



HELSINKI COMMISSION NEWS

UNITED STATES COMMISSION ON SECURITY AND COOPERATION IN EUROPE

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For Immediate Release

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June 10th, 2005

U.S. HELSINKI COMMISSION MEMBERS DENOUNCE IRAN'S HUMAN RIGHTS RECORD, CALL FOR JOINT U.S.-EUROPE RESPONSE

(Washington) - The human rights situation in Iran is deteriorating, and the United States and its European allies need to develop a joint strategy to pressure Tehran to improve its record. That was the key point made yesterday in what will be the first in a series of hearings held by the U.S. Helsinki Commission to examine rogue regimes and their impact on the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) region.

"Virtually every fundamental freedom is trampled by the mullahs in Tehran," said Senator Sam Brownback (R-KS), Chairman of the U.S. Helsinki Commission. "In the absence of any meaningful accountability, the Government of Iran's dismal rights record has actually worsened. This is not something the United States or our European allies can ignore."

The Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe, also known as the Helsinki Commission, is a U.S. Government agency that monitors progress in the implementation of the provisions of the 1975 Helsinki Accords. The Commission consists of nine members from the United States Senate, nine from the House of Representatives, and one member each from the Departments of State, Defense and Commerce.

"The names of many of the regime's victims are not known to us," added Commission Co-Chairman, Rep. Chris Smith (R-NJ). "One thing is certain though, dissent in many places can be dangerous, but in Iran it can be deadly. That kind of regime poses a danger not only to its own people, but to the participating States in the OSCE, as well."

According to a Department of State human rights report, Iran's already bad human rights record worsened in 2004. Iran was cited for widespread human rights abuses, including summary executions, disappearances, torture, and arbitrary arrests and detentions. Journalists and editors of pro-reform newspapers have been arrested, and press reports say Iran had also begun blocking hundreds of pro-reform websites. Iran has been cited as a "Country of Particular Concern" for religious persecution under the International Religious Freedom Act.

"The United States, Britain, Germany and France have worked together in recent months on the growing threat of Iran's nuclear ambitions, now we need to expand that focus to Iran's abysmal human rights situation," added Brownback.

It was also noted at the hearing that, unlike in previous years, there was no joint U.S.-E.U. resolution on the subject of human rights in Iran at the U.N. Human Rights Commission meeting in Geneva.

"I am disappointed that the spotlight has not been kept on Iran at the U.N. Human Rights Commission," said Helsinki Commission Ranking Member Rep. Ben Cardin, (D-MD). "Hopefully this hearing will shed a new spotlight on the Iran problem, and we can begin to spur creative thinking on how the United States and Europe can jointly approach this growing threat to global security and democratic progress in the region."

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