

WRITTEN STATEMENT
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Chairman Casey, Ranking Member Risch, Distinguished Members of the Committee: thank you for inviting us to appear before you today to discuss the Iranian government’s continuing and worsening abuses against its own people.

Almost two years after Iran’s disputed presidential election, Iranian authorities continue to harass, arbitrarily detain, torture and imprison their citizens, as well as some of ours. Their targets include those who demand accountability from their government and who stand up for the rights of their fellow citizens; ethnic and religious minorities; journalists, bloggers and students. Unfortunately, the situation has only further deteriorated in the first months of 2011 as compared with last year: protestors were killed in Tehran in February and in ethnically-Arab areas in April; the reduction of prison sentences for seven Baha’i leaders from 20 years to 10 was reversed; additional sentences were levied on those already in prison merely for sending letters to family members; political prisoners are held in deplorable conditions with convicted murderers in former stockyards; those released from prison are forced to pay exorbitant bail sums; a Jewish woman and her Armenian-Christian husband were reportedly executed based on undisclosed charges; mass executions of mainly ethnic minority prisoners have been carried out without their families’ knowledge; Iran has executed at least 135 people this year, more than any other country in the world except China; restrictions on speech have intensified; journalists and bloggers continue to be targeted by the regime for daring to write the truth; teachers and other workers are harassed and incarcerated when they seek freedom of association and payment of wages owed; trade union leaders remain imprisoned on questionable charges; politically-active students have been banned from universities; and entire university faculties deemed un-Islamic have been forced to close their doors.

Particularly troubling is the deepening persecution of religious minorities. On May 1, the Revolutionary Court in the northern city of Bandar Anzali tried 11

members of the Church of Iran, including Pastor Abdolreza Ali-Haghejad and Zainab Bahremend, the 62-year-old grandmother of two other defendants, on charges of “acting against national security.” On September 22, 2010, Christian pastor Youcef Nadarkhani was given a death sentence for apostasy although, according to human rights groups, this sentence is against Iranian law. Another pastor could be sentenced to death later this year. In March, over 200 Gonabadi Sufis were summoned to courts around the country based on allegations that they were insulting Iranian authorities. In April, eight other Sufis were re-arrested on charges of disrupting public order – charges for which they had been punished with flogging and imprisonment.

Iran’s leaders continue to signal to their citizens that criticism will not be tolerated, while selectively applauding protestors in other countries in the region. As the country’s economic situation deteriorates, workers are arrested when they protest for back wages, only to have authorities deny that strikes are taking place. At the same time the Iranian government was claiming influence in shaping popular unrest in the Arab world last month, its security forces arrested over 200 of its own people and three protestors died at the hands of authorities. While it decries crackdowns against protestors in Bahrain, it defends and assists the Syrian government’s repression of protestors in Syria. Though Iranian leaders continue trying to portray regional events as inspired by the 1979 Islamic revolution, we are confident that the people of the Arab world will recognize those statements for the opportunistic falsehoods they are.

As Iran’s leaders have increased their repressive tactics, we have increased the scope of our efforts aimed at challenging the Iranian government’s deplorable human rights violations. President Obama and Secretary Clinton continue to speak out on behalf of the hundreds of victims in Iran who suffer at the hands of their government. Other world leaders have done the same. We have designated 10 Iranian officials for serious human rights abuses in accordance with the Comprehensive Iran Sanctions Accountability and Divestment Act and, as the act requires, we are actively seeking more information on possible targets.

Following these designations, we engaged our European partners on ways to strengthen our collective voice, express solidarity with victims of torture, persecution, and arbitrary detention, and amplify the effect of our asset freezes and travel bans against Iranian officials. We welcomed the European Union’s April 11 decision to sanction 32 Iranian officials, and have begun working with other partners to explore similar actions. We immediately imposed travel bans on the additional individuals not designated by the United States. While the U.S. and EU

human rights sanctions regimes have different evidentiary standards, we are working closely together to share information on possible targets.

We continue to urge more nations to join our call to shine a spotlight on Iran's gross violations of human rights in bilateral and multilateral settings. We successfully kept Iran off of the United Nations Human Rights Council (HRC) and helped win passage of a Canadian-led resolution condemning Iran's human rights abuses by the largest margin in eight years. At the March session of the United Nations Human Rights Council, we led a successful effort to establish a Special Rapporteur on Iran – the first country-specific human rights rapporteur created since the Council came into being. This historic action sent an unmistakable signal to Iran's leaders that the world will bear witness to their systematic abuse of their own citizens' human rights. More importantly, the Special Rapporteur will serve as a critical voice for those Iranians being persecuted for their political, religious, and ethnic affiliations. We have also urged other countries to press Iran on its abuses in their bilateral diplomacy.

Our efforts to address Iran's human rights abuses have been consistent and sustained. We often work behind the scenes in order to increase our effectiveness. We also continue to work quietly with civil society organizations in Iran to give them the tools they need to expand political space and hold their government accountable. Just as we do throughout the region, we provide training and tools to civil society activists to foster freedom of expression and the free flow of information on the Internet and via other communication technologies.

We believe that Internet Freedom is essential to 21st century democracy promotion. Our Internet freedom programming, which is a priority for Secretary Clinton, is aimed at making sure the voices for peaceful democratic reform – in Iran and around the region – can be heard. We have spent \$22 million on Internet freedom programming to date, and have notified Congress of our intent to spend \$28 million more this spring. Countering Iran's increasingly active Internet surveillance and censorship efforts requires a diverse portfolio of tools and training. State Department grants will support more advanced counter-censorship technologies, including circumvention tools in Farsi, secure mobile communications, and technologies to enable activists to post their own content online and protect against cyber attacks. We also have trained 5,000 activists worldwide – including Iranians – in cyber-self defense. And we plan to expand these efforts to teach democratic activists, journalists, bloggers, human rights defenders and others how to protect their online privacy and their data – so that they in turn can train others.

One of our grantees has just developed a mobile panic button that works on the kind of inexpensive cell phones used in much of the world. Pushing the button alerts others that an activist has been assaulted or arrested – a sad necessity in an era when official abductions and disappearances are all too common. Activists around the world have told us that when police come to break up pro-democracy protests, they often grab demonstrators’ mobile phones in order to track down their contacts. Within a few months, we also expect to have software that will wipe the contact lists from mobile phones with the push of a button.

Countering Iran’s increasingly active Internet surveillance and censorship efforts requires a diverse portfolio of tools and training. We are finalizing new global grants for projects that will support digital safety and capacity building training, counter-censorship technology, virtual communication, and peer-to-peer technologies. No single tool will overcome the Iranian government’s repressive Internet efforts, and that is why we have invested in incubating a diverse portfolio of technologies and digital safety training. This way, even if one particular tool is blocked, other tools will still be available. Likewise, we work to prevent the Iranian government from acquiring sensitive technology to repress its citizens.

Despite growing international consensus and a resounding condemnation of the Iranian government’s actions, the regime continues to turn a deaf ear to the aspirations of its own citizens. But there is hope. Hundreds of brave Iranian citizens continue to engage in the most basic of human rights work, documenting and reporting on abuses, with the hope that one day Iranian government officials will be held accountable for crimes they have committed against their fellow citizens. Along with our international partners, we will continue to draw attention to these and other abuses and call on the leaders of the Islamic Republic of Iran to respect the universal rights enshrined in Iran’s constitution and enumerated in the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, to which Iran is a signatory.