

# USADI Dispatch

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## USADI Commentary

### A Requiem for a Failed Dogma

If there was any doubt about the impossibility of any improvement of the Iranian people's lot under the current theocratic rule, it was put to rest by the report published earlier this week by the US-based Human Rights Watch.

Entitled, "Like the Dead in Their Coffins: Torture, Detention, and the Crushing of Dissent in Iran," the scathing report is a requiem for a failed dogma, the possibility of reform within the clerical system.

"Claims that reforms in Iran have put an end to torture are simply false," said a spokeswoman for the human rights group, adding, "More than ever, journalists, intellectuals and activists are afraid to voice opinions critical of the government."

The report clearly affirms the notion that the ruling regime, erected on the totalitarian doctrine of the *Velayat-e faqih* (the absolute supremacy of clerical rule), structurally and intrinsically lacks any capacity for genuine change.

Unelected bodies such as the Guardian Council and the Judiciary, which the report said are "at the center of the human rights violations," shield the regime from real change. The slightest letdown in repression would lead to the collapse of the whole system in the face of legitimate demands of Iranians.

The Human Rights Watch report noted that "Little hope remains for domestic organs to push for change in the judiciary's behavior. The costs for speaking out against human rights violations by the judiciary and by the parallel forces have increased considerably over the past three years."

It added that Iran's rulers had silenced the dissidents "through the systematic use of indefinite solitary confinement of political prisoners, physical torture of student activists and denial of basic due process rights."

"In the aftermath of the February 20, 2004 parliamentary elections, it seems that this climate of fear will only increase," it concluded, quoting a former Parliament deputy as saying that "compared with the past, we must expect a much worse condition."

The movement for secular democracy in Iran has been stressing on the need to unseat the mullahs to bring about real change. The reason: the impossibility of real democratic reform under the *Velayat-e faqih* system.

The tyrannical regime rules by terrorizing and intimidating its citizens. But it cannot sit on the tip of the bayonet forever. Despotism ensures their own demise by being dictatorial, more so in the case of a dictatorship under the cloak of religion in Iran.

In order for freedom to flourish in Iran, the reign of terror in there must be brought to an end. This is not a luxury, but a prerequisite.

The United States and the European Union must help Iran's democracy movement in its endeavors. It is the only solution for a true democratic change. That's the untold message of the Human Rights Watch report.

### Three Men publicly hanged in Iran

TEHRAN - Three Iranians have been hanged publicly in the western city of Khoramabad, the Jaam-e Jam newspaper reported Tuesday.

The report quoted a local police official as saying the men, who were not named, were strung up before dusk on Monday in three different places in the city.

*AFP, June 8, 2004*

### Family Ties

TEHRAN -- A leading conservative with family ties to Iran's supreme leader was elected Sunday as speaker of Iran's parliament.

Gholam Ali Haddad Adel was elected as head of the parliament, after running unchallenged. He received 226 out of the 259 votes in the 290-seat Majlis for a one-year term, according to state-run Tehran radio.

His family ties to Khamenei are expected to strengthen the speaker's position.

Conservatives won control of parliament in the disputed February elections, in which 2,400 candidates were disqualified.

Adel's party, Developers of Islamic Iran, won February's polls on a platform of absolute loyalty to Khamenei.

Adel also holds three appointed positions. He is the head of the Persian Language Academy and a member of the Expediency Council, an advisory body that arbitrates between the parliament and the Guardian Council. He also is a member of the Supreme Cultural Revolutionary Council.

*Associated Press, Jun 6, 2004*

The US Alliance for Democratic Iran (USADI), is an independent, non-profit organization, which aims to advance a US policy on Iran that will benefit America's interests, through supporting Iranian people's aspirations for a democratic, secular, and peaceful government, free of tyranny, fundamentalism, weapons of mass destruction, and terrorism. The USADI is not affiliated with any government agencies, political groups or parties.

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**"Like the Dead in Their Coffins"**  
**Torture, Detention, and the Crushing of Dissent in Iran**  
**Human Rights Watch**  
**June 6, 2004**

**Excerpts:**

No one knows how many people are held in Iran's prisons and secret detention centers for the peaceful expression of their views. Over the past four years, as the window of free expression has closed in Iran, abuse and torture of dissidents have increased in Evin Prison's solitary cells and secret detention centers...

With the newspapers closed, treatment of detainees worsened considerably in Evin prison and in detention centers operated clandestinely by the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps and the judiciary.

The Iranian authorities have managed, in the span of four years, to virtually silence the political opposition within the country through the systematic use of indefinite solitary confinement of political prisoners, physical torture of student activists, and denial of basic due process rights to all those detained for the expression of dissenting views. Paradoxically, criticism of government policies has increased over the past several years on the streets, in shopping lines, in taxis, within homes. ...

The former political detainees interviewed for this report were denied the most basic aspects of due process, including rights of access to counsel, to be formally charged, to prepare a defense, and to have a public trial. Many were held in small basement solitary cells for weeks or months without any contact with other human beings except their interrogators. Some were denied medical care. Judges used confessions extracted through torture, ill-treatment, or the threat of continued isolation to hand down prison terms, fines, and lashings.

The Iranian judiciary is at the center of the human rights violations documented in this report. A small group of judges accountable only to the Leader has shut down public dissent. They have used various tools for repression: including plainclothes militia, various intelligence services, prisons and detention centers, and courtrooms.

This report documents treatment in detention in a number of facilities in Iran. Among these, Evin Prison is the most well-known and holds many political detainees. In addition, former prisoners interviewed for this report were held in several secret detention centers in and around Tehran. The entire number of secret detention centers in Iran is unknown, but this report documents conditions in Prison 59 and Towhid detention center. Finally, this report discusses an interrogation center, *Amaken*, the location most recently used to threaten and terrify political activists, writers, and journalists.

The combination of torture and ill-treatment in detention, closing off of avenues for legal redress, and silencing public information about these abuses has created an increasingly hostile environment for human rights in Iran... By attacking a small percentage of those critical of the government, Iranian authorities have been able to silence a much larger body of journalists, activists, and students...

The climate of fear created by the abuses documented in this report has affected many Iranians. Several students told Human Rights Watch that while they supported the views of the student activists, they were afraid to go out into the streets or attend public speeches. "Before, you might be afraid that they would take you to jail for the day," one said, "Now, you are afraid that they will beat you and cut you."

Today, little hope remains for domestic organs to push for change in the judiciary's behavior. The costs for speaking out against human rights violations by the judiciary and by the parallel forces have increased considerably over the past three years. As Ambeyi Ligabo, U.N. Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of the right of freedom of opinion and expression observed in a report on his recent trip to Iran, repression of speech created a "climate of fear."

The Special Rapporteur would go even further, underlining that the climate of fear induced by the systematic repression of people expressing critical views against the authorized political and religious doctrine and the functioning of institutions, coupled with the severity and disproportion of the sentences imposed, leads to self censorship on the part of many journalists, intellectuals, politicians, students and the population at large, thus in effect impeding freedom of expression.

In the aftermath of the February 20, 2004 parliamentary elections, it seems that this climate of fear will only increase. One popular disqualified MP, who was the first to resign from the Sixth Majles, recently said, "The Judicial mechanisms, which are under the direct control of the hardliners, and all the hardliners who are involved in a plan to limit the political space, and this new political space will render the country in a worse condition than before. Compared with the past, we must expect a much worse condition."

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