



International Liberty Association Newsletter

Rowlandson House • 289-297 Ballards Lane • London N12 8NP
W: www.iliberty.org.uk • E: info@iliberty.org.uk • T: 020 8452 3481

EDITORIAL

As we prepare this, our first newsletter of 2019, we hold the door open on the closing days of the passing year. We hear the calls of hope and celebration “Happy New Year!”, “Peace on Earth, Goodwill to all.” and behind these the joyous cries from the ‘Festivals of light’, all held around December’s darkest night. “Merry Christmas!”, “Happy Hanukkah!”, “Yalda Mubarak!”.

And, listen, mingled with these traditional greetings, giving us even more cause for hope and joy, we hear the voices of the people of Iran, rolling right back beyond the dawn of 2018, an unstoppable force determined for their truths to be heard and their demands for justice and their rights to be met.

And we hear also the voices of so many good men and women across the globe, who have heard the people’s call and stepped up their efforts to support them. We at ILA have been overwhelmed by your love and everything you have done to stand by us in these most challenging, yet most exhilarating, of times. Mere words cannot express our feelings, but we have done our best to encapsulate a sense of all this for you within these pages.

As we all know New Year is traditionally the time to make resolutions and we do here pledge to be tireless in our efforts to support the Iranian people throughout 2019.

Who knows how events are going to unfold over the coming weeks and months, but it seems fitting that our invitation for you to celebrate our Persian New Year, Noruz, alongside Easter, is on the last page of this newsletter. A good time to take stock, reflect and re-pledge commitment to this vital cause. Please be there with us if you can.

65TH UN RESOLUTION ABOUT IRAN’S ABUSE OF HUMAN RIGHTS—TIME TO ACT



On Monday 17 December, the UN General Assembly approved a resolution urging Iran to stop its widespread use of arbitrary detention and expressing serious concern at its “alarmingly high” use of the death penalty.

The Canadian-drafted resolution was adopted by a vote of 84 to 30 with 67 abstentions.

The resolution “strongly urges”

Iran to eliminate discrimination against women in law and practice and expresses “serious concern about ongoing severe limitations and restrictions on the right to freedom of thought, conscience, religion or belief”.

It singles out violations including harassment, intimidation and persecution against religious minorities

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ILA WELCOMED TO CHURCH IN PUTNEY ON CHRISTMAS EVE



ILA volunteers were welcomed to midnight prayers held on Christmas Eve at All Saints Church in Putney, where the Reverend Christopher Eyden spoke movingly about the situation in Iran. Excerpts from his talk follow:

There are people in Iran right now who experienced that [oppression]. We have taken them to our hearts as one of our Christmas charities this year, and we welcome tonight representatives of the International Liberty Association. There are many of you here, my brothers and my sisters, and you are most welcome.

They represent the persecuted and imprisoned people of Iran. Many of them are Muslims. Salaam aleikhum, and we are delighted to welcome you here.

I am going to speak to them [Christians incarcerated in Iran] tonight. Hassan, Yousef, Ebrahim Firouzi, we here in Putney are praying for you tonight.

Anousheh, we know you were arrested with your son Soheil ... continued on p.3



65th UN Resolution *continued from p.1*

including Christians, Gonabadi Dervishes, Jews, Sufi Muslims, Sunni Muslims, Yarsanis, Zoroastrians and members of the Baha'i faith, and urges the release of religious practitioners including Baha'i leaders.

The resolution also calls on Iran to end "widespread and serious restrictions" including on freedom of assembly of political opponents, human rights defenders, labour leaders, environmentalists, academics, filmmakers, journalists, bloggers, social media users and others.

The adoption of this 65th resolution highlighting the Iranian regime's abysmal rights violations leaves no doubt that this regime is one of the most aggressive violators of human rights in today's world. Seemingly, a lack of practical measures by the international community against the crimes of this regime has emboldened it to continue and spread these

crimes, the latest example of which has been the heinous midnight raids on the residences of protesting workers and the arrest of dozens of deprived workers who demand their unpaid wages.

Clearly the impunity of the perpetrators of the massacre of political prisoners in 1988, one of the most obvious examples of crimes against humanity since the Second World War, has played a major role in encouraging the regime to continue its crimes against humanity. Many of the current regime leaders are either directly involved in, or continue to defend, this horrible crime and prevent disclosure of details such as the names of the victims and their burial grounds.

Obviously the immunity of the regime's leaders who have taken part in these atrocities has not only led to more violations of human rights, but has also emboldened them to commit



crimes in other parts of the world.

The International Liberty Association calls upon the international community and particularly the UN to investigate these crimes, especially the massacre in 1988. The dossier of these crimes must be referred to the UN Security Council and Ali Khamenei, Hassan Rouhani and all the other regime officials who are clearly responsible for these violations must be brought to justice. This is not only necessary for the Iranian people, but also a prerequisite for peace and tranquillity in the Middle East and the wider world.

ALBANIA EXPELS IRAN'S AMBASSADOR FOR SECURITY REASONS – THE REST OF EUROPE SHOULD FOLLOW



Albania has expelled two Iranian diplomats for engaging in illegal activities that threaten the country's security.

On Wednesday 19 December 2018, a spokesman from the Albanian Foreign Ministry told The Associated Press that the two diplomats were expelled for "violating their diplomatic status".

The US National Security Advisor, John Bolton, praised Albanian Prime Minister Edi Rama for expelling the Iranian ambassador, "signalling to Iran's leaders that their support for terrorism will not be tolerated".

"We stand with PM Rama and the Albanian people as they stand up to Iran's reckless behaviour in Europe and across the globe," he wrote in Twitter. US Secretary of State, Mike

Pompeo, also supported the move and tweeted:

"I commend PM Edi Rama's expulsion of two Iranian agents who plotted terrorist attacks in Albania. European nations have thwarted three Iranian plots this year alone. The world must stand together to sanction Iran's regime until it changes its destructive behavior."

Friends of a Free Iran (FOFI) in the European Parliament also welcomed the expulsion of the Iranian regime's ambassador from Albania and, in a statement sent to the press on 21 December, FOFI's chairman, Gérard Deprez MEP, said: "In recent months several Iran regime's terror plots have been neutralized by European and American Security agencies. An Iranian diplomat arrested in Germany is now facing trial in Belgium for a bomb plot...in Paris on 30 June 2018.

"Denmark has also recalled its ambassador from Iran over a foiled assassination plot targeting Iranian dissidents living in Denmark.

"Parallel to terrorist activities, Tehran spends millions on a massive smear campaign throughout the western world, disseminating false news

and misinformation against this main opposition movement.

"Last month, in a joint statement signed by 150 members of the European Parliament, we criticized the current EU approach towards Iran. 'The EU's silence in the face of brutal human rights violations in Iran and lack of any response to the serious terror plots in Europe is unacceptable'.

"We are delighted that Albania has now expelled Iran's ambassador and another diplomat for 'damaging its national security'.

"We call on the EU and the Member States for a firm policy towards Iran. We must hold the Iranian regime accountable for its terror plots and expel Iranian Intelligence Ministry operatives from Europe", Mr Deprez concluded.





Putney Welcome continued from p.1

and we can only imagine what hardship and fear you must endure, and we are praying for you tonight.

Maryam, you are a music teacher. I hope you hear the song of hope, of the love of God in our music tonight. Maryam, keep on campaigning, do not lose hope. None of you must lose hope. You are not forgotten by the world. God bless you at Christmas time. Putney stands alongside you.



You are all invited to be a part of their struggle tonight. There are thirty people who will help you to sign a petition for their release, and for the end of the use of the casual death penalty in Iran. Christians, political activists, gay people are tortured and hanged daily. They need to be reminded that they are not forgotten and that they are not crushed by despair. They, we, have to know that there is always hope, hope that is born again with almost every breath that we take. Hope is the thing

that powers the cosmos, hope of abiding love, not tinsel and bauble love, but tenacious, tough love that shines through the bloody world that we inhabit. It takes a bit of time and takes a bit of effort.

The effort may be to stop for a few minutes as you leave this church and sign a petition. It does work.

And your signatures will make a difference, believe me. We can't ignore the world that we live in. We're compelled to act upon the message of the angel, the act of God in coming into our world, and acting on it means doing something, something loving, something that is right, making good choices.

Tonight, perhaps the light kindled in the manger of your heart can translate into what you are able to give to them, to help them. And the child you help could grow to be the adult whose inspiration eventually brings about peace in Iran, in the Yemen, in the Middle East. Every Gandhi, every Martin Luther King, every Nelson Mandela, was a crying child, born into cruelty and persecution, once. Who knows what good you will bring about when you put your hand in your pocket and take a few minutes of your life to sign a petition, exercising the love born into the manger of your heart and acted on in real time. You know hope is so much more than a fairy tale. Looking at beauty, you have to look and listen long and listen well, engage your heart, bring fear and honesty to the same place. Hope is not waiting for rescue or being woken from a sleep, it's not gambling or a bit of luck, it's not dreaming dreams, hope is bringing breath and love

and sweat to bear on the darkness. You have to DO hope, and unless it teeters on the edge of despair it's not hope, it's the saccharine gain of a Disney wish.



My friends, who fight tirelessly to free people wrongly imprisoned in Iran, know how much hope costs. Just like the baby, born in a stable in a war-torn part of the Middle East called Bethlehem, hope is painful, beautiful, dangerous, compelling, utterly absurd. That's the way that you have to go about things. That's why people try to ban it, imprison it, execute it, for that's what the world is like, this year, every year - painful, dangerous, compelling, utterly absurd, but bloody beautiful! And God gets that. And I hope we can all bloody get it this year too, because we all need it. We all need hope, and we all need to share it too. We might know how; God, hope, light that darkness cannot, will not, could not ever extinguish. It is born to our broken, sick and tearing world. I will remember it, so will you.

Amen!

PATRICK KENNEDY & INGRID BETANCOURT VISIT ASHRAFIS IN TIRANA



On Saturday 15 December, a conference simultaneously held in 40 different locations across the world called for international action against the increasingly hostile activities of the Iranian regime and its human rights abuses at home.

Mr Pandeli Majko, former Prime Minister of Albania participated in the gathering at Ashraf 3, near Tirana, and said: "It is a great honour every time that I have taken the floor in front of you, not as a minister or former prime minister but first of all as a friend of yours.

"[What] you have done in less than one year [is]

a miracle. You have constructed a city, and like we in Albanian have the expression, 'my home is my castle,' Albania is your castle."

Patrick Kennedy said: "I've visited many of you today here and it is amazing what you have built in a year. And that says to me something very hopeful. It says that if you could rebuild Ashraf and Camp Liberty and you could build Ashraf 3 here in Albania, then it won't be long before you're going to build Ashraf in Tehran."

Ingrid Betancourt (*pictured left*) said: "It is time the European governments adopt a firm policy against the regime and side with no ambiguity with the Iranian people. Finally, free Western media has to be alert in order to avoid spreading the dictators propaganda against democratic opposition.

"Time has changed. You are the hope... And we have to win."



HAPPY NEW YEAR: ILA CHRISTMAS EVENT AT HAMMERSMITH

*We need to dream
a peaceful dream,
that all the world
should see,
the beauty of creation
flowing naturally.
No greed or destruction,
just build, share and grow,
from loving kindness
our wisdom could know
a peaceful dream.*

By Carol Allen

The poem above set the theme of our Christmas event which was filled with music and the loving spirit of the season. Following are excerpts of some of the talks which combined with photos of the event will give you a glimpse of what went on that Saturday, the 15th of December.

Peter Watsham (Master of Ceremonies):



Welcome to the ILA Christmas celebration.

Christmas celebrations vary across the world. There are lots of differences in the traditions we have, and the food we eat, but the shared wonder and amazement of the gift of Jesus unites many of us this time of the year. This is indeed a time of celebration, but not only for Christians. Jews celebrate the festival of Hanukkah, commemorating the rededication of the second temple in Jerusalem, as many have done this year, from the 2nd to the 10th of December. On December the 21st, Iranians across the world celebrate the arrival of winter on Yalda night, the longest night of the year, one of the most ancient of Persian festivals. People stay awake around a fire, talking and eating nuts, watermelons and pomegranates, to fend off evil

associated with the darkest night.

One word links all three of these celebrations: light. Hanukkah is also known as the Festival of Lights. Yalda celebrates the beginning of longer days and shorter nights, the renewal of the sun, the victory of light over darkness. We only have to look around our streets and neighbourhoods to see lights of all kinds, shapes and sizes. So Christmas can certainly claim to be a Festival of Lights too. And for Christians, Jesus came as the Light of the World.

Whatever our faith, what brings us together is our shared passion for justice and freedom from oppression, especially for the people of Iran.

We have supported and loved the people of Ashraf, who have overcome violence, tortures and the darkest of times to shine as a beacon of light for people of Iran, expectant and hopeful for release from their suffering under the oppression of the Islamist State.

Christmas is a time of Friendship, Peace and Rest.

Above all, it is a time of Hope.

We are here to celebrate LIGHT, HOPE and LOVE!

Dr Lars Rise (Keynote speaker), former Member of the Norwegian Parliament and a good friend of the Ashrafis:



Christmas is very much about a dream, a dream about something wonderful which will happen, and our dream together is that one day we can walk around in the streets of Tehran as free people in a free country. The story of Christmas is probably the most famous story in the world, about the most famous name in world history. There are so many dreams connected to that name of Jesus, and even when there were rumours that he was born there were wise men coming from the East, and many scientists assume that actually they came from Iran. They came from Persia, the wise men, to see what has happened in Bethlehem, and there were so many dreams connected to that little baby, about freedom from oppression, freedom from captivity and freedom from poverty.

We can also read in the Qur'an that one day the Angel Gabriel came to the Virgin Mary and said "You will give birth to a son, and his name will be Messiah, the saviour of the world." And I once heard one of the top ten theologians of Islam having a speech in Norway about Jesus, the saviour of the world, and it's interesting how we have so many common things that bind us together, and especially the story of Christmas, which gives us all hope.

My wife reminded me one time that, she said: "When we celebrate a birthday, like we celebrate the birthday of Jesus of Nazareth, why are we only focusing on the baby Jesus?" That's usual, of course.

It is interesting then to read something from the more adult life of Jesus, and I have selected one special verse which was helping me a lot in



HAPPY NEW YEAR: ILA CHRISTMAS EVENT AT HAMMERSMITH



Albania, working with the Albanian government to convince the Prime Minister of Albania to receive all the people living in Camp Liberty, which was actually the opposite of liberty, but they lived in Camp Liberty in Baghdad, and waited for years to have freedom. So it is told that one day Jesus went up to the synagogue and somebody handed over to him the Prophet Isaiah and he was reading to them, and I would like to read those verses for you:

‘The spirit of the Lord is on me, because He has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners, and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free and to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favour.’

So as we were in the crucial moment to convince the Albanian government that the only right thing is to let all the people come from Baghdad to Tirana, I reminded the Prime Minister about the words from Isaiah.

So I think it was a crucial moment, it was a whole team working on freedom for the people coming from Camp Liberty and moving over to Tirana. Senator Torricelli, former Prime Minister Pandeli Majko, and many other people were working on this, and I think maybe this verse was the tipping point, which is interesting because it’s all about a dream of something which will come. And my wife has many times reminded me since our visit to Camp Ashraf that what she can remember was a revolution of love. This is a movement of love, to put it very simply, fighting against an evil regime, the way we

know it in Tehran, and this is what it’s all about.

And one other statement from Jesus, the main person in Christmas: ‘No one has greater love than those who lay down their lives for their friends’. And this is what we can see in this amazing movement, a movement of love, so many who are willing to lay down their lives for their friends. We actually have this on a plaque in the Norwegian Parliament commemorating all those who died during World War I and World War II. It says they died so the people could live, and it’s almost exactly the same sort as we have in John: 15: No one has greater love than those who lay down their lives for their friends. It’s amazing how some people are willing to make the sacrifice, and do all they can and give the ultimate sacrifice. And of course the main person of Christmas is the main role model in this.

So I want to thank each of you for what you have done for freedom, for making the dream come true, that one day we can all walk in the streets of Tehran. I want to thank each of you for what you have done, to give and to



think about what you can do to help, because together we are stronger, together we can make the dream come true.

It’s a wonderful dream. We can all stand and say, “I have a dream”. I have a dream that one day we will see the freedom, we will see the freedom from captivity, freedom from oppression, freedom from poverty, and we will all be free men and women in a free country.



I wish all of you a blest Christmas and a special greeting to our friends in Tirana today. Greetings to you from all of us in London and have a Happy New Year!

Saleem (ILA volunteer):



Hello everyone!

I don’t want to make a speech. I just want to take a couple of minutes expressing my profound gratitude to you for your friendship and what you have meant to us in all these years. I personally believe that each and every one of you who sits here, no matter if you’ve been with us for one day or for many years, you’ve made a very big difference to our lives, our cause, our personal lives and our community. Each and every one of you, every face that I see, every heart that beats here, has given something special out of yourself, something ... *continued on p.6*



HAPPY NEW YEAR: ILA CHRISTMAS EVENT AT HAMMERSMITH

continued from p.5 very beautiful, a value, a value of humanity that we treasure, and in these years we really needed it. I don't think we could miss it, it's like air that we breathe. And I wanted to share with you our inner feelings; that of myself and all the volunteers, sometimes so intense it is not possible to put it into words. So I'll just try my best to speak out of the heart and tell you what we really experience with your friendship.

There have been countless moments in these years that we feared the worst and fear would overpower us and we wouldn't know what to do. There've been tens of times, maybe hundreds of times, that we didn't think we could take the next step. It was like between giving up or persevering. The reality is that your beautiful human values and what you stood for has empowered us just at the time that we didn't have any strength left. And we learnt so much from you, from each and every one of you. And I think that's something that not necessarily everybody in the world can experience. We consider ourselves very blest, very fortunate, with your friendship. You've allowed us to take a very warm, beautiful, special place in your hearts, and because of that you have gone very very deep down in our hearts too.

There's a very beautiful Persian expression that I only learnt recently from one of the volunteers, and I think it's very fitting and is very applicable to you and the relationship that's built here: we've gone a very arduous road but the ornaments and the gems that have adorned this path and the alleys and these ways, are people like you.

I don't think you can begin to imagine what you've meant for us, but I can tell you: a little letter of comfort, the warm words, the encouraging moments, even a little stimulus coming from a little email that you've sent as a reply for anything. The very moment that you took our hands, gave us your blessing, not allowing us to give up, meant the whole world to us.

I am not an expert on Christmas but I think that one of the values that has made it such a universal and such a treasured celebration, is that through this celebration you can make a difference to other people, just by a small act of humanity. That is what you all mean to us. Thank you so much for allowing us to share Christmas with you.





NEWS IN BRIEF

TUC EXPRESSES SOLIDARITY WITH IRAN'S STRIKING WORKERS



On 19 December 2018, the Trades Union Congress expressed deep solidarity with the workers of the Ahvaz steel plant and the Haft Tappeh Sugarcane Complex in their campaigns for the realisation of their just and legitimate demands.

In their communiqué, after providing details of over 6 weeks of strikes by the workers, the TUC called on the Iranian authorities to immediately release all arrested workers and trade unionists and make payment of all delayed and unpaid wages, in addition to highlighting other legitimate demands of the workers. The Iranian regime's response to these demands, however, has been more arrests and torture of the striking workers, a clear indication that governments should sever ties with this regime unless and until it is prepared to respect these basic rights.

FAMILIES OF ARRESTED WORKERS DEMAND THEIR RELEASE

A group of workers and family



members of apprehended National Steel Group employees arrested by Iranian regime authorities rallied on Wednesday 26 December, for the third consecutive day, outside the Khuzestan Province governor's office. They were holding a large banner reading: "Release jailed workers",

"Workers belong in factories; thieves belong in prison".

Workers of the National Steel Group issued a statement in this regard saying: "We are awaiting the release of our colleagues. Investors cannot play with the workers' lives."

PROTESTS AND STRIKES IN ISFAHAN AND TEHRAN



On Tuesday 25 December the farmers of Varzaneh, Isfahan, gathered in Darvazeh Abbas square for a demonstration and marched in the streets of the city. Women, students and the children of the farmers also participated in the demonstrations.

In Tehran, families of students who are studying abroad gathered in front of the offices of the Budget and Planning Organization and demonstrated in protest to the elimination of student tuition loans.

FOUR GIRLS DIE IN A SCHOOL FIRE



The death of four six-year-old girls during a fire at a school in Zahedan, Iran, on December 18, has sent the nation into mourning.

The fire began after one student tripped over an oil heater whilst playing during a break and quickly spread throughout the school. Most of the 59 students were rescued by neighbours and school staff before fire-fighters arrived, but many students have been injured.

An official quoted by Iran Daily, who represents the Rouhani government, admitted that 42% of Iranian schools have substandard heating systems.

BRAVE WOMEN LEAD THE WAY IN PROTESTS IN IRAN



Brave women of Iran are at the forefront of demonstrations and protests across Iran. On Saturday, 15 December 2018, when the anti-riot forces intended to stop the workers' march by blocking the road, the steel workers of Ahvaz managed to overcome the barriers and continue their march by brave women leading the way. Women have also a decisive role in protests in other cities by deprived teachers, students, workers and families whose life savings have been plundered by institutions affiliated with various authorities.

UNIVERSITY BUS CRASH LEAVES 9 DEAD, 27 INJURED



A bus carrying students of Tehran's Science and Research Centre in Azad University unfortunately tipped over, leaving nine students dead and twenty seven others injured. The head of the Iranian regime's emergency services said this incident took place at 12:20 pm local time on Tuesday 25 December.

Iranian authorities first dispatched anti-riot units to the scene in fear of possible outbursts of anger turning into anti-regime protests.



GREETINGS FROM TIRANA

Father Christmas (Shahram):



Ho, ho, ho!
Merry Christmas!
Happy New Year!
Greetings, Dear
friends, Greetings
of the New Year
from Ashraf to
you! Christmas
has a spirit of joy,
happiness and
kindness, and

those are exactly what we have found in you. Yes, you the supporters of the International Liberty Association, so you are truly the ones who are the most deserving to be greeted on Christmas! Happy New Year! Merry Christmas! Ho, ho, ho!

Taher:



Hello dear friends! On behalf of all Ashrafis in Tirana, I want to thank you, International Liberty Association, and all your volunteers as well as all you, dear friends who have, during the years of hardship, stood shoulder to shoulder with us. Merry Christmas and Happy New Year to all of you.

Mahbubeh:



Hi, dear friends. I would like to wish a very Merry Christmas to you all, dear friends, and the ILA. I would like to celebrate this wonderful time and important day and pray for the Christian Iranians to have the opportunity to celebrate this wonderful day without any sorrow. So I would like to let you know that it would be an honour for us to celebrate this day with you soon here with us. Enjoy a very great time! Thank you again.

Forough:



Dear friends, I am very glad to have this opportunity to speak with you, friends and supporters of ILA. I'd like to wish a Merry Christmas to you and your dear family. In fact, my friends and I will never forget your support and all you have done for us. Really, your help is very valuable for all of us, and the words can't express our deep emotions toward you. So thank you again and I am sure that we will meet each other as soon as possible in a free Iran.

**YOU ARE CORDIALLY INVITED
TO THE ILA NORUZ AND
EASTER EVENT**

**4PM-8.30PM
SATURDAY 20 APRIL 2019**

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

Fee: £10 RSVP info@iliberty.org.uk

