

Bill Ritter, Jr., Former Governor of Colorado

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Hi. My name is Bill Ritter, Jr. I'm the former governor of Colorado in the United States of America. Today I'd like to present a message of thanks and a message of hope to the Iran Conference for Human Rights and Democracy. I want to congratulate all the people who are here today and here in resistance to the regime presently in Iran. I want to thank our keynote speaker and thank her for her courage, for her vision, and for just being bold in her resistance. Mrs. Maryam Rajavi, thank you.

I certainly want to send a message of thanks as well to all the people around the international community who stand in support of the people of Iran, and really send a message as well to the people of Iran who are inside the country and have been part of the protests and part of the resistance, which have intensified over time since 2017. And a special message today to those people who are imprisoned in Iran who have been subjected to abuse and torture, some of the worst forms of physical violence because of their own efforts to protest all of the things that are wrong about the regime.

But I think so much of it is the evidence of a weakened regime. If you think about the intensifying protests since 2017, the efforts of the international community to support the people who have been part of those protests within Iran, the purge of leadership from the regime because of its weakened state, and then really the presidential elections that were recently held in Iran where people protested by not voting, by not voting, where in Iran it's so important to so much of your own ability to live to demonstrate that you have voted. People have decided not to.

And then I would argue that the installation of Ebrahim Raisi as the president is really another sign of weakness. This is a man who should not be president of Iran. He should be on trial for crimes against humanity and people around the world and the international community for a very long time have understood Raisi's role in the 1988 massacres, where literally because of him and the death commission, there were tens of thousands of Iranians who were murdered, brutally murdered because they protested the regime, because they did not support the regime, because they spoke out against the regime. This is the person

who was chosen to be president, a sign that you bring the worst form of abuser in to try and lift up a weakened regime. The darkest hour is just before dawn.

And really, it is a message of hope that you know that the international community stands with the people of Iran. We make a clear distinction between the evils of the regime and the goodness of the people of Iran.

Now I want to spend just a minute talking about what we think of and what we mean when we talk about a democratic Iran. We mean that the people in Iran can associate freely with whom they want. They can assemble freely. The people of Iran have a right to express themselves by voice, by voicing their opinion. They have a right to express themselves by writing what they believe and what their opinion is. The regime has imprisoned or killed over 800 journalists since 1979. This is not a freedom that can go away, the freedom to be able to write and express yourself is freedom of speech, is freedom of the press, but also the freedom to exercise your faith, whatever your faith may be. The freedom to vote in free elections.

We stand in solidarity with you in the present and in the present struggle. But we are here and we will do everything we can as part of that international community to ensure there is a different Iran in the future, to ensure that we welcome into the international stage an Iran that looks completely different from the weakened regime of today. We stand with you in your struggle.

Thank you.