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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, March 27, 2012**

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**Chair**

**Mr. Scott Reid**



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

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• (1305)

[Translation]

**The Chair (Mr. Scott Reid (Lanark—Frontenac—Lennox and Addington, CPC)):** This is the Subcommittee on International Human Rights of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development. It is March 27, 2012, and we are holding our 29th hearing.

[English]

Today we are continuing our hearings into the human rights situation in Iran. This is an issue that has seized this committee in the past, and to which we unfortunately find it necessary to return.

Joining us today from Brussels is Dr. Ottolenghi, who is the senior fellow at the Foundation for the Defense of Democracies.

Doctor, you've been with us before, so you know how this works. We invite you to begin your remarks. They will be followed by responses and questions from the committee. Please feel free to begin at any time.

**Dr. Emanuele Ottolenghi (Senior Fellow, Foundation for Defense of Democracies):** Thank you for giving me the opportunity to appear before you today and to address a subject that, in my view, deserves more attention than it currently receives in the international debate over Iran.

For a number of years now, the international community has understandably sought to persuade the Islamic Republic of Iran to comply with its international obligations under the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty.

Within the context of these negotiations, the UN Security Council has adopted six chapter 7 resolutions condemning Iran's refusal to abide by its responsibilities under the treaty, including four resolutions introducing sanctions against the regime's proliferating efforts and a number of its senior military leaders and nuclear scientists. UN sanctions have been gradually expanded by western countries, with significant legislation passed by the United States, the European Union, Australia, Canada, Japan, South Korea, and others. These measures have targeted the Iranian energy sector, Iran's oil and petrochemical exports, Iran's shipping and banking sectors, and Iran's Revolutionary Guards, the entity within the regime responsible for Iran's proliferating efforts.

Since the Islamic Republic unleashed a new wave of repression against its internal opposition following the fraudulent 2009 presidential elections, western countries have also begun to target

Iran's regime on account of its human rights violations. These measures have focused mainly on designating individuals involved in the repression, imposing travel bans on them, and freezing their assets abroad. Some countries, however, have been reluctant to make their human rights agenda beyond these measures an integral part of the strategy used to confront Iran.

Underlying this reluctance is the conviction voiced privately by some western diplomats that Iran needs reassurances that sanctions and negotiations over Iran's nuclear program are not aimed at toppling the regime, in order to be persuaded to negotiate in good faith. But Iranian opposition figures have criticized this approach. For example, Iran's dissident film-maker Mohsen Makhmalbaf was quoted by *Time Magazine* in November 2009 as having said during a visit to Washington, D.C., that "the West should not trample on the green movement by fully embracing Iran's regime if it eventually reverses course on nuclear talks".

More than two years later, the challenge for western democracy seeking to curb Iran's nuclear ambitions remains the same, how to balance the desire to reach an agreement with the regime over its nuclear ambitions with the western commitment to universal human rights.

In order to address this dilemma, one must start from the basic facts of Iran's repressive regime and its abysmal human rights record. According to Freedom House, Iran remains a deeply repressive political system. Its 2011 freedom score, both on political freedoms and civil liberties, was six on a scale of one to seven, where one is the freest and seven the least free. Iran fared better than only a handful of countries, including North Korea, Saudi Arabia, Syria, and the Sudan.

According to Freedom House reports,

Opposition politicians and party groupings have faced especially harsh repression since the 2009 presidential election, with many leaders—including former lawmakers and cabinet ministers—facing arrest, prison sentences, and lengthy bans on political activity.

Restrictions on political freedom in Iran are pervasive, with limitations on freedom of expression, bans on media coverage for specific topics or events, widespread monitoring of Internet and telephone communications, jamming of foreign Farsi broadcasts, and a strict control on local media output, including the banning of hundreds of publications since the 2005 election of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad as the president of the Islamic Republic. In 2010 Iran held the world record in the number of jailed journalists, with 37 behind bars, according to Freedom House.

Iran restricts freedom of religion as well. While some religious minorities are recognized and granted limited freedom to worship without interference, there are important restrictions in place. Non-Muslims are barred from missionary work, although their communities are subject to constant pressure to embrace Islam. Conversion from Islam is punishable by death in Iran. Recognized religious minorities are denied equal political rights. They can only be represented by a set number of MPs inside the Majlis, but do not participate in the elections as equals.

Other groups, meanwhile, suffer varying degrees of discrimination and persecution. Sunni Iranians are discriminated in practice, for example. Bahá'í and Sufi Muslims are actively persecuted. The Bahá'í community particularly is very vulnerable. Their leadership has been rounded up and jailed in a political trial on trumped-up charges of espionage. Students are denied access to public education. Their shrines have been subject to growing attacks in recent years.

The house of Bab, one of the key figures in the Baha'i faith, was razed to the ground by the Islamic Republic as early as 1981. Cemeteries were desecrated over the years, and the house of the father of the Baha'ullah, the founder of the Baha'i faith, was destroyed in June 2004.

The systematic destruction of the Baha'i cultural heritage in Iran is continuing. This community of 300,000 people is increasingly under pressure, and has no real means to redress its grievances at home.

A similar fate has befallen ethnic minorities inside Iran, nearly half the country's population. The regime has aggressively pursued its war against Jundallah in Iranian Baluchistan. It has used military force against Kurdish separatists, while jailing and persecuting leaders and activists of the non-violent Democratic Party of Iranian Kurdistan, whose late leaders were murdered by Iranian assassins in Vienna in 1989 and Berlin in 1992.

Iranian Arab activists and leaders in Kurdistan were targeted by arbitrary arrests in late 2011. Azeris, meanwhile, are still denied the right to conduct education in their language.

Meanwhile, the regime continues to come after civil rights, punishing dissidents, NGOs, activists, and human rights lawyers for their attempts to mitigate the regime's grip on individual freedom. It also silences dissent through proxy harassment by intimidating and persecuting relatives of dissidents as a way to silence criticism.

Cultural life is also targeted. Film productions and literary works are subjected to severe censorship. Foreign books and other cultural artifacts are subject to strict controls that sometimes lead to comical situations, such as the banning of Barbie doll imports and, more recently, the dolls of the American satirical cartoon sitcom *The Simpsons*.

It is understandable that human rights would not be an integral part of international efforts to persuade Iran to stop its quest for nuclear weapons. After all, compliance with the NPT has nothing to do with the regime's nature as an NPT signatory. Besides, key countries in the international community's efforts to curb Iran's nuclear ambitions include member states of the UN like China and Russia, whose records on human rights are not much better than Iran's.

Regardless, the nature of the Iranian regime has something to do with the severity of the threat that a nuclear Iran would pose to the regional order. A regime that so ruthlessly brutalizes its own citizens, while pursuing hegemonic nuclear and regional ambitions, should not be trusted to grow responsible once it acquires nuclear weapons.

Secondly, Iran is believed to seek nuclear weapons to enhance the chances for the regime to survive. A policy designed to threaten its internal stability would be expedient, because it would create the impression that unless Iran negotiates a way out of its nuclear program, the west will actively try to depose the regime. It would also be principled. Given that western countries were able to engage the Soviet Union while promoting the plight of its dissidents during the Cold War, it should be possible to do both when it comes to Iran as well.

What can be done? Human rights lend themselves to higher-ground diplomacy. Largely symbolic measures will not overthrow the regime, but will no doubt embarrass Tehran at a time when its rulers feel vulnerable.

Here, Canada's leadership deserves credit. Your decision to restrict engagement with Iran to a limited number of subjects that are human rights-related is remarkable. Canada is not the only country that saw its citizens brutally assaulted in prison, tortured, and killed by this regime on account of their Iranian origins. Other countries should look to your principled decision as an example to emulate and as evidence that a government can pursue diplomacy on the nuclear file and stand up for its own principles on human rights.

Symbolic measures, of course, when presented to the public in conjunction with the reasons for their implementation, may also have an adverse, if indirect, effect on trade, as increased exposure of Iran's dismal behaviour discourages business from investing in a highly volatile environment, especially if there are reputational risks added.

Human rights lend themselves to such higher-ground diplomacy. Criticizing the regime openly would not be useless if it created an embarrassment for Tehran, focused public attention on Tehran's true nature, and helped isolate Iran on the international stage.

For all these reasons, many western countries—Canada first—should consider adopting a number of symbolic measures. I'd be happy to elaborate on these in the Q and A period. If I read out the list of all my suggestions, I think I would take up our entire time.

• (1310)

Let me add one last point, about the value of human rights sanctions, beyond the symbolic.

Western countries should also take a look at legislation adopted to impose sanctions against egregious violators of human rights, like the Republic of Myanmar under the military junta. The European Union, in this sense, provides a useful precedent that should be contemplated by countries like Canada as they develop their own tools to sanction human rights violations by the Iranian regime.

With regard to Myanmar, the EU adopted a council regulation in May 2006, which included a new range of restrictions. I quote from the legislation:

...a ban on technical assistance, financing and financial assistance related to military activities, a ban on the export of equipment which might be used for internal repression, the freezing of funds and economic resources of members of the Government of Burma/Myanmar and of any natural or legal persons, entities or bodies associated with them, and a prohibition on making financial loans or credits available to, and on acquiring or extending a participation in, Burmese state-owned companies.

The EU has denied any financial advantage to commercial organizations and individuals involved in the repressive acts of the regime, even if the specified items bore no immediate relation to human rights abuses and denial of freedom in Myanmar. Though companies and governments might object to such a blanket restriction in the case of Iran, these measures could be contemplated for other areas, such as Iran's refineries, metallurgy sectors, automotive industries, and so on.

Most Iranian companies involved in these fields, it bears noting, are owned by the state, if not altogether by the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps.

There are, then, compelling reasons to impose sweeping trade restrictions on a country whose record of human rights abuses is egregious, and there is ample justification for applying the Myanmar precedent to Iran.

The EU regulation I just mentioned states that the restrictive measures in this regulation "are instrumental in promoting respect for fundamental human rights and thus serve the purpose of protecting public morals". The new restrictive measures target sectors that provide sources of revenue for the military regime of Burma/Myanmar, and target practices that are incompatible with the European Union principle.

I think that—and this is really my last point—considering the targeting of companies that provide profit and revenue to the state and to the IRGC, regardless of whether they're linked to proliferating efforts, should be an integral part of the strategy adopted by western countries to confront Iran.

It is a model worth expanding, particularly as so much of the Iranian economy is controlled by the IRGC, and so much of the activities of the IRGC have to do with promoting and advancing proliferating efforts while ensuring that the regime maintains a tight grip on ordinary Iranians and their freedoms.

Thank you.

• (1315)

**The Chair:** Thank you, Dr. Ottolenghi.

We begin our questioning with Mr. Sweet.

Given the amount of time we have, I think we can get away with six minutes each. Actually, I should be careful here. We may have a motion at the end of the committee.

Professor Cotler, are you going to be moving your motion at the end of the meeting?

**Hon. Irwin Cotler (Mount Royal, Lib.):** Yes.

**The Chair:** Okay, so let's make it five minutes each to make sure we can fit things in.

Mr. Sweet, you're up.

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

Dr. Ottolenghi, thank you very much for your testimony. I just want to ask you one question, to begin, that's outside of your testimony.

How much support is the Iranian regime giving to Bashar al-Assad right at the moment? Estimates are that up to 10,000 people are dead in Syria. Is the common citizen of Iran aware of the regime's support for the Syrian regime?

**Dr. Emanuele Ottolenghi:** The Iranian regime looks to Syria as one of its key strategic assets. It will not allow the regime of Bashar al-Assad to fall without a fight. While it is difficult to ascertain the extent of direct Iranian involvement in the repression inside Syria, there are conclusive open source reports that the Iranian regime has been providing weaponry, financing, training, and perhaps boots on the ground through the participation of Hezbollah, which is an Iranian proxy, and possibly other forces inside Syria. The involvement of the Islamic Republic of Iran in supporting Syria's repression of its own people is significant and extensive.

As to the second part of your question, it is difficult to ascertain the Iranian public's awareness of events in the outside world. Iranians do have access to free information from the outside world. It is beamed inside Iran by various providers, based mostly in Europe or North America. However, the number of Iranian citizens who have the means to access these sources is rather limited. Not every Iranian is fluent in English. Not every Iranian is able to own the satellite dishes necessary to link up to these sources. The regime has been extremely active in trying to jam these broadcasts. Most Iranians get their news through government-controlled Farsi media. Therefore, their awareness of the extent of repression going on in Syria and the complicity of their own government should be questioned.

That is also true, incidentally, when it comes to the nuclear program. It is doubtful that ordinary Iranians are aware of their government's non-compliance with its own international obligations. They are probably not fully aware of the cost they bear every day because of the economic sanctions they suffer as a result of their regime's non-compliance with its own international obligations. They are not fully aware that their government is doing something that goes well beyond its legitimate right to have a peaceful nuclear program.

•(1320)

**Mr. David Sweet:** The regime is always looking towards Israel or the west as the big enemy and the great Satan. They use this as a tool of manipulation. I'm wondering if that is beginning to diminish in light of their violent repression of the Green Movement and the news leaking in about their support for regimes like al-Assad. I wonder if the average person in Iran is beginning to see just how corrupt the regime is.

**Dr. Emanuele Ottolenghi:** I think we have abundant anecdotal evidence of how ordinary Iranians are putting less and less faith in the party line, if you'll allow me the expression.

One of the most popular TV programs that is being followed inside Iran is broadcast by a TV station that is based in a European country: Manoto TV. It is a satirical program that makes tremendous fun of the regime and its leaders. We know from the experience of the Cold War that at some point, even under the worst repressive regimes, the people will stop believing what they're told. They will know they're being lied to.

The fact that satire and jokes are so pervasive inside Iran today about the regime and its leaders tells us something about the extent to which Iranians are prepared to believe what they're told. Again, it's anecdotal evidence.

On the specific question of sanctions and the regime trying to deflect the concerns of its population by blaming the west or Israel, or both, it's interesting that the regime so far has been denying that sanctions have had any impact inside the country.

If you are an ordinary Iranian and you can't afford to buy meat more than once a month, and you have to take up an extra job or two in order to pay your bills, and even as a government employee you see your revenues profoundly eroded by inflation and the devaluation of the currency, and you're told by your government that all of your suffering is not caused by the outside pressure imposed by sanctions, you must obviously conclude that it's the incompetence and mismanagement of the government that is causing your suffering.

I think that if you take all of this combined, it's quite clear that very few people inside Iran are prepared to believe what they're told. The question is how you leverage this widespread lack of confidence in their government to make things change inside the country.

•(1325)

**The Chair:** Thank you.

We'll go now to Mr. Marston.

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

Mr. Ottolenghi, welcome today. I appreciate your being here.

I spent some time in Saudi Arabia in 1979. I was there for six months. One of the things I noticed at that time was the demonization of the west in general, and the U.S. in particular. That was done to keep our way of life separated from the Saudi Arabian people.

Of course in Iran it's a similar thing. Now that we have the Internet and news of this so-called Arab Spring has gone across the Middle

East nations to some extent, I suspect that governments like the Iranian government are very, very fearful. We've had testimony at this committee before that people in that country are being executed, hanged at the rate of one every eight hours.

There seems to be a real movement to obliterate the Green Movement itself. Do you have any information on that, sir?

**Dr. Emanuele Ottolenghi:** I think evidence has been gathered by various human rights organizations. I refer you to the reports by Amnesty International or Human Rights Watch that suggest that in principle you're absolutely right, that the level of repression has mounted inside the country following the 2009 elections.

Certainly the level of freedom within Iran had already deteriorated considerably after the accession to the presidency by Mahmoud Ahmadinejad in 2005. Hundreds of publications have been shut down since 2005, even before the fraudulent presidential elections. You see an intensification of repression against ethnic minorities inside Iran. The rounding up and execution of Kurdish dissidents is one example.

We saw the government use significant violence to repress peaceful protests in Iranian Azerbaijan late last year, which were related to nothing eminently political, if you wish. Rather it was political, but it had nothing to do with the nature of the regime. It had to do with an environmental crisis affecting a UNESCO world heritage site in Iranian Azerbaijan caused mainly by the mismanagement of the environment by a combination of factors. The peaceful protesters who saved this heritage site were met with brutal repression.

If you put that together with the increased rounding up of dissidents, bloggers, journalists, and the active harassment of reformists, who have been barred from participating in elections to all intents and purposes, the fact that the Green Movement's leaders have been under house arrest for over a year, that their families have been harassed, that a number of prominent figures even within the inner sanctum of the regime are no longer invulnerable—I think here in particular of the case of former president Rafsanjani, who is no saint when it comes to human rights, but who certainly has been more supportive of the reformists than the regime in recent years—all of this tells you that the grip of the regime is becoming tighter and tighter. It may also be a reflection of the concern the regime has that its own population is not supportive of this kind of approach. Here there may be a difference with Saudi Arabia.

One should not forget that society tends to be very conservative in Saudi Arabia. Perhaps they share if not a fear at least a concern over the interaction between their own society and westerners and the western values and culture they bring.

As I mentioned before, the fact that the Iranian regime feels threatened by the import of Barbie dolls or Simpson dolls is very revealing about what their population really wants and the gulf that increasingly exists between them and their own leaders.

**The Chair:** Unfortunately, that uses up your time, Mr. Marston.

•(1330)

**Mr. Wayne Marston:** That's okay. I'm going to get a second round.

**The Chair:** All right.

Mr. Hiebert, it's your turn.

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

Dr. Ottolenghi, I have a couple of questions related to the nuclear ambitions of Iran, but before I ask them, I did want to ask you a follow-up to Mr. Marston's questions.

Your answer made me think about the possibilities for regime change in Iran. We saw what happened in the last election. What are the options? Looking ahead, speculating a great deal, how will things change in this country?

**Dr. Emanuele Ottolenghi:** On the one hand, the general feeling, I think, inside the country and among dissidents outside the country, is that a great opportunity was missed in 2009, and part of the reason that happened may have to do with the reluctance and the ambiguity of the Green Movement's leader to challenge the regime in such a radical fashion as to question its own legitimacy and very existence.

When millions of people were in the street protesting the elections in the weeks following the June 12 electoral round, the Green Movement's leader basically told the people to go home. That was probably a great mistake, because no regime would be able to open fire and crush the will of an organized protest of millions of people in the street.

Your colleague mentioned Syria before. We should compare the Syrian spring or the Syrian revolt with the Iranian one to see how, even in the face of terrible adversities, a determined people can continue to sustain a revolt against a brutal regime if the will for change among its leaders is there.

So that would be the first problem.

However, on the upside of things, if you observe the situation inside the country today—and I don't mean to sound like a Marxist by saying this—the country is ripe for revolution in the sense that you have a number of dramatic economic circumstances that will only be made worse by sanctions in months to come, that will only increase the discontent among the population even within those sectors of the population that perhaps were traditionally more committed to the regime. The targeting of the IRGC is extremely important in this sense, because the IRGC, while perhaps the most ideologically committed element of the regime, is a significant factor for its own stability and very highly dependent on revenue from economic activities. It is a very significant organization, a big one, one that plays a role in the Iranian economy akin to the one played by the Egyptian army. If you take the example of what happened in Egypt under the combined stress of economic difficulties and popular uprising, you can see how it is possible to foresee a situation where inside the regime a significant part of the power structure may consider defecting and changing sides and changing course.

In addition to that, you have unrest within the ethnic minorities, you have wildcat strikes going on in critical government factories and infrastructure, and you have the mounting repression, which to me is a sign that the regime is afraid of losing control and recognizes the extensive nature of dissent in the country.

So the question is whether—

**Mr. Russ Hiebert:** With the limited time I have, I'd like to ask another question.

**Dr. Emanuele Ottolenghi:** —the opposition in some way can make a move and get organized and be able to confront the regime and bring it down. If we don't, it may happen tomorrow or it may happen in twenty years' time. If we do, we are likely to speed up the process.

**Mr. Russ Hiebert:** Thank you.

The original question I was going to ask with the time that I have left was related to Israel and the nuclear threat from Iran. What stage do you believe Iran is at? Do you believe that Israel has cause for a pre-emptive strike? And if you have time left, what allies does Iran have in support of becoming nuclear-armed?

● (1335)

**The Chair:** I hate to do this, but I have to ask that this be fairly brief.

**Dr. Emanuele Ottolenghi:** Israel is one of three countries that launched a pre-emptive strike against the nuclear facilities of an adversary. The other two, by the way, are Iran and Iraq. They both tried to neutralize each other's nuclear facilities at some point of the Iran-Iraq war, without success, by the way. Israel has done that not once but twice, with Iraq in 1981 and with Syria in 2007. So if one judges Israel's pronouncements and posture by its history and precedent, one would assume that the Israelis are prepared, even if not ready or willing, to do it again. I think that the Israelis believe they have the capability to launch a strike that would achieve a measure of success they can live with, maybe not as disruptive as an attack by the combined forces of allied countries in the west led by the United States, but certainly one that could gain Israel a number of years.

I don't think the Israelis are at the stage of making that decision yet. I think that with all the talk of war we have heard in recent weeks and months, the fact that the Israelis have waited until now tells us how reluctant they are to go forward with this kind of operation. In both the Iraqi and the Syrian case, Israel acted at the very early stages of progress of those two nuclear programs. We are way past that moment today.

To the question of how far the Iranian program has gone and whether the Israelis have cause, again I have to defer for a complete answer to classified information I do not have access to, but based on the open sources that I have access to and that I have read, my judgment is that the question hinges more upon the kind of political thinking that is happening within the senior ruling elites in Tehran and has less to do with technical issues. Iran has proven capable of enriching uranium to nearly 20%. It has the technical ability to go all the way to 90% if it so wishes. It may take a few months, but capability-wise, Iran is there already. There is enough evidence in IAEA reports that Iran has conducted extensive experiments with the components of a nuclear device, and it may be significantly closer to being able to miniaturize a warhead to install it on a ballistic missile.

Iran may be also conducting activities related to a military program in a covert fashion. The fact that we do not know of any covert facility does not mean that there isn't one, for the very simple reason that Iran's nuclear program's history is one where much of the activities related to the military dimensions of the program and the enrichment were being conducted in a covert fashion. The fact that these facilities were exposed was actually a significant setback in the timeline of the program, but it's a fact that Iran has always done things covertly.

What would happen if an attack occurred? What would Iran do? There are two schools of thought here. One says that Iran is a rational actor. If Iran is rational and calculates, my instinct would be to say that a limited attack on its nuclear facilities would not unleash all of the reprisal tools that Iran has at its disposal. Iran would probably focus on responding to Israel first by unleashing Iranian proxies in the Levant by having Hezbollah and Hamas launch missile attacks on Israel and initiate hostilities on Iran's behalf, and secondly by launching and trying to execute a number of terrorist attacks on soft targets overseas against both Israeli diplomats and diplomatic missions, as well as Jewish centres across the world.

• (1340)

I doubt that a rational Iran would engage in the kinds of activities that would draw the United States to come to Israel's side.

The second school of thought, of course, says the opposite, which is that Iran is not a rational actor, and if attacked, it would unleash every single tool it has in its arsenal. In addition to the things I've described, it could conceivably target critical civilian infrastructure on the Arabian shore of the gulf. It could seek to target western troops—NATO troops stationed in Afghanistan, U.S. troops in the gulf. It could try to close the Strait of Hormuz, of course.

It could try to do a number of additional extreme and disruptive actions that would have a tremendous impact, at least in the short term, on the global economy.

The decision to attack is therefore one fraught with danger and risks, and I think that is the reason, mainly, why Israel so far has held itself and is still giving time to the possibility that sanctions and negotiations will yield a result.

**The Chair:** That went way over the intended time.

Mr. Hiebert asked a question just as his time was running out. It is hard to stop a discussion like that, because it is so substantive.

What I'm going to suggest to get us back on time, since that was basically more than twice the normal time, is that we take that out of the Conservatives' time.

That being said, the next speaker is Professor Cotler.

I have one last point. In a few minutes I'm going to have to abdicate the chair to Mr. Marston. I have to go back to the House of Commons.

Anyway, Professor Cotler, you're up.

**Hon. Irwin Cotler:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

You indicated that I would have five minutes at the end of the meeting. It's actually with respect to a matter regarding Iran, so it

dovetails with our discussion. But because I have to be in the House for an SO31, I'm going to incorporate it as part of my remarks now.

Dr. Ottolenghi, I appreciate your remarks, particularly with regard to the persistent and pervasive state-sanctioned assault on human rights in Iran and the intensification of repression targeting, as you put it, religious minorities, such as the Baha'i and the Kurds. There are 15 Kurds on death row right now. All the leaders of all the movements have effectively been silenced or imprisoned. We've had a dramatic increase in both the number of political prisoners and the related number of executions.

As a result of that, we formed, several months ago, an interparliamentary group for human rights in Iran involving parliamentarians all over the world, which I co-chair with Senator Mark Kirk of Illinois. We announced this morning the establishment of an Iranian political prisoner advocacy group. We are going to be inviting parliamentarians to adopt prisoners of conscience.

This committee can play a particular role, because there's a particular Canadian connection to these political prisoners. As we meet, Saeed Malekpour, one of them, is a Canadian Iranian political prisoner in imminent threat of execution. We have also, among the Baha'i leadership, Canadian Baha'i who, after graduating from Carleton University, returned to Iran and were arrested, etc. I trust that the members here may each seek to adopt one of the political prisoners, particularly one with a Canadian connection. I'll make the list available to the members here.

This brings me to my two specific questions, which I'll be brief about. First is the matter of the IRGC, which has emerged at the epicentre of the fourfold Iranian threat—nuclear, incitement, terrorist, and massive domestic repression. The United States has listed them as a terrorist entity. The question is whether Canada should list them as a terrorist entity. That's the first question.

I'll do the second one very quickly. As this committee and others have found, Iran has already committed the crime of incitement to genocide that was created under the genocide convention. Should Canada, as a state party to the convention, along with other like-minded states, initiate any of the legal remedies under the genocide convention to hold the leaders of this incitement to account, such as an interstate complaint before the International Court of Justice? Iran is also a state party to the genocide convention and can be held accountable there.

Those are the two questions.

• (1345)

**Dr. Emanuele Ottolenghi:** Thank you. My answer could be very brief: yes and yes.

To be a little more specific, on the issue of the IRGC, I would like to make a specific point. Especially with countries like Canada that still have diplomatic relations with Iran, Iran has a history of using its embassies abroad as staging points for terrorist attacks. The IRGC, especially its overseas special force, operation force, the Qods force, uses the diplomatic cover provided by these embassies, and sometimes actually have their personnel hired by the embassies as non-diplomatic staff.

Sometimes you'd be surprised at the kind of cover they take: the driver, the janitor, the receptionist, and so on. These people are based, through these embassies abroad, for the purpose of gathering information on and intimidating members of the exiled opposition, and conducting surveillance operations and recruitment for possible terrorist activities.

I think that with a view to your own country's relations with Iran, and given Iran's modus operandi, targeting the IRGC as a terrorist entity is of supreme importance. The IRGC, through its branches, its proxies, and its operatives, has been involved in the past in terrorist activities. It continues to be involved in terrorist activities. There is absolutely no reason the IRGC should not be therefore targeted.

There is an argument that at least some members of the IRGC are conscripts and therefore they should not be penalized, because they have to serve in the Iranian army in some way or another. The fact of the matter is that every member of the IRGC is very carefully vetted for their ideological commitment to the Islamic Republic's foundational tenets. They swear an oath of loyalty to the principle of the guardianship of the jurispudent, which is the foundational doctrine of the Islamic Republic, and they're beholden to—

**The Vice-Chair (Mr. Wayne Marston):** Excuse me, Doctor; I'm going to have to get in here.

**Dr. Emanuele Ottolenghi:** In so far as they prove themselves committed members of the organization ideologically, they continue to be card-carrying members of the IRGC long after they have abandoned the uniform. In view of this fact, they should be targeted.

**The Vice-Chair (Mr. Wayne Marston):** Doctor, I have to jump in here. Can you hear me, Doctor? I'm sorry, but you're a minute over on Mr. Cotler's time.

Can you hear us, Doctor?

**Dr. Emanuele Ottolenghi:** I do want to make a point, though, that whether this route is practical, at least we should consider the fact—

**The Vice-Chair (Mr. Wayne Marston):** I'm sorry, Doctor, I have to interrupt you.

This is Wayne Marston, the vice-chair.

At this point we have to move to Ms. Pécelet.

**Dr. Emanuele Ottolenghi:** They should not be allowed to move about as if they were leaders of the free world, and should be constantly subject to chastisement, isolation, and condemnation when they visit foreign countries.

**The Vice-Chair (Mr. Wayne Marston):** Thank you, Doctor.

We'll move to Madame Pécelet.

[*Translation*]

**Ms. Ève Pécelet (La Pointe-de-l'Île, NDP):** My question will not be very long. I would like to know if you are in a position to comment on the labour rights situation in Iran. As a militant member of Amnesty International, I know that there are several problems in Iran concerning the Tehran bus drivers' union. Even in Canada, these are fundamental rights that the NDP fiercely defends. At this very time, some workers are demonstrating because the government is refusing to help them, and we have several problems.

I would simply like an update on the fundamental right to freely associate, and the situation of union delegates in that country.

• (1350)

[*English*]

**Dr. Emanuele Ottolenghi:** Thank you for your question.

There are significant restrictions inside Iran with regard to the freedom of association that apply to political parties and other civil society organizations.

In the specific instance of labour rights, there are no legal independent unions inside the country. There is no minimum wage guaranteed to workers and there are practices in terms of hiring and firing workers on short-term contracts to ensure they can be employed under the minimum wage, which I think would make even the most rampant, turn-of-the-20th-century, unfettered capitalists ashamed of themselves.

Iran portrays itself as the country that stands for the oppressed, and yet its workers are among the most oppressed and least free on the face of the earth. I think this should encourage trade unions in the west and workers' organizations and governments within the context of the International Labour Organization to go after Iran for its blatant and systematic violations of workers' rights.

As you mentioned, a number of these workers and their leaders have been jailed, harassed, intimidated, and persecuted. In a number of cases, despite the fact that these people are prisoners of conscience and political prisoners, they have been transferred to either psychiatric mental health institutions or prisons where common criminals are detained, things that of course increase the risks and the dangers for their own personal safety.

They have been denied access to basic medical care, as often happens with political prisoners inside Iran. And they have been denied the most elemental rights, such as visits from relatives, in order to put pressure and intimidate their colleagues who are still at liberty to act.

I think in the landscape of human rights violations, labour rights is one of the most egregious instances where the regime has trumped basic rights, and has done so not just in a blatant fashion, but in utter disregard and in open contradiction with its own rhetoric.

**The Vice-Chair (Mr. Wayne Marston):** Doctor, I'd like to ask you a little about a statement you made before regarding the fact that the Canadian government should pay attention to Iranian companies that are operating within Canada. Would you like to expand on your concerns a bit?

Before you do so, sir, you mentioned that you had recommendations for us, but you didn't have time to read them. If you'd like to send them to the clerk here electronically following the meeting, we'd certainly look at them.

**Dr. Emanuele Ottolenghi:** I actually have done so already before coming to this session, so hopefully they will be available to you after we end our conversation.

The answer to your question about companies is something I would like to follow up on with perhaps some written submissions. Because Iran has diplomatic relations with Canada, and you do cherish open relations with individuals who apparently pose no threat, and because Canada has a thriving energy industry, you have a significant presence of Iranians in your country. Some of them have come with perfectly innocent intentions, some of them haven't.

You have had, in the past, the presence of people working in Alberta with the oil industry, who listed on their open CV on the Internet past affiliations with IRGC-linked entities in Iran. At least a number of Iranian companies have established procurement companies or subsidiaries that are incorporated under Canadian law, sometimes run by Canadian citizens, that can be traced back to Iran.

I do not have any hard evidence that these companies have been engaged in clear violations of the sanctions regime, but I think it deserves some scrutiny, given their connections, given that in some cases—I have at least one case in mind—these connections have been blurred or wilfully denied or removed. The fact that companies are operating within the Canadian jurisdiction, linked to Iranian companies, but denying that connection I think is suspect and deserves your attention. And I would be happy to provide the kind of information that would help to prove that.

• (1355)

**The Vice-Chair (Mr. Wayne Marston):** Thank you, Doctor.

The Conservatives have three minutes left.

**Mrs. Nina Grewal (Fleetwood—Port Kells, CPC):** Thank you.

Dr. Ottolenghi, on March 12, 2012, the special rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Iran presented his report to the United Nations Human Rights Council. The report cites numerous human rights violations, including violations of the rights of women, unions, prisoners of conscience, religious minorities, journalists, and ethnic minorities. The mandate of the special rapporteur has recently been extended for another year, I think.

In your opinion, what is the significance of this report, and how can the international community use these findings to advocate for a stronger adherence to international human rights standards?

**Dr. Emanuele Ottolenghi:** The first point I would like to make is that the significance of this report is the report itself. The United Nations does not have an illustrious and consistent record of shedding light on human rights violations by repressive regimes. It has oftentimes focused in a petty fashion on criticizing and demonizing the imperfections of western democracies. The fact that the focus of international attention is now on Iran and its human rights record is significant in and of itself. The fact that the mandate has been extended for another year will ensure that the record of the regime will remain in the spotlight.

One thing that should be done to build on this report is to use forums like your Parliament and similar institutions, as well as your roles as members of Parliament, to amplify the findings of the report and bring them to the attention of western audiences. One of the most difficult battles we have in confronting Iran is that there is very little awareness in the west. Perhaps in Canada that is less so, because sadly you've had individual cases of Canadian citizens who

have been the victims of Iranian repression. But elsewhere in the west there isn't much awareness of how repressive this regime is. Enhancing the understanding of such a thing would help to demonstrate why Iran has been the subject of such a harsh sanction regime and why there is so much concern about its nuclear programs. So that is extremely important.

The second point I would make is that the Iranian regime does not like to be embarrassed. The Iranian regime has been aggressively seeking to gain a more active and influential role in a number of international forums, including the UN forums that deal directly with human rights. It is seeking a role in places like UNESCO. To have a report produced by the UN itself that proves beyond doubt the extent of human rights violations conducted by this regime inside Iran against its own people will serve as a useful tool for western diplomacies in trying to undermine Iran's efforts to gain legitimacy through seating in influential positions in international forums. It would help isolate the regime. It would help put pressure on the regime and make the regime feel more vulnerable. To prove its legitimacy, the regime has used the ability of its leaders to travel, to obtain audiences, to be heard, and to be in the international spotlight. Reversing the trend is extremely important and useful in the effort to isolate the regime.

I think we can take that report and build on it significantly.

• (1400)

**The Vice-Chair (Mr. Wayne Marston):** Thank you, Doctor.

Mr. Sweet.

**Mr. David Sweet:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman, for being patient with me.

Our foreign affairs minister has publicly stated his resistance to labelling the Revolutionary Guards as a terrorist organization. Believe me, nobody has more loathing for that group and what they do to their own people than I do. Young people are conscripted who don't have any dedication to the regime but out of fear for their lives go along with their conscription. That's my concern.

Could you speak to that as far as labelling them as a terrorist organization?

**Dr. Emanuele Ottolenghi:** Absolutely. My point was that such people who would be drawn into the IRGC because of necessity or against their own choice would soon drop out of the IRGC. They would serve their time in the IRGC, one or two years, and then they would leave. But the IRGC, as an organization, prizes loyalty and keeps its members close even after their military service has long passed its duration. People remain on the payroll of the IRGC, if they are loyal, long after they have abandoned the uniform. People who are loyal to the IRGC as conscripts will continue on to universities that are run by the IRGC and will then enter professions through companies controlled or owned by the IRGC, so it is against these people and this infrastructure that sanctions should be adopted and designation should be adopted.

The people who spend their two years of army service in the IRGC and then eventually move on and leave the IRGC would not suffer from these kinds of measures unless they were being sent abroad to engage in activities during their military service, but again, those people who do tend to be loyalists tend to be ideologically committed and are not usually sent abroad for benign purposes.

With that in mind, although in theory the distinction is very understandable, in practice it is much less relevant.

**Mr. David Sweet:** The problem, Mr. Chair, is that once you name a group a terrorist organization and someone has any affiliation at all, the person lives with that for the rest of his life.

**The Vice-Chair (Mr. Wayne Marston):** I agree with you on that.

Doctor, we have reached the end of our time. In fact, we are a little bit past our time. We have to return to the House.

I want to thank you for your fulsome testimony here today. We certainly appreciate your coming before this committee. Thank you very much, sir.

**Dr. Emanuele Ottolenghi:** Thank you for having me.

**The Vice-Chair (Mr. Wayne Marston):** The meeting is now adjourned.

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