

Take Note Debate on Iran – May 5, 2015
Overview of Iran’s Systemic Human Rights Abuses

**Speech by Hon. Deepak Obhrai, M.P., Parliamentary Secretary to the
Minister of Foreign Affairs and for International Human Rights**

House of Commons, Ottawa, Ontario

Mr. Speaker, I rise today to express the grave concerns of the Government of Canada about the dire human rights situation in Iran. Abuses and violations happen regularly, and are pervasive throughout Iran’s judicial system and extensive state security apparatus.

Over the past two years the Iranian regime has had some success in reshaping its public image. Iran’s President continues to make public comments that allude to support for rights and freedoms for the people of Iran. Sadly, this slick diplomacy and charm offensive is contradicted by the reality on the ground. The human rights situation remains as dismal as ever, with no measurable improvements since the 2013 election of President Rouhani.

Canada remains profoundly concerned by the alarming rate of executions in Iran – a rate that spiked considerably after the election of President Rouhani. In the first three and a half months of 2015, Iranian officials have already executed at least 300 people. Last year Iranian authorities reportedly executed over 750 people. We cannot know for sure how many, because the regime carries out hundreds of executions every year without officially acknowledging them. Many of the executions take place in public, without fair and public trials, and sometimes without warning to the victim’s family. The regime also continues to execute juvenile offenders.

On October 25, 2014, a 26 year-old woman, Reyhaneh Jabbari, was hanged to death, convicted of killing a man that she asserted was trying to sexual assault her. A 30 year-old man

is on death row as we speak for a post he made on Facebook. Soheil Arabi, a husband and father, was sentenced to death for “insulting the prophet” in his Facebook posts. It is inconceivable to Canadians that someone could be executed for something they posted to social media, but that’s exactly what is planned for Mr. Arabi. His case is one example of the extraordinary restrictions to freedom of expression in Iran, and the regime’s increasing targeting of average Iranians for their activities on popular social media sites. This past fall, six young Iranians were sentenced to prison terms and lashes simply for dancing to a pop song about being happy in a Youtube video.

Iran is among the ten most censored countries in the world, according to the Committee for the Protection of Journalists - and was the second highest jailer of journalists in 2014. Authorities regularly threaten, harass and arbitrarily arrest journalists, as the regime exerts its control over information and any expression of dissent that might challenge its authority. The Washington Post’s Tehran Bureau chief, Jason Rezaian, has now been imprisoned for 283 days facing trumped up charges including espionage, simply for reporting on issues of interest to the Iranian people.

The women of Iran face serious restrictions to their fundamental rights and freedoms. They are denied equality in law and in practice, rendering their full participation in political and economic life impossible. In the 2013 elections, all female presidential hopefuls were barred from running by Iran’s Guardian Council. Iran has extraordinary female lawyers, but women are not permitted to preside over a court as a judge. Women endure state condoned harassment. This past fall a number of women were attacked with acid by men on motorbikes believed to be targeting women they saw as dressing immodestly. A number of draft laws and policies at different levels of government in Iran have emerged through 2013 and 2014 that aim to further

limit womens' rights, including by limiting equal access to the labour market with their male counterparts, access to birth control and access to education.

Iran, like Canada, is a culturally and linguistically diverse country. Unfortunately, the Iranian regime views this rich diversity as a threat. Ethnic and religious minority communities in Iran face persistent marginalization, harassment, arbitrary arrest and detention.

Iran's Baha'i community has suffered some of the most overt state-led discrimination in Iran, and has been especially targeted for intimidation and persecution. In October 2013, Iranian security officials raided 14 Baha'i homes in the city of Abadeh. This past October, 79 Baha'i shops were closed up by authorities in Kerman Province after the shop owners closed their businesses to observe a Baha'i holiday. Christian converts have also seen brutal treatment by authorities in Iran, including reports of violent raids of private gatherings, arbitrary arrest and detention.

Mr. Speaker, we remain troubled by the deliberate failure of the Iranian regime to abide by its human rights obligations and commitments. We cannot forget the case of photographer Zahra Kazemi who was tortured and killed by Iranian officials while in detention.

It is because of the persistent human rights violations that Canada, in partnership with a strong cross-regional group of similarly concerned countries, leads a resolution at the United Nations General Assembly on the situation of human rights in Iran, which highlights and brings international scrutiny to bear on Iran's human rights record, calling on the Government of Iran to fulfill its human rights obligations in law and in practice, and provides a public signal to human rights defenders that they are supported by the international community. The 2014 Resolution,

drawing on credible and well-informed sources including reports of the UN Secretary General and the UN Special Rapporteur, was successfully adopted with broad international support.

I am proud to convey Canada's support for those inside and outside Iran who are working tirelessly for positive change in their country. Iranians deserve to live in freedom and to have their rights respected. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.