Mr. President, recently,

international media and diplomatic attention

has focused on the inspiring

stories of citizens across the Middle

East and North Africa demanding

greater participation in their government.

While the regime changes in Libya,

Egypt, and Tunisia have certainly

opened the door for democratic

progress in a region long dominated by

authoritarian rulers, we cannot allow

these hopeful aspirations to monopolize

our focus or distract our attention

from the fact that brutal and oppressive

regimes remain.

Today, I want to highlight an especially

dangerous and odious regime—

that of Iranian President Mahmoud

Ahmadinejad and the mullahs in

Tehran.

I am seriously concerned by Tehran’s

continued march toward a nuclear

weapon. Earlier this month the International

Atomic Energy Agency, IAEA,

published a report confirming the obvious—

that Iran remains in violation of

United Nations Security Council resolutions

to halt its nuclear program,

and that it is not cooperating with the

IAEA.

We also know that the Iranian regime

continues to increase its support

for terrorist groups operating in Iraq;

reports also indicate that it is providing

weapons and assistance to the

Assad regime in Damascus in its brutal

crackdown on the Syrian people.

Iranian authorities, apparently fearful

of the popular unrest that swept

longtime leaders in Egypt and Tunisia

from power—and which is currently

threatening Bashar al-Assad’s dictatorship

in Syria—have cracked down on

dissent and increased the arrest and detention

of activists and opposition figures

in the past months—even arresting

young people with squirt guns.

One dissident whose case I have been

following is Bahareh Hedayat, a student

and women’s rights activist.

Bahareh was arrested in December 2009

for participating in Iran’s prodemocracy

student movement and placed in

solitary confinement in the notorious

Evin prison. After nearly 2 months of

interrogation, she was sentenced to 91⁄2

years in prison for her activism. Her

91⁄2 year sentence included 5 years for

‘‘activities against the state,’’ 2 years

for insulting Supreme Leader

Khamenei, and 6 months for insulting

Mahmoud Ahmadinejad. Iranian authorities

also reinstated a 2-year sentence

she received in connection with a

2006 women’s rights protest that had

been suspended.

While in prison, Bahareh has endured

Evin’s harsh conditions, interrogation,

and a lengthy solitary confinement, all

while being denied contact with her

husband and family. She has kept her

spirit and has even protested her detention

and treatment with hunger

strikes. However, detention has taken

a toll on her and her health has deteriorated.

Earlier this year she developed

gall stones, and while it was clear

that the prison’s facilities could not

provide adequate treatment, she was

only allowed to seek outside care this

month. After receiving treatment, she

was promptly returned to prison last

week.

Bahareh Hedayat and dissidents like

her—those who have been brutally punished

for seeking basic human freedoms—

has shown great courage in confronting

the brutality and intolerance

of the Iranian regime. She and thousands

of others have sacrificed immeasurably

to bring about reform in Iran,

the United States must show similar

courage and do all in its power to support

their vision of a peaceful, free, and

democratic Iran.