

WHITHER IRANIANS AND IRAN?

**Introductory Comments by moderator Hon. David Kilgour, co-chair of Canadian Friends
of a Democratic Iran,**

John A Macdonald Hall, Parliament of Canada, Wellington Street

Ottawa

Feb 25, 2020, 6-8pm.

Senators, Members of Parliament, guests,

Soyez le bienvenu a tous et toutes,

On behalf of Canadian Friends of a Democratic Iran, I welcome you to Ottawa and the Canadian Parliament.

All of us are grateful to the Members of Parliament who co-sponsored this event: the Hon. Judy Sgro (Liberal), and James Bezan (Conservative).

We all welcome two respected guest speakers, Senator Robert Torricelli, and Ambassador Lincoln Bloomfield Jr. from the United States.

Iran's civilization goes back thousands of years and includes King Cyrus the Great, one of antiquity's most enlightened leaders. In the early 1950s, the movement to establish modern democratic governance in the country ended abruptly when a U.S./U.K.-backed coup ousted the elected government of Mohammad Mosaddegh.

The ensuing restored Pahlavi monarchy was overthrown in 1979 by Ayatollah Khomeini, who tragically created a model of clerical totalitarianism, which continues to wield absolute power over 80 million Iranians.

Since 1979, the regime has spent vast sums seeking to crush dissent and imprison or execute those aligning with the

resistance. It has spent billions, supporting Bashar al-Assad's inhuman civil war in Syria and funding Hezbollah and other proxy terrorist groups across the Middle East.

To be sure, our hearts go out to the 16 Iranians who have died from the coronavirus epidemic, which appears to have begun with the sale of wild animals in Wuhan, China.

The turnout in Iran's recent parliamentary election, from which Ayatollah Ali Khamenei and others barred 9,000 of 16,000 would-be candidates, was low, reflecting anger over poor economic conditions, the brutal repression of protests last year and the shooting down of Ukrainian Airlines Flight 752 plane outside Tehran in January.

Torricelli and Bloomfield

Senator Torricelli served as the Democratic United States senator from New Jersey from 1997 to 2003 and a member of the U.S. House of Representatives from 1983 to 1997. From 1999 to 2000, he chaired the Democratic Senatorial Campaign Committee. The senator has been a vocal supporter of the National Council of Resistance of Iran and advocated a free and democratic country in countless forums.

Ambassador Bloomfield has extensive experience in foreign policy/national security, including the 140-nation UN agreement on Small Arms and Light Weapons in 2001. He served as the assistant secretary of state for political military affairs from 2001 to 2005. He was also the then president's special representative on landmine issues.

Let's begin by asking James Bezan to take the floor. We will then hear our guests. I am sure we will have time for other MPs and Senators before hearing from others with us tonight. Merci.