

KEYNOTE ADDRESS

ISLAM, HUMAN RIGHTS, AND IRAN

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On the 60th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, I deem it necessary first and foremost to thank all those individuals and groups who have endeavored to promote human rights values globally. I would also like to extend my warmest gratitude to everyone who has helped to sponsor the event today.

One of the important debates today, both in the Muslim world and globally, is whether Islam and human rights are indeed compatible and whether Islamic governments can run state affairs in a manner that is in accordance with human rights values. There are two groups that believe Islam and human rights values are not compatible. The first group includes non-democratic Islamic states and extremist religious groups. They argue that human rights and democracy are Western concepts and that these are incompatible with Islam as a religion.¹ Non-democratic Islamic states believe they are God's representatives on earth and maintain that they gain legitimacy through religion and not through the votes of the people. Therefore, they must uphold religious values. For them, Islam is simply the concept that applies to their own ideology and not what is understood to be the Islamic religion by many other Muslims. These non-

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¹ See, e.g., Nazila Fathi, *Iranian Clerics' Angling Stirs Worry on Absolute Rule*, N.Y. TIMES, Sept. 25, 2006, at A12 (quoting senior cleric for Iran, Muhammad Taqi Mesbah Yazdi, as saying, "Democracy means if the people want something that is against God's will, then they should forget about God and religion Be careful not to be deceived. Accepting Islam is not compatible with democracy"); Nicole Hallet & Elisabeth Motlke, *Islam and Democracy: Extremists on Both Sides Claim They Are Incompatible. Why Do We Believe Them?*, in HUMANITY IN ACTION 2002 ANNUAL REPORT 60, 61 (2002), available at http://www.humanityinaction.org/docs/Hallett_Moltke_2002.pdf (discussing Hizb-ut-Tahrir, an extremist Muslim group in Denmark, which believes that democracy implies secularization, making it *haram*, or forbidden, in Islam).

democratic Islamic states force their political opponents into silence.² They rob their people of the power to confront them. Let us not forget that it is much easier for people to fight earthly leaders than religious leaders or those who claim to represent religion on earth.

These forms of government have many examples across the Middle East, including the governments in Iran, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Yemen, and Bahrain. What is interesting to note is that 19 years ago, in a meeting of the foreign ministers of the Islamic countries in Cairo, these Islamic states attempted to draft an Islamic Declaration for Human Rights. Most Islamic countries acceded to the declaration.³

I have always opposed the Islamic Declaration on Human Rights. It is quite simple. If Muslims want to have their own universal declaration of human rights based on their own religious premises, then we must grant the same right to the followers of all other religions as well. We will then have the Jewish Declaration of Human Rights, the Buddhist Declaration of Human Rights, and numerous other human rights declarations representing other faiths and belief systems across the globe. It is impossible to run the world based on the many faiths and religious belief systems that exist. It is necessary to have as our starting point the principles to which we all agree, not those on which we differ.

The second group that argues that human rights and democracy are incompatible with Islamic religion is comprised of Western theorists who attempt to present new arguments, such as the clash of civilizations.⁴ They maintain that since human rights values, such as democracy, were born in the West as a result of modernity, these values are incompatible with Islamic civilization, which is unable to absorb these values. This group argues that a

² See Khaled Abou El Fadl, *Political Crime in Islamic Jurisprudence and Western Legal History*, 4 U.C. DAVIS J. INT'L L. & POL'Y 1, 2-3 (1998) (discussing how Islamic states have historically sought to undermine opponents by accusing them of apostasy or heresy).

³ The Cairo Declaration on Human Rights in Islam (CDHRI) was adopted in 1990 by the 19th Islamic Conference on Foreign Ministers, following the Universal Islamic Declaration of Human Rights proclaimed at UNESCO in 1981. David G. Littman, *Human Rights and Human Wrongs*, NAT'L REV. ONLINE, Jan. 19, 2003, <http://www.nationalreview.com/comment/comment-littman011903.asp>.

⁴ See, e.g., SAMUEL P. HUNTINGTON, *THE CLASH OF CIVILIZATIONS AND THE REMAKING OF WORLD ORDER* (1996) (proposing the theory that variance in religion and culture will cause a "clash of civilizations" between the West and the Islamic world).

clash between Western civilization and Islamic civilization is inevitable.⁵ To prove their arguments, they refer to the many terrorist actions carried out by radical Islamic groups, as well as the behavior of many non-democratic Islamic states.⁶

It is important to understand the history behind the emergence of these theories in the West. Immediately after the collapse of the former Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War, we saw the formation of arguments that presented Islam as the new enemy. With this enemy in mind, these Western theorists could justify their wars in the Middle East and the sale of their weapons to the region.⁷ I have argued and strongly believe that this theory of the clash of civilizations is in fact only the other side of the argument proffered by non-democratic Islamic states. I oppose both viewpoints.

Let us remember that in the Cold War era, Islam was considered a friend and ally of the West for its ability to fight Communism. Strangely enough, at that time, nobody talked about a clash of civilizations. In fact, the United States supported many radical religious groups.⁸ Following the invasion of Afghanistan by Soviet troops, the Taliban emerged through financial support provided directly or indirectly by the United States.⁹ This led to the establishment of the radical group and its ability to rule over Afghanistan, which resulted in the crisis that we witnessed later.

⁵ *Id.* at 212 (“So long as Islam remains Islam (which it will) and the West remains the West (which is more dubious), this fundamental conflict between two great civilizations and ways of life will continue to define their relations in the future even as it has defined them for the past fourteen centuries.”).

⁶ See John F. Murphy, *Brave New World: U.S. Responses to the Rise in International Crime—An Overview*, 50 VILL. L. REV. 375, 384 (2005) (stating that the failure of Muslim leaders to condemn acts such as suicide bombings and beheadings lends support to the clash of civilizations theory); Khaled Diab, *The Clash Inside*, GUARDIAN.CO.UK, June 3, 2008, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2008/jun/02/theclashinside> (“[S]upporters of [the clash of civilizations] thesis have seen the September 11 2001 attacks, and the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, as confirmation of this clash.”).

⁷ See M. Shahid Alam, *Is This a Clash of Civilizations?*, MEDIA MONITORS NETWORK, Feb. 28, 2003, <http://www.mediamonitors.net/mshahidalam2.html>; Thalif Deen, *New Study: The United States Is the Primary Supplier of Post-Cold War Surplus Weapons*, INTER PRESS SERVICE, July 17, 2001, available at <http://www.commondreams.org/headlines01/0717-05.htm>.

⁸ See Arthur L. Lowrie, *American Foreign Policy and the Campaign Against Islam*, MIDDLE E. POL’Y, Sept. 1995, at 210, 210 (1995).

⁹ See MATTHEW J. GIBNEY & RANDALL HANSEN, *IMMIGRATION AND ASYLUM: FROM 1900 TO THE PRESENT I* (2005); Barnett R. Rubin & Sara Batmanglich, *The U.S. and Iran in Afghanistan: A Policy Gone Awry*, AUDIT OF THE CONVENTIONAL WISDOM (MIT Ctr. for Int’l Studies, Cambridge, M.A.), Oct. 2008, at 1, 1, available at http://web.mit.edu/cis/pdf/Audit_10_08_Rubin.pdf.

With the end of the Soviet era, the Taliban turned from a U.S. ally into a new enemy, leading to the decision to invade Afghanistan.¹⁰ If the clash of civilizations theory—the foundation of many adopted policies—is true, how can we possibly justify the alliance between Western states, particularly the United States, and countries in the Middle East, such as Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, that do not even have proper parliaments? It seems quite clear that these theorists have no goal in mind but to justify wars across the Middle East.

But let us take a look at what happens in the Muslim world. On the other side are Islamic thinkers and intellectuals who have risen to challenge the Western theorists. A single front of Muslim thinkers and scholars from across the Muslim world, who do not belong to any one nationality, will uphold Islamic values in the years to come. This single front does not have a name; it does not have a leader; it does not have a central office or any branches. These values rest in the hearts and minds of all enlightened Muslims who seek to protect and uphold their religion and the values of their predecessors by respecting human rights and rejecting any untruthful assertions made to justify oppression.

These Islamic thinkers and enlightened individuals believe that the inherent problem does not lie in Islam.¹¹ The real issue here is that these non-democratic Islamic states wish to use Islam as a means or pretext to arrive at a wrong interpretation of religion in order to justify their goals. If this were prevented, it would lead to their downfall.

Islam is a religion that actually endorses cultural pluralism. The Qur'an underscores this principle. It instructs, "I will keep my religion for myself and you keep yours."¹² Addressing the prophet of Islam, it says, "Had your God willed, all people on the planet would have been believers. Do you truly seek to forcefully impose the belief system on the people?"¹³

¹⁰ As the Cold War dissipated, the Western perception of these former allies changed from that of "freedom fighters" to members of the new "Islamic threat." Lowrie, *supra* note 8, at 211.

¹¹ Radwan Masmoudi, director of the Center for the Study of Islam and Democracy, "asserted that there is no inherent contradiction between Islam and democracy and that democratic ideals and principles are also Islam's ideals and principles. Thus, the explanation of why so many Muslim countries are not democratic lies in historical, political, cultural, and economic factors, not religious ones." David Smock, *Islam and Democracy*, SPECIAL REPORT 93 (U.S. Inst. of Peace, Washington, D.C.), Sept. 2002, at 1, 2, *available at* <http://usip.forumone.com/files/resources/sr93.pdf>.

¹² See THE HOLY QUR'AN 109:6 (A. Yusuf Ali trans., 1983) ("To you be your way / And to me mine.").

¹³ See *id.* 10:89 ("If it had been thy Lord's will, / They would all have believed,— / All who are on earth! / Wilt thou then compel mankind, / Against their will, to believe!").

It is essential to understand these debates, especially at a time when many Islamic political groups have come to power across the Muslim world. For example, in Turkey, the Islamic party gained power through free and fair elections.¹⁴ One of their first initiatives attempted to overturn the law that banned women from wearing headscarves in public places, including universities.¹⁵ There is nothing wrong with this initiative in and of itself, but if it leads Turkish women to fear that in the future, the same party will start forcing the Islamic headscarf on all women, then it becomes problematic. It is very possible that Turkish women, like Iranian women, could be forced to wear the Islamic hijab.

To open up the importance of this debate in the Muslim world, I would like to say a few words about the definition of democracy. In the classical sense of the term, democracy means the rule of the majority. However, it does not mean that the elected majority has the right to rule in whatever manner it pleases. Let us remember the many dictators in the world, such as Hitler, that came to power through the democratic process. Hence, electoral victory does not necessarily indicate democracy.

I believe that the elected government is still obliged to observe a framework for democracy. That framework is comprised of human rights laws and regulations. No majority that comes to power has the right to force its will on others or to discriminate against half of society, that being women. Unfortunately, this is happening in my country, Iran. No majority has the right to use ideology as a pretext to restrict freedom of belief and speech, as is done in Cuba and in China. No majority has the right to restrict the civil freedoms of people, as the United States of America has done by eavesdropping on its own people.¹⁶ It is clear that governments cannot find legitimacy solely through polls and votes. Legitimacy appears only when the vote of the people is combined with the state's respect for human rights. Consequently, any excuse for ignoring human rights, whether it is cultural relativity, religion, ideology, or national security, is unacceptable.

¹⁴ Ishan Dagi, *Turkey's AKP in Power*, J. DEMOCRACY, July 2008, at 25, 25.

¹⁵ Sarah Rainsford, *Turkey Divided over Headscarf Ban*, BBC NEWS, Feb. 11, 2008, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/7239330.stm>. Turkey's Constitutional Court blocked this reform. Hidir Goktas, *Court Annuls Turkish Headscarf Bill, Blow to Government*, REUTERS, June 5, 2008, <http://www.reuters.com/article/worldNews/idUSL0583906420080605>.

¹⁶ James Risken & Eric Lichtblau, *Bush Lets U.S. Spy on Callers Without Courts*, N.Y. TIMES, Dec. 16, 2005, at A1.

Under this definition of democracy, even Islamic groups, when democratically-elected, as in Turkey or Iran, still must uphold human rights. This is because human rights is an international value system. It has nothing to do with the East or the West, with Muslims or Christianity. It belongs to the entire human race.

Ladies and gentlemen, allow me to say a few words about human rights in my country, Iran. Iran exemplifies how governments use Islam as means to achieving their own goals. Although the Iranian government acceded to the International Covenants on Civil and Political Rights and Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights,¹⁷ the laws approved by the revolutionary government oppose the principles embodied in these two covenants. For example, the law allows gender discrimination. Court hearings often require two female witnesses to substitute for one male witness.¹⁸ In the Iranian criminal code, a woman's life is worth only half that of a man.¹⁹ Consequently, if a man and a woman were murdered, compensation paid to the woman would be half that paid to the man.²⁰ Further, the law sanctions polygamy, allowing men to have multiple wives.²¹ These are just a few examples of discriminatory laws in Iran.

In a society where over 65% of university students are women, and there are more educated women than educated men,²² naturally the women strongly oppose these laws. But whenever women challenge them, they are told that these laws have their source in Islam and are therefore unchangeable. However, in recent years, women have proven that these laws have nothing to do with religion and have succeeded in overturning some of them. For example, a few years ago, the Iranian Parliament changed Iran's child custody law. The original law, passed in the early days of the revolution, discriminated against women in the granting of custody rights. Whenever women challenged the custody law, they were told that it was Islamic law, period.²³ But with the

¹⁷ The Secretary-General, *Report of the Secretary-General on the Situation of Human Rights in the Islamic Republic of Iran*, ¶ 71, U.N. Doc. A/63/458 (Oct. 1, 2008).

¹⁸ See Majmua-hi Qava'nini Jaza'i [Code of Criminal Laws] Tehran 1381 [2002], article 75 (Iran).

¹⁹ *Id.* article 300.

²⁰ *See id.*

²¹ See Qanun-I Madani [Civil Code] Tehran 1314 [1935], article 942 (Iran) (discussing division of inheritance among multiple wives); *id.* article 1119 (discussing a wife's power to stipulate conditions of the marriage, including the consequences of a husband taking another wife during the marriage).

²² Mike Celizic, *Beyond the Veil: Lives of Women in Iran*, MSNBC, Sept. 13, 2007, <http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/20757597/>.

²³ Shi'a custody rules leave little room for negotiation. The supervision exercised by the father or paternal grandfather (*wilaya*) is incontestable according to the civil code, whereas the mother's right to give

rise of the feminist movement in Iran, surprisingly, the same law that seemed unchangeable, all of a sudden, changed.²⁴

Iranian law also allows religious discrimination. According to the Constitution, Iran's official religion is Shi'aism.²⁵ Other Islamic sects, as well as Christianity, Judaism, and Zoroastrianism, are recognized in the Constitution,²⁶ but those who follow any other faiths have no rights. For example, Baha'is have been denied all civil and social rights, even the right to go into universities. And the law discriminates between followers of different Islamic sects. In the city of Tehran—a city with 12 million people—the government has forbidden the establishment of even a single Sunni mosque. Even constitutionally recognized religions are discriminated against when it comes to their interactions with followers of the Islamic faith. I give you one example. According to the law, if an unmarried man and woman engage in sexual intercourse, both actors can be punished by 100 lashes.²⁷ But if the woman is a Muslim and the man is a non-Muslim, then the punishment for the man changes from 100 lashes to execution.²⁸ The punishment for the same act depending on whether the person is a Muslim or a non-Muslim can change from 100 lashes to execution.

It is quite obvious that democracy is incomplete in Iran. People cannot vote for whomever they want as their representatives in Parliament or as President. The qualifications of candidates running for office must be pre-approved by an institution named the Guardian Council before people have the right to vote for them.²⁹ Anyone who has made even the slightest criticism of the government is naturally disqualified. Freedom of speech is severely restricted inside Iran; in recent years the government has shut down many publications.³⁰ The Iranian press law declares that criticizing the constitution

care (*hadana*) and have access is restricted. Sen McGlenn, *Family Law in Iran*, in ISLAMIC FAMILY LAW 78 (Leon Buskens ed., 2000–01).

²⁴ Mothers are now allowed to keep custody of their children following a divorce until the children reach the age of seven. AMNESTY INT'L, IRAN: WOMEN'S RIGHTS DEFENDERS DEFY REPRESSION 2 (2008).

²⁵ Qanuni Assassi Jumhuri'i Isla'mai Iran [The Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran] 1358 [1980], article 12.

²⁶ *Id.* article 13.

²⁷ Code of Criminal Laws Tehran 1381 [2002], articles 83, 88.

²⁸ *Id.* article 82.

²⁹ See The Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran 1358 [1980], article 99.

³⁰ See, e.g., Kim Murphy, *Iran Closes Reformist Paper Again: The Publication Ran an Interview with an Exiled Poet Known for Her Exploration of Female Sexuality*, L.A. TIMES, Aug. 7, 2007, at A4.

is illegal and can lead to the closing down of the publication.³¹ As a lawyer, I wonder what constitutional professors have to do in this environment. Are they only supposed to praise the constitution and never criticize it?

Regretfully, a large number of students, workers, journalists, and human rights defenders are in prison now. As one example, I mention Mr. Kabutvan who, for the simple act of defending human rights values, was sentenced to eleven years of imprisonment. And Mr. Rosalu, the head of the Iranian bus guild, who was sentenced to five years in prison simply for requesting a higher wage—very difficult circumstances given his illness. Since the time is short, I do not want to mention each individual in prison by name. But I want to pay my respects to each and every individual who upholds freedom of speech and democracy, and is willing to go to prison for it.

Having said that, improving the human rights situation in Iran is the responsibility of each and every individual Iranian. It has nothing to do with foreign troops. We are strongly opposed to any military invasion or the bombardment of Iran because it will not improve the human rights situation or the life of people in the country. It will simply give the Iranian government an excuse to use national security as a pretext to increase its own power and further repress the rights of individuals. We Iranians love our country and will not permit it to become a second Iraq.

Allow me to share a story with you. In 1980, Saddam Hussein invaded Iran, leading to eight long years of war.³² He leveled Iranian cities and used chemical weapons on numerous occasions against Iranian targets.³³ It was around that same time that Donald Rumsfeld flew to Baghdad and shook hands with Saddam Hussein, promising him the friendship and alliance of the United States.³⁴ Fast forward several years later. The same people called Saddam Hussein a terrorist, said he had weapons of mass destruction, and declared that the United States therefore had to invade Iraq.³⁵ But when the American

³¹ See Iran Press Law, article 2, available at http://www.parstimes.com/law/press_law.html (identifying one of the goals of the Iranian press as being “[t]o advance the objectives outlined in the Constitution of the Islamic Republic” and prohibiting action in conflict with that goal).

³² *The Iran-Iraq War: 25 Years On*, BBC NEWS, Sept. 22, 2005, http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/4260420.stm.

³³ See *id.*; William E. Smith & Barry Hillenbrand, *The Gulf Now, the War of the Cities*, TIME, Mar. 25, 1985, at 48.

³⁴ *Regime Change: From Building Ties to Saddam to Removing Him from Power*, CNN, Sept. 20, 2002, <http://archives.cnn.com/2002/US/09/30/sproject.iqr.regime.change/>.

³⁵ Thom Shanker, *Rumsfeld Says Iraq Has Chemical Arms Ready*, N.Y. TIMES, June 11, 2002, at A14.

troops landed, searched everywhere, and could not find those weapons of mass destruction, they had to think of something else.

So they made the argument that they were really there to promote democracy in Iraq.³⁶ But I would like to ask you a question. Was Saddam Hussein the only dictator in the world? The world is filled with dictators; the only difference between Saddam Hussein and the other dictators is that he just happened to sit on a lot of oil.

Just as Islamic states do not have the right to use religion as a pretext for promoting their own policies and ideologies, Western governments do not have the right to use human rights and democracy as a pretext to invade other Muslim states. Concepts such as religion, ideology, democracy, and human rights are highly valued. These concepts should not be imprisoned nor taken advantage of. Instead, they need to be left in the hands of nations in order to evolve, so that governments can no longer use them as a pretext to advance their own agendas.

Let us be as giving as the skies. Let us spread friendship like the wind. Let us rage with anger and fire against prejudice and ignorance like fire itself. Let us sow the seeds of the tree of cooperation like the earth. Let us be kind to one another—truly kind. Thank you.

The following is a lightly edited transcript of the question and answer session between conference participants and Dr. Ebadi after her keynote address.

What success have you had communicating the message from Iranian civil society, warning the United States against airstrikes or military action against Iran?

The U.S. is a superpower, and the situation in the world will not get better unless U.S. foreign policy changes. And this will not change unless the

³⁶ See Elisabeth Bumiller, *Bush Lays Out Goals for Iraq: Self-Rule and Stability*, N.Y. TIMES, May 25, 2004, at A1.

American people, especially the youth, understand what is going on in the world.

How can we combat the defamation of religion? While it is obvious that social understandings of respect must develop around the world, how do you think the law should address issues of religious expression in a pluralistic world where one religious truth claim is blasphemous to another?

As I said, we have to have as our starting point principles we have a consensus on, not simply those principles we ourselves accept. In my opinion, these principles are embodied in human rights regulations. That is why I believe the framework for democracy is human rights. And governments whose foundation is ideology, like in China, or religion, like in Iran, they must interpret their ideologies and religion in a manner that is compatible with human rights. Thankfully, Islam as a religion has the capacity for adapting. For years, Islamic thinkers have taken on the task of showing how Islamic principles are compatible with human rights.

What is the role of the international community in supporting human rights defenders in Iran, without that support being twisted by the authorities in Iran?

When human rights defenders are arrested in Iran, please make sure you raise your concern. On the surface, the Iranian government shows that it will not take action based on the concerns raised by the international community. But the truth is different. For 15 years, I have devoted my work to defending political prisoners, and experience has shown me that when the world voices its concern over the arrest of a political prisoner, it puts a lot of pressure on the government. It has to react in some way. Remember, those who are nameless are in far harsher circumstances than those who are known. I request that you put the names of individuals, human rights defenders who go to prison in Iran or elsewhere, up for international human rights awards as a means to shed light on them. The world's attention will come to those people as a result, and it will help them a great deal.

What is the next step in advancing basic human rights for Baha'is?

The government's treatment of the Baha'is is so harsh that human rights lawyers are fearful of defending them in the courts. There are only a few lawyers who are willing to go to court for them. The Association for the Defense of Human Rights Advocates offers pro bono legal support for all political prisoners. I take pride in saying we have been defending Baha'is in Iran for many years. For ten years, we have filed complaints with the Supreme

Administrative Council of Iran for disallowing Baha'is to enter the universities. Because our courts are not completely independent, they have failed to issue a ruling on the matter. About four months ago, seven Baha'i leaders were arrested. I personally accepted to defend them. This angered the government. The official Iranian news agency said that my daughter converted to Baha'ism, which is what prompted me to defend the Baha'is. In Iran, if a Muslim converts to Baha'ism, by law he or she must be executed. When the official Iranian news agency makes this statement, it is to take away the courage to defend these people. I held a press conference to announce that myself and my entire family are Muslims, but because I believe in the freedom of religion, I chose to defend the Baha'is. And I said that if you send me to prison for ten years for choosing to defend the Baha'is, on the eleventh year, I still will defend them.

What advice would you give the U.S. in shaping its foreign policy toward Iran?

War is not a solution to the problem in the relations between the two countries. It's a bad idea for America, seeing the results in Afghanistan and Iraq. Consider all the money spent and all the people killed in Afghanistan, yet still 60% of the country is in the hands of the Taliban. What was the result of the invasion in Iraq? The deaths of over one million civilians and the enrichment of two or three corporations. Why do you pay taxes when the money goes to waging wars? War is not the solution to Iran's problems either. It will worsen the conditions for Iranians. That is why the people are opposed to a military attack on Iran. More than two million Iranians are living or studying in the United States. If each of them has four relatives and friends back home in Iran, imagine the large number of Iranians who would like to see the improvement of relations between the two countries. There has always been friendship between the Iranian people and the American people. Let us forget our governments and continue our friendship.

How can the international community prevent genocide?

Two things have led to this catastrophe. The first is prejudice. Each side believes it has the whole truth and the other side does not. The way to fight prejudice is by raising awareness. The more schools we build, the more literacy rates go up, and the less prejudice we will have. The other reason behind this catastrophe is the sale of arms and high military budgets. Instead of using natural resources to improve the welfare of the people, they are used to buy arms. So the day the world will succeed in imposing its will on

governments to reduce their military budgets in comparison to more important budgets is the day we will find the solution to genocide.

Let me talk about Afghanistan as an example. The September 11th attacks were horrific. A group of innocent people went to work and were killed by terrorist attacks. The United States went into Afghanistan, more people died, and the Taliban was not destroyed. The Taliban still controls over 60% of Afghan territory. Terrorism also increased. What was done for the relatives of the victims of the 9/11 attacks? Imagine if 9/11 happened yesterday. Would it not have been better to build a school in Afghanistan in memory of every victim instead of waging another war? Don't you think that if a student in Afghanistan was studying at a desk in a school that was established in memory of an American who lost his life in 9/11, that student would not grow up to be a terrorist?

I genuinely believe that looking correctly at solutions can reduce the problems of genocide, such as those that have arisen in Nigeria or the Sudan. How I wish that instead of waging a war in Afghanistan, that in the memory of the 4,000 victims of 9/11, 4,000 schools would have been built in Afghanistan, and that a tragedy like 9/11 would never reoccur. But what do we have on our hands now? This side is killing, as is the other side. How long are they going to continue the game of killing one another?

Do you believe human rights have progressed or regressed since the time of the Shah?

In some areas of human rights law, we have progressed, in others, regressed. Human rights is a culture, a culture that has been established in Iran. During the Shah, no one talked about human rights, and there was no such culture pervasive in the country. The only human rights institution established during the Shah was secret because it was forbidden. It was only a year prior to the revolution, in 1978, when the Shah allowed Amnesty International to visit Iran on one occasion and check on the political prisoners. That became an occasion for people to voice their complaints more. In my opinion, since human rights culture has become more pervasive within Iranian society now, in comparison with the Shah's era, the human rights understanding is better now than it was then. Of course, I would like to add, I receive thousands of complaints about human rights violations in Iran.