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# **Subcommittee on International Human Rights of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development**

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**EVIDENCE**

**Tuesday, April 27, 2010**

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**Chair**

**Mr. Scott Reid**



## Subcommittee on International Human Rights of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development

Tuesday, April 27, 2010

•(1310)

[Translation]

**The Chair (Mr. Scott Reid (Lanark—Frontenac—Lennox and Addington, CPC)):** Order.

This is the 10<sup>th</sup> meeting of the Subcommittee on International Human Rights of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development. Today is April 27, 2010.

[English]

We have a distinguished guest with us here today, Dr. Shirin Ebadi, who is attending this committee for the second time. She was here over a year ago, at our first hearing. That led to the subcommittee's report on Iran, which is now being sent off to our parent committee, the foreign affairs committee. We are seeking rapid agreement from them so that the report can be passed on to the House of Commons.

I want to go through a few housekeeping matters before we ask Dr. Ebadi to begin.

First of all, I want to alert everybody to the fact that Dr. Ebadi has with her a translator. Translation is being done from both English and French into Farsi, and the reverse. This will slow things down a little bit, and that will probably lead to our having only one round of questions per party, with adjustments to the time to allow for full use of the time.

I also want to mention a couple of other things. We have a schedule of meetings that I don't want to discuss today, but you will have it in your hands. It has been sent to your offices. I'd like members to be aware of that and to take a look at it. It relates to our future hearings on all the subjects we're looking at between now and June. If you have comments, please bring them back to me or the clerk off-line.

Dr. Ebadi has been travelling across the country. She met with audiences in Vancouver and Toronto. She has been hosted by Mr. John Weston, whom I have invited to sit with us, although I understand he won't be asking any questions. At 6:30 this evening she will be giving a public address in the Booth Building at the press gallery, so anybody who wants to attend is free to do so.

I also want to alert members to the fact that today's meeting is televised, so of course you'll all want to be on your best behaviour.

With those things taken care of, the appropriate thing to do is to turn the floor over to Dr. Ebadi.

Dr. Ebadi, welcome. Please begin whenever you feel comfortable doing so.

**Dr. Shirin Ebadi (Iranian Lawyer, As an Individual) (Interpretation):** I'm very happy to be here today to be able to speak to Parliament's human rights division.

Very briefly, I would like to give a report of the violations of human rights in Iran today.

Unfortunately, the courts in Iran lose their power day by day. Many of the people accused in prison have said that the interrogators had decided their fate and what their sentence should be, and that was approved by the court. Also, in the cases for which I am their lawyer, I have never witnessed justice.

For instance, Zahra Kazemi's case has been just sitting for more than two years and nothing has been done with it. Or take the case of leaders of Baha'i in Iran who have been in prison for over two years; nothing has been done for them. The court can very easily accept bail and release the prisoners by bail, and the request has been submitted several times, but it has never been accepted.

What the courts are doing specifically towards the political accused is totally against our laws. As a lawyer, I have repeatedly mentioned to the courts that they should not go beyond the law, but they have never paid attention.

During the past ten months, numerous people have gone to jail simply because they had opposed the results of the election. In prison, they don't have any kind of rights—even less than the regular criminals like murderers and so forth. Right now several political prisoners are on hunger strikes because of their situation.

•(1315)

In Iran, several bad laws were passed after the revolution, with punishments such as stoning, amputation of limbs, and crucifixion. Unfortunately, they are actually being done. Last month they amputated the leg and arm of one person who was accused of robbery. In 2009 Iran had the highest number of executions of minors. Last year we had the highest number of executions of adults, after China.

According to the report of Reporters Without Borders, Iran has the highest number of journalists in prison. Not only does government control radio and TV; they also prevent Persian-speaking media outside the country from accessing the people by distorting satellite signals.

The conditions of advocates for human rights in Iran are very bad. Many of them are in prisons. I have a client by the name of Mr. Kaboudvand who was sentenced to five years in prison because he started up an NGO. The NGO I founded a year and a half ago was closed down by the government, which was against the law of the country. We complained, but nobody paid attention to that complaint.

I'll stop my comments with thanks for listening to me patiently. I'll answer any questions.

• (1320)

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, Dr. Ebadi.

We'll start with the Liberals. We can probably get away with one 10-minute round for each of the parties. That means we'll go slightly past 2 p.m. I'm assuming there will be no problem with that.

Mr. Silva.

**Mr. Mario Silva (Davenport, Lib.):** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I want to thank and welcome Dr. Ebadi for coming back here to our committee. It's a great honour for all of us.

We have been studying for over a year the situation of human rights in Iran, and we have a report that we hope will be made public soon. Certainly what we've heard from testimonies of witnesses throughout the last year have been extremely disturbing, specifically, as you mentioned, the execution of minors. Iran does have one of the highest records in terms of executions of both minors and adults. The death penalty is still very widely used there. There's the imprisonment of journalists, as you mentioned, and also what has taken place since the last presidential election where there's been a series of arrests, particularly of young people, protesters, but also of opposition leaders.

I want to know if you can give us a perspective. Maybe you can help us, both on the issue of prisoners and if you know of the number of political prisoners there might be. In terms of the parliamentary legislature that's taking place, are there any allies that you can reach out to that maybe would also help out, or have all those voices of dissent all been silenced since the last election?

**Dr. Shirin Ebadi (Interpretation):** One of the problems we have in Iran is that the government does not announce whom they have arrested. They always threaten the families—that they should not announce it, that they should not go to lawyers, that they should not tell anybody that their children have been arrested.

This has caused the fact that during the last 30 years, the exact number of political prisoners has always been in doubt. According to the official report of the government, since the June 12, 2009, election, 6,000 people have been arrested. But of course the actual number is much higher.

Some of these detainees, after paying very high bail, have been released. They have come out of prison, but because of their bail, they cannot do anything; the bail has been confiscated. Among the people who have been in prison, several have been killed under torture. A number have claimed that they were sexually assaulted. Some have been tried, and have unfortunately been sentenced to

long prison terms. Some have been sentenced to death, and four of them have already been executed.

What was the other question?

• (1325)

**Mr. Mario Silva:** It was on the issue of whether there is any opposition support within the legislature of Parliament that we could also work with, and also speaking on the issue of human rights, specifically in relation to detention of political prisoners.

**Dr. Shirin Ebadi (Interpretation):** In fact, right now in Iran there are two kinds of activities. One is those people who are against the government. In fact a great number of people are against the government. The other struggle is between the people in the government.

Because of the things that have happened, there is in fact dissension among the people in the government. Wiser people believe that eventually this kind of violence will cause the downfall of the government. In this group, I can mention Hashemi Rafsanjani. The other group believes that the people who are against the government should be totally demolished as soon as possible.

I can testify that the green movement is becoming stronger day by day.

• (1330)

**Mr. Mario Silva:** Do I have any more time?

**The Chair:** You do, Mr. Silva. There is one minute left.

**Mr. Mario Silva:** I believe you were against sanctions toward Iran, the last time you were here. I'm wondering, given what's taken place in the last little while, the political imprisonments and the fraudulent election that's taken place, would you now reconsider? Are you still of the belief that sanctions should not be applied against Iran?

**Dr. Shirin Ebadi (Interpretation):** I still am against military attack and economical sanctions against Iran, because that will cause the situation of the people to be worse. That would allow the government, under the excuse of national security, to oppress the people even more. But the trade that would cause the strengthening of the government in its suppression of people should not happen. Therefore, we are against any sale of armaments to Iran. As well, Nokia Siemens corporation, for example, has sold software to Iran, and through that they are controlling all the mobile phones and SMS. Some of my clients right now are in prison because of that.

We are against this kind of trade.

**Mr. Mario Silva:** Thank you very much.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Silva.

We now move to our next questioner, Mr. Dorion.

*Commencez, s'il vous plaît.*

[Translation]

**Mr. Jean Dorion (Longueuil—Pierre-Boucher, BQ):** Ms. Ebadi, I would like to start with a quick question to you. We are aware of the highly authoritarian nature of the current regime in Iran. The government of Iran doubtless has ways of preventing you from travelling and providing testimony as you are doing here today.

How do you explain the fact that you are allowed to speak overseas as well as being able to enter and leave Iran?

[English]

**Dr. Shirin Ebadi (Interpretation):** A day before the election, I went to Spain to participate in a three-day seminar. On the fourth day, as I was prepared to go back to Iran, my country was not the same one that I had left. They had expelled all the foreign journalists and they had imprisoned a lot of the Iranian journalists. Some of my colleagues had been arrested and the rest were in hiding. Several people had been killed on the streets. My colleagues asked that instead of going back to Iran, I go to the United Nations and speak of what had happened.

During this time I met Mr. Ban Ki-moon twice, and I had a telephone conversation with him once. I have gone to the High Commissioner for Human Rights several times and have spoken with Mrs. Pillay. I have gone to the European Union several times.

Because of all of this, the government has confiscated all of my and my husband's possessions. My husband was imprisoned for several days and right now he's not allowed to leave the country. My sister is a university professor and has never had any political or social activities. In order to silence her, they arrested her and she was imprisoned for three weeks. The reason they released her after three weeks was that she had a heart problem and they were worried that she might die in prison. Continuously they are bothering my friends, my relatives, and my family.

Continuously I am threatened that wherever in the world I am, eventually they will reach me and kill me. You have to keep in mind that I have won the Nobel Peace Prize and there are a lot of cameras on me. When they dare to do this to me, you can imagine what they can do to ordinary people. Therefore, contrary to what you might think, the Iranian government is not very democratic and they are not kind to people.

•(1335)

[Translation]

**Mr. Jean Dorion:** Ms. Ebadi, I would like to tell you how much we admire the courage you have shown in providing us with this testimony, given the extremely difficult situation that you and your loved ones are in.

My second question is more general. We know that the government of Iran that preceded the current government, the government of the Shah, that is, was very pro-west and even westernizing. Some people even suggest that the fall of that government was caused by its excessive westernization; hence, a reaction against the west and the imposition of a certain view of Islam.

Could you give us a few comments about your people, so that we can see the relationship between Islam and the way in which Iranian society should work?

[English]

**Dr. Shirin Ebadi (Interpretation):** As you mentioned, in the previous regime Iran had a great dependency on the United States. The CIA did a coup d'état and overthrew our national leader, Dr. Mosaddegh. For this reason the people of Iran, during the time of the Shah, were not agreeable to the United States. But this is no reason

that, in the name of Islam, the government should oppress people. The government has misused or taken advantage of the name of Islam, to the extent that some of the high-ranking clergy in Iran are against what the government is doing. One of the high-ranking spiritual leaders of Iran who, unfortunately, passed away a few months ago, announced that this government is neither Islamic nor republic. Right now, a lot of the high-ranking officials or high-ranking religious leaders are against it. Unfortunately, they do not have any power and you do not hear them.

As a Muslim, as a practising Muslim, I can witness that these people are taking advantage of the name of Islam.

•(1340)

[Translation]

**Mr. Jean Dorion:** Thank you, Ms. Ebadi.

[English]

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Mr. Marston, please.

**Mr. Wayne Marston (Hamilton East—Stoney Creek, NDP):**

Dr. Ebadi, I want to welcome you back here and say to you that this committee had been studying Iran for a year, and last summer, as we were about to recess, when the demonstrations were starting, we chose to pause: our report would not have been complete unless we addressed the changes that appeared to be happening. We also understood as a committee that the repression would probably escalate.

Personally, I understood from media reports that your office was closed. We were very concerned, each of us here, about the ramifications for you. We know that on the world stage you have presented a case for the Iranian people in a way that has captured the interest of governments and people as a whole.

I'm pleased today to hear that you're optimistic about the green movement growing, and I agree with you. I spent time in Saudi Arabia in the 1970s—six months, in fact—and returned to Canada. Over the period of that 30 years, I have come to know a number of Muslims, and the practice that I see in their lives does not compare to the practices that we're hearing about in Iran from the government quarters.

One of the things that has seized this committee is Ahmadinejad's call for the genocide against Israel. Of course, some believe that, like a magician, he's using that to distract away from what he does to his own people, and others are very concerned that there's a reality that he's seeking nuclear weapons with the intent to use them.

What would be the reaction of the people on the ground, the members of the green movement, to this call to genocide?

•(1345)

**Dr. Shirin Ebadi (Interpretation):** By listening to the slogans of people, we can understand what they think. From the beginning of the revolution, the slogan of the government in any gathering was "Death to America! Death to Israel!", and people repeated that. After the presidential election, every time the government said through loudspeakers, "Death to America! Death to Israel!", the people immediately said, "Death to China! Death to Russia!"

Why “Death to Russia”? Because Russia is building the atomic energy source in Bushehr and because they support Iran in the United Nations very much.

In fact, by saying, “Death to Russia”, people are trying to say that they do not agree with the Russian atomic energy.

And why “Death to China”? Because China is the greatest economic partner to Iran and the great supporter of Iran in the United Nations.

So if you want to understand what the people think, you can analyze these slogans.

**Mr. Wayne Marston:** Listening to your testimony today, compared to your last visit here, you've talked about amputation, stoning, and even crucifixion. You spoke about the high execution rates of both youth and adults.

Some of those things you have spoken about before, but I'm getting kind of a mixed signal. On the one hand you speak about the green movement growing; on the other hand we hear what sounds like further and greater repression and suppression of the people of Iran.

Compared to the last time you sat before us, I tend to read optimism—it's my nature—and hopefully you're more optimistic, even though things sound graver.

**Dr. Shirin Ebadi (Interpretation):** I must say that the violation of human rights and the suppression of the people have caused this movement. If people were happy with the situation, they would not take to the streets and demonstrate. As the violence of the government increases, the dissatisfaction of people will increase. Do you think somebody whose child has been killed will forget that? Therefore, the green movement is strengthening day by day.

I know it will be victorious one day. As to when and how, neither I nor anybody else can make any assumptions about that.

There are several things that are very important in this—for example, the international price of oil, the political conditions of Iraq and Afghanistan, the relationship between Iran and the U.S., atomic energy, and Iran's relationship with Russia and China. All of these can have an effect on shortening or lengthening the process of democracy in Iran.

• (1350)

**Mr. Wayne Marston:** I know my time must be nearly up, Mr. Chair.

**The Chair:** You have 30 seconds.

**Mr. Wayne Marston:** Well, that's perfect.

I just want to thank you, Dr. Ebadi, for your courage in coming here today. I want to express my appreciation, and I'm sure that of the rest of the committee, for informing this committee as we do this study on Iran. The value of having this kind of direct testimony can't be measured in terms of our determination of what the outcome of our report should be.

I salute your courage, Madam.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much.

Now, for a final round of questioning, we'll go to Mr. Sweet.

**Mr. David Sweet (Ancaster—Dundas—Flamborough—Westdale, CPC):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The 39th Parliament was the last time Ms. Ebadi was here. I want to welcome her back.

I will start where my colleague Mr. Marston left off. That is, on behalf of the Baha'i community in Canada, and of course all those, including Zahra Kazemi's family, who witnessed what you tried to do there, just a very heartfelt thank you.

You mentioned that the authorities, the Iranian regime, had shut down the NGO you led. It's my understanding that you actually started two: the Society for Protecting the Rights of the Child, and Defenders of Human Rights Center.

Did they bring to an end the operation of both of those NGOs?

**Dr. Shirin Ebadi (Interpretation):** With the money from my Nobel Prize, I purchased an apartment, furnished it, and gave it to two of the NGOs that were founded. One was the Defenders of Human Rights Center; I and a number of other lawyers were working on human rights issues. The other part of the apartment belonged to another NGO against land mines; we helped the people who were injured by land mines.

The police illegally confiscated the apartment. Right now, it's in the hands of the government. Therefore the offices of both NGOs were closed down. Of course we continue our efforts, but it has been a lot more difficult for us to work.

In the meantime, I would like to give a report about the land mines in Iran. For eight years, Iran was at war with Iraq. The war has been over for 20 years, but more than three million hectares of land have land mines. On average, two people every day are either killed or injured by land mines. Unfortunately, the speed of cleaning the land mines in Iran is very slow. If it goes at this speed, it will take 50 years for the country to be cleaned of the land mines.

At the same time, there's not enough support for the people who are injured by the land mines. I had founded the only NGO in Iran for land mines, because the Government of Iran had prevented the news, and even people in Iran were not aware of the fact that there were land mines in some parts of their country. Instead of admiring what I was doing, or appreciating the services we were providing, they told us we were trying to make them look bad.

• (1355)

**Mr. David Sweet:** You know, it's just disastrous that a regime would not only victimize its own people, but then would be irresponsible and not actually remove a great threat to them as well, such as land mines.

Madam Ebadi, you had mentioned that about 6,000 had been incarcerated since the election, and you said that the number was probably much higher. We know of this force called the Basij that infiltrates protests and harms Iranians who try to voice their opinion against the regime.

Do you have any idea about how many people have been beaten and critically injured because of the Basij?

**Dr. Shirin Ebadi (Interpretation):** Regrettably, I do not have the exact number, because if anybody claims that they were beaten, that shows that they were participating in the demonstration; therefore, the government will go after them.

Even the exact number of those who were killed is not known, because the government has threatened the families by saying that they do not have the right to say what happened to their children and they should say their kids were killed in a car accident.

Recently they were able to find a few people who were prepared to testify that their children were killed in the demonstrations. I would like to talk about one of the people killed in this regard, a young girl by the name of Neda. You have most probably seen the video of her killing.

When Neda was killed, people arrested the person who killed her, because they thought if they took him to the police station, most probably he would be released and they would be arrested themselves.

Some suggested that they should beat him up because of the crime he had committed, but a few women who were there opposed that suggestion, and said, "We are not like them: we can only get all his identification documents and release him."

According to the ID cards they got from him, he was a member of the Basij. They announced the identity of the person on the Internet. They even found out his address; people who knew him knew his address.

There were at least ten witnesses who saw it, and who testified that they saw that person shoot and kill Neda. Also, it was all recorded on film.

● (1400)

What do you think the Government of Iran did in this case? They announced that the doctor who had helped her was the murderer—a spy from the United Kingdom who had come to kill Neda and go back.

When I say that the courts have lost their power, this is what I mean. We have film and we have witnesses to show who killed this girl and where he lives, but the government claims that the United Kingdom had a plan and that there was a conspiracy to kill her.

● (1405)

**Mr. David Sweet:** I have no further questions, but my colleague has a question, Mr. Chairman, if there is time.

**The Chair:** We're actually out of time, but if there is the consent of the committee, we can have one more question.

Is there consent to allow Mr. Hiebert to ask a question?

**Some hon. members:** Agreed.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Mr. Hiebert, please go ahead.

**Mr. Russ Hiebert (South Surrey—White Rock—Cloverdale, CPC):** Thank you, Dr. Ebadi.

I have one question: what do you think would be the most effective response by Canada to the human rights violations?

**Dr. Shirin Ebadi (Interpretation):** Canada has made a very positive response so far. I am talking about the resolutions that Canada has brought forth in the United Nations General Assembly. For several years these resolutions have been passed.

Although these resolutions do not have any executive power and don't have any sanctions, the important thing is that the claims of people have been proven in an international community. The Government of Iran knows that it cannot lie very easily.

**The Chair:** Yes, Mr. Sweet.

**Mr. David Sweet:** We would be remiss if we didn't thank Mr. Weston for looking after Madam Ebadi's trip. He was the one who brought to my attention that she'd be here; and when I brought the motion...and he's done all kinds of work.

He was also the one who moved the motion in the House of Commons regarding human rights for Iran. I just thought it would be good if the committee thanked him for that.

**The Chair:** That is duly noted.

Before we adjourn, I'll ask Dr. Ebadi if she has any final comments to make.

**Dr. Shirin Ebadi (Interpretation):** I would like to thank you for your empathy for the people of Iran, and also for the cooperation of John with the Iranian community. As you know, a lot of Iranians, especially after the revolution, have come to Canada.

This is a good time for the Government of Canada and the Iranian community to have a liaison, and John has done a lot of really useful activities in the limited time he has been doing this. There has always been a very good relationship between the Iranian people and the Canadian people.

Again, I would like to thank you for your empathy.

● (1410)

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, Dr. Ebadi.

Thank you to all the members for the extra time.

**Mr. David Sweet:** Mr. Chair, I know that we're over time. I will be quick. I understand that you'll be sending the report on Iran to the mother committee of foreign affairs and international trade.

I'm wondering if we might consider annexing, not part of the report, but the testimony, to the actual report we did on Iran and human rights.

**The Chair:** Is there a willingness to append this testimony?

**Some hon. members:** Agreed.

**The Chair:** All right.

Then we'll take your advice and do just that. Thank you, Mr. Sweet.

We are adjourned. Thank you.





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