment.

My reading of Article 156 of the Iranian Constitution is that it is the judiciary's role to serve as "the protector of the rights of the individual and society," and that the Chief Justice of Iran, Ayatollah Sadeq Ardeshir Amoli Larijani is, under the constitution, ultimately "responsible for the implementation of justice."

Ironically, Iran wants the world to lift sanctions and trust them with nuclear capabilities despite continued and violent disregard for even basic human rights. Pastor Saeed, Mr. Hekmati and Mr. Levinson are American citizens, but not the only examples of the regime's deliberate disregard for human rights.

The U.N. special rapporteur for human rights in Iran, Dr. Ahmed Shaheed, warned in a March 2014 statement: "Hundreds of individuals reportedly remain in some form of confinement for exercising their fundamental rights; including some… 179 Baha'i, 98 Sunni Muslims, 49 Christians, and 14 Dervish Muslims."

While I am grateful that the President raised the case of Pastor Saeed, Mr. Levinson, and Mr. Hekmati in his call with President Rouhani last September, the United States can and must do more to secure the release of these Americans.

Naghmeh Abedini testified before our committees in December:

> "While I am thankful for President Obama's willingness to express concern about my husband and the other imprisoned Americans in Iran during his recent phone conversation with Iran's new president, Hassan Rouhani, I was devastated to learn that the Administration didn't even ask for my husband's release when directly seated across the table from the leaders of the government that holds him captive.
>
> My husband is suffering because he is a Christian. He is suffering because he is an American. Yet, his own government at least the Executive and diplomatic representatives has abandoned him. Don't we owe it to him as a nation to stand up for his human rights, for his freedom?"

The U.S. government must not waste another opportunity to secure the release of these three Americans – their cases need to be front and center in the next round of U.S.-Iranian negotiations. Time is running out. The families of these men would dearly love them to be home before the next Father's Day.

Statement for the Record

Submitted by the Honorable Gerald E. Connolly of Virginia

Despite President Hassan Rouhani's campaign promises for a stronger civil society and more open political dialogue, Tehran remains committed to the repression of ethnic and religious minorities. Fears persist about women's access to equal employment and contraception, trade unions are denied the right to take collective action against employers, and members of the LGBT community lack basic rights.

During my tenure in Congress, this Committee has pursued an aggressive agenda on the issue of human rights in Iran. The 111th Congress, my first in the House of Representatives, passed into law the H.R. 2194, the Comprehensive Iran Sanctions, Accountability, and Divestment Act of 2010 (P.L. 111-195). This was the first time human rights violators were explicitly targeted in Iranian sanctions legislation. In August 2012, the President signed into law H.R. 1905, the Iran Threat Reduction and Syria Human Rights Act of 2012 (P.L. 112-158), which among other things, required the U.S. government to block the issuance of visas to individuals involved in human rights abuses or censorship in Iran. The legislation included my amendment, which ensures that the annual *Comprehensive Strategy to Promote Internet Freedom and Access Information in Iran* include recommendations on "[expanding] access to proxy servers for democracy activists in Iran" and "[discouraging] telecommunication and software companies from facilitating Internet censorship by the government of Iran."

The United States Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) recommended in its 2014 Annual Report that Iran retain its designation from the U.S. State Department as a Tier 1 Country of Particular Concern. While the Iranian constitution recognizes Islam as the official state religion and Christianity, Judaism, and Zoroastrianism as religious minorities, it does not protect members of other faiths from state-sponsored persecution. In fact, members of the Bahá'í community, Iran's largest religious minority, have been singled out for persecution by Ayatollah Khamenei and former President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad. President Rouhani has not shown a commitment to reversing this trend. Bahá'is property rights continue to be ignored and community leaders are treated as illicit political dissidents. This year 60 Bahá'is have been arbitrarily arrested.

Imagine for a moment, that you are an LGBT, woman and Iranian ethnic minority whose working conditions are deplorable and you would like to take action to improve life for you and your coworkers. First, your successful effort to join the workforce is to be commended since it is something only 32% of Iranian women ever realize, as opposed to nearly 60% in the U.S. It is presumed that your husband did not object to your employment, as he is allowed to do by law if he wishes to legally bar you from the workforce. Second, you have eluded charges of consensual same-sex sexual activity, and have therefore avoided possible execution or raids on your home. Third, like most Kurds, Arabs, Azeris and Baluchis in Iran, you have persevered through a lifetime of government neglect and institutionalized discrimination. Finally, despite overcoming these significant obstacles, you are arrested for "spreading propaganda against the regime" and "forming socialist groups" when you seek to coalesce your workplace around the issue of workplace safety.

The human rights situation in Iran remains bleak, and this scenario is only partially illustrative of the human rights abuses committed by Tehran. All Iranians face constraints on civil society and freedom of expression. It is estimated that the Committee in Charge of Determining Unauthorized Websites has banned over 5 million websites, and most social networking websites are blocked from public use. Civil society is repressed at every turn that might lead to criticism of Tehran, and critics of the regime are in constant fear of abuse and arbitrary detainment. I look forward to hearing from our witnesses about how this Committee can continue its dogged pursuit of improved human rights in Iran.

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