



International Liberty Association Newsletter

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EDITORIAL

Welcome to the year 2020, a new year, a new decade, trustfully the start of a new era, one where the world becomes a safer and happier place, with an Iran free from the brutal repressive rule of the theocratic regime, where human rights will be respected throughout the country, the region and the wider world.

2020, the year of clarity, where all the decades of secrets and lies come to the surface and are exorcised and dispersed, where the perpetrators of atrocities are exposed and expunged from the annals of history, preferably taken from an International courtroom to a prison cell. This is our hope for this year.

Looking back, as we have done in previous years, down the tunnel of time for the year just completed, we find it blocked by the events of mid-November 2019 when a triple price hike of fuel costs sparked another major uprising of the people across Iran. The ferocity with which these protesters were met by state forces, with over 1,500 dead in the streets, thousands injured, and 12,000 arrested in a very few days, changed the goalposts for ever. There is no going back from here for the Iranian people. It is onward to victory for humanity.

However, no such barrier prevented us from reflection across the decade and, in looking back through to 2010, we are in awe of how far all our efforts have brought us. In these 10 years a humanitarian army of freedom lovers has been forged across the globe, facing and surmounting many challenges, including bringing Ashraf safely to Albania and being the voice of the people in Iran, enabling them to find their

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IRAN DEMONSTRATIONS: 1,500 KILLED, 12,000 ARRESTED



Sixteen mothers, whose children were killed amid violent state crackdowns on street protests in November 2019, called for Iranians to observe a minute of silence for the victims on 26 December.

“We, the mothers, will not remain silent,” they said in a statement published on 17 December that also called on the UN to establish a fact-finding committee and investigate the killing of protesters during the major street demonstrations that erupted across Iran in November 2019.

“We, the mothers of grief-stricken families who have lost our children in the path of freedom and justice during the past 40 years, call on the noble and freedom-hearted people



of Iran to observe a minute of silence on December 26... to pay respect to those who fell victim in the month of November.”

There are 29 children among the 1,500 martyrs killed during the November 2019 protests across Iran.

The regime has rejected the figure of 1,500, but a key question remains as to why it has not given its own estimates, nearly two months after the uprising?

However, Reuters news agency confirmed the number in a special report published on 23 December 2019 stating that “After days of protests across Iran last month, Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei

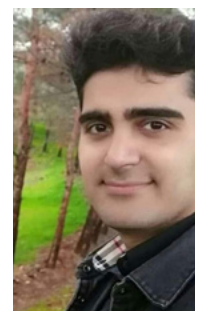
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IRANIAN COUPLE JAILED FOR TRYING TO MOURN THEIR SON

Pouya Bakhtiari was shot in the head during anti-government demonstrations that swept through Iran in mid-November 2019 after the sudden tripling of petrol prices. His family wanted to pay tribute to the 26-year-old in accordance with Shiite tradition, marking the 40th day of mourning with a commemoration.

That simple tribute led to the arrest of Bakhtiari family members. The government limited Internet and phone services in some major cities and put security forces on high alert to confront acts of honouring the dead.

Pouya’s parents, sister and two uncles have been detained for refusing to accept the ban on mourning their son.





Iran Demonstrations *continued from p.1*



appeared impatient. Gathering his top security and government officials together, he issued an order: Do whatever it takes to stop them.

“That order, confirmed by three sources close to the supreme leader’s inner circle and a fourth official, set in motion the bloodiest crackdown on protesters since the Islamic Revolution in 1979.

“About 1,500 people were killed during less than two weeks of unrest that started on Nov. 15. The toll, provided to Reuters by three Iranian interior ministry officials, included at least 17 teenagers and about 400 women as well as some members of the security forces and police.”

There have also been numerous reports indicating that before handing over the bodies of the victims, security forces threatened families and made them sign written pledges not to hold funeral ceremonies for their loved ones and refrain from talking about the reason for their deaths.

Before being able to collect the bodies of their loved ones, bereaved families face two options when filling in the death certificates:

If the family insists on registering the reason for death as “being shot with live ammunition and firearms” they must pay between 20 and 200 million tomans (£460 to £4,600) as the cost of bullets.

If the family accepts to register the

reason for death as “natural death” and proclaim that “they have no objections,” they can receive the bodies for free.

In both cases, however, security forces control and monitor the funeral procession and memorial of the

victims. They even prevent families from crying at the grave of their loved ones to bid farewell.

Intelligence Ministry agents also patrol the street where the victims’ residences are located. They check all flyers and banners announcing the funerals. They instruct families not to use large portraits of their loved ones, and they are the ones to choose the eulogizer.

Mohammad Javad Abedi, 16, from Isfahan worked as a construction worker. On Sunday, 17 November, he was shot dead as he was going back home from work. His family did not receive his death certificate and were not allowed to see his body. His shrouded corpse was buried in Isfahan, in the presence of intelligence agents. Mohammad Javad’s father said he could not even see which part of his son’s body had been shot.

Ali Sartippi, 21, was shot in the abdomen by security forces and wounded in the city of Malard on Sunday night, 17 November. He was taken to a hospital in Karaj where he lost his life at 4 a.m.

The body of Ali Sartippi was buried on 21 November. There are no black mourning flags or flyers around his residence. According to witnesses and reports, a large number of youths from this neighbourhood have been killed during the Iran November

protests but the families are forced to restrict their mourning ceremonies to within the walls of their homes due to threats and intimidations by the security forces.

At the time of collecting his body, the family of Arsham Ebrahimi were instructed to bury him in the dark of the night. Four agents of the State Security Force made sure that he was buried in a place designated by them.

Due to massive suppression, many of those wounded remained in dire conditions. Plainclothes agents and IRGC forces were stationed inside most hospitals to identify and arrest those wounded during protests.

Many of those wounded refrained from going to hospital to receive treatment, as they would have faced high risk of arrest.

According to reports from family members, a protester wounded in Karaj who was transferred to a hospital to be operated on was interrogated by agents of the Intelligence Ministry despite his critical physical condition. Two days later he was transferred to a temporary detention centre. After spending one night there without food and medicine he was transferred to prison. 12000 protesters have been arrested.



Some of the teenagers murdered during the uprising in Iran in November 2019

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own voice as they did in 2017. We thank you all so much for everything you have done, walking and working by our side as we strive for justice and peace and human rights to flourish in Iran.

And so, on the threshold of this new year, we bring you a newsletter full of information about the November protests and their aftermath and pay tribute to all who gave their lives and are still suffering as a result.

However, it is with a strong sense of hope and optimism rising above the sadness that we look to the future and our full coverage of the beautiful and joyous occasion that was our Christmas event emphasises this as it brings home to us the unbowed spirit of humanity and the importance of living life today as we would wish it to be lived in a free Iran. Thank you all again for being with us at that event and on this path to humanity.



THE STORY OF NAVID IN THE DEADLIEST CRACKDOWN

Navid Behboudi (23) finished work at his bookstore on Saturday morning, 16 November 2019. He joined a group of people protesting the gasoline price hike. The regime's security agents ruthlessly shot him in the head.

According to his friends, Navid was polite, kind, energetic, active, and full of passion. He was the eldest child in the family. He ranked 70 in the admission test for mechanical engineering. His Instagram account had 22,000 followers. Despite his admission to the university, he opted to run a book gallery. He was an athlete and had passed the TOEFL test.

On the Saturday morning he left his work and returned to his hometown, the city of Quods, to visit his family. He had also planned to attend a friend's wedding on Sunday, intending to return to his work on Monday. On the Sunday afternoon, he was shot at Emarat Street, near Liberty Square, and none of his plans materialized.

His father called Navid at 3 p.m. from the City of Quods, near Tehran. Navid told him that he would come home for lunch. However, he had

lunch instead at his aunt's house and went to join the protesters. On Sunday, 17 November, a guard stationed on the roof of a nearby building shot Navid in the head and brought his life, as well as his dreams, to an end.

In a desperate and cowardly attempt, the regime decided to cut off the Internet from that day, hoping to prevent the world becoming aware of the brutality of its crackdown.

At around 5 p.m. one of Navid's friends informed his family who began a frantic search for his whereabouts. They finally went to the Kahrizak forensic centre where, according to a forensic source, Navid's corpse had been ripped apart to show that the cause of death was not shooting.

The security forces banned his family from having any funeral ceremonies in Navid's hometown. They also warned his father to keep his mouth shut and not say anything about the cause of his son's death. His father was asked to announce the cause of death as illness. Any disobedience to their orders could have resulted in his body not being



released to the family.

Eventually, on Tuesday, November 19, 2019, after receiving the necessary commitments from the family, Navid's body was transported by a pickup truck void of any government affiliation to the village of Mehravazan in the northwest of Gilan province, hundreds of kilometers from his hometown, and buried there. Navid's family was not allowed to bury their child in their own town.

The pickup driver said there were two other unidentified bodies in the truck, which were secretly buried on the way. The driver told Navid's family that dead bodies which had not been identified routinely accompanied the bodies that had been identified and were buried in random places along the way to the final destination.

"IRAN'S HIDDEN SLAUGHTER": A VIDEO INVESTIGATION



France 24 published a 15 minute video on 24 December

2019 about investigations by its Observers team after viewing more than 750 video clips and photos posted online by ordinary people who witnessed the massacre of protesters by Iran's official and plainclothes forces. Below is a short description of the video which is on the France 24 website.

"Between November 15 and 18 hundreds of people were killed in Iran when the government cracked down on protests that had been sparked by a hike in petrol prices.

"The government shut down phone lines and Internet access, but hundreds of videos emerged showing uniformed soldiers and police shooting unarmed civilians.

"The Observers team reviewed more than 750 amateur videos and photos, focusing on the images that showed gunshots and injuries.

As the protests spread to cities across the country on November 16, the government put in place what the monitoring group NetBlocks called "a near-total national Internet shutdown."

"One man who had joined the protests in Shahriar, a working-class suburb of Tehran, told the Observers: 'I took lots of photos and videos, but the Internet was shut down so I couldn't share them online. In the end I had to erase them because the police were stopping people in the street and checking their cellphones'.

"Despite the government's efforts, hundreds of video and photos circulated widely during and after the internet shutdown, especially on Telegram, the messaging app popular in Iran.

"According to a Dec. 1 report by the New York Times, troops from Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard



Corps (IRGC) fired on protesters who had sought refuge in the marsh Nov. 18, killing 40 to 100 people.

"The Observers team focused on four cities and towns: Shahriar, near Tehran; Sadra, near Shiraz; Marivan in the West; and Mahshahr on the Persian Gulf. Using geolocation techniques cross-referenced with firsthand accounts from inside Iran, the Observers identified the exact location – to within five metres – of three dozen videos showing uniformed men shooting, and civilians being injured and killed."



EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT RESOLUTION ON THE VIOLENT CRACKDOWN ON THE RECENT PROTESTS IN IRAN



Excerpt from resolution 2019/2993(RSP):

The European Parliament,

- having regard to its previous resolutions on Iran, including its most recent of 19 September 2019 on Iran, notably the situation of women’s rights defenders and imprisoned EU dual nationals,
- having regard to the Council conclusions of 4 February 2019 on Iran,
- having regard to the declaration of 8 December 2019 by the Vice-President of the Commission/High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy (VP/HR), Josep Borrell Fontelles, on behalf of the EU on the recent protests in Iran,
- having regard to the statement by the Spokesperson of the European External Action Service (EEAS) of 21 November 2019 on the developments in Iran,
- having regard to the Council decision of 12 April 2018 to extend its restrictive measures for a further 12 months in response to serious human rights violations in Iran, ...
- having regard to the report of the UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Islamic Republic of Iran of 30 January 2019,
- having regard to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948,
- having regard to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) of 1966, to which Iran is a party,
- having regard to Rule 132(2) and (4) of its Rules of Procedure,

A. whereas tens of thousands of people from all over Iran and representing all segments of society have exercised their fundamental right to freedom of assembly and expressed their economic grievances over the increase in fuel prices of at least 50% in the largest scale unrest in 40 years;

B. whereas despite repeated international calls for restraint, the Iranian security forces have employed disproportionate means and force against protesters; whereas according to civil society reports, Iranian security forces opened fire on unarmed protesters who posed no imminent threat, and allegedly shot to kill;

C. whereas according to Amnesty International, at least 304 people have been killed, including children, with many more wounded, and whereas thousands of protesters, as well as journalists, human rights defenders and students, have been arrested; whereas the Iranian authorities have not announced the official death toll and have refused to release the bodies of the victims to their families;

D. whereas on 16 November the Iranian authorities implemented a five-day-long near-total shutdown of Internet

communications, cutting almost all means of online communication for people inside Iran and preventing any flow of information in relation to the brutal crackdown; whereas shutting down internet communications is a violation of the fundamental right to access information, constituting a disproportionate limitation on freedom of expression, and has become an ongoing modus operandi on the part of the authorities;

E. whereas its resolution of 25 October 2016 on the EU strategy towards Iran after the nuclear agreement stresses the importance of upholding the EU human rights guidelines, including on human rights defenders, in the context of EU-Iran relations;

F. whereas human rights defenders, journalists, lawyers and online activists in Iran continue to face harassment, arbitrary arrest, detention and prosecution for their work; whereas the Iranian Ministry of Intelligence and other forces have initiated a severe clampdown on civil society; ...

G. whereas Iranian courts regularly fail to ensure fair trials, with the denial of access to legal counsel and denial of visits by representatives from consulates, the UN or humanitarian organisations, and permit the use of confessions obtained under torture as evidence; whereas there are no independent mechanisms for ensuring accountability within the judiciary, and serious concerns remain over the politicisation of judges, particularly those presiding over Revolutionary Courts;

1. Extends its condolences to the families of the victims; wishes a speedy recovery to those injured;

2. Deplores the widespread and disproportionate use of force by Iran against non-violent protesters who are simply, were merely, exercising their rights to freedom of expression, association and peaceful assembly; stresses that such actions are unacceptable, and urges the Iranian authorities to make public (announce) the total number of deaths and detainees, conduct prompt, impartial, independent and transparent investigations into allegations of excessive use of force, including the direct targeting of protesters by security forces, and hold all perpetrators of violence accountable;

3. Demands that all protesters, human rights defenders and journalists currently held under arrest in Iran for exercising their legitimate rights to freedom of expression and assembly be freed unconditionally; demands, moreover, that the authorities inform all families of the location of their detained relatives, and calls for granting unhindered access for lawyers and international observers to be granted unhindered access to all those detained during the protests, and for providing the identity of the detainees to be communicated to the international community;...





WORLD SHOULD BE THANKFUL

Excerpts of an article by former MEP

Struan Stevenson

published by *United Press International (UPI)*

on 4 January 2020.

The elimination in Baghdad by the Americans of senior Iranian Gen. Qassem Soleimani and his ally the Iraqi Chief of Staff of Operations Abu Mahdi Muhandis, has dealt a fatal blow to the Iranian regime.

The US State Department listed Soleimani as an international terrorist. As the *de facto* second in command in Iran's military hierarchy after supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, he was responsible for thousands of deaths among Iraqi, Syrian and Lebanese people as well as among US military personnel.

He controlled the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps Quds Force, its vicious unit responsible for extraterritorial operations. Soleimani was answerable only to Khamenei and as such was described by many as the second most powerful person in the Islamic Republic. As Quds Force commander, he oversaw the theocratic regime's proxy wars in Syria, Yemen, Lebanon and Iraq, where he commanded all the Iraqi militias. His death will have come as an irreparable blow to the clerical regime.

Following the 1979 revolution that brought Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini to power, the Iranian constitution was altered to introduce the system of *velayat-e-faqih*, or guardianship of the Islamic jurist, effectively providing the supreme leader with power he claimed came directly from God. Khomeini moved rapidly to eliminate opposition to his clerical dictatorship, ruthlessly murdering tens of thousands of political opponents whom he said were guilty of "moharebeh" or "waging war against God."

Khomeini created the IRGC as his own version of the Gestapo, to spread their revolutionary policy of violence and terror beyond Iran's borders. The IRGC and its Quds Force offshoot not only brutally enforces the clerical regime's oppressive domination of Iran's population, it also controls most of the Iranian economy, paying no taxes and funnelling resources into the pockets of the ruling elite, while sponsoring terrorism and aggressive military expansionism abroad.

Soleimani played a pivotal role in this process. His poster still features on walls and hoardings across the Middle East. Following the siege on the US Embassy in Baghdad on New Year's Eve, graffiti sprayed onto the embassy walls in Farsi, rather than Arabic, stated "Qassem Soleimani is our leader," giving the lie to Iran's insistence that this was purely an Iraqi protest.



Millions of Iranians have taken to the streets over the past month protesting the venal corruption of the ruling mullahs and their wanton spending on conflict and terror.

In a blind panic, Khamenei instructed Soleimani to mobilize his IRGC thugs to launch a murderous crackdown on the peaceful protesters, during which an estimated 1,500



were murdered, more than 4,000 were wounded and over 12,000 were arrested. Soleimani ordered a systematic shoot-to-kill policy that has seen masked snipers on the roofs of government buildings, indiscriminately shooting unarmed, young protesters in the head and chest. IRGC goons and security agents then scoured the country's hospitals, dragging the wounded from their beds.

The uprising was triggered by the regime's decision to triple the price of gasoline. This was the last straw for a nation whose citizens have been impoverished by the venally corrupt regime that for 40 years has stolen Iran's wealth for the benefit of its rulers and to finance proxy wars across the Middle East, where Soleimani oversaw Iranian support for Bashar al-Assad's bloody civil war in Syria, the brutal Houthi rebels in Yemen, the terrorist Hezbollah in Lebanon and the vicious Shi'ia militias in Iraq.

Similar nationwide protests have raged across Iraq in recent weeks, where young Iraqis demanded an end to Iranian interference in their country and the expulsion of Soleimani and his cohorts. In a chilling interview Soleimani claimed, "We know how to deal with protesters in Iran," as once again he deployed masked gunmen to murder hundreds of peaceful Iraqi demonstrators. It is no surprise that tens of thousands of young Iraqis took to the streets to celebrate Soleimani's and Muhandis' assassination.

Soleimani was one of the most vicious criminals in Iran's history. Pretending to aid the West in its war against the Islamic State, Soleimani oversaw the genocidal massacre of hundreds of thousands of Sunnis in the ancient Iraqi cities of Fallujah, Ramadi and Mosul, leaving smoking ruins in his wake.

The international community cannot continue to treat the theocratic regime in Iran as a normal nation state. The belligerent, repressive and vicious behavior of the regime proves that attempts at negotiation or appeasement are pointless.

The ayatollahs, with the direct involvement of their most powerful general, Soleimani, have committed appalling crimes against humanity that require an immediate response from the international community, involving, at the very least, a U.N. fact-finding mission to establish the truth about the numbers killed and injured in the recent nationwide uprising and to ascertain the treatment of those imprisoned. The U.N. must hold those responsible for these crimes accountable in the international courts of justice. As Soleimani and Muhandis discovered to their ultimate cost, there can be no impunity for those guilty of such chilling atrocities.

The Americans have eliminated a monster and the world should be thankful.



OUR CHRISTMAS EVENT



Our Christmas celebration was well attended and from the feedback we received which you can see a glimpse of on the back page of the newsletter, we can say that it was successful, enjoyable and informative. **Peter Watsham** was the Master of Ceremony and the speakers included **Jim Higgins**, former Irish MEP; **Andrew Caplen**, former president of the Law Society; **The Hon. Dr Jocelyne Scutt**, author and film maker; **Malcolm Fowler** and **Revd Ryder Whalley** who recited famous poems. Excerpts of some of the speeches follows:

Jim Higgins: The beautiful menu which is on your tables says the true meaning of Christmas is giving, sharing the love and reaching out to those who have touched our lives. It's the time to count our blessings and to be grateful for them. You have touched our lives in so many ways and we thank you for being a wonderful friend.



Well, if ever a picture is six thousand words that video that we have just

seen graphically illustrates the need for friendship: friendship, solidarity and support for this beleaguered people who are suffering on a daily basis in Iran... while there's life there's hope; where there's support, there's solidarity; where there's solidarity it's going to happen. Let's make it happen. Let's come back here next year and let's say that today is another stepping stone, another milestone, in what is making Iran, hopefully, in the future, free, democratic and a wonderful part of the free world.

Andrew Caplen: It's a tremendous privilege to be able to share this early Christmas celebration with you.

I'm here in my personal capacity, because I'm concerned at the situation in Iran. It's a country where so many have been tortured, so many have been imprisoned, so many have lost their lives over the course of too many years. And these are things that should concern every single one of us, because we are all part of humanity. What happens in one part of the world, however far away that place might be, affects us all. And I've got a poem for you. It's a little different from the poems we heard before. It's a poem of which some of the words might be very familiar to you. It's early 17th century, written by a guy called John Donne, who at one time was Dean of Saint Paul's. It's only very short, and as I said, some of these words will have a resonance with you. It's called "*No Man Is an Island*"

No man is an island, entire of itself. Every man is a piece of the continent, a part of the main... any man's death diminishes me, because I am involved in mankind; and therefore, never send to know for whom the bell tolls; it tolls for thee.

They're very thought-provoking words, aren't they? That we're all part of humanity, that we're not an island: '*Never send to know for whom the bell tolls; it tolls for thee*', you've heard other speakers speak about this...

You may not have celebrated Christmas in the same way in Iran as they do in England, but I'm sure that thoughts turn to days in Tehran and Isfahan and other places, and memories, and parted families, and those



who cannot be with us, either because of distance or because of the actions of a totalitarian regime. It can be difficult. Christmas is, however, also a time of hope. We've had that told to us already. I'm sure you know the story: a family forced to travel a hundred miles over rough terrain, long before the advent of Virgin Trains; a totalitarian regime headed by a Roman Emperor who was celebrated as being a God; the birth of a baby in a stable as there was nowhere else for the family to stay, and then forced to flee as a refugee to Egypt because of a murderous king who was terrified of any challenge to his supreme authority. Has that resonance with you with the situation in Iran and the situation of any here? ...I very much believe that justice and rightness and righteousness and fairness will eventually prevail, and so my encouragement to you, going into 2020, will be not to give up hope, to keep working for change, to keep lobbying the politicians, to keep sending stuff over the internet into Iran, aiming for your righteous goal... My hope is that 2020 will be the year when we see the change in Iran.



Special thanks to our good friend Max Emmons for organising the magnificent One More Time Jazz Band



NEWS IN BRIEF

UN ADOPTS 66TH RESOLUTION CONDEMNING HUMAN RIGHTS ABUSES IN IRAN



On 18 December 2019, the United Nations General Assembly adopted a resolution censuring the flagrant and systematic human rights violations in Iran. This is the 66th UN resolution in this regard. Clearly after 66 UN condemnations, the world community must take effective measures to stop the escalating trend of human rights abuses and the continuous crimes against humanity by the clerical regime. It is time for the Security Council to take action to stop increasing rights abuses by the Iranian regime.

IRANIAN REGIME EXECUTES 100TH WOMAN DURING ROUHANI'S TERM IN OFFICE



The Iranian regime hanged a woman by the name of Fatemeh R. last week in Gohardasht (Rajai-Shahr) Prison of Karaj, according to state-run media outlets. Fatemeh's death marks the execution of the 100th woman since Hassan Rouhani took office as the regime's President.

Fatemeh was a minor at the time of her alleged crime. She was arrested in 2015 at the age of 17, for allegedly killing her husband during a family quarrel, the state-run News.ir website reported on 16 December 2019.

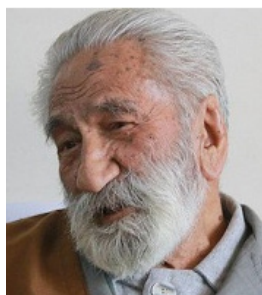
HUMAN RIGHTS PRISONER, GOLROKH IRAEE DENIED VISITING HER HUSBAND



Prison authorities have blocked Golrokh Ebrahimi Iraee's contact with her jailed husband, Arash Sadeghi.

Political prisoner Golrokh Iraee, currently detained in Qarchak Prison in Varamin, is denied to visit or call her husband, Arash Sadeghi, a prisoner in Rajai Shahr Prison. He is serving a 19-year sentence for his peaceful activities. He suffers from bone cancer and underwent an operation last year, but was returned to prison before completing his treatment.

DERVISH LEADER PASSED AWAY IN HOSPITAL IN TEHRAN



The leader of the Gonabadi dervishes, passed away in a hospital in Tehran, on 24 December 2019.

The 92-year-old Noor-Ali

Tabandeh, also known as Majzoub Ali Shah, was a French educated lawyer and the spiritual leader of the Gonabadi dervishes. He was also an outspoken critic of Velayat-e Faqih (Guardianship of the Islamic Jurist), Iran's theocracy, for which he was imprisoned for nearly two years, spending six months of his sentence in solitary confinement.

EUROPEAN BAR ASSOCIATIONS AWARD 2019 HUMAN RIGHTS PRIZE TO FOUR IRANIAN LAWYERS

The Council of Bars and Law Societies of Europe (CCBE) on Thursday, 29 November, 2019, announced that its

human rights award for 2019 goes to the four Iranian lawyers Mohammad Najafi, Nasrin Sotoudeh, Amir-salar Davoudi and Abdolfattah Soltani.



Lawyers Mohammad Najafi, Nasrin Sotoudeh, and Amir-salar Davoudi are imprisoned in Iran for expressing their opinion and for defending their clients, including civil activists, human rights defenders and ethnic minorities. Lawyer Abdolfattah Soltani was released from prison last year after almost a decade of imprisonment.

ANNUAL CHRISTMAS FAIR AND MARKET AT THE ARARAT CLUB IN TEHRAN WAS CANCELLED



This year the annual Christmas fair and market at Tehran's Ararat Club was cancelled.

Every year on Christmas Eve, a group of Christian citizens greeted the coming birth of Jesus with a marketplace in the Ararat complex near Vanak Square, and Christmas and national celebrations served as a pretext for attracting customers and limited business prosperity. Some vendors even offered their products in this market.

In a situation where the economy is declining and the business market is sluggish due to the policies of the Iranian government, this cancellation for preventing "Christian propaganda" is an irrational decision.

The cancellation of the market, which is a clear sign of discrimination and inequality, has received widespread criticism in the Armenian community of Iran.



YOUR COMMENTS ABOUT THE ILA CHRISTMAS CELEBRATION



Janet: The Christmas celebration on 18th December was a wonderful occasion which I really enjoyed.

Roger: The time and effort put into the decor and the welcome was truly amazing. It was an impressive venue and the entertainment, food and speeches all made for such a memorable occasion.

Beryl, who has not met you before, was overwhelmed by the event but especially the hospitality and the kindness. It was a splendid way to start our Christmas celebrations.

Nigel: I have always thought that you all do things to a high standard, but I observe that the standard keeps going up! It was also great to see the involvement of a number of the younger generation among the volunteers.

I came away feeling very glad I had come.

David: Please convey my thanks to all concerned in organising, preparing and presenting the event last Wednesday. I thought it all went very well and was a great success.

Leena: The food was delicious and, if possible, I would really like the recipe for the celery and lamb stew which was extremely tasty. I enjoyed the jazz band at the beginning and also the speeches which did not go for too long. The poetry reading, too, was fun – particularly as I knew them all as my husband Julian has been a Hilaire Belloc and Edward Lear enthusiast all his life and used to recite them to our children.

Carolyn: I loved the ILA event. The food was sublime (as always) and I loved the decorations. It was amazing that you got them all put up in time. The video and speeches were also fascinating. I particularly appreciated the notices and the people who were available to guide guests from the tube station as I'd never been in that area before and was afraid of getting lost.

Gill and Chris: We both enjoyed the event on Wednesday,

the food was wonderful as ever, everyone was very friendly, the venue was beautiful and easy to reach for us, and the entertainment was excellent too.

Robert: Thank you for the ILA Christmas event. It was enjoyable, with interesting speakers and good musical entertainment, as well as the usual excellent food! The volunteers always work hard and cheerfully to look after all the guests at your events.

Graham: You excelled yourselves in what you achieved and presented for your guests. So professional and nicely balanced between up-dating your supporters on the current, terrible situation in Iran and celebrating Christmas.

Jill: I admire your ability to put on a celebration of a religious festival that is not your own- and not once but twice.

Jenny and Stuart: The venue was fantastic and everyone had made it quite beautiful and so joyous..thank you all! Plainly many many hours of hard work and love had gone into it.

Margaret: I enjoyed the Christmas event very much and found the display interesting. It reminded me of churches I have visited in Iran, Egypt, Syria, Jordan and Turkey. The room with the large chandeliers was very beautiful but the decorations made it perfect along with stage paintings.

Tim: I am always impressed by the diligence and hard work the ILA puts into its events, and how your volunteers make the guests feel so welcome.

David: Thank you for inviting me to your wonderful evening last night, I very much enjoyed the event. Again I was very moved by the terrible news highlighted in your exhibition of photos and reports. The present government cannot go on as they are, with the demonstrations I assume they will fall, one only has to look at Eastern Germany and so see the results in November 1989 when the Berlin Wall fell after the demonstration.

Geoffrey and Bryony: Thank you so much for receiving us so warmly and giving supporters such a festive time. As with the Christian story of Jesus coming to earth surrounded by Roman oppression and stories of exile and massacre, so the celebration of your work of rescue is in the context of recent and continuing repression in Iran: what a sad world we live in where those mullahs who have everything still continue to embezzle and repress!

Yes, the speakers you chose emphasised the poignant contrast between now and soon: when liberty will be achieved; meanwhile, we have solidarity, trust and an absence of fear - all things to celebrate.

