

# The Washington Times

## Holding Tehran accountable

Editorial, December 26, 2004. The U.N. General Assembly took a step in the right direction on Monday by passing a resolution criticizing the Iranian government's abysmal human-rights record. The General Assembly voted 71-54 with 55 abstentions to condemn the regime's repression of free speech and use of torture against political opponents.

The resolution was sponsored by Canada, which has long pursued a policy of engagement with Iran through trade and political dialogue. But ties between Ottawa and Tehran have significantly deteriorated ever since Zahra Kazemi — a photojournalist who was a citizen of both countries — was beaten to death while in Iranian police custody in July 2003.

The resolution, which passed on Monday, expressed "serious concern" about "continuing violations of human rights" by the Iranian government. It pointed out that the situation has been worsening, and that problems include "crackdowns by the judiciary and security forces against journalists, parliamentarians, students, clerics and academics; the unjustified closure of newspapers and blocking of Internet sites." The resolution also expressed concern about other actions taken by the radical Shi'ite regime — amputations and stonings, discrimination against women, and arbitrary arrests and detentions against religious minorities, including Sunni Muslims, Christians, Jews and Baha'is.

When the Iran resolution was debated last month by the U.N. High Commission for Human Rights, it was opposed by members of the Organization of the Islamic Conference, led by Pakistan. Other governments that tried to derail it included Belarus (often described as the sole remaining Communist dictatorship in Europe) and Sudan, whose own Islamist regime is engaged in genocide against Muslims. For its part, Iran denounced the resolution as "unreal" and "invalid."

In fact, the Iran resolution may be a sign that the United Nations is feeling the heat over its hypocrisy and double standards on human rights. In January, for example, U.N. special investigator Ambeyi Ligabo of Kenya issued a report documenting how intellectuals and journalists were being subjected to harassment and imprisonment for criticizing the government. But in April the commission ignored the Ligabo report and refused to condemn Iran. At the same time, commission members passed five resolutions condemning Israel and officially mourned the assassination of Hamas terrorist boss Ahmed Yassin by Israel. Several weeks later, they voted to give Sudan — one of the

world's worst human-rights violators — another term on the human-rights commission.

To be sure, problems still remain. In October, for example, a Swiss U.N. human- rights rapporteur investigating world hunger decided to ignore genuine crisis situations in states like Burundi and Congo while publicly calling for a boycott of Israel. But the General Assembly's condemnation of Iran suggests that at least some member states realize that world body will never be taken seriously so long as it remains infested with such blatant hypocrisy on human rights.

Moreover, unlike North Korea and Saddam's Iraq, Iran values its international standing. If there is a nonmilitary solution to Iran's nuclear aspirations, it may be found in denying Iran the international standing and connections it so values — unless they give up their nuclear weapons program. This U.N. vote is a small step down that path.

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