Senator Casey, Senator Risch, members of your

staff who have worked so hard in putting this together, thank you

very much indeed for inviting me today. And also, thank you for

putting me on a panel with Rudi Bakhtiar and Kambiz Hosseini.

It’s very flattering to be in such good company.

I’d like to talk about three aspects of the human rights issue in

Iran. The first is the regional, the second is the repressive policies

of the regime, and the third is how we can practically help

Iranians.

In terms of the regional, the place where the Arab revolt meets

Iran is in Syria. By sending tanks into his own cities, Bashar al-

Assad has demonstrated that he is as much a reformer as Leonid

Brezhnev was in 1968 when he sent tanks into Czechoslovakia. I

think Shirin Ebadi has put it very well when she said that, ‘‘If

there is democracy in Syria, it’s as if an arm of Iranian regime was

cut off.’’ The Syrian regime, let’s remember, is not only an ally of

the Iranian regime, it’s also a partner in many of its crimes. So,

let’s take the Syria test seriously, because I think it tests just how

committed we are to helping our friends in Iran.

With regard to the regime’s repressive policies, there are three

main aspects here. The first is the isolation of the opposition leaders.

Mr. Karroubi and Mr. Mousavi and their wives, who are, themselves,

activists in their right, Fatemeh Karroubi and Zahra

Rahnavard, have been in a form of incommunicado detention since

mid-February. I’m sorry to say, I don’t think we’ve said enough

about this and made enough of a fuss. Let me remind you of the

fuss that we did make in August 1991, when Mikhail Gorbachev

was detained, when Margaret Thatcher stood up in public and said

‘‘we will hold you accountable for this person.’’ We must do the

same in Iran.

The second repressive policy of the Iranian regime is, as Rudi

Bakhtiar mentioned, the horrendous increase in executions. Iran

doesn’t just use the death penalty against people who are murderers

or drug traffickers, as they claim—and even those people

don’t have proper trials or proper legal process before they face the

death penalty—Iran uses the death penalty for matters of sexual

orientation and matters of opinion. This is clearly an attempt to

intimidate the population. What was encouraging was that the

United States, the European Parliament, and the U.N. made statements

on the large increase in executions. We saw a decrease in

the reported number of executions. But, we fear—and Rudi has

pointed this out, as have many others—that they’re actually doing

executions now in private.

The third repressive measure being used—and you’ve highlighted

it with these pictures—is to try and break political prisoners. Iran

has implemented the most outrageous sentences on people who

have done nothing more that Nasrin Sotoudeh, be a human rights

activist and lawyer; or Navid Khanjani, be a human rights activist

and a Baha’i; or Mahdieh Golroo, for being a human rights activist

who stood up for Mansour Osanloo or the Alaei brothers. Another

case I’d like to mention is Hossein Ronaghi-Maleki. He is currently

serving a 15-year sentence for helping people with Internet

freedom.

I’d also like to mention a very worrying development that occurred

last week, which is, a number of prisoners, some of them political,

were moved from Rajaei Shahr Prison, which is a pretty

awful place, where Mansour Osanloo is currently held, to a place

called Qarchak Varamin, a prison where the facilities are grossly

inadequate to handle the number of women held there. The reports

we have is that something like two or three times the number of

prisoners are being held in that prison, relative to its capacity. And

that’s precisely the sort of thing that a U.N. Rapporteur or a U.S.

Special Representative could demand answers about.

So, how can we help people in Iran? Well, there are four ways.

The first is doing what you’ve just done here, which is adopt prisoners.

It worked with the Refuseniks. It will work with Iran.

The second thing we can do is push human rights up the human

rights agenda, in terms of U.S. policy. I have to say I was very

pleased with President Obama’s Nowruz address this year. He

mentioned human rights defenders. He mentioned human rights.

And it was a very welcome change from the message in 2009.

The third thing we can do is to sanction both the abusers and

those who help those who do abuse. That can mean using existing

legislation, having new legislation, or doing the sort of, frankly,

guerrilla actions, if I can put it that way, that Stuart Levey did

when he was at Treasury.

Fourth, and finally, we can actually practically help activists in

Iran. That means helping them document abuses and report on

abuses, helping them to communicate and to organize.

At Freedom House, we were helping people in Syria and Egypt

for many years. And there were many years, frankly, where it

looked pretty lean and fairly bleak. But, you never know when the

opportunity will come. And I think we have to be ready, and we

have to make certain the people of Iran are ready, for when their

next opportunity of freedom emerges.

Thank you.

Got it, thank you very much.

Well, first of all, as I mentioned, the leaders have been isolated.

So, that’s obviously had an effect. But, what was interesting was

the demonstrations in mid-February that followed the fall of

Mubarak, which showed, you know, people Iran are watching

what’s happening elsewhere.

In terms of the horizontal connections among the movement,

many of these have now been broken. Many of the organizers have

been arrested or they’ve been forced to flee the country. But, at the

street level, there’s clearly a lot of discontent. What we’ve seen is

that there are people organizing autonomously. Clearly, helping

them with organizational techniques is very important. I’ve spoken

to Arab activists who have said to me—and actually, Wael Ghonim,

the Google executive, said this publicly—that they were inspired by

what the Iranians did in 2009. They were amazed. They said,

‘‘Wow, the Iranians stood up to that regime? Well, I can do that

in my own country.’’ And what’s interesting is to hear from those

Arab activists, who now say, ‘‘Well, I’d like to help the Iranians,

in turn, because they inspired me.’’

So, I think there is great potential there. But, you know, I think

Rudi’s absolutely right, we shouldn’t expect people to stick their

necks needlessly on the line, but I think the occasion will come.

Well, thank you very much.

I think what Kambiz has done is very important. Because, if you

think about it, in any dictatorship, to be a subject of that dictatorship

is to be a target of broadcast; that’s all they’re doing to you

all day: broadcasting, broadcasting, broadcasting. In his case,

though, they’re broadcasting to him. So, that interaction and giving

people that ability to speak is very, very important.

I think the second thing is, he’s right, that there is a base of support

of the regime. This is not a hollow regime. This is not the

meaningless NDP regime in Egypt, where nobody even knew what

the ruling party stood for in the last few years. There are people

who really do believe in this regime. And the government in

Tehran is very good at feeding that base and mobilizing it. So, if

you can find the correct message to undermine that, that’s absolutely

critical.

The other point is, you have to make people understand that—

again, Rudi made this point—we’re not asking for excessive risk.

But, at a certain point, you’ve got to take your frustration and activism

offline. I mean, political power does not grow out of a

Facebook account. And so, there has to be a certain movement at

a certain point. But, if you can undermine the base of the regime

and teach people, themselves, how to do that—this has been done

elsewhere; there are other places where people have gone to people

in their area and said, ‘‘Look, I know your husband, your uncle,

your brother, your cousin is in the police, in the Basij. You know,

I want you to know there’s a future for them in a new democratic

Iran. We’re not after you; we’re not after the little guys. We’re after

the big ones.’’ And eroding the base that way is a very useful

technique.

Can I just quickly say with regard to Rudi’s

point about Nokia Siemens networks. I think it’s extremely important

that this be pursued. They provided a monitoring center for

mobile telephony. That’s standard when you provide this sort of

equipment, but it’s standard when you provide it to a country that

has law enforcement agencies, as opposed to people who impose

human rights abuses. What they have done is that they claim to

have sold that business to other companies—and quite who those

new companies are and who’s doing that is important—because you

cannot operate this sort of equipment without ongoing updates of

both software and hardware. It’s a very sophisticated kit. That

needs to be fully investigated. Nokia Siemens does a tremendous

amount of business in the United States. And, you know, many of

us carry their telephones. They do an awful lot of U.S. Government

work. And the potential to expose that, I think, is very important.

And that needs to be very, very fully investigated. The two companies

that have been named as being involved here, Trovicor and

Perusa, and we don’t really know who owns them.