

Remarks of Ambassador Gary Locke
The Virtual Iran Human Rights and Democracy Conference
Saturday, July 10, 2021

Several months before his tragic death nearly six decades ago, President John F. Kennedy said: “The wave of the future is not the conquest by a single dogmatic creed but the liberation of the diverse energies of free nations and free people.”

Greetings to Mrs. Maryam Rajavi, President-elect of the National Council of Resistance of Iran, and to the tens of thousands of people who have gathered virtually around the world to participate in this Iran Human Rights and Democracy Conference.

I am truly humbled and honored to have been invited to speak to you today and to express my support as you continue your unrelenting fight.

The people and government of the United States of America stand in full solidarity with the people of Iran and fully support their desire to be a free people.

The Iranian people are freedom-loving, brave, and resilient.

You are waging an heroic uprising against the corruption and brutality of the terrorist regime. I say with unwavering confidence that a brighter future awaits Iran thanks to your efforts.

In addition to being the world’s leading state sponsor of terrorism, the evil regime in Tehran continues to suppress the most fundamental human rights of its own people.

The Iranian people deserve a government that respects democratic norms, the rule of law, and places the needs of the Iranian people above funding its adventurism and terrorism abroad. It is critical for the United States and other democracies around the world to stand with the Iranian people.

This 2021 Free Iran Conference is critical to keeping alive your movement for freedom and democracy.

Conferences and Summits like this are so critical. They remind the world
>that the evil regime does not speak for the people;
> that Iranians are committed to the ideals of democracy like free speech, public assembly, and fair elections;
> that human rights are universal rights sought by every people and nation on earth.

Since the tyrants governing Iran came to power in 1979, hundreds of thousands of Iranians have suffered arrest and death for standing up to these cruel rulers.

I support House Resolution 118 of the current U.S. Congress with over 240 Democratic and Republican co-sponsors that condemns the Iranian regime's human rights abuses and calls on all democratic governments to unequivocally support the Iranian people's basic need for human rights.

Women in Iran suffer under a system of discrimination and inequality. This fact is manifest in the constitution and penal code of the Islamic Republic.

Based on this system, the life of a woman literally is regarded as half as valuable as that of a man.

The combined effect is that half of the Iranian population lives with a legal vulnerability that would astonish observers all over the world.

Simply put, women and girls in Iran are vulnerable to violence and harassment, and this permeates every aspect of their lives.

As for the treatment of ethnic minorities in Iran, they are among the most subjugated, dehumanized, and repressed groups.

It is incumbent on the United Nations to pressure Tehran and hold the Iranian dictators accountable for the ongoing and heightened suppression of these vulnerable groups.

America has a proud tradition of supporting the rights of aggrieved people around the world. I am proud that President Biden on his first trip abroad, renewed the importance of human rights.

The people of Iran can be confident that President Biden understands their persecution and will always support your efforts for a democratic Iran.

While the murderous government officials in Tehran are master propagandists, even they could not whitewash the election in mid-June of Iran's new president, Ebrahim Raisi.

Of course, it was such a sham election that the vast majority of the Iranian people boycotted the election.

Raisi's election means he is the first serving Iranian president to have been sanctioned by the U.S. government **before** entering office, for his involvement in human rights abuses – including the mass execution of political prisoners in 1988.

The U.S. Treasury Department sanctioned him in 2019, citing reports that, under Raisi, the judiciary had condoned the execution of child offenders and arrested lawyers for defending political prisoners and human rights defenders.

The U.S. government has also noted his involvement in what it described as a "brutal" crackdown on protesters following the 2009 election and the uprisings in 2016, 2017, and 2018. Dissidents have zeroed in on his role in a "death commission" that ordered the executions of thousands of political prisoners in 1988.

Iranian political prisoners were asked to identify themselves. And those who responded "mujahedeen" were sent to their deaths, while others were questioned about their willingness to "clear minefields for the army of the Islamic Republic," according to a 1990 Amnesty International report. It is estimated that some 30,000 Iranians were killed.

The religious Fascists currently running the Iranian government must be held to account. The world community must speak with one voice: that a president like Raisi is unacceptable.

As we look to a brighter future, I am very impressed with the 10-point plan that has been developed for a democratic Iran – which also includes the Rule of Law, so important to a free society.

I got my start as a lawyer working as a criminal prosecutor in my hometown of Seattle, Washington. My passion for the law has continued throughout my career.

So, I am speaking from the heart when I say that much of the success of the United States can be traced to our strong rule of law that guarantees rights and protections to each individual.

As you build a vibrant new democratic Iran, let me share the words of President Barack Obama about the beginnings of American democracy and its Constitution:

“It wasn’t perfect...(B)ut embedded in this document was a North Star that would guide future generations; a system of representative government – a democracy – through which we could better realize our highest ideals.”

And President Abraham Lincoln, in the midst of the American Civil War, believed that American democracy meant equal rights and equality of opportunity for all its people.

His thoughts from that turbulent time ring true to this day. Lincoln said: "Democracy is a government of the people, by the people, and for the people."

I close with the words of another U.S. President, Thomas Jefferson, written some two hundred years ago:

Jefferson, the author of the Declaration of Independence, wrote: “When the **people** fear the government there is tyranny. When the **government** fears the people there is liberty.”

It has been an honor for me to join you today.

Your cause is just and noble. Oppressed people everywhere on earth are warmed by the flame from the lamp of liberty you hold with such courage and conviction.

Long live a free democratic Iran!