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HUMAN RIGHTS IN IRAN

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PROCEEDINGS

MR. POLLACK: Good morning and welcome to The Brookings Institution. I am delighted to see so many people out there for an event that is both very important and long overdue.

This is an event brought to you by a combination of the Saban Center for Middle East Policy at The Brookings Institution of which I am the director, the Century Foundation, and the National Security Network. And we here at Brookings are delighted to be partnering with those two fine organizations to bring you an event, which as I've already said I feel is long overdue.

Soon after Iran's disputed June 12, 2009 election, I found myself on a number of occasions in Europe and in the Middle East talking with a variety of friends from Iran, people who in those circumstances found it possible to actually speak somewhat freely about what was going on there. In every one of those conversations, I would say to those people, what is it that the United States can and should do to help the Green Movement to demonstrate our solidarity with them, but to do so in a way that would actually help them rather than hurting them, that would not trigger Iranian nationalism and fears about foreign subversion and interference in their internal affairs but that could actually be somewhat helpful to the opposition?

And what I typically heard from every single one of those people I spoke to was, you need to talk more about Iranian human rights

abuses. That is the one thing that would actually be helpful to us and not hurtful to us.

And so it is for that reason that we along with the National Security Network and the Century Foundation bring you this event. We have a superb panel, and I will give you brief introductions in just a moment. Perhaps, I think, the most important thing to understand is that this is a topic which is very much a work in progress. We've seen in Iran leads us all to have great concern for the people of Iran for the future of that political system, but at the moment I think that we are all still struggling to understand fully what is going on there and what can be done about it, and for that reason I am delighted to have the four people sitting with me on this panel.

We'll begin today with Geneive Abdo. I think Geneive is well known to many people in this room. She is the director for the Iran program at the Century Foundation and the editor and creator of insideIRAN.org. She is also the lead author of a new report on Iranian human rights which she will be presenting for us today in just a few moments.

Geneive was, of course, a liaison for the United Nations Alliance of Civilizations. She served for many years as a foreign correspondent for *The Guardian* and also for *The Economist*, and she is author of a number of superb works including *Answering Only To God*,

Faith and Freedom in 20th Century Iran, and her newest book is *Mecca and Mainstreet: Muslim Life in America after 9/11*.

After Geneive, we will hear from Mojtaba Vahedi. We are absolutely thrilled to have Mr. Vahedi with us today. Again, this is a name that I think is certainly known to many of you even if very few in this room have had the pleasure of actually meeting him in person. Mojtaba Vahedi has been one of the closest political advisors to Mehdi Karroubi, the leader of the Iranian Green Movements.

He served first as a senior executive in Iran's Ministry of the Treasury. He has been the editor-in-chief of *Aftab Yazd*, reformist newspaper in Iran, and in 2005 was Karroubi's chief advisor when he first ran for president, and, of course, in 2009 during Karroubi's long and very eventful run for the presidency against President Ahmadinejad, Mojtaba Vahedi was standing by Mehdi Karroubi's side the entire time as his chief political advisor.

He has, unfortunately, been forced to flee his native Iran under fear that the government would take action against him, and so for that reason it is particularly compelling that he be here today to tell us a little bit about the human rights situation in Iran and the role that the international community can play therein.

Following Mr. Vahedi, we will hear from Herr Markus Löning. Markus Löning is the Federal Government Commissioner for Human Rights Policy and Humanitarian Aid at the Federal Foreign Office in Berlin.

Herr LÖNING has also had a long and distinguished career, including membership in the German Bundestag. He has been the chairman of the Parliamentary Friendship Group for Relations with Belgium in Luxembourg; he was the president of the German Group of the Liberal International, and ultimately served as the president of the Liberal Party in the State of Berlin. We're thrilled to have him here to give us a European and international perspective on this issue.

And, finally, we will hear from Philo Dibble, an old friend and colleague of mine. Philo was dragged back into government recently to serve as the deputy assistant secretary of state for Near Eastern Affairs for Iran. Again, for those of you who have been in Washington for any period of time, I'm sure that Philo's name and face are familiar ones to you.

He has served in any number of capacities during his long service in the foreign service. He was the principal Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for the Bureau of International Organization Affairs. He has been the Deputy Assistant Secretary of State in Near Eastern Affairs. He was our Deputy Chief of Mission in Damascus, and has served in a whole variety of overseas posts, mostly in the Middle East.

Philo is also, I can tell you, one of the most effective, one of the most insightful, and one of the clearest-eyed thinkers that you will find in the U.S. bureaucracy, and I think that that says a tremendous amount these days for him and for the Department in bringing him back when they

realized that they needed someone to actually deal with Iran and actually figure out where it is that we go, given all the problems that we have had with them over the past few years.

So with that I will turn things over to Geneive to get us started and to present the report and her findings. Geneive.

MS. ABDO: Good morning, everyone. Thank you so much for joining us for this important discussion, and I'm particularly grateful to Ken for organizing this event and to the Brookings staff. As we all know, Ken is a renowned expert on Iran, and I'm grateful for his support on this issue and for allowing us this wonderful platform in which to discuss human rights in Iran.

I thought I would give you a brief summary of the reports which are being distributed outside placing human rights violations in Iran on top of the foreign policy agenda. The report is written by myself and also my colleague who's present here, Sebastian Groffe, from the Heinrich Boll Foundation here in Washington.

We decided, as Ken pointed out, to try to highlight this issue which is receiving a lot of attention in Europe, but much less so in the United States. And so in July in Brussels, the Heinrich Boll Foundation helped us organize a meeting that's part of an ongoing series of conferences that I hold as part of the program I'm directing along with the National Security Network that basically brings together Iranian academics, people who are involved in the opposition movement, others

who are living outside but also helping the movement inside, and we paired them with European and American policymakers to talk about some of the sensitive issues that people aren't really talking about publicly. And so our last meeting in Brussels, that meeting was focused on human rights, and it is some of our discussions that we had in Brussels that prompted Sebastian and I to write this report.

The report is also based upon research that both of us conducted in Washington, in Europe, and in Turkey. Unfortunately, we were not able to go to Iran for the report but nonetheless I think that it's quite informative about the situation in Iran.

As we all know, the state of human rights in Iran has deteriorated even further since the 2009 disputed election that brought President Ahmadinejad to power. During the heated months that followed the election, the authorities imprisoned thousands of high-profile activists and in some cases subjected them to severe torture. Later they moved on to minor figures who had participated in a few demonstrations but were virtually unknown. And now, a year and a half later, we see that the regime is targeting very, very minor civil society actors who have participated in maybe one or two demonstrations, and they are particularly focused on the universities.

This has not really received that much coverage in the United States, but the regime is now trying to cleanse the universities of anyone involved in civil disobedience to the point of even destroying their

academic records. And we know personally just from our work on the project that, and our contact with young students, that many of them now have been expelled, and they have virtually no future because they cannot prove that they ever attended university. Mr. Vahedi will speak in a few minutes more specifically about the regime strategy.

So in addition to this kind of repression, we've also seen the pace of executions not only for alleged politically-related crimes but for adultery and social behavior that has been deemed un-Islamic. These people are also being targeted. Now more than ever the segment of the Iranian population seeking positive change feels depleted and disillusioned. We've had many statements coming from Iran even from people such as Faiza Hashemi, the daughter of the former president, talking about just how depressed and disillusioned the population has become.

A sizable percentage of young Iranians have given up hope and that a reform may occur any time soon. Others who have the resources to do so have been fleeing to Turkey with the hope of eventually being settled in the E.U. or the United States. So one of the central messages that came out of our Brussels meetings is that the Iranians want Western governments to draw attention to Iran's human rights violations and pressure Iran's regime.

There is a tendency to believe here in the West that defending the rights of Iranian civil society will taint the opposition, as Ken

mentioned. And while that may have been true and sort of the feeling among a lot of civil society actors right after the June 2009 election, it is less so true today.

As one of our Iranian participants mentioned in Brussels, he said, "The international community must take a clearer stance against the government with its regard to the treatment of the Civil Rights Movement in Iran; second, in order to create a democratic society, we must build civil society; third, we must address the situation that all human rights organizations in Iran are banned; and fourth, we must address the lack of the free flow of information."

Now, the person who made this comment is -- was an Iranian diplomat who defected in January and is now living in exile in Oslo.

It was also agreed by the Iranian participants in Brussels that the United States and Europe should arrive at a coordinated effort to highlight violations in order to support civil society. So there's a feeling among a lot of Iranians that even when there's as willingness by governments to address this issue that there is no coordinated effort, and therefore it's very easy for the Iranian regime to dismiss the complaints from Western governments on this issue.

There's also a feeling that, as Ken pointed out, that to highlight human rights is to taint the opposition movement, and the point that a lot of the Iranians made in our meeting was that this is going to happen anyway, the regime has already made as part of its strategy the

claim that Western governments are behind regime change in Iran, and so this argument is being made by the authorities whether or not Western governments highlight human rights.

Two of our Iranian participants in Brussels also noted that the regime cares when it is criticized for its human rights violations and therefore this could serve as a pressure point for Western governments.

The other point that came out of our meeting and that we have highlighted in our report is the situation of Iranian refugees fleeing Iran to Turkey with the hope that they will be resettled in the United States or Europe. Again, there has not been that much attention focused on the refugee problem, particularly if you view this in light of the attention that was drawn to Iraqi refugees. So we want to make sure that there is attention placed on this issue.

At the end of 2009, there were 4,200 Iranians in need of protection that had been registered with the UNHCR in Turkey. The situation for them in Turkey is difficult. According to Turkish laws which date to the 1940s, refugees can only be granted status as asylum seekers, which means that they're not eligible for financial aid, they don't have jobs, and they're assigned to live in towns primarily in Anatolia, which creates a lot of hardships for them.

In order to actually be granted political asylum, the process takes approximately two years, and that's considered fairly fast. So you have a situation where Iranian refugees are sort of in Turkey without any

means of livelihood, and they're waiting to sort of be processed through the UNHCR system. Therefore, another recommendation that stems from our report was to support the rights and needs of Iranian refugees. The Iranian participants in Brussels called upon the United States, the European Union, and Turkey to increase the numbers of persons granted refugee resettlement status and also increase funding for NGOs both in Turkey and in Europe that are trying to help with the refugee crisis.

We have a few charts in our report that will show you exactly the numbers and where people are being resettled.

In conclusion, I'd just like to point out that our report states that in addition to improving the human rights situation for Iranians for humanitarian reasons, we also need to highlight this issue in order to try to effect public opinion inside Iran. And I think that this is another point that has somewhat gone unnoticed that the Iranian society, and the people particularly who have been affected by this human rights violations, this is a point in which people, even the staunch supporters of the regime really care about, and according to scholarly research we know that's happening inside Iran now, this is a subject that can turn public opinion in Iran against the regime. So that's the other reason to try to highlight this issue on the outside with the hope that we can effect public opinion inside.

So I'll leave it with that. Thank you very much.

MR. POLLACK: Thank you, Genevieve. First, for those people sitting in the back there, there are actually a number of seats up

here at front. If you'd like to come down, I can seat 10 or 11 seats right up here in front. Please do feel free to come down. We'd be delighted to actually have you sit rather than having to stand, I know it's a lovely wall back there, but if you'd like to sit, I promise you the seats are actually quite comfortable.

I'd like to turn things over now to Mojtaba Vahedi, and I should let everyone know that Mr. Vahedi will be speaking through a translator, so please be patient with us and allow the translator to actually translate everything that Mr. Vahedi has to say.

Mojtaba, please?

MR. VAHEDI: Good morning, everybody. I apologize all of you because my English is not good enough to talk English, and I asked my friend then to translate. I hope the next time I see you, all of you can speak in Farsi, and there is no translator.

I will begin my speaking with some topics that I believe have not been attended to up till now, and this topic is the strategy of the Iranian government with regards to human rights. It is my opinion that the strategy of the government with regards to human right has changed from what the strategy was before the elections of 2009 and after the elections of 2009.

We have always had issues regarding human rights in Iran, and it has always been the effort of the government to either cover up or outright reject the notion of human rights violations in Iran. But after the

elections, for reasons I will tell you, the government itself insists that its human rights violations be given coverage, and the reason is that the government reached the conclusion that if there is no strict oppression of the protests and the violations of human rights are not shown to the people, then these protests will continue until the overthrow of the government.

And also, after the pictures of protesters being killed were distributed around the world, including Neda Soltan, and people saw the way the protesters were being treated, the Iranian government reached the conclusion that there is no credibility remaining for it to lose. Therefore the conclusion was by reviewing the violence and the oppression, the government chose to use fear as a means in order to put pressure on the protesters and to silence the protests.

The first step was taken in this regard from the beginning of September 2009, which I will explain to you. On September 6, 2009, the Iranian television broadcasted a report of Kahrizak Prison. The report was reflected in newspapers, including my newspaper. I was the editor of *Aftah Yazd* at the time. We put the report on our first page, and the report was put together by my wife. The chief inspector of Iranian police gave a report regarding the events that occurred in Kahrizak Prison. I am pretty sure that some of you or all of you have heard the name of Kahrizak, but the dimensions that have been mentioned in this report might not have reached your attention. In this report, the tortures are mentioned and also

the deprivation of medical needs and food that the prisoners had to go through.

But the most important is an issue that I will mention right now. The chief inspector of Tehran police said in the report, which was also broadcasted on television two times, that they were holding 145 prisoners in a room of 70 square meters for three days. I would like to mention it again, 145 people in 70 square meters. That means each person had half a square meter which he was living in for three days.

On the second day, based upon the report, they also added 25 notorious criminals who were known for violent actions and hooliganism to these prisoners, so as of Day 2, it was 170 prisoners in 70 square meters. At the time my newspaper mentioned that maybe some of the claims of rape that were mentioned by Mr. Kadlovi were committed by these criminals which were put in the same area that the other prisoners were because the crimes that many of these prisoners had committed was rape.

This was the beginning, and this was the first step of the government's plan and government claim at the time that they will deal efficiently with those who committed crimes at Kahrizak, but now that 16 months have passed since the crime itself and 13 months since the reports that came out, the main person who was behind these crimes is believed to be Mr. Ahmadinejad himself in Iran. I would like to correct my previous statement: The main person who is being held for these crimes

is Mr. Mortazavi, which is an individual very close to Ahmadinejad. He is actually now the deputy of Mr. Ahmadinejad.

This person comes onto television as the deputy of the president, as representative of the president, and states reports, his reports to the people. This shows that the intention of the government for revealing the crimes at Kahrizak was not bringing those who were behind the crimes to justice but to bring fear into the equation and to make people be afraid and to get the message across that if your children participate in protests, this will be their fate as Kahrizak Prison.

I would like to repeat that after 16 month, not one person has been prosecuted or held accountable for the crimes that were committed at Kahrizak, and the main person who was behind these crimes, Mr. Mortazavi himself, has actually been rewarded for these crimes, and he is now the deputy for the president. But, as I mentioned, Kahrizak was the first step of using fear as a means by the Iranian government.

The second stage was the execution of two of those held originally for protest after the elections, a Mr. Zamani and Mr. Arash Rahmani. After that, Mr. Jonnati, himself, which is a high-level official in Iran, came to the Friday prayers, attended Friday prayers, and at those Friday prayers his only objection was: Why did you not execute more people? This was very public, and his statements were broadcasted by the television many times. In my hand is the report by an official statement news agency, *The Iranian Student News Agency* where these

statements have been published: "Thank you for executing, and why didn't you execute more?"

After that, it has been persistently the policy of the government to use fear, propagate fear as a means to put pressure on the population. I will give you several examples of where this fear was used as a means by the government, also censorship and a violation of human rights. During the previous year, all of the ranking clerics who were criticizing the government and objected to the actions of the government, all of their websites have been filtered. The minority faction of the parliament, the reformist minority, they have a website which has been filtered for one year.

And in the most academia, Mr. Mohammad Khoshchereh who I will explain to you who he is, they have been including him and many other professors have been forced to resign. Mr. Khoshchereh was the head of Ahmadinejad's economic campaign during his first election. After a year he came out and publicly stated that "Mr. Ahmadinejad does not stand by any academic or any scientific means of economy, of evaluating the economy, and I will not work with him."

And don't think that when they forced these professors to resign they're ashamed of it. Only recently the Minister of Science stated that "We will bring down the walls of the universities upon secular professors." And this is while Mr. Khoshchereh was not even a secular

professor. Up until recently, he was known as a religious professor, but still because he was critical of Ahmadinejad he was forced to resign.

I also have another example here for you to understand that this is not, that these actions are not only limited to officials and professors. The Tehran Province prosecutor has a statement over here which I would like to read for you.

He stated last month that "The government newspapers are being forced to not publish my statements." You should pay attention: This is the Tehran prosecutor who is objecting that the government is preventing newspapers from publishing his statements. A while ago it was also published that newspapers have been ordered to not publish any statements or any articles on Mousavi, on Karroubi, or Hatami. They are trying to publicly get the message across to become commonly known that whoever is critical of the government or has objectives [sic] to the government has no right to have his or her statements be published. And this is why they are issuing very heavy statements, and a lot of heavy verdicts for students and also for journalists, and for political activists.

I will give you a few examples. Mr. Hossein Derakhshan, who was only a web blog writer, he was a blogger, he has been sentenced to 19-1/2 years in prison. Mr. Hamzeh Karami was heading a website in Iran called *Jomhuriyat*, and he has been sentenced to 11 years in prison.

Majid Tavakoli, a student, has been sentenced to eight and a half years in prison for a speech, only a speech that he had in the university.

Others who are also in prison are in a very bad situation. They're under constant pressure. The doctors have ordered Mrs. Hengo Mishahegi (?) and Mr. Mastri Devostahni (?) be seen by the doctor and to be released from prison for treatment, but the bail money that they put for them is so high -- for example, \$600,000 bail fees -- that in action these people are not allowed to leave prison because they are unable to raise the bail money.

I only have two minutes based upon what my watch tells me, so I will put this all together. I believe that the strategy of the Iranian government to an extent has been successful. Based upon the strategy, the street protests, and the actual type of protests and objections that is visible to us has gone down to a large extent, although there is objection towards the government to actions, and there is a large amount of objection towards that they do. That's why other governments, non-Iranian governments, are using this as a reason to validate their argument that there is no other options remaining to deal with Iran -- I'm sorry, I'll correct that: And there are no alternatives remaining for the Iranian government, and we have to therefore sit at the negotiation table with them. It's the good time to do so.

But that's not the case whenever even there is mention of the leaders of the Green Movement coming out onto the streets, they have severe security measures taken. Just as recently there was a possibility that Mr. Karroubi was to attend one of the public demonstrations, and his house was put under siege and he was, in fact, imprisoned in his house under house arrest for five days.

I hope, if there's anything remaining, I can -- we can go through it in Q&A, and because of the time I think I will have to stop at this point.

MR. POLLACK: Thank you, Mr. Vahedi. Herr LÖNING, the floor is yours.

MR. LÖNING: Thank you very much, and good morning to everybody. The human rights situation in Iran has been very bad up to the elections and last year already, and as we have heard now that that's, the assessment of the German government shares, it has dramatically worsened over the last years. We have seen crackdown on any kind of opposition on any kind of dissident voice on people speaking out, on people writing, on people standing up for their rights in an unprecedented way by the government of President Ahmadinejad over the last bit more than a year since the election.

And the German government is extremely concerned about what is happening there, and we share the, what has been said that what we need to do is speak out publicly, speak out clearly on the situation and

try to put pressure on the Iranian government because that is one thing that we believe seems to work. It seems, as funny as it may sound, that public exposure is not what the Iranian government likes. If they are being confronted in public, be it in the framework of the U.N. and the Human Rights Council, or in the Third Committee in New York or via newspapers with demonstrations on the streets of our cities, it is not what the Iranian government likes.

Whenever I make a public statement to the German press, I get a very long letter from the Iranian ambassador to Germany explaining why I am wrong. So they do take notice of what we are saying, and I know that the, for example, whenever we have bilateral meetings with Iranians, we do address the human rights issues at all levels, starting with the foreign minister. If he meets his Iranian counterpart, he is addressing that very, very clearly.

We had people from the German parliament traveling to Iran twice in the last month, and they have been very outspoken on the situation, and we see -- you ever hear the German chancellor being very clear, the German foreign minister being very clear in public.

The question is some of these pressures that we make, some of them we don't make in public, sometimes we try to use other channels. It seems to us that this pressure does make a difference. It may be a small difference sometimes, it may be frustrating sometimes that in certain cases we don't achieve making a difference. But all in all, we

believe that it is the main instrument we have at the moment is to put public pressure on the Iranian government.

What we have also done and what we are busy doing is bringing refugees from Iran to Germany. You have talked about the Iranian refugees that are in Turkey now, in Eastern Turkey. Germany has invited 50 human rights defendants that have fled Iran after, in the close of the last year and that are now mainly in Eastern Turkey.

We have invited 50 of these human rights defendants to come to Germany, to live in Germany, and to work in Germany, and to continue their work in Germany, which is a difficult process to get them from Turkey to Germany, but we have more than half of them are, meanwhile in Germany, have arrived in Germany and I will be personally visiting some of the people that are still in Turkey in the next week to see how they are doing and how we could speed up that process. That is something that I am not very happy about that this takes so long, but at least we do accept people, we do invite people, and I think it's important that the West as a whole, and many countries in the West, clearly send the signal that we invite people to come and live safely and continue their human rights work from our countries.

I believe one thing we have to -- we should also point out to the Iranians again and again is that this government is actually not complying to the Iranian laws. I mean some of the things that are being done now by the police, that are the crackdowns that are being done, are

against Iranian laws. Some of the things that we see happening in Iran are against what Iran has committed to on the international level, and I think it is important to always remind the Iranian government of Iranian laws, of the Iranian constitution, but also of the international commitments they have made, and to tell them very clearly that we expect them to comply with the commitments they have made and to comply with the Iranian laws. As funny as it may sound, but I believe that we should also do that and say there is an Iranian constitution, and at least we expect you to be in line with the Iranian constitution and respect the Iranian constitution.

I think apart from that what we also need to do is go on working at the U.N. level and strongly support the new country resolution on the human rights situation in Iran that's going to be in the General Assembly. I believe this needs to be done again and again and again. And I think it is also very important to, not to mingle the nuclear issue and the human rights issue. I think the human rights issue needs to be dealt with separate from the nuclear issue. We need to address the human rights situation again, and again we need to help the people that are fleeing Iran. We need to go public, and we need as much as we can -- and that is obviously very, very difficult -- try to support the people that are fighting for, standing up for their rights in Iran.

Thank you.

MR. POLLACK: Thank you very much, Herr LÖNING.

Philo, wrap things up for us.

MR. DIBBLE: Thank you. I think it's appropriate and to sort of finish up -- and I'll try and be as brief as I can to leave as much time as possible for questions -- with what the United States is trying to do in this context.

Let me just mention first of all our most recent action. You will note that basically a month ago today the president signed an executive order authorizing the Departments of State and Treasury to impose sanctions on eight Iranian government officials tied to serious human rights abuses against the people of Iran. I want to note that one of them is Mr. Mortazavi that was mentioned by our friend Mr. Vahedi.

These actions not only obviously have the support of the president. His message was unmistakable, but also the secretary of state who jointly designated these individuals with secretary of the treasury. This comes in the context of policy actions of longstanding and which we have taken, I think, continuously over the years the most obvious being high-level statements that spotlighted on most egregious human rights abuses. The work we have done in the Human Rights Council and in the Third Committee of the General Assembly, as our colleague mentioned, the country report on human rights practices in Iran, which we do annually, as well as the annual international religious freedom report, and our efforts

along with other countries pressing them among other things to speak out as loudly as possible to condemn the human rights situation.

Finally, I'd like to mention our support for refugees seeking to flee Iran which we have provided through the U.N. Committee on Refugees, and as Geneva's report makes clear, our leading role in admitting asylees from Iran.

A second feature that I think is worth pointing out is our Iran democracy program which is funded in Fiscal Year 2010 at a level of \$40 million by the Congress. This is, I think, the sixth such appropriation. The point of this program is to find ways to allow civil society to acquire the tools necessary to hold the government in Iran accountable for its actions. This is a difficult program to administer because, obviously, it's difficult to do this kind of thing inside Iran, and our effort have therefore been confined to some extent to Iranians who are outside the country.

I will not go into a lot of detail on this because our first concern, of course, is to protect those who participate in these programs. So I'm not going to give you a lot of information about it. I just want you to know that it's there, and I want you to know what the purpose of it is up front.

Finally, again, as our colleague Mr. Vahedi mentioned, is the question of the use of the Internet and other means of communication both from the outside into Iran and the means of communication among Iranians inside Iran. The Internet freedom is a priority of the secretary of

state. It's a global issue, it doesn't involve just Iran but Iran is a very important piece of it. We are currently working on a global strategy into which Iran will fit. I would like to give you more detail, but again this is, first of all, a highly technical question.

It's a question with a great deal of technical ambiguity since what is a useful tool for a dissident is also a useful tool for repressing a dissident. However, what we have done so far is to license free software to be provided to users inside Iran so that they can have a better chance -- let's put it that way -- of talking to each other and talking to the outside world.

Finally, I'd like to echo Mr. LÖNING's comment that all of this becomes much more effective if we can do this together with other governments and with NGOs and with others who are concerned about developments inside Iran. Obviously, what happens in Iran is ultimately a matter for the Iranian people to do and to deal with. We, however, have an obligation, as the president has said repeatedly, to speak out, to highlight abuses, and to help where we can.

I'd like to stop there and give time for questions.

MR. POLLACK: Thank you, Philo. I really appreciate being able to have you on this panel and hear from you on that.

I'd like to start the questioning because I think that there was an issue that Mr. Vahedi raised, but I'd love to hear him a little bit more fully on it because I think it's a question that a lot of Americans have that

often kind of preoccupies the question whenever it gets raised in the United States regarding Iranian human rights.

The question I'd like to put to you, Mr. Vahedi, and, Geneive, please feel free to echo as well, is the question, why is it that the regime is so sensitive on the issue of human rights? You know, a lot of Americans see this as a regime with complete control over its population that uses as much force as it needs to whenever it needs to, but you very consistently, and I think very powerfully, made the point that this is an area of great sensitivity for them. I think it's useful, I think it would be helpful for our audience here to understand why it is such a sensitive issue for them, why they are so nervous about this issue.

MR. VAHEDI: I believe I explained that the issue of human rights is not a sensitive issue for them anymore. The most sensitive issue for them is to holding their place as government. I believe if the government is even to a very small extent sensitive towards issues of human rights, they would do none of the stuff that I stated to you over here.

Over here they asked Mr. Ahmadinejad why are people being attacked, why is violence being used against them, and his response is constantly that they attacked the police, while in reality they have not been able to produce one bit of evidence or an example of such a thing occurring. I would like to repeat again, if the issue of human rights was important for a government, then it's well known a most popular Imam

for Friday prayers would not come and say in front of everybody that it's good that you executed people, and why did you not execute more?

MS. ABDO: I think that the question that we're trying to get to is, yes, they're -- maybe they don't feel threatened by the reaction to the brutality, but I think there's enough evidence for us to conclude that they are sensitive on this issue, particularly --

MR. POLLACK: To react to that question.

MS. ABDO: Right, exactly -- to international pressure and also to the kinds of response that had happened inside the country. I mean if you look on -- Mr. Vahedi mentioned this earlier -- if you look at the criticism that's come from the clerical establishment, I mean this is really significant. And I think that there is a problem for the regime now because they're being called -- their Islamic credentials are being called into question by the clerical establishment.

So the question now out there in Iran is, how can the current leadership then sort of claim that they are heading an Islamic state if you consider the human rights violations? And that's why I think it's a particular problem now because you have people within the clerical establishment calling the regime out on this kind of torture and human rights violations.

MR. POLLACK: Thank you to both of you. That was very helpful.

Okay, why don't we open it up? We've got a fair amount of time. Are there any questions out there? We'll start right down here. Do we have a microphones? Yes, if you can just wait for the microphone, and please do remember to ask a question rather than simply making a statement.

SPEAKER: Thank you so much for doing the talk and bringing to the attention what needs to be said after the election. One more than to add to Mr. Vahedi as a comment, they appointed a cleric in each school and university to overview all the curriculum, academic curriculum of students, and recently, two days ago at the *New York Chronicle*, they eliminated 12 disciplines in schools. So those students have no way to transfer.

And my question is if there is a way to communicate to the admission of universities around the world to be a little bit more flexible for Iranian students, make sometimes exceptions. They are brilliant students there, have no way out, they have no way to continue their studies, and if there is a possibility to look into not have them as refugee but as students when they come overseas, keeping the student's visa, because when they become refugee and want to continue their studies, it becomes -- I'm not sure if this is a question, but if there is a way to have them come here or anywhere else as students?

MR. POLLACK: Thank you. Let's put it in the form of a question. Herr LÖNING, Philo, are there things that we can be doing in

terms of helping Iranian students who very much would like to study abroad and are fearful of heading back?

MR. DIBBLE: I think -- obviously, I can't make any promises from this seat, but I think it's an interesting question. I think the repression in the universities and especially the cancellation of whole disciplines is something that we need to consider as we look at refugee admissions policies. And I'm happy to make a note of it and take it back.

MR. LÖNING: Well, obviously, I also can't make a promise from here, but what we do not look at is our policies generally, for student -- admission for student visa, not only for Iran but also for other countries because we believe it's extremely important to give students a possibility to come to Germany or to come to Western Europe and go to universities there, pick up some ideas, and go back to their countries. So we have a general policy of trying to get students to Germany. Please?

MS. FACIEM: My name is Dohi Faciem with the Democracy Coalition Project. There has been a serious lack of international leadership on the human rights situation in Iran over the past 15 months. The U.N. was raised as a very important forum in terms of addressing the situation, but the reality is over the last 15 months there's been no serious action at the Human Rights Council or at the General Assembly.

We've had the same resolution been adopted over the past three years, and human rights organizations have called a special rapporteur or special representative to deal with the human rights situation

in Iran to start documenting abuses in Iran, and this has not happened, and I'd be very curious to head from the representative of the U.S. government and German government as to why this has not happened and how you plan to move forward in the future to ensure that the nuclear issues is not interfering with the human rights situation. Thank you.

MR. DIBBLE: Thank you for the question. It's in fact two questions. I can't really speak to the tactical decisions that were taken in the Human Rights Council why we didn't pursue any special rapporteur or whether we're going to pursue one this time. I think it's absolutely worthwhile to ensure that Iran's human rights abuses are documented. I think there are numerous mechanisms within the U.N. system to do that, and I think certainly they could be pursued more energetically, and we intend to do that.

I think to the extent that we are able to work, sort to create a sort of critical mass of world opinion, it'll be easier to do that.

Second, I don't think the nuclear negotiations such as they have been over the past year, have interfered in any way with anybody's concern for or focus on the human rights question.

MR. LÖNING: And one, you have to see on the special rapporteur question is that Iran has a standing invitation to all this to have a special rapporteur, but didn't let any special rapporteur come into the country for five years now. So I know that several special rapporteurs are

trying to get into the country to look at their specific dramatic issue, which would be a progress already, but so far all was can do is call on the Iranian authorities to comply with their commitments.

They have a standing invitation to the special rapporteur, so they should at least -- and that would be a first, a major step already -- they should at least admit the ones that are requesting to visit their country and to have a report, and to deliver a report on the situation in the country. That would be a first step, and then we can see about the country rapporteur.

But it makes no sense to have a country rapporteur when not even the existing rapporteurs can visit the countries.

MR. VAHEDI: I would like to explain that the Iranian government is misusing a situation. They are taking advantage of the sensitivity of the world towards Iranian -- the Iranian nuclear program to also take into account the Iranian human rights situation. I believe that Western governments, other governments, have paid attention to the human rights situation in Iran, but it is not comparable to the amount of attention that is being given to the nuclear issue of Iranian government.

Seven months ago at Carnegie Institution next door, I mentioned that if the issue of human rights is solved in Iran, then the issue of the nuclear program will also be solved because if Iranian people are able to choose their true representative, and they are not people who would be following nuclear weapons.

MR. POLLACK: Okay, the gentleman right to your left.

MR. BASHIR: Thank you. Dwight Bashir with the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom. I want to just commend the Deputy Assistant Secretary Dibble for the announcement, the U.S. government's announcement last month on the human rights sanctions. My question has to do with this, though, and it's for the German commissioner.

While we appreciate that and identifying eight individuals of the government who were responsible for violations postelections. There are others who we've identified who we feel should be named and could be named for violations before the June elections, but obviously imposing the travel bans and asset freezes on these individuals is important for the U.S. to take the lead. Is the E.U., the German government, the French government, and so will they follow suit is my question really to you, and because it seems like on the human rights issue, if there are sanctions imposed on these individuals responsible, that would put a lot of attention on the human rights issues, keep it separate from the nuclear issue.

And I would like to ask Mr. Vahedi if he could respond, how would that be perceived if there were sanctions by the E.U. for human rights violations of specific individuals like Mr. Mortazavi and others? Thank you.

MR. LÖNING: Well, I will take this question back to Berlin. We will be looking at this question because generally I believe that it is the

only way that we can have, especially in human rights question, that we have sanctions that make sense and that really hurt, sanctions that are targeted at human rights violators. So I will take back this question. I cannot answer it from the panel, but I will take it back and I will look at it, because that is the kind of sanction which I personally believe in that was should use in different cases, not only in Iran.

But what we just have done, and I believe that is something, although it's not immediately connected to the human rights issue, we have just increased the pressure, the sanction pressures. And so what you see is that -- and that has been always criticized from the U.S., the German trade with Iran. You see the German trade going down, you see German major companies now retreating from Iran. Siemens has just done so. Other major companies are to do, to retreat from Iran. Small and medium enterprises are leaving Iran, so there is sanction pressure on Iran that the Iranians are feeling, and that's Germany is driving.

MR. VAHEDI: I believe that these recent sanctions, especially those on these eight individuals, are highly effective, but everybody in Iran knows that Mr. Mortazavi can do nothing without the support of Mr. Ahmadinejad and Mr. Jafari, who is head of the IRGC, cannot do anything without the support of the supreme leader.

And the question is, why don't the sanctions include the main leaders of the crimes that are being committed, namely Mr. Ahmadinejad and Mr. Karami himself.

MR. POLLACK: Let's go right down here.

SPEAKER: Thank you so much for all the remarks. I'll actually like to pursue this issue of sanctions further, and ask Mr. Vahedi about their effect. I think, if I recall a few days ago, a former advisor of Mr. Mousavi mentioned that he doesn't support, and I think by implication he meant Mr. Mousavi's camp do not support the sanctions.

Now, if I -- I'm not sure -- I wonder if he had identification on it. Did you just said that you would support the current sanctions that are mainly financial, and others from most of the accounts are hurting the common people. And if that's the case, how would you reconcile your view with Mr. Mousavi's advisor? And contingent on your answer, if that's the positive answer that you do support, I would like to ask Mr. Dibble, how would you react if Mr. Wahadi or, if in that case Mr. Mousavi's advisor doesn't support those sanctions, how would you reconcile U.S. policy which is basically, lately at least, pushing the sanctions more than the negotiation track? Thank you.

MR. VAHEDI: I clearly stated that I support a number of the sanctions, some of the sanctions, and I have reasons -- of course it is natural and it's well known -- that economic sanctions damage the people of Iran. I believe that if the sanctions are carried out well thought, intelligently, and if they target specific parts of the Iranian government clearly without a political -- it can result in the overfall or at least the giving up of the Iranian government.

When I say that it can force the Iranian government to give up, what I mean is that the Iranian government can given up opposing their own laws and to finally abide by the laws of Iran itself, which are currently being violated. Those who are worried about the damage of sanctions on the people of Iran should understand that the continuation of this government damages the people more. One example is that sanctions on petroleum are recently being mentioned, and they have not even been put into action. But the Iranian government has been rationing fuel for four years. This shows that the Iranian government does not have the capacity to run the country in a well manner.

MR. DIBBLE: Let me -- let's be precise about what we're talking about. The sanctions, the economic sanctions that have been implemented through the U.N. Security Council and which we have followed up on and the E.U. have followed up on, are aimed specifically at sharpening the choices for the Iranian leadership with respect to the nuclear question.

They have been complimented by, in our case and in other cases, a willingness on the part of the administration from the president on down, to reach out to the Iranian leadership and to engage with them on this question as well as others. If there has been no progress on that, it's not because we haven't tried. The offer is there. The offer has been repeated several times. We are waiting now for the Iranian leadership to recognize the choices in front of it and to make the appropriate one, the

one that is most, I think most beneficial for Iran's future and for the people of Iran.

There is some sign now that that may be happening. We've seen this before, and I hope this time it's true that there will be a meeting with the P5+1 and the Iranian negotiators. I don't know for sure, there is no confirmation, but this is, I think, a very helpful sign. And maybe we can get to where we need to be, which is an appropriate solution to the nuclear question and an end to the sanctions regime. That's what we're after.

MR. POLLACK: Okay, time is starting to draw down, and, of course, the number of questions is continuing to multiply. So I'm going to ask that we do two things: First I'm going to ask you questioners to please keep your questions brief; and, second, I think we're going to start grouping questions in the hope of getting more people.

So we'll start back there with Matt, Alex to your right, thank you, and then we'll take these three gentlemen right here.

SPEAKER: Hi, thank you. Mr. Vahedi, there's been quite a bit of talk here in the United States about the importance of keeping military action against Iran on the table talking about the possibility of U.S. military action. Could you -- you talk about does this -- what effect does this have on the democracy movement in Iran? Is there any measurable effect, good or bad?

MR. POLLACK: Please, sir?

SPEAKER: Yes, this is a question also for Mr. Vahedi but also Ms. Abdo. Is the opposition such as it is, gestating? Or is it only latent? In other words, is it organizing, or is it just there?

And, secondly, do the people of Iran even hear of our human rights criticisms, given the control they have of the meeting?

SPEAKER: A question regarding minority communities within Iran. You didn't address the situation. Since the revolution in '79, there had been a deterioration, especially the Ba'hais, the Jews, and other communities. What is the current situation, and has it become worse since the 2009 election?

SPEAKER: Mr. Dibble, you mentioned the democracy program funded a \$40 million FY 2010 and indicated this is the sixth year it's been in operation. But I'm wondering how this administration would try to differentiate the funding coming from this program, given it's been cast previously as a regime change fund, and whether sensitivities understood about not naming people, but how effective you can be if, in fact, groups receiving funds are not, you know, organically connected to civil society in Iran?

MR. POLLACK: Okay, why don't we take some answers to those and just go right down the row and start with Geneive, if you'd like to give some answers to --

MS. ABDO: To the gentleman's question about is the opposition there, I think that particularly after 2009 we have to sort of

change the terminology. I would say that what exists is a social movement, not a green movement, not even necessarily an opposition movement but what we're seeing that is evolving is different sectors of society that are now expressing grievances from labor unions to women's groups to -- and, yes, they're not organized. It's not a coherent movement, but I think that what has fundamentally changed in that there's an apparent social movement in Iran that is much more clearly defined now than it was before the summer of 2009.

MR. DIBBLE: Let me address the question on the democracy program. I'm sorry if I was not clear. It is our interest, of course, in that our participants in the program be able to reach back into Iran. We're not especially interested in organizing the diaspora, particularly, except to the extent that it can have an impact back home.

So the constraints that we're operation under require us to hold the training or the similar kinds of programs outside Iran for people who can travel back and forth, or who can link in by other means like the Internet or something like that. But our intent is that the benefits of that program be transferred in. I hope that answers the question.

MR. VAHEDI: Let me explain a little bit about the Green Movement. Overall, in a more general manner, the situation of opposition in Iran, I believe that even if one of the things that the Iranian government did to the opposition, not all of the things, if one of the things that

happened to the people of Iran happen to right here in Washington, people would stay at home and not come out for a long time.

The extent of alliance was so severe that it had an impact on every the every-day livelihood of the people. But if the Green Movement had died, as has been unfortunately stated by some governments and also by its trying to be projected by the government of Iran, the Iranian government had no -- there was no reason for it to put such pressure and to prevent the leaders of the Green Movement from any action. It has been mentioned many times during the last year by both Mr. Karroubi and Mr. Mousavi that if the government has the public support that it claims to have, they should allow us to hold one rally and issue the necessary licenses for it, but also regarding military attack, which was also not a question.

It is my opinion that the issue of a military attack is not serious. It is natural of a head of a government to say that all options are on the table when asked a question about it. Naturally, as an Iranian, it's out of the picture for me to support or be happy regarding a military attack on my country by any person, individual others.

A good example we have is Iraq in which good or bad, the reason behind it being good or bad, thousands of Iraqi civilians have been killed based upon the reports by American officials themselves. And this can be repeated in Iran. I believe if intelligent political and also economic

pressure is put upon the Iranian government, there will be no need for military attacks.

Your question regarding if the people of Iran know about the human rights actions that are being taken outside of Iran, yes, they are well aware of it. And it is actually used by Mr. Ahmadinejad to prove to the people that it is the foreign governments that are the main supporter of opposition in Iran. After Mr. Ahmadinejad's recent trip to New York, he lied and stated that many Americans state officials met him during his trip from in Iran, when he went to Iran, and he lied and stated that the deputy head for justice also met him. Of course, as far as I know, there was such a meeting to take place, but it was not in capacity of the deputy head of justice from 40 years ago, but he approached him as a lawyer or us, de facto lawyer for Sadon.

MR. POLLACK: Okay, let's see if we can just squeeze in a couple more questions here and get some quick responses. The gentleman over here.

SPEAKER: Yes. My name is (inaudible) from Iran Democratic Union. Mr. Dibble, you mentioned that we all know that the vast majority of the pressure put on the Iranian regime, the sanctions and other pressure, is based on the nuclear issue. And President Obama has stated many times, you know, it's a way for the, you know, the Iranian regime to change their calculus of the cost benefit. Does that mean that if the Iranian regime backs down on the nuclear issue, all pressure we put

off, so their involvement in Iraq, their involvement in with Hezbollah, with Hamas, and in this particular case their human rights violations will be forgiven and ignored once they give up their nuclear ambitions and comply by the West standards.

MR. POLLACK: And, you know, there's a lady just to your left, Alex.

MS. SALEKI: Shawna Saleki from Voice of America, Persian News Network. We do certainly hear about the encouraging the regime in Iran to comply with their own constitutional or Islamic law. Isn't it going to be turned to another slippery slope perhaps given the man excuse to haggle over that, whether they are doing it, you know, based on their own law or not. Or is it another strategy, perhaps, that, you know, may be encouraging them for now and then the next step.

MR. POLLACK: Thank you. And then the gentleman on the window sill, and we'll have it wrap there, I'm afraid.

MR. HADIB: Hi, My name is Ali Hadib, and I'm with Enterprise News Service, and I'm just -- I have a question for Ms. Abdo and a follow-up for Mr. LÖNING.

I'm just wondering if -- I haven't had a chance to read the report, unfortunately, but, Ms. Abdo, you said that the a human rights discussion could turn Iranian public opinion against the regime, and I'm wondering is that's an endorsement of regime change, or are we just

talking about Ahmadinejad or Khamenei, and what -- just a clarification on that.

And if we -- if the human rights dialogue is conflated with the nuclear issue in Iran, or as it's perceived in Iran, I'm wondering from Mr. LÖNING, how the two can be separated, if you could expand on how to separate the two negotiations. Thanks very much.

MR. POLLACK: A great trio of questions to end on. If I could ask for a brief wrap-up comments and responses to those questions from the panelists, Mr. Vahedi, why don't we start with you, and we'll go work our way back this way.

MR. VAHEDI: I think the issue that concerns me was a question about the Iranian law and holding the Iranian government accountable based upon Iranian law and, by doing so, to reduce the number of human rights violations in Iran. Based upon the Iranian constitution, public assembly is permitted and free, and somebody who is arrested can only be held for 24 hours before he is -- if there is nothing, no charges being held against him after 24 hours, he or she must be released.

MR. LÖNING: Two questions on whether we would give up pressure if Iran gives up the nuclear -- gives in on the nuclear issue, whether we can separate nuclear and human rights. I mean, this is -- we always have a -- obviously, we have a holistic approach to any kind of bilateral relation we have. What I was trying to say is, first of all, to give

you an answer, I mean why should we give up pressure on human rights if the Iranian regime gives in on the nuclear issue? I mean there is no reason to do that, and there's also no reason to believe that, because we put pressure on other governments in human rights issues so -- where we don't have a nuclear issue -- so we do that. We do that with the Chinese, we do that with Russia, with many other governments.

We have some issues with the U.S. and human rights question, and we address them. So although we don't have a nuclear issue with the U.S.

And so what I believe is that, of course, we do have a holistic approach to what's Iran which contains nuclear, it contains human rights. It also contains other questions: It contains the question of their role in the region on issues on Afghanistan and, you know, we have more questions with the Iranians to deal with. But what I'm trying to say is that we should not forget the human rights question.

And you were talking about -- someone was talking about missing leadership in human rights questions over the last 15 months, and that is what I was trying to say is that we must address the human rights question whether there's a nuclear issue or whether there is not a nuclear issue. And Iran is one of the worse human rights violators we have right now, and we have to address that very, very clearly whether we have a nuclear issue or not. That was what I was trying to say.

MR. DIBBLE: I will simply say that I agree entirely that if the nuclear issue is resolved, if Iran meets its obligations, then the sanctions that are specifically linked to that will be lifted, yes.

But as Mr. LÖNING has said, we have other issues with Iran as we have other issues with other countries, including human rights, but not just human rights, and those will continue to be pursued whether the nuclear issue is resolved or not.

MS. ABDO: To the gentleman's question in the back, there is enough research that's being conducted in Iran now. There's actually an American scholar at Johns Hopkins University who's done extensive research for a dissertation on how conservative, what we would sort of define as conservative, public opinion is shifting away from the hard-liners within the regime, not just Ahmadinejad and Khamenei, but the way that the government has dealt with the demonstrations and with the postelection events that have occurred, and he's done a lot of research in conservative areas to show that public opinion can turn on the human rights issue.

There are also scholars at Tehran University conducting similar research, so that's what I was referring to. And I think also to sort of end our great discussion today on a more positive note, President Ahmadinejad is not going to be in power forever, and I think that we know from just sort of reading the tea leaves in Iran that, that Supreme Leader Khamenei is distancing himself from Ahmadinejad and that preparations

are already underway for his successor that is a likely to be a more moderate conservative that the West can deal with than Ahmadinejad, perhaps. Thank you.

MR. POLLACK: Please join me in thanking our important organizations, National Security Network, and The Century Foundation. Read the report on The Century Foundation website, and please join me in thanking our superb panel. (Applause)

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