

# International Liberty Association Newsletter

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## Season's Greetings

### EDITORIAL

This, our final newsletter for 2018, leads us to reflect on the year just travelled and to thank you, with all our hearts, for making the journey with us. Despite its challenges, we find ourselves immensely cheered by the very visible progress made towards our goal of a better life for the people of Iran.

The people in Iran themselves, making their voice clearly heard by their uprising and continuing protests throughout the country during 2018, are bringing the prospect for real change and restoration of human rights nearer than ever.

But we must not be complacent. We must prepare to push harder. The years of relentless neglect and abuse of the people and the environment of Iran have taken their toll and there is widespread poverty amid ecological disaster which urgently needs to be addressed.

As we approach the season of peace and goodwill, a special time for families, we focus in this newsletter on the children and young people of Iran, the spirit of the future, those living and working on rubbish dumps, girls forced into cynical, loveless, marriages, boys into military units, the many executed after years on death row for offences committed as a minor, often in self defence against abuse.

We must be the voice of these young people, but also heed the call to become like little children ourselves, to show the way to live with love and compassion for all.

We wish you all the joys of the season as you join in the celebration of life and love with family and friends, including, some of you, with us in Hammersmith on 15 December. We look forward to greeting you all again in 2019, which we trust will prove a pivotal year for Iran and the world.

## LET'S BE LIKE CHILDREN

The keynote speaker at our 13 October social event in Oxford, Mr Lars Rise, was a member of the Norwegian Parliament for many years for the Christian Democratic Party. He is also the Chairman of the Friends of a Free Iran in Norway. Excerpts from his inspiring speech follow:

“It’s actually my brother’s 65th birthday today, so I had to call him one and a half months ago when I was contacted to tell him that ‘I am so sorry, I cannot come to your birthday because I have something more important to do in Oxford’.

“So it’s an honour to be here, and we can see on the wall here, the long history of Persia. It was Persia, I think, until 1935 and it started 4,000 years before Christ, with one of the oldest cultures in the world. And we speak of one of the biggest countries, there are only sixteen countries which are bigger than Iran in the world, it’s the second biggest nation in the Middle East, it’s a key state, it’s the country in



the world with the biggest reserves of natural gas, and that means it could have been a tremendous force, positive force in the Middle East, instead of being the centre of terror and horror and the spread of violence, and I would say also an evil way of thinking. So we should really pool our resources to see if we could make a change in this fantastic country with all the possibilities. But when you have a population ... continued on p.2



## DETAINED ENVIRONMENTAL ACTIVISTS FACE DEATH SENTENCE IN IRAN

According to the Iranian government’s official news agencies, five environmental activists who were arrested nine months ago by the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) Intelligence, have been charged with spreading “corruption on earth,” and hence face death sentences according to the draconian laws of the medieval theocracy.

In another development, a lawyer and environmental activist, Mr Farshid Hakki, was killed on 17

October near his house in Tehran and his body burnt. A few days after the widespread posting of this news on social media, IRGC affiliated media quoted the coroner’s office that the cause of his death was self-immolation. Attorney General Dowlatabadi, announced on October 23 in Tehran that after the transfer of the corpse to the coroner and the autopsy having been performed, no signs of beating or suspicious signs were found. ... continued on p.2



**Let's be like children** *continued from p.1*

of 81.6 million and maybe only two or three million who are supporting the regime, it cannot really last, and we know that many in the leadership of the country, they are already planning their escape.

“For me, Iran has been a big subject since I was a student. I actually studied comparative politics and wrote my thesis about the Islamic fundamentalism and revolution in Iran, so I had a great interest [in this cause].

“In 2005, I was invited to go and see all the thousands of people in Camp Ashraf with my wife. I had newly been married two months before, and I went to my old father and told him: ‘We are travelling to Baghdad’, and he was horrified, because he was at that point watching CNN every day and he saw almost every day it was blowing up something in Baghdad, a suicide bomber, terrorist attack, he couldn’t figure out, ‘why in the world are you going to Iraq, to Baghdad?’ So he was almost like crying when he heard it. But we felt very safe, we spent a little more than a week, maybe four or five days in Camp Ashraf, and we were overwhelmed by not only their hospitality, but I would say the love that we met. And my wife, she was so taken by the emotion she felt, all the love she felt, that she didn’t want to leave. So the evening before the last day she told me: ‘I want to stay here’. So she was newly married, but she said: ‘The love I experienced here is something I never experienced’.

“And they were teaching about love, they actually were teaching a lot of the New Testament and how – and also the principles of Jesus and also the thinking that God is love, which was new to many. So it was an interesting experience.

“I know that this is mainly a



meeting about human rights, and Iran is one of the worst violators of human rights in the world today. Iran is the country that executed most persons per capita, there’s no other country executing more people, so Rouhani who has been portrayed as a liberal and soft politician, he seems to be more hard-line than even Ahmadinejad, the former President, at least when we look at numbers of executed people; and it is strange that a country with 53 per cent Farsi speaking and then you have the rest of the country are minorities, it’s actually a very large proportion of the population who are minorities, the biggest one is the Azeri, the people from Azerbaijan; you have the Kurds, and then you have smaller groups, and you have a multi-religious society as well, a large Christian minority, and Iran has of course signed on the International Convention on Human Rights.

“But they are the worst violators of international treaties, and the world has to stand up against that, but the West seems to have been paralysed by the thought of appeasement.

“We are all responsible for our brothers and sisters who are in pain right now in Iran and it’s interesting that I think I got the solution from

a professor of mathematics who sat down with me, I don’t know if he’s still present here, Mr Colin Hannaford. He delivered his message to me in writing, so he said that: “Bring all the children to me because the Kingdom of God belongs to the children,” and he said that’s the solution, that’s how you can make peace, that’s something I got in writing here, and of course if you have, if you have seen a little group of children, I have two daughters, they are seven and nine now, but they don’t know of the difference between a Buddhist or a Muslim or a Jew or an atheist, they play together, so it’s when they grow up that the parents explain to them, “OK, we don’t like them so much or we don’t like them so much.” So unless you become the children, unless you become like children you cannot enter the Kingdom of God, and I think for Iran this philosophy of treating every human being on an equal basis, which is actually the foundation of the International Convention on Human Rights, unless we can start to think like children who will be fair and just to everybody, I don’t think we can find peace, but together with groups like this I think we can, we can do it.

Thank you!”

**Environmentalists** *continued from p.1*

The coroner, however, dismissed these claims and, according to another official news agency, refused to comment on the case and said “any kind of finding and the cause of death would be announced by the judge of the case”, (ILNA News Agency - 23 Oct 2018).

ILA calls on all international human rights organisations to

strongly condemn these crimes. The United Nations should adopt binding measures to stop these atrocities and establish a delegation to investigate the suspicious circumstances of many deaths in the past nine months across the country as well as the status of prisons and prisoners all over Iran.

**Iranian lawyer and environmental activist, Farshid Hakki, was killed mysteriously near his home in Tehran**





## CHILDREN OF IRAN, A LOST FUTURE?!

### Early marriage, the worst oppression against Iranian girls



According to an article in the state-run [salamatnews.com](http://salamatnews.com) on 20 October 2018, in a gathering in the city of Tabriz, northwest Iran, about violence against women, Massoumeh Aghapour, a Majlis deputy (member of the so called parliament of the Islamist regime), said early marriages are examples of violence against women. “They are in fact, the worst form of oppression of girls and future women of Iran,” she added.

“Looking at official statistics,” Aghapour said, “we realize that this is the great pain of our present society.”

Lawyer Zohreh Arzani also pointed to the large numbers of divorced children in Iran and said, “When the parliament talks about 15 being a suitable age for marriage, has any of the gentlemen listened to the complaints and pains of any one of these girls?”

The regime’s parliament has not passed the bill proposing to tackle violence against women for eight years. The only effort made so far has been an attempt to pass a bill banning marriage of girls under 13 years of age, which has not yet been decided upon.

According to the official statistics, there are 24,000 under-18 widows in Iran, and most of the early marriages end up in divorce. Khorasan Razavi Province (eastern Iran) has the largest number of early marriages, while East Azerbaijan Province (Tabriz is its capital) ranks second.

### Iranian regime’s Basij Force still uses child soldiers

On 16 October 2018, the US Treasury Department sanctioned the Basij Force and 22 other banks, companies and financial institutions that were

directly involved in the funnelling of billions of dollars to the Revolutionary Guards’ foreign adventures.

The Basij has earned a spot on the US’ blacklist after decades of recruiting, training and dispatching hundreds of thousands of child soldiers and Afghan refugees into wars in the region.

The Treasury Department said: “In addition to its involvement in violent crackdowns and serious human rights abuses in Iran, the Basij recruits and trains fighters for the IRGC-QF (Qods Force = Jerusalem Force), including Iranian children, who then deploy to Syria to support the brutal Assad regime.”



The statement emphasises that the IRGC used children as young as 12 as cannon fodder in its regional wars and that it has been sending children to fight in Syria since at least 2015. They even included a screenshot from a 2017 broadcast by the state-run IRIB, which showed a 13-year old Basij member in the Syrian border city of Abu Kamal, who said that he was a “defender of the shrine”. This is a euphemism used by the Iranian regime to justify sending fighters to Syria and Iraq.

This blacklist enforces sanctions on a number of Iranian companies, but it also freezes all Basij assets held in the US and bans US citizens from doing business with the Basij or any of its front companies.



Yemeni Students are forced to say pro-Iran chants at school



The US ambassador to the UN, Nikki Haley criticised Iran at the UN Security Council for its use of child soldiers. She said: “The use of child soldiers is a moral outrage that every civilised nation rejects while Iran celebrates it... Iran’s economy is increasingly devoted to funding Iranian repression at home and aggression abroad. In this case, Iranian big business and finance are funding the war crime of using child soldiers. This is crony terrorism.”

The use of children in armed conflict is a war crime and many international human rights organisations have condemned the Iranian regime for it but the regime has turned a deaf ear to all of these criticisms. A concerted effort is needed to stop this violence.

### Iranian regime executes juvenile ‘offenders’



‘Child bride’, ‘criminal’, ‘juvenile offender’, these are some of the many labels assigned to Zeinab Sekaanvand during her far too short life.

Sekaanvand, who was executed on Tuesday 9 October 2018 in Urumieh prison in Iran’s West Azerbaijan province, was rarely seen for who she really was: a vulnerable young woman trapped in a cycle of violence and sexual abuse since childhood.

Sekaanvand, who was 24 when she was hanged, had spent almost a third of her life in detention. In February 2012, she was arrested and put on trial for the murder ... continued on p.4



**Children of Iran** *continued from p.3*

of her husband, a crime that took place when she was 17 years old. She had reported being raped by her brother-in-law and tortured by police after her arrest.

What’s especially chilling about Sekaanvand’s case is the number of points at which the Iranian authorities could have intervened to help her. Sekaanvand reported the abuse she suffered. She spoke out, yet she was ignored.

It’s a scenario that is all too familiar to many women and girls. But because Sekaanvand lived in Iran, her story took an even darker turn.

There are many more like Sekaanvand in Iran, which is one of the world’s last countries to execute “juvenile offenders.” At least 88 people who were under the age of 18 at the time of the crime are currently on death row, some of whom have been languishing there for over a decade.

Looking closer, Sekaanvand’s case reads like a textbook example of the myriad ways the Iranian justice system stacks the odds against women.

Born in northwest Iran into an impoverished and culturally conservative Iranian Kurdish family, Sekaanvand was 15 years old when she married Hossein.

Although Sekaanvand registered several complaints about her husband’s violent abuse with the police, they repeatedly ignored her pleas for help and failed to launch an investigation against him.

Meanwhile, according to her statement, Hossein’s brother was regularly raping her.

Still a child, she was under the power of two violent and abusive men, and no one would help her.

In February 2012, Sekaanvand was arrested for the murder of her husband. She was denied access to a lawyer and said she was tortured and beaten by police officers during questioning. It is under these circumstances that Sekaanvand “confessed” to stabbing her husband.

It was only at her final court hearing, three years after her arrest, that the authorities provided her with a lawyer. At this point, she retracted her “confession,” telling the judge that her husband’s brother—her alleged rapist—had committed the murder.

Sekaanvand said in the court that her brother-in-law had told her that if she accepted responsibility, he would pardon her. Under Iranian law, murder victims’ relatives have the power to pardon the offender and accept financial compensation instead.

But instead of requesting further investigations, the authorities dismissed Sekaanvand’s statement and sentenced her to death by hanging.

In his report to the General Assembly on 27 September 2018, Javid Rahman, the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Iran, reiterated “the grave concerns previously expressed by the Secretary-General, High Commissioner for Human Rights, and his predecessor with respect to the continuing execution of juvenile offenders in Iran, noting that at least four juvenile offenders were executed in first-half of 2018, with several others facing imminent execution”.

**Child labourers**  
**Children without childhood**



Millions of children are either sold, rented, or sent off to work by their impoverished families. Poverty imposed by the regime is driving parents to such measures in order to keep themselves above water. To repay their debts or gain meagre sums of money, some poor families rent their children as young as five and less for work who might experience years of violence and abuse.



These children work as breadwinners, losing their only opportunity of childhood as they toil along the highways and streets or in gruesome work places.

**Iran government hires children to sort rubbish**



Other than deprived children searching garbage to find food, children as young as six years old have been recruited by government contracted waste disposal facilities to collect and sort through the garbage in order to cut labour costs – children are given less than one-tenth the wage of an adult worker.

According to state-run news agency Tasnim: “The lack of precise monitoring, and licensing of garbage collection to contractors who use deprived children, who have to work for bread, has caused the formation of authorized and unauthorized recycling centres on the border of southern regions of Tehran and in centres such as Mahmud Abad and similar places”. According to the report these children “work and live in the worst conditions in the middle of a mountain of garbage”, and the government, well aware, is doing nothing to stop this heinous phenomenon.



## A SEARCH IN THE PATH OF THE IMPOSSIBLE



Happy New year, I have had the opportunity to meet many of you, I have been a human rights activist and volunteer for more than two decades. I am very honoured to have met many of you face to face in meetings or in our events. Seeing the values that each and every one of you represent has given me the strength and motivation to continue this struggle for a

large portion of my life. Whenever I see any one of you I remember the famous Iranian saying that *“One candle can light several thousand other candles without losing even a bit of its brightness”*.

In previous years together we turned an impossible to a possible and managed to relocate three thousand Ashrafis from the critical situation they faced in Iraq; several attacks and massacres. The day that we were told they had all been finally relocated I was filled with joy. We had saved people who have sacrificed a lot for alleviating the pains of others, particularly children, the main victims of the mullahs’ rule in Iran. Many of you had made that victory possible, for which I am most grateful.

When I was young I travelled to villages where I saw children working in harsh conditions in brick furnaces. Poverty had forced families and particularly children to work like slaves. It was so painful to me. I was ashamed of myself and always tried to help them out. My father told me how he had to work as a child to provide for his younger brother and sister.

These days when I hear the horrible stories of abuses

against children in particular in Iran, the things they go through are disturbing, their body parts being sold and the smuggling of children. When I hear these things I say to myself I wish I was a poet or a writer so I could show the world the situation these children are living in. I wish I could be the voice of activists like Atena Daemi, who because of standing up for children’s rights was imprisoned. I have a dream that one day such phrases like ‘child labour’ vanish from the face of the earth. I feel that working together this dream can come true. It is like building a bridge or a large structure; you start with a brick but eventually you will build something big brick by brick. It is with this motivation that I ask for your help and support. Children make our future, how we raise them up and what we teach them forms the foundation of our future society.

Let me finish with a quotation by Arthur C. Clarke I have been told: *“The only way to discover what is possible is to search in the path of the impossible.”*

Blessed you are, Mohamad



## UN RAPPOREUR GRAVELY CONCERNED ABOUT EXECUTION OF JUVENILE OFFENDERS IN IRAN



Javaid Rehman, the new UN Special Rapporteur on the human rights situation in Iran, who took the position after former Special Rapporteur, Ms Asma Jahangir, died unexpectedly last February, presented his report to a UN panel in New York on Wednesday 24 October, criticizing the rise in executions and particularly those of juvenile offenders as well

as various forms of suppression in Iran. Mr Rehman explained that throughout 2018 a nationwide protest movement, which the Iranian regime has tried to suppress, has besieged Iran.

Mr Rahman called on the Iranian authorities to allow him to visit the country in order to assess the human rights situation there through interviews with actual Iranian citizens.

In his report to the General Assembly of the United Nations a month earlier Mr Rehman expressed grave concerns with respect to the continuing execution of juvenile offenders in Iran and mentioned the names of four (3 boys and one girl) who were executed for crimes allegedly committed when they were juveniles; Amir Hussein Pourjafar,

Ali Kazemi, Mahboubeh Mofidi and Abolfazl Chezani Sharahi.

In his report he rejected the government’s explanation that “the aforementioned individuals were executed in accordance with the punishment of qisas (retaliation in kind) for the crime of murder upon the request of the next of kin of the victim”, and stated that “the Special Rapporteur believes that the Government should not delegate its responsibility to protect the right to life to the next of kin.”

Mr Rehman emphasised that: “The Special Rapporteur intends to closely follow the situation of juvenile offenders on death row in the course of his mandate and the legislation concerning the application of the death penalty to such individuals.”



## OUR EVENT IN OXFORD



Retired General Medical Practitioner, Dr Rosalind Kent, spoke at our event in Oxford on 13 October. Excerpts of her touching speech appear below:

*“My first encounter with any refugees was as a baby during WWII when my parents took in a Jewish couple who were fleeing from Hitler—they became virtually my ‘other parents’.*

*“I have witnessed the activities of the ILA over the years and the enormous efforts which its courageous volunteers have put into improving human rights in Iran, in Ashraf and in Camp ‘Liberty’. I have met many of these dedicated volunteers and have great respect for, and trust in them. Their efforts in highlighting the human*

*rights situation in Iran and the plight of Ashrafis have been gigantic, with the latter culminating in their release from Camp ‘Liberty’ in 2016.*

*“In 2009 I attended the demonstration outside the American Embassy where the brave hunger strikers impressed me. I am sorry that the media have not given you more publicity, and I believe that this is further evidence of the insidious influence that the current Iranian regime has in many countries.*

*“Currently the ILA are focusing their efforts on settling the Ashrafis in their new country, Albania, as well as supporting friends and family in Iran. The importance for Britain of their work is towards the stabilisation of the Middle East, as well as the immediate humanitarian aspects and the promotion of universal democracy. The money spent on political disruption and wars would fund a beautiful and peaceful way of life for all of us, everywhere.”*



## IRANIAN ACTIVISTS AND PRISONERS CALL FOR ABOLITION OF THE DEATH PENALTY IN IRAN



On the occasion of the World Day Against the Death Penalty, Iranian activists, political prisoners and families of political prisoners as well as 2320 death row prisoners across Iran called for abolishment of the death penalty in Iran.

Three political prisoners detained in the Women’s Ward of Evin Prison, Maryam Akbari Monfared, Atena Daemi and Golrokh Iraee, sent out a letter addressed to Mr Javaid Rehman, the UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Iran.

In their letter they underlined the grim situation of human rights in Iran particularly relentless executions “out of media spotlight”.

The three brave prisoners wrote:

“It has been some time now, that the media cite officials as saying that the death penalty has been abolished for drug trafficking related convicts. However, the truth is that these convicts are hanged out of the media spotlight. The executions of those convicted of possessing, purchasing

or selling narcotic drugs, in addition to those convicted of murder comprise the largest number of executions in Iran. As you do certainly receive the existing data, every year a large number of men and women are sentenced to death for committing (intentional or unintentional) murder and the verdicts are rapidly carried out.

“In addition to the ordinary prisoners, many political activists and dissidents have been hanged or executed for dissent and thinking differently from the ruling regime. According to credible documents, the largest number of executions took place in the first ten years of the rule of this regime (1979-1989). These executions were mostly carried out without fair trials, and yet after carrying out the verdicts, the bodies of execution victims were buried somewhere in the outskirts of the cities without any marks. This is while activists who oppose the death penalty are not allowed to have any campaigns, and many of them have been imprisoned merely for their opposition to the death penalty.”

The three political prisoners urged Mr Rehman to visit Iran to see the truth for himself, first hand.

At the same time, 2,320 death row prisoners from nine prisons in Iran called for the abolishment of the death penalty in an open statement which was unveiled in a conference in the municipality of the 5th district of Paris. According to Iranian regime officials, there are currently more than 5,000 people in prisons across Iran awaiting execution. You can only imagine the nightmare they are enduring.



## NEWS IN BRIEF

### DETAINED CHRISTIAN DENIED MEDICAL TREATMENT



Political prisoner Ebrahim Firouzi, held at Rajaie Shahr Prison, has been denied adequate medical access despite severe toothache.

He has been imprisoned since 2014 without a single day of leave.

According to an informed source, due to being denied access to a specialist, his entire face hurts, affecting his ability to eat.

He has been prosecuted three times since 2010 for converting from Islam to Christianity and allegedly organizing Christian religious meetings.

### RIGHTS ACTIVISTS AND LAWYERS SENTENCED TO PRISON AND FLOGGING



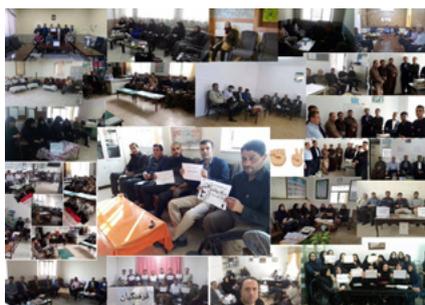
Eleven civil rights activists who were arrested during the December 2017 and January 2018 uprisings were sentenced to prison and flogging by the 1st Branch of the Markazi Province Court of Appeal.

Human rights lawyer Mohammad Najafi (centre) was sentenced to three years of prison and 74 lashes.

He was arrested on 15 January 2018 after he revealed that his client Vahid Heydari, 22, was beaten to death at the police station in Arak and how the local police concealed the true cause of his death.

### CRACK DOWN ON TEACHERS

Following the nationwide sit-in protest of teachers on October 14 and 15, the regime intensified the crackdown on educators in fear of continuing



strikes and protests. The Ministry of Intelligence and the IRGC Security and Intelligence departments in various provinces across the country have arrested or summoned a number of teachers and filed cases for them.

On Tuesday, 23 October, Hashem Khastar, a prominent teachers' rights advocate who has faced arrest and imprisonment



on several occasions in the past, was kidnapped by intelligence agents and transferred to a psychiatric centre after disclosure of his kidnapping.

### HEAVY SENTENCES FOR ARRESTED PROTESTERS

The Iranian judiciary is resorting to heavy sentences against protesters arrested during demonstrations to discourage people from participating in demonstrations. Many of the detainees are held in heavily controlled prisons and detention centres and under high security conditions.



It is worth noting that Iranian authorities arrested over 8,000 protesters in different cities during the protests that started last December. At least 14 of these individuals were killed under torture and the Iranian authorities claimed some of them committed suicide.

In another development three



girls, Yasaman Ariani, 23, Saba Kord-Afshari, 19, and, Azar Heydari, have been sentenced to one year behind bars.

Yasamin Ariani and Saba Kord-Afshari were lingering in limbo in Qarchak Prison in Varamin since the time of their arrest on 2 August 2018. They have been transferred from Qarchak to Tehran's notorious Evin Prison after their sentences were issued.

Yasamin Ariani was arrested after helping an old woman who was thrown to the ground by anti-riot units.

### GRAVE CONDITION OF PRISONS IN IRAN



On Monday 15 October, anti-riot security guards raided political prisoners in Ward 12 of Orumieh prison, beating them and transferring some of them to solitary confinement. The attack came after prisoners protested the beating of another prisoner and his transfer to solitary confinement. The next day prisoners started a hunger strike in protest to this brutal attack. Prisoners in this prison have been deprived of minimum medical treatment and last month three prisoners died as a result.

On Friday 12 October, the prison guards took a group of detainees in Zahedan Prison to fresh air and beat them naked.

Zahedan's central prison holds several times its capacity, and a large portion of the 2000 prisoners have no place to rest.



## GREETINGS FROM TIRANA

Dear Friends

I am writing to you from Tirana. Some of you may have read my book 'Face to Face with the Beast', my memoirs from Iranian prisons. I thought that the occasion of the festive season is fitting to inform you of a piece of good news.

You remember that we were denied medical treatment while in camps Ashraf and Liberty and many Ashrafis have sustained injuries after the many missile and physical attacks.

I am pleased to inform you that with the access to medical care here in Tirana hundreds of those injured have received beneficial treatment. Many have fully recovered, while others are gradually improving. Many who had suffered from loss of eyesight, have experienced the remarkable return of their vision. Others whose mobility had reduced to none due to their serious injuries, are now able to walk without aid or wheelchair. We are so grateful for the collective work and support of all of you supporters and volunteers of International Liberty Association who have made these results possible.

As we celebrate the joy of Christmas and the deriving values, I would like to share with you some of my thoughts, reflections and what has touched my heart in recent years.

Looking back to the days when we were in Ashraf City and then later in Camp Liberty, there were times where I could not help to feel desperate, helpless and frightened. The pres-

ures of the medical and logistical blockade, that caused so much suffering to my comrades, and having to be alert for fearsome attacks every moment, would at times overpower me. I sometimes felt the torment of having to await the attacks unbearable and knew that it would take the lives of my friends, those whom I love the most. Knowing that you have skills to save lives, but lack facilities, equipment and that even basic tools are withheld from you, is a torture. These are scars that do not heal easily. I must admit that I learned so much about life in hardship from some of my suffering patients, who were much braver than I. They became my best friends and guides, as their heroic spirits gave me energy and it was as if we healed each other. Creating an environment where we would speak of our fears, give each other hope, and not allow grief or anguish to take over, ensured happy and gentle occasions as well as many joyous moments for all of us. I learned that as the pressures intensified, so would our resolve, ingenuity, hopes and even our happy spirits. We found joy, laughter and kindness to each other, as powerful instruments.

A different yet powerful and touching experience was to see the relentless efforts of kind hearted and dignified people such as yourself in the UK. It was heartening to know of your care, giving us your love, doing so much for our health, safety and for being our voice. When I saw your support during the recent years, even



though we were safe in Albania, I was taken aback with amazement. I realised that being an Ashrafi knows no boundaries and I learnt that love recognises no limits, bars or personal connections. When I visit the patients in the clinic, I feel carried by you. The values that you stand for strengthen my resolve and help me do my job even better. My colleagues and I will never forget the beauty of your deeds and we venerate your humanity. Everyone here would like to adorn you with their gratitude and heartfelt joy and we are indebted to you for setting an example. We may not have met many of you in person, but you are on our thoughts every day and we are inspired to learn human qualities from you.

I wish you all happy Holidays and a successful and joyous New Year. And a very Merry Christmas to our Christian friends. May in 2019 all your wishes come true.

With lots of love from Tirana,  
Hengameh

**WE CORDIALLY INVITE YOU  
TO THE ILA CHRISTMAS  
CELEBRATION AND DINNER  
Hosted by Father Christmas**

**3PM-6PM  
SATURDAY 15 DECEMBER 2018**

**Hammersmith Town Hall,  
King Street, London W6 9JT**

