

## IRAN AND HUMAN DIGNITY

David Kilgour,

co-chair of Canadian Friends of a Democratic Iran

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Macdonald Room, Parliament of Canada

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Irwin Cotler (between screens, rear of photo) receiving standing ovation. MPS and senators from Government and Official Opposition participated

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Friends of the Iranian people have gathered here tonight from across Canada as far as Vancouver; I welcome all of you very warmly. *Merci d'être venu.*

People from differing faith communities and political parties are also here tonight to share our common concerns about human dignity in Iran on almost the eve of International Human Rights Day.

Tragically, it appears that more than 1000 persons died during the devastating quake of November 12th. Deepest condolences from all of us to the earthquake victims in western Iran. Iranian government aid in rescuing those trapped under debris appeared to be minimal. The regime declared on the second day after the earthquake that its rescue operation had ended. The Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC) and the Basij militia sent columns of vehicles with anti-insurgency units to the region, which sparked outrage among residents. According to eyewitnesses, the armed persons arriving offered no role in helping victims, and their only goal was to prevent popular protests.

The overall situation of human dignity in Iran has been in the world spotlight during four decades. Successive governments in Canada have led the international community in recent years in condemning the human rights situation in Iran. This year was no exception, but was in some respects different from previous ones.

For the first time since the massacre of as many as 30,000 political prisoners in 1988, the catastrophe was referred to by the UN Secretary General, thereby demonstrating again the need to bring to justice the perpetrators of this terrible crime against humanity. As the UN Special Rapporteur, Asma Jahangir, noted, the families of the victims deserve closure on this issue and in demanding justice. The culture of impunity and closing eyes on atrocities committed by the regime has helped to place the responsible international community in the current quagmire.

As the Special Rapporteur also noted, almost two years after the nuclear deal with Iran, many across the world hoped the agreement would moderate the ongoing harsh treatment of Iran's clerical regime against its own citizens and dissidents. Sadly, there have been no tangible improvements in human rights in Iran.

The violence of the Iranian regime in the Middle East and the role that its Islamic Revolutionary Guards (IRGC) play in destabilizing the region, propping up the inhuman regime of Bashar Assad, and worsening the sectarian divisions in a region already in turmoil, is continuing.

Other speeches tonight will focus on various aspects of the dangers and threats posed by the rogue regime in Tehran. We must all ask ourselves what policy option is best for Canada to adopt now.

The Canadian Friends of a Democratic Iran, a non-partisan NGO, has monitored the situation in Iran for many years. We believe that a principled approach is one that puts the people of Iran and their desire for freedom, equal opportunity, gender equality, and the separation of religion and state at its core. Canada's policy should not sacrifice human dignity and basic rights and not side with those who for years have denied the people of Iran the opportunity to find their rightful place in the world.

Now that the regime's footprints can be seen across the Middle East, the eviction of it and fighters of the IRGC from the region is a self-evident necessity for regional peace. Appeasing mass murderers and gross and systematic human rights violators under whatever pretext is doomed to fail.

Thank you.