

Summary of Fakhteh Zamani and Ahmad Batebi's Presentation to the Canadian Parliament's Subcommittee on International Human Rights of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development.



On March 24, 2009, Mrs. Fakhteh Zamani, President of the Association for the Defense of Azerbaijani Political Prisoners in Iran and Mr. Ahmad Batebi, a spokesperson for Human Rights Activists in Iran gave a presentation to the Canadian parliament regarding the current status of human rights in Iran.

Mrs. Zamani opened the discussion with a brief presentation on treatment of Azerbaijanis as an ethnically marginalized minority that is barred from linguistic and cultural expression. Mrs. Zamani, who is herself of Iranian Azerbaijani descent, cited examples of the oppressive treatment by the Islamic Republic of Iran on ethnic Azerbaijanis simply for promoting linguistic rights. She mentioned the case of Reza Avaz-Pour, 17, who was sentenced to 15 months in a political prison for stating that his mother tongue would never die; 5 university activists in February 2009 who were charged with establishing illegal

groups and disturbing national security after they campaigned to promote linguistic rights; and Mr. Farhad Mohseni, 25, who was tortured and killed in June 2008 for similar activities.

She goes further to describe her own experience in Iran as a member of a marginalized minority group. Mrs. Zamani remembers the Iranian media's discriminatory nature toward Azerbaijanis and her inability to speak her native tongue openly. Upon immigrating to Canada, she became well aware that these discriminatory actions were not covered in the Western media outlets. Three years ago she set out to increase awareness for her cause, which has intensified since the May 2006 Azerbaijani uprising. She has continued her work despite attacks from opposition groups. She currently speaks with the families of Azerbaijani victims to make sure their stories are heard.



Association for the Defense Of Azerbaijani Political Prisoners in Iran

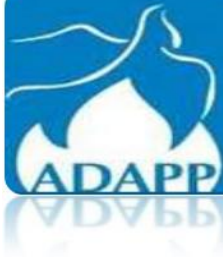
Mr. Batebi followed this presentation by giving statistical information on general human rights violations in Iran. He noted that human rights violations are supported by the Iranian laws, which are based on Sharia, and the Iranian Constitution. He started off mentioning censorship as the principal problem. He described that within the past year, 29 cases of newspapers shutting down and 26 reporters who had been tried for spreading propaganda, 21 of whom were found guilty. He goes further to explain human rights violations committed on students, student groups, women's rights groups and even religious groups. His figures showed the following data on political arrests, totaling 278: 42 arrests of Baha'i activists and 11 execution verdicts, 51 Christians arrested, 131 Sunnis arrested of which 19 received execution verdicts.

After Mrs. Zamani and Mr. Batebi's presentations, Canadian MPs were allotted some time for questions. Mr. Mario Silvia asked both panelists what concrete steps the Canadian parliament could take for their cause. Mrs. Zamani's response was that allowing her to present her case and raising awareness were the first and most important steps. Mr. Batebi described that when the international community becomes aware of Iran's human rights violations, the Iranian government seemingly becomes less harsh on political prisoners in Iran. His goals were threefold: to proliferate international conferences on human rights in Iran, to be able to express his cause to the United Nations, and somehow support Iranian activists that are currently in Iran.

Furthermore, MP Mr. Bernard Bigrsas asked what measures both panelists would like to see. Mrs. Zamani's response was to increase the importance of oppressed minorities in UN resolutions against Iran. She also stated that she would like to see more resolutions to bring awareness of the issue within the Canadian Parliament. Mr. Birgras followed up by asking if Mrs. Zamani would like to see the cases brought up before an International Tribunal. Mrs. Zamani's response was that while this would be "fantastic", for now she just wants to see more awareness of the issue.



MP Wayne Marston began by noting the use of the internet as a powerful tool of raising dissent within Iran. He then asked if there had been any impact from the UN. Mrs. Zamani explained that her experience with the UN had been limited to special support from the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR). Mr. Marston then turned to Mr. Batebi to ask about his treatment as a political prisoner in Iran. Mr. Batebi's response was that the government of Iran uses torture to get information on the plans of activists as well as to scare activists into



halting those activities. In his own case, Mr. Batebi was routinely cut and threatened with execution. To address the latter part of Mr. Batebi's torture, Mr. Marston agreed that torture could be psychological in nature as well.

MP David Sweet began his commentary by noting that these human rights abuses in some way mirror the events that precluded the Holocaust. He went on to ask Mrs. Zamani who had been attacking her. Mrs. Zamani responded by saying opposition groups surprisingly more than the Iranian government. MP Russ Heibert later asked if the panelists were concerned for the safety of their families, to which both responded in the affirmative.

Before Mr. Heibert's question, MP Irwin Colter asked if the situation in Iran had been getting worse. Mr. Batebi said that the situation in Iran is far worse now under President Ahmadinejad than it had been 10 years ago under President Khatami. He argues that there are two groups within the government: the Hojjatieh are willing to worsen the condition in Iran to facilitate the arrival of the "Promised One" while the other group is steadily waiting for his return. Mr. Ahmadinejad is under the influence of the former, which accounts for his blatant lack of respect for human rights. To describe the situation for women in Iran, Mr. Batebi asserts that when it comes to blood money, a woman costs about the same as a man's "manhood."