

IRAN: Why the Human Rights Violations in Iran Should Matter to the West

IOPHR (10.04.2018) – <http://www.iophr.org> – After forty years of continued human rights violations by the Iranian regime, it is imperative that the West finally takes firm steps to challenge the brutal clampdown of the Iranian regime on its own citizens, as they desperately attempt to voice their discontent through various types of protests.

Ever since the 1979 Iranian revolution, the Iranian regime has pursued a long term multi-pronged policy of suppression of all internal opposition voices in order to dominate every part of the religious, legislative, judicial, social and economic agenda of Iran and its citizens. This policy, in conjunction with its methodical clandestine plan to export its ideology, firstly within the Middle East, and then to other regions of the world, has been the hallmark of the Iranian regime's engagement with its own citizens and the world. These policies also have global consequences through many avenues, such as the mass immigration of people from war torn countries, as we have witnessed in the immigration of Syrian refugees to Europe.

The Iranian regime's policy of expansion is not only based on suppression of all forms of internal freedom, but also skillful manipulation of global events in its favour. For example, by disguising its true intentions, within the context of global events, in the name of "fighting the threats of Extremism" posed by groups such as Daesh or ISIS in Iraq or Al-Qaida in Afghanistan. Faced with such policies, the Western governments have often failed to recognise the long-term plan

of the regime, just as they have been equally slow in responding to the human rights violations that occur in Iran on a daily basis. The West's fixation with threats posed by the Iranian nuclear enrichment process, and the Western governments' consistently vague or intermittent condemnation of human rights violations in Iran, has only exacerbated the oppression of Iranians by the regime. Sanctions based solely on nuclear enrichment have also given the signal to Iran that the West only cares about its nuclear policy, and not about its human rights violations. All of which has led to the increased oppression of Iranian citizens and the slow, yet unswerving export of the Iranian regime's extremist ideology.

The regime's oppression within its own borders has taken many forms, such as the house arrests of non-conformist voices (Mr Karroubi, Mr Mousavi and Mrs Rahnavard), the suppression of all forms of peaceful protests on trumped up charges like sedition or Moharebeh (the charge of "being an enemy of God"), and total elimination of any group they see as a threat, such as the 1988 mass execution of 30,000 members of the MEK.

The recent protests, and the subsequent arrest of 5,000 people, has led to further repression of the Iranian people, including suppression of the protest movement against imposed Hijab by Iranian women, which resulted in a number of arrests and the imprisonment of many women. In fact, in Iran of today, all forms of protests act as signals for ever increasing arrests and clampdowns. Religious persecution has been one of the cornerstones of the Iranian regime's plan to suppress all forms of worship that do not adhere to its fundamentalist religious doctrine. Consistent persecution of Baha'is, Christians (in particular Christian converts), Zoroastrians, Jews, and even Sunni Muslims exemplify the intolerant views of this regime. Moreover, following the recent Sufi protests,

which led to the arrest and torture of many Sufi men and women, the regime has instigated a clandestine plan to put influential human rights advocate and spiritual leader of the Sufi community, Dr Noor Ali Tabandeh, under house arrest.

The suppression of Sufism is nothing new in Iran, and has been prevalent since 1979, with many Gonabadi' Sufi houses of worship being destroyed or shut down, and many other Sufi groups under consistent repression by the regime. The sectarian religious approach of the regime, of divide and conquer, has only increased, to the point that they are willing to openly prosecute Shia Muslims, such as Gonabadi Sufis, who have a long history of following the Shia branch of Islam. From all these actions, it is clear the Iranian regime's policy is purely ideological, which sees Islam as a useful tool for exporting their own extreme ideology, under the guise of "Islam".

At a time when Western countries are trying to counter extremist religious doctrines within their own borders, the survival of tolerant religious and ethnic diversities, both within the East and West, is of the utmost importance. Spiritual paths, such as Sufism, have long been associated with tolerance and unity across all races and beliefs. In fact, within the East, in terms of tolerance and non-violence, Sufism is very much in line with the path of Buddhism, taught by spiritual leaders like the Dalai Lama. Just as the Chinese government, 60 years ago, pushed the Dalai Lama out of his homeland, so as to supplant its own brand of Buddhism, the Iranian regime is now following a similar strategy, by putting the head of the largest Sufi order in Iran, Dr Tabandeh, under house arrest. This is supplemented by a hidden agenda of propagating misinformation and vilification, such as equating Sufis to "Daesh" within their Friday prayer ceremonies across

Iran, the regime continues to step up their plan of mass elimination of this peaceful spiritual group.

Therefore, it is time for the West to stand up and speak against human rights violations within Iran. Although human rights violations are committed by many countries such as North Korea, none of them have had the same track record of exporting their fundamentalist ideology with the success and determination of Iran, over the past forty years. Hence, by standing up against Iran's lack of respect towards human rights and even imposing sanctions based on the regimes human rights violations, the West will not only stop the expansionary path of the regime's ideology, but will also send a strong decisive message to the Iranian regime that their barbaric policies towards their own citizens will not be tolerated, thus giving hope to the oppressed voices in Iran.

To do so would echo the voice of Prince Charles in his recent Easter message of tolerance and peace amongst different faiths, who in reference to Christian persecution stated, "I want to assure them that they are not forgotten and that they are in our prayers!" For one cannot be tolerant in the face of intolerance, as by doing nothing we allow the proliferation of intolerance. And as Pastor Niemöller wisely said, "First they came for the Socialists, and I did not speak out, because I was not a Socialist. Then they came for the Trade Unionists, and I did not speak out— because I was not a Trade Unionist. Then they came for the Jews, and I did not speak out— because I was not a Jew. Then they came for me—and there was no one left to speak for me!"

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