

Iranian Society for Human Rights

Peace, Justice and Dignity for All

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Invitation to Participate and Make Suggestions for Agenda Completion

A Seminar on the Impediments to the Observance and Promotion of Human Rights in Iran

In the past four decades, dissident Iranians, both inside and outside the country, have exposed violations of human rights in Iran, calling for international attention to the Iranian states' abuses of power. In recent years, such activities have been expanded and defense of human rights has gained unprecedented urgency among dissident Iranians.

While this development is encouraging, the number of Iranians engaged in such activities in a sustained manner remains small and those who are involved rarely go beyond condemning the state authorities for committing illegal and cruel acts. There is an impressive body of scholarly studies about the human rights situation in Iran, but few Diaspora Iranians are familiar with these works or have done much to support or praise their authors. Similarly, the bulk of the documented reports about human rights violations in Iran have been produced by international human rights organizations with little material assistance from Iranians.

Iranian Society for Human Rights in Northern California plans to organize a seminar in order to generate an inclusive and non-partisan discussion among interested Iranians on the problems and challenges facing human rights activists in Iran.

The idea of a non-partisan struggle for human rights or democracy is very new to our political culture. While recognizing that non-partisanship is not opposed to or a substitute for partisanship, the proposed seminar will explain the central role of non-partisan agents and agencies in promoting a culture commensurate with the idea of human rights.

It is true of course that there can be no struggle for human rights or democracy in a country without partisan politics or competing social agendas. It is equally important, at the same time, that non-partisan defense of human rights should transcend all partisanship. Leaders of political groupings or parties can also be non-partisan defenders and promoters of human rights and democracy. An open society needs human and civil rights associations whose goals, strategies and tactics are strictly nonpartisan. The proposed seminar intends to go beyond routine condemnations of the Iranian state and devote some attention to human rights deficits in the context of Iran's history, culture and society.

To be sure, when defending victims of human rights abuses in the political realm, or critiquing prejudicial state policies, our activities must be directed at the institutions of the regime and public officials. But when it comes to promoting a culture of human rights or debunking the traditional taboos and discriminatory practices rooted in the culture, we need to observe and advocate a self-critical approach as well. We need to recognize that cultures embody values of identity and solidarity, as well as practices that perpetuate privilege and exclusion.

We need to take our discourse of human rights beyond concerns about state behavior and begin to view the challenges facing us from cultural and historical perspectives.

Failure to appreciate the diversity and pluralism of Iranian society is not limited to holders of political power; it even permeates the discourse and behavior of many dissident elements of our people, and we need to counter this reality in a systematic fashion.

It is of course heartening that conversations on human rights have become routine among educated Iranians, even though clerical despotism has made it extremely difficult for them to transform their vision into a sustained project. Diaspora Iranians now have the opportunity to do so and the Internet has made it possible for them to do it in constant contact with like-minded Iranians inside the country. Iranian Society for Human Rights in Northern California* will soon begin a fund raising drive and preparation for the seminar. The seminar will be a three-day event and it

will take place in Northern California during the summer of 2008. The exact location and schedule of the seminar will be announced in the coming weeks. The general topics to be considered for the seminar's discussions are the followings:

- 1- The concept of non-partisan human rights activism
- 2- Socio-cultural impediments to the cultivation of respect for human rights
- 3- Women's struggle for human rights
- 4- Torture and capital punishment in Iran's judicial system
- 5- Secular laws, religious values and human rights
- 6- Child labor, juvenile execution and human rights
- 7- Popular attitudes concerning torture or death penalty for convicted criminals
- 8- Rights of citizens and religious, ethnic and sexual minorities
- 9- Work, poverty and human rights
- 10- Institutionalization of human rights activism
- 11- Human rights issues, national foreign policy and international organizations
- 12- Environmental politics and human rights
- 13- Respect for human rights among opposition groups
- 14- Human rights in Persian literature. These topics reflect the general issues and challenges facing Iran's human rights movement and each one of them can be the basis of some specific questions that concern the activists, scholars or analysts. We invite all individuals interested in participating in this seminar to e-mail us a brief abstract of an issue or question that they wish to address in a 10-15 page essay or research paper.

We particularly appeal to those working in social sciences, literature, arts and humanities, as well as activists and journalists to consider our invitation (presenting a paper or participating in panel discussions) and send us their suggestions for elevating the quality of the seminar and making it a learning and inspiring experience for all. In anticipation of such a gathering, we hope to receive encouraging responses from interested Iranians so that we can begin to organize the presentations and panel discussions and establish contact with potential participants. Please e-mail us at: koshesh@aol.com

* Iranian Society for Human Rights was established in 2003 by a group of Iranians committed to the sanctity and advancement of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and related United Nations Human Rights Conventions. In the past four years, the Society has been active in defending and promoting human rights principals by organizing lectures, protests, petition drive and appealing to the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights and other international human rights organizations.

The Society has also responded to numerous international calls for action in support of prisoners of conscience and other victims of human rights abuse, as well as the rights of women, workers and ethnic, religious and sexual minorities.

Iranian Society for Human Rights is registered as a non-profit organization in the state of California. Mission: IS4HR is a non-profit, non-partisan and non-governmental Human Rights group working to promote and provide a better understanding of the rights defined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and all other international covenants. IS4HR is a network of Iranian-Americans committed to strengthening advocacy on human rights issues in Iran.

IS4HR believes that building respect for human rights law will ensure that individuals are treated with dignity and will thus curtail tyranny, extremism, intolerance, and violence. We believe that every individual has the right to live in peace and with justice and dignity. In order to maintain our independence, we accept no government funding.

1st Iranian wins Canada election

IranTimes: Reza Moridi last month became the first Iranian-born candidate to win election to public office in Canada. Moridi easily won a seat in the provincial legislature of Ontario, Canada's most populous province, in the elections last month. Moridi said, "This is a great honor and a great privilege.... The Iranian-Canadian community is very much pleased, as you can imagine, that now they can give something back to our wonderful country, Canada." In a five-candidate race, Liberal Party candidate Moridi, 62, won 48 percent of the vote versus 35 percent for Conservative Alex Yuan, 9 percent for New Democratic candidate Nella Cotrupi, 8 percent for Green Liz Couture and 1 percent for Family Coalition candidate Lisa Kidd. Moridi was elected from the riding (constituency) of Richmond Hill, which is part of Greater Toronto. Moridi's main opponent was Chinese-Canadian. Richmond Hill's population is 20-to-25 percent Chinese. Moridi's Liberal Party won 71 of the 107 seats in the legislature, a loss of one seat. Premier (Governor) Dalton McGuinty will thus continue to run the province. The Liberals were in deep trouble a few weeks ago. But then Conservative leader John Tory proposed giving provincial funds to schools of all faiths. That proposal backfired with voters and sank the Conservatives. In Ontario, the government has funded Catholic schools and public schools since the 1860s, but not other schools. Moridi was at the center of a scandal that broke out over the summer and embarrassed the Liberals before the issue of funds for faith-based schools came to dominate the campaign. The Liberals were criticized for quietly giving funds to some minority organizations, including the Iranian-Canadian Community Centre (ICCC), which received \$200,000. Critics jumped on the fact that two ICCC board members were Liberal party activists: Moridi and David Mario Farmani, the president of the Richmond Hill Liberal Association. An investigation of the grants criticized the procedure for lack of transparency and forced the resignation of the immigration minister who approved the grants. Moridi was born in Orumiyyeh.



He was educated as a physicist at Brunei University and is the vicepresident for science and technology of the Radiation Safety Institute of Canada. Moridi joined the institute as a staff scientist in 1990. He and his wife, Pari, have two children, Michelle and Mike, and two grandchildren. There are now eight Iranians holding elective office in North America—five in California and one each in Ontario, Texas, and Washington state. They are: Reza Moridi, elected in October 2007 as a member of the 107-seat Ontario provincial legislature; Sheila Meskin Hanson, who has the largest electorate of any Iranian-American as a Superior Court judge elected in November 2006 in Orange County, California, with a population of 3 million; Susan Etezadi, elected in June 2006 also as a Superior Court judge, in San Mateo County, with a population of 700,000 in northern California; Ross Mirkarimi, elected in 2004 as a county supervisor of San Francisco county, population 750,000; Farid Javandel, elected the same day to the city council of Albany, California, a town of 18,000 people on the east side of San Francisco Bay; Jimmy Delshad, elected in 2003 and re-elected in 2007 to the city council and then chosen as mayor of Beverly Hills, California, adjacent to Los Angeles and with a population of 34,000; Nezam Tooloee, elected city councilor in 2003 in Bainbridge Island, Washington, a town of 22,000 just across Puget Sound from Seattle; and Natasha Kamrani, who won election in December 2005 to one of nine seats on the Houston School Board, the seventh largest school system in the United States and a city with a population of 2 million.

Continued from page 44 >>

Is Putin pulling...

telling the media in Iran that Putin has changed Russia's policy toward Iran and inflicted a "political defeat" on the West. Davudi said "all countries and political analysts" have described Putin's visit to Tehran as a victory for Tehran's nuclear diplomacy. Davudi said Putin now recognized Iran as "an independent and powerful state." While in Tehran, Putin simply parroted the Iranian line, drawing plaudits from Iranian officials. Putin went so far in parroting the Iranian line that he even said the news reports of a plot to assassinate him in Tehran were part of a scheme to "wreck the visit." However, the news reports of an assassination plot did not come from the West, but from Kremlin officials who confirmed they had intelligence on such plans. The Russian Interfax news agency said a source in the Russian secret service told it that several people telephoned the Russian embassy in Tehran to warn of a plot against Putin. One caller said he had quit a "band of fanatics" who were planning to kill Putin. Interfax said multiple other reports were received in other countries. The apparent volume of reports gave credence to the idea that someone was trying to get Putin to cancel the trip. No assassination attempt was launched during the visit, which the Russians cropped to just half-a-day with Putin flying in Tuesday morning and flying out Tuesday night.



Continued from page 44 >>

Is U.S. laying...

Cheney had used "his harshest language for Iran" by calling it "the world's most active state sponsor of terrorism"—a phrase that actually dates back two decades and has been used in each annual report on terrorism by Presidents George H.W. Bush, Bill Clinton and George W. Bush. The New York Times, not normally in Bush's corner, felt compelled to defend Bush from the war charges.

Writing in Review section, David Stout said, "Taking everything into context, the hyperbole about world war does not make it less remote than it already is.

The maneuvers so far have been diplomatic, more like chess, a game Russians love, than war games." But in Tehran, Foreign Ministry spokesman Mohammad-Ali Hossaini said, "The stands that he [Bush] has announced are themselves a threat to world security and peace."

Neither Bush nor Cheney said a word about military action. See the accompanying box below for the full quotes. Ayatollah Ahmad Khatami said Bush had issued his threats out of anger at the huge success Iran enjoyed at the Caspian summit meeting.

One of the regime's main propaganda lines has been the immense honor conferred on Iran when Russian President Vladimir Putin visited for the summit and the additional power and authority conferred on the Islamic Republic by virtue of hosting the summit. Khatami responded to Bush saying, "It is the pharaonic nature of America that paves the way for World War III.

I quote the famous sentence by Avicenna, who said: I am frightened of cows because they have weapons [horns] but they lack brains. If there is to be any concern, it should be about America's arrogant attitude. America interferes in the affairs of every part of the world. It wants to be the headman of the [global] village. But with the grace of God, this will never happen."