



Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission Briefing

Human Rights in Iran

**Thursday, October 29th, 2015
11:30 AM – 12:30 Noon
2172 Rayburn House Office Building**

Opening Remarks – Rep. James P. McGovern

Good morning. On behalf of the Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission, I would like to welcome you to our briefing this morning on human rights in Iran. I extend a special welcome to our distinguished panelists, who include the United Nations Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Islamic Republic of Iran. Thank you for taking time to be with us today and for the outstanding work you do on behalf of human rights. Finally, I thank the Commission staff for organizing the briefing.

Prior to the 1979 revolution, Iran was an ally of the United States. Since the revolution, it's been an adversary. Only recently, with the decision to join other international powers in negotiating to end Iran's nuclear weapons program, has the U.S. begun to re-engage. I believe the resulting Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action is worthwhile, and I am among the members of Congress who support it. But the JCPOA was not meant to, and does not, address other areas of strong and very significant disagreement between the international community and Iran. Human rights is one of those areas.

On June 12, 2009, thousands of Iranians took to the streets to protest what they believed were irregularities in the presidential elections that brought Mahmoud Ahmadinejad to power. For months what came to be known as the Green Movement convened mass demonstrations and practiced civil disobedience in an attempt to guarantee civil liberties – until February 2010, when a rally in support of the emerging Arab Spring movements was brutally suppressed, and its leaders arrested, tried and jailed.

A few months later the Congress passed the Comprehensive Iran Sanctions, Accountability and Divestment Act (CISADA), which imposed travel bans and froze the assets of Iranians determined to be responsible for or complicit in post-2009 election human rights

abuses. These sanctions remain in place today. They can only be terminated when the president of the United States determines that Iran has:

- Unconditionally released all political prisoners detained in the aftermath of the June 2009 uprising;
- Ceased its practices of violence, unlawful detention, torture and abuse of citizens engaged in peaceful protest;
- Fully investigated abuses of political activists that occurred after the uprising; and
- Committed to and is making progress toward establishing an independent judiciary and respecting human rights recognized in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

Clearly, the president hasn't been able to certify compliance with these conditions.

The post-2009 election abuses that led the Congress to impose sanctions are not the only human rights violations happening in Iran. Restrictions on freedom of expression, association and assembly are ongoing: as of last April, at least 46 journalists and media activists were in custody or sentenced for peaceful activities. Gender-based discrimination is wide-spread, and executions are rising at an exponential rate. These are the kinds of issues our panelists will be discussing today.

Let me note that three Americans are among those unjustly imprisoned in Iran: Jason Rezaian, the Washington Post's Tehran correspondent who has been jailed since July 2014 and was just this month reported to have been convicted, although we don't know for what; Amir Hekmati, a Marine veteran arrested while visiting relatives in August 2011 and serving a ten-year sentence for "aiding a hostile country" – the U.S.; and Saeed Abedini, sentenced in 2013 to eight years in prison on charges of disturbing national security by creating a private network of churches. The Congress is following these cases closely. All three of these innocent Americans should be released by Iran unilaterally and immediately.

I believe in diplomacy and engagement, and I also believe in holding governments, including our own, accountable for the way they treat their people. Sometimes foreign policy experts and our government act as if engagement and accountability are at odds with each other. But as I look around the world, I see human rights abuses contributing to generate violent extremism and war. I believe our only option is engagement with accountability. For that reason, I look forward to learning about the current human rights situation in Iran, and to hearing our guests' recommendations for ways the U.S. government, and especially the Congress, can contribute to improving Iran's compliance with its human rights obligations, in spite of our policy disagreements.

I now turn the microphone over to Stephen McInerney of the Project on Middle East Democracy, POMED, who will moderate the discussion.