

Remarks by Congressman Elliot Engel (D-NY)
Former Chairman of the House Foreign Affairs Committee
Capitol Hill Rally and Photo Exhibition
August 2nd, 2021

Well Hello.

The last time we had this a few years ago in Washington, DC it was about 100 degrees, so this is actually cool. It good to see you, good to be here with you, it is good to stand up for freedom and democracy. It is good to stand up and stay that people of Iran to have the same rights and everyone else around the world. The people of Iran are good people. It is good to see so many people

Thank you for what you are doing, it is just so important. It is great to be among my Iranian American friends.

First of all, I want to acknowledge the great suffering of the Iranian people displayed here and you walked by any of these columns and pictures, and you see the young people it sort of breaks your heart. As a father of 3, it breaks my heart to see these young people who were all murdered by a regime who does not care about human life. The horrific crimes the regime in Tehran has been committing for over 4 decades is not something that we can stand idly by and watch without condemning.

Two years ago at a similar event on this historical lawn, I lamented the loss of so many bright human beings in Iran and said, 'what is so disgraceful is that many of the people who were responsible for massacre of these beautiful young people here, are the very people who have high positions in the Iranian regime today.' Unfortunately nothing has changed.

Just days after that gathering to commemorate the 1988, which by the way, was the first year I was elected, the 1988 massacre of 30,000 political prisoners, we saw nationwide protests erupt in Iran in November 2019. We witnessed how the regime, this number one state sponsor of international terrorism applied this terrorism against protesters, taking at least 1500 innocent lives. We have here today, the pictures and stories of some of those murdered.

Since then, as you all know, Khamenei and his gang have been using the COVID-19 virus against the Iranian people and intentionally withholding the vaccine and treatment from ordinary citizens in Iran. Ignoring the suffering and deaths it has caused, the Ayatollahs want to force people inside their homes, with the perverted hope to prevent other nationwide protests.

Well, they are wrong. Iranian people's thirst extends beyond that of water or life's basic needs. Yes, they do have thirst for water, the most basic necessity of life. But they hunger for freedom, for liberty from Islamic fundamentalism.

For more than 2 weeks, streets of Iran have been brimming with protests, calling for an end to the regime itself, an end to religious tyranny, and an end to persecution of the innocent. So I am pleased that the Government of the United States has stated its position in support of the protester's inalienable rights - The right to assemble, the right to freely speak, the right to basic needs of life.

So what does the Supreme leader do?

Well, he did what I said these barbarians have done for 4 decades. He puts in charge Ebrahim Raisi, the very person who had a big role in perpetrating the 1988 Massacre. A person with a dark history of being a member of the death committee. A person who as chief of Iran's supposed judiciary the last couple of years, had a big role in the killing of 1500 protesters in 2019 as well as arrest and torture of thousands more.

But the free world has other ideas. Amnesty International's Secretary General said, "That Ebrahim Raisi has risen to the presidency instead of being investigated for the crimes against humanity of murder, enforced disappearance, and torture is a grim reminder that impunity reigns supreme in Iran." The United Nations has also called for a probe into Raisi's role in the massacre. And when I addressed your Free Iran 2021 gathering last month, I expressed my repulsion of Raisi and want to again express my support for your call today, a call that Madam Maryam Rajavi has been reiterating: "the appointment of Ebrahim Raisi is a test of whether international community will engage and deal with this genocidal regime or whether it will stand with the Iranian people...the United Nations and the international community should recognize the 1988 massacre in Iran as genocide and a crime against humanity.'

I am pleased that President Biden's Administration has reiterated sanctions against Raisi for his role in the 1988 killings and pledged to hold Raisi accountable. This a call supported by Amnesty International, the U.N., countless other human rights organizations, and also some 250 bipartisan members of Congress who have cosponsored House Resolution 118.

So I am honored to be with you today to call on the U.S. government to take a leading role in a U.N. led investigation into the 1988 Massacre and Ebrahim Raisi as a person. As was the case in previous genocides in history, accountability is the only way to prevent future crimes and loss of previous life.

And lastly, I want to reiterate what I believe is the right path forward on Iran policy. As I mentioned before, we need to view and treat the terrorist regime in Tehran according to its deeds. The accumulation of more than 40 years of experience has driven home the indisputable fact that the clerical regime in Iran is unchangeable, un reformable and as protesters in Iran are shouting, must go - in its entirety. It can not be a partner of any value in any dialogue and can not represent both the country or its people. The people of Iran will have to do this themselves, but the international community can and must help by holding these oppressors accountable.

That is why I support your cause today and that is why I join my bipartisan House Colleagues in supporting you, and the people of Iran in their unwavering quest to establish a secular, democratic, non-nuclear republic in Iran.

Thank you.