



NORUZ IN TIRANA

ASHRAFIS ARE ABLE TO CELEBRATE NORUZ IN A SAFE ENVIRONMENT AFTER 14 CHALLENGING YEARS IN IRAQ

Ashrafis celebrated the Persian New Year, NoRuz, in Tirana. This was their first NoRuz in a safe environment since 2003. Mrs Maryam Rajavi had joined the celebration and in her short talk she wished for the blooming of the spring of freedom and the failure of the mullahs' belligerence in the region during the new year.

Robert Torricelli, former member of the US Senate; David Muniz, deputy

US Ambassador in Albania, John Bolton, former US Ambassador to the UN; Jean-Pierre Muller, Mayor of Magny en Vexin and member of Val d'Oise Provincial Council; and Bruno Macé, and Mayor of Villiers Adam from France, joined a considerable number of distinguished Albanian personalities including Elona Gjebrea, Deputy Minister of Interior; Pandeli Majko, former Prime Minister; Fatmir Mediu,

former Defence Minister and leader of the Republican Party; and Archbishop George Frenco, the Archbishop of Tirana-Durres, who took part in the gathering.

In her speech Maryam Rajavi pointed out, "The Iranian people's NoRuz comes the day when all sectors of Iranian society including the Fars, Baluchis, Kurds, Arabs, Azeris, Shiites,

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"I'D RATHER DIE THAN GIVE IN TO OPPRESSION" WRITES FEMALE PRISONER ON HUNGER STRIKE

Children's rights defender Atena Daemi is on hunger strike in Evin Prison protesting against the unlawful conviction of her two sisters, Hanieh and Ensieh.

In a letter about her reasons for starting the hunger strike she wrote: "We hear from around the world how criminals or terrorists take people hostage to reach their goals, namely retaliation or wealth. But in Iran the law

enforcement officials are the ones who take people, the families of political prisoners, and their properties, hostage in order to create a climate of fear and repression in the society. Thus they try to achieve their objective which is nothing but staying in power."

Explaining about the circumstances of her arrest she wrote: "They [the security agents] raided our house

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Sunnis, Christians, Jews, and followers of other religions and creeds could live together in peace in a society based on separation of religion and state. This would be a society where everyone can freely think and express their opinions, elect and promote their political traditions, endeavour to change any government they deem is against the people's interests, and a society where people can choose their clothing, and no compulsions are sanctioned.

Ms Elona Gjebrea, Albania's Deputy Minister of Interior said:

I want to thank you for inviting me to your celebrations and for introducing us to parts of your customs and traditions.

This year I was fortunate to celebrate the New Year twice, once in January and again now with you. We are very happy that you are here and able to celebrate this beautiful NoRuz on a sunny day in free and democratic Albania. Once again I want to thank the Prime Minister, the American friends, the UN Refugee Commission, and all those who helped organise this successful operation and the fact that you are here today. We will certainly do more beautiful things together. Happy NoRuz.

Pandeli Mjko, former Prime Minister of Albania said:

Happy NoRuz. NoRuz Mubarak. It is a great honour being today in front of you all, friends, sisters and brothers, fathers and mothers, that for the first time all Ashraf Camp has the NoRuz Day in Albania, safe, in your second home.

Thanks to such a support, you are here, you are not thinking that during the night somebody will attack you with missiles.

Senator Torricelli said:

My friends, it is only the first day of



spring and already my prayers have been answered. A new Ashraf has been created before our eyes... It has been the honour of my life to be a soldier in your struggle.

David Muniz, deputy US Ambassador in Albania said:

Happy New Year. Happy NoRuz. It is very very good for me to see all of you here today safe and sound. I thank God that we were able to finish the relocation so quickly and efficiently and that you are all here in Albania.

Thanks to the generosity of the Albanian government, you have a new home here and, as always, you amaze us with your ability to do so much in such a short amount of time. We are always impressed.

When we knew that we had to transfer two thousand people in such a short period of time from Iraq under such difficult circumstances, we knew it would be a huge challenge, and I wanted to share with you, as I've shared with many of your colleagues before, I've had the privilege of serving my country in Iraq, and when I was there I was also on, shall I say, the receiving end of what the Al-Quds Force can do with its rockets and its merciless hate. So I understand what so many of you faced for so many years. Congratulations on surviving that difficult period in the desert. Congratulations.

I want to again acknowledge the hard work, the very hard work done by so many of our partners during this relocation process that finished last fall. Dr Gjebrea was instrumental in this. She cannot be thanked enough. She worked so hard...



She deserves your undying gratitude for what she did, she and her staff, some of whom have been able to join us today as well from the Ministry of the Interior. So you have already made, I think, a wonderful start here in Albania.

Senator John McCain visited Ashrafis in Tirana on 14 April at the start of his trip to the Balkans. In his speech Senator McCain expressed his condolences to the victims of the mullahs' tyranny and thanked the government of Albania for accepting the former residents of Ashraf and Liberty. He then told the Ashrafis: "You have stood up, fought, and sacrificed for freedom, for the right to live free, for the right to determine your future, for the right that is God given."

"I thank you for being an example; an example to the whole world that those people who are willing to fight and sacrifice for freedom, will achieve it and you are an example to everyone in the world who is struggling for it."





“I’d rather die than give in to oppression” *continued from p.1*

while covering themselves with masks and hats, without showing any arrest warrant or identity cards. While insulting and threatening, they beat me and recorded an unauthorized video with hidden camera.

“They [the agents] also complained against me and my sisters, so that a new case was opened.

“I, along with my sisters Hanieh and Ensieh, were convicted of ‘insulting the officers on duty’, the same charge for which a stay of proceedings was issued before. I received a three months and one day prison sentence, to be added to my previous five-year jail term, and each of my sisters also got a three-month suspended prison sentence.

“Over the months following my arrest, I did the necessary follow-ups and also complained against ‘Sepah-e Sarallah’ [a branch of the Revolutionary Guards who were responsible for the unlawful arrests] officials, but a stay of proceedings was issued for them!

“I complained against the verdict, but my complaint went nowhere as my complaint letter disappeared with the intervention of the warden. Since the law is a one-way street, and given that



I’ve never surrendered to oppression and will never do that, I decided to protest against this clear act of hostage taking. So, I announced that I would sit-in at the office of the women’s ward guard officer for a few days, so as to give them adequate time to address my demands and fix the violations and the illegal verdict in my case. And [I told them] that I would go on a hunger strike if my demands remain unaddressed by the end of the deadline.

“I spent four days and three nights at the office, starting from Tuesday 4 April 2017. I even slept there overnight! What they did about my demands, however, was to indict me and open a new case for me for my sit-in at the office. They then threatened my ward mates, who came to visit me at the office, with new, strict,

and punitive measures so as to prevent other prisoners from backing me. And lastly, they sent the warden’s secretary to the ward to, in addition to insulting and threatening, make a speech about his political positions and brag about the capabilities of the Revolutionary Guards. And all these incidents were arranged by the warden. They had been told that I would go on a hunger strike from April 9 unless my demands were met, which were, meeting with my sisters, their full acquittal, and the return of the bail.

“I am not going to stop my hunger strike until my demands are met. The warden, the Revolutionary Guards agents and the prosecutor are responsible if anything is going to happen. I will defend the legitimate rights of my sisters to the last bit of me. I will not allow the security bodies to violate the law that they themselves have legislated, using our families as a means of psychological torture to create a climate of repression in society.

“I’d rather die than give in to oppression.”

Atena Daemi

Women’s ward, Evin Prison

“RESPECT INTERNATIONAL LAW”

UN EXPERTS URGE IRAN TO STOP EXECUTIONS OF JUVENILE OFFENDERS



A group of United Nations rights experts called for an immediate halt to the execution of two persons who were sentenced when they were both under 18.

The experts said in a press release issued on 28 April in Geneva that “Iran must abide by its obligations under international human rights law and stop carrying out death sentences passed on persons who committed offences when children”.

“We are dismayed by the unprecedented rise in the number of cases of execution of juvenile offenders in Iran,” the experts said. “The psychological suffering inflicted on adolescents kept languishing for

years in prison under a death sentence is appalling, and amounts to torture and ill treatment.”

“These executions must be halted immediately and the death sentences quashed. We also call on Iran to commute without delay all such sentences imposed on children,” they stressed.

One of the two persons, Mehdi Bohlouli, was 17 years old when he was sentenced to death in 2001 by a court in Tehran. The other person, Peyman Barandah, was 15 when he was sentenced to death in 2012, for the fatal stabbing of a teenager.

The UN Human Rights experts have counted 6 scheduled executions of juvenile offenders since January and “express concern that the cases may be only the tip of the iceberg”.

“Taking into account that at least

90 people were on death row at the beginning of April for crimes committed under the age of 18, the exact number of those executed or at risk of execution is likely to be much higher”, they stressed.

“Any assumption that a girl over nine years old or a boy older than 15 can be considered mature enough to be sentenced to death, infringes on the very basic principles of juvenile justice and violates both treaties,” the experts emphasized.

The experts who issued the statement are: Ms Asma Jahangir, Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Iran, Ms Agnes Callamard, Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions; and Mr. Benyam Dawit Mezmur, Chairperson of the Committee on the Rights of the Child.



EASTER & NORUZ IN HAMMERSMITH TOWN HALL

Our NoRuz and Easter event in Hammersmith Town Hall was a success by every standard. The supporters who attended the event were welcomed by Amoo NoRuz (Uncle NoRuz the equivalent of Santa) and volunteers serving in a Persian tea house.

Amoo started the program by a happy song followed by the beautiful playing of the piano by Prof Stephen Rhys who also played famous Persian tunes.

Peter Watsham managed the stage and did an excellent job as the Master of Ceremonies.

A video message from Ashrafis in Albania was followed by thanks and greetings in person from former Ashraf residents who are now in the UK.

Professor Alejo Vidal Quadras, Dr Tahar Boumedra, Lady Moody-Stuart, Prof Sophia Bowlby, Dr Tony Wagg, and Jonathan Bayliss were the speakers, while music continued to delight with the Persian Group of Maestros who played traditional art music, followed



by Theresa Haine, playing the recorder, Elizabeth Watson the viola and David Hawkins the guitar. All in all, it was a most eventful evening.

We thank everyone who took part in this event, the speakers, the musicians, the MC, and in particular those who attended and gave warmth to the event and those who also helped in the preparations.

Following are excerpts from a few of the many comments that we received after the event:

ALAN: The entire proceedings were most pleasurable and entertaining... EVERYONE involved, in whatever way, with the planning and organisation of the celebration deserves praise and acknowledgment for the part they played in what was undoubtedly a major and most successful celebration of this special occasion.

ANDRINA: I just wanted to say how much I enjoyed today's celebration at Hammersmith Town Hall. It was lovely to see so many supporters there and was a testimony to continued hard work of ILA.



EASTER & NORUZ IN HAMMERSMITH TOWN HALL



BILL: Iranian musicians excellent, food very nice, hospitality wonderful, socialising with other friends very good. Altogether an A* event.

CRISPIN: Most most impressed with the Iranian music, it was amazing.

MICHAEL AND CYNTHIA: It was a great privilege to attend such a very wonderful memorable evening, and we want to thank all those who planned and organised it, and decorated the hall and the tables so beautifully to create the welcoming Persian ambience. Special thanks of course to all who worked so hard to prepare such superb feast for so many people – a great achievement! It was also lovely to hear the special Iranian music played on the traditional instruments by very fine musicians.

DANIEL: It was a terrific event and I am sure that I am not the only person who had a great time.

DAVINA: My friend Margaret and I had a lovely time sharing Noruz with you on Easter Saturday...

The food was lovely and the music incredible...

We were made to feel very welcome and we were very impressed with how well organised you were with the food etc. I would have liked to have a link with Albania or see some photos but the technology may not have allowed that.

DIANA: Saturday's Nowruz was nothing short of a triumph – of conceptualisation, organisation, and presentation. Great hospitality, great food, and a great atmosphere in a beautifully decorated hall. I was aware of a real feeling of camaraderie among the guests as well as the volunteers. I also noted that there was a very good attendance, which I hope you found gratifying, and many people stayed until the very end. The Iranian musicians were really special – more please! Many



thanks to them for performing for us all.

An added triumph was to see Camp Liberty residents on stage. To hear their collective expressions of thanks for our support after all they have endured with such fortitude and resolve is really humbling. But it is wonderful to see them and to have the chance to applaud them and to know that others are safe from attack in Albania.

Just when it seems that there can be no room for improvement on previous NoRuz celebrations, ILA volunteers prove us wrong! Amazing!

EILEEN: I was really glad I made it to this year's NoRuz/Easter celebration, especially now that all the remaining Ashrafis are safe at last.

ELIZABETH: Thank you very much for a wonderful evening – the Iranian New Year. The hall looked splendid, the food was interesting and delicious and the company and the talks were fascinating. I specially loved the Iranian music and the great quartet. This was a thrilling insight into Iran and the welcome into

Albania, and it connected me with the tales of ancient history – a world view.

FIONA: The organisation was impressive. It was interesting to hear what efforts have been made by representatives of the EU to improve human rights in your countries of origin.

GEOFFREY: It was a lovely experience and my wife and I were privileged to come up from South Wales to be there and enjoy your hospitality and the good company of other guests, as well as the excellent entertainment from some talented performers. Well done!

JANE: It was a lovely event and a great privilege to be there. I thoroughly enjoyed it. I thought it was a good venue and straightforward to get there. I particularly loved the mix of Easter and NoRuz decoration, the jewelled rice and chicken and the wonderful company.

JOHN: Thank you so much for the welcoming hospitality displayed. I was particularly taken by the music which was played and would like to thank the performers. A very enjoyable evening.

JOHN: Anne and I enjoyed ILA's event in Hammersmith, the first NoRuz we have attended. As ever, the inspiration of your compatriots was amazing. Thank you for the evening. Your hospitality was excellent. We also enjoyed the videos, the Iranian music and the front table displays.

KATE: We felt privileged to be there, and everyone was so warm and welcoming and friendly. It's the first time I have experienced Iranian culture and I loved it. The food was absolutely delicious and so efficiently served – well done!

I thought the Iranian music was fascinating and obviously extremely well executed; I would have loved to have known what the words of the



EASTER & NORUZ IN HAMMERSMITH TOWN HALL

songs were.

It was a fascinating evening and we felt very welcome in your company. We loved the films from the Ashrafi and being able to see how they are getting on in Albania. I would love to go there myself one day!

KEVIN: Thanks so much for organising such an enjoyable event. The welcome and hospitality offered are second to none. Although I had to leave before the end to attend another event, I went away feeling good and inspired. It was nice to meet with other supporters and make new contacts within the Association.

It is also good to see and hear the recorded messages from the Ashrafi in Albania as it reminds us of the success we have achieved, but also of the support work that still needs to be done.

JOHN: We loved the food, the busyness of our hosts and the terrific organisation. The attention to detail was amazing. Our tables were full of treats and a great sense of love and caring was shown.

It was very good to have something so positive to celebrate and Maggie and I hold you and your friends at ILA in high regard.

JUDY: I particularly enjoyed the range of 'entertainers' that you had lined up, it was such a homely mixture of professional and amateur, in speakers as well as musicians, and I very much enjoyed hearing about the people who were involved in enabling Albania to wonderfully become the new home for the remains of the Ashraf/Liberty community, so inspiring to hear of those community members building their material life-support-system once again....

Thank you for the lovely food so kindly delivered to our tables, and the feeling everywhere of being welcomed (like a new year) with kindness and creative energy.

Another time I would like to hear one of your creative lady volunteers explain to us the cultural significance of the table decorations.



SIR MARK: It was an excellent celebration of a very happy beginning in Albania of everyone from Camp Ashraf. It is a great gesture from the Albanian government. It was great to see films of the Albanian celebration and also to be able to celebrate it in London with such magnificent NoRuz hospitality – the food and decorations were fantastic.

Very many thanks to all those volunteers who helped to make the event such a success.

PETER AND BARBARA: We greatly enjoyed our evening; we found the balance of informative speeches and entertainments just right; the Persian music was intriguing to our ears and we could just about follow the rhythms; the food was good and much of it was new to us. We met interesting & like-minded people.

It was a joyful occasion, especially with the re-settlement of 'Camp Liberty' in Albania. Albania is poor; but I remember that for most of my lifetime it was also under dictatorship and shunned by its neighbours – how their times have changed.

ROB: Sue and I had a lovely time – great to see so many people there especially as it was Easter so lots of people would have been away.

We were in Albania last week and that was a great experience so wonderful to see everyone safe and well at last.

SALLY: It was particularly thrilling to see the film of the celebration in Albania... we did not dare to hope that such pictures might be possible a year ago!

The big hall looked as though it was bathed in sunlight when I came in – it was a beautiful sight and there were a great many people there celebrating with you and enjoying – once again – delicious Persian food!

I wish you and your friends and relatives in Albania in particular success in your heroic efforts to restore the rule of law in your own country.

ROSALYN: It was a wonderful event, especially the music programme. I enjoyed it very much and am already looking forward to the big Paris rally.



NEWS IN BRIEF

Three young social media activists get 12 years prison each

Mohammad Mohajer, Alireza Tavakoli and Mohammad Mehdi Zamanzadeh have been sentenced to 12 years of prison each for being administrators of various Telegram channels. All three were born in 1994.



Twelve protest rallies across Iran in just one day

On Sunday 23 April, various gatherings were held in cities across Iran protesting poor living conditions and government-sponsored theft. The protestors included kindergarten teachers, retired electric workers, municipality workers, shopkeepers, dam workers, factory workers, and miners. These protests shed light on the overall situation in Iran.



Political prisoners condemn the attack on prisoners

In a letter to the United Nations Human Rights Council, political prisoners of Evin and Gohardasht condemned the attack on the women's ward of Evin prison.

In the letter they said: "The Prison Guards, under the command of the Organization of the Prisons, attacked the women's ward of Evin prison and with humiliation and insult, destroyed all personal equipment and facilities. Therefore, we, the political prisoners of Evin and Gohardasht prisons condemn this repressive measure and inform

your human rights body that these measures by the Organization of the Prisons are simply aimed at suppressing and intimidating prisoners in order to frighten them not to raise awareness about what is going on in prisons.

We, political prisoners, as victims of these atrocities are demanding from all human rights organizations, especially the UN Human Rights Council, an investigation and follow-up.



Book translator sentenced to death

Marjan Davari, 50, a researcher and interpreter who translated philosophical books was sentenced to death on 12 March 2017 by the 15th branch of the Revolutionary Court in Tehran. She has been convicted of "corruption on Earth" and "association and collusion against the state".

Ms Davari was arrested on 24 September 2015 at her residence in Karaj without specific charge. She was detained at the notorious Ward 209 of Evin Prison and spent three months in solitary confinement.

Ms Davari has translated several books dealing with psychology, mysticism and metaphysics. She used to teach in an institute called Rah-e Maarefat meaning "the path to knowledge".

Apparently the Iranian regime officials see any attempt to raise the knowledge of the population about anything that does not conform to their strict interpretations as "corruption on Earth"

Farmers protest against land grab and the destruction of natural resources

A number of farmers and ranchers in Kuhdasht, western Iran, gathered in front of the headquarters of the

governor to protest against land grab and degradation.

One of the farmers in the rally said: "Our lands have been seized at gunpoint, but the officials have conducted no investigation".

Another protesting farmer pointed out that the farmers are protesting the degradation of national lands and the destruction of natural resources in the area.

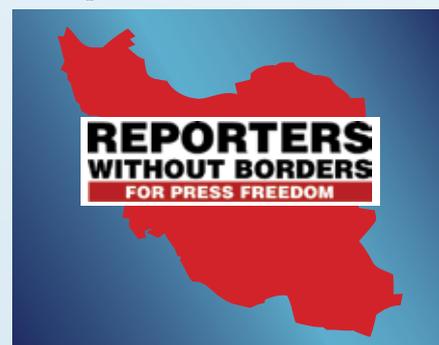


Iran remains one of the world's main prisons for journalists

On 26 April, in its report about world press freedom, 'Reporters Without Borders' stated that Iran continues to remain one of the world's biggest prisons for media activists and the Supreme Leader, Ali Khamenei, remains on the list of the enemies of press freedoms.

The report indicates that the Iranian regime has imprisoned dozens of journalists and web bloggers on alleged charges of "acting against national security" and "moral corruption."

According to RWB, "Media personnel are still constantly exposed to intimidation, arbitrary arrest, and long jail sentences imposed by revolutionary courts at the end of unfair trials. Despite an improvement in its international relations, Iran continues to be one of the world's five biggest prisons for media personnel."





MESSAGES FROM TIRANA



I am Sahar and this is my mum Najmeh. We are very happy to be celebrating NoRuz here in Tirana together after many years. I just wanted to wish you a happy Easter and Happy Persian New Year.

Najmeh: Happy New Year. I am very happy to be able to send you this message. This is the first year that we are celebrating NoRuz without fear of rocket attacks. This is of course made possible because of your kind and selfless support for our transfer and resettlement here in Tirana. I wanted to thank you for this. We are all one family.



Hejrat: I wish that you were with us here. It was you who helped us relocate to Albania and now we can have a great celebration.

Forogh: Happy NoRuz and Happy Easter! We are very thankful of you from the bottom of our hearts since our celebrating NoRuz in peace is because of you and your help. Our father Ali Moezzi who is in prison in Iran also knows that you are his voice.



I am Dr Nafiseh. I would like to give my gratitude to all ILA supporters and volunteers who have been supporting us all these years.

This is the first year after many that we are going to celebrate the New Year without fears and missile attacks. Happy NoRuz and thank you!



I am Dr Moslem, the dental surgeon here in Tirana. I wanted to give you my sincerest congratulations for the arrival of Iranian New Year. Happy NoRuz.



I am Navid. Thank you for your endless efforts for us during all these years.



Mohammad (standing): I am a nurse taking care of patients in the clinic.

I would like to thank all our UK supporters and wish you all Happy Easter and Happy NoRuz!



GRAND GATHERING IN PARIS: 1 JULY 2017
PLEASE JOIN US AS WE AIM TO BE THE VOICE OF THE VOICELESS
IRANIAN PEOPLE WHO ARE SUFFERING EVERY MINUTE OF THEIR LIVES.
PLEASE CONTACT ILA TO BOOK YOUR PLACE