



U.S. DEPARTMENT of STATE

**Press Statement**

**Sean McCormack, Spokesman**

Washington, DC

December 23, 2008

## **The Human Rights Situation in Iran**

The United States condemns the closing of the Center for the Defense of Human Rights and urges Iranian authorities to allow this and similar civil society organizations to operate free of oppression. On December 21, Iranian authorities closed down the civil society organization of Nobel Peace Prize winner Shirin Ebadi just prior to a ceremony celebrating the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Moreover, authorities briefly detained Ms. Ebadi, a renowned human rights defender and both the first Iranian and the first Muslim woman to win the Nobel Peace Prize in its 102 year-old history.

The United States is also deeply concerned by the continued detention of internationally known Iranian HIV/AIDS physicians Dr. Arash Alaei and Dr. Kamiar Alaei. December 22 marked six months since the physicians were arbitrarily arrested by Iranian authorities and detained in Tehran's Evin Prison. As a party to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, Iran has the obligation to afford due process rights to anyone detained. The two have been active in various international exchange programs and academic research, helping to involve Iranians in the international academic and scientific community.

In November 2006, because of their work on HIV/AIDS, the Alaei brothers were participants in the first professional exchange program for Iranians in almost three decades, sponsored by the U.S. Department of State's Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs. The program, which focused on public health, led to collaboration between American and Iranian medical professionals that could benefit the global fight against HIV/AIDS. Similar programs have brought citizens from over 165 countries to the United States.

The Iranian people have consistently expressed their desire to be connected to the global community. The actions of the Iranian Government against the Alaei brothers, Ms. Ebadi, and other human rights activists only serve to isolate further the Iranian people. With our friends and allies in the region, we stand by the brave people of Iran, who are trying peacefully to exercise their universal human rights, and call upon the Government of Iran to abide by its international obligations.

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