I’d like to thank you, Mr. Chairman, for providing

this opportunity to speak to you on behalf of the International

Campaign for Human Rights in Iran. It is an independent NGO

dedicated to research and advocacy regarding the human rights situation

in Iran. We’d like to share our main concerns and offer you

some recommendations.

Two years after the disputed Presidential election of 2009, the

human rights situation in the Islamic Republic of Iran continues to

deteriorate and is in a state of unprecedented crisis. Under the

Presidency of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, Iran has become one of the

worst violators of human rights in the world, egregiously violating

virtually every article of the International Covenant on Civil and

Political Rights of which Iran is a state party, and also ignoring the

human rights protections in Iran’s own constitution.

Since the start of 2011, Iran has been on an execution binge. In

January alone, IRI officials executed 85 people, compared to 86 in

all of 2005. That’s the year President Ahmadinejad took power.

In all of 2010, Iran executed at least 542 people, 242 of them officially

announced and over 300 reportedly put to death in secret

executions inside of Vakilabad Prison in Mashad.

Reports of cruel and inhumane punishments, including stoning,

limb amputations, and floggings, are also on the rise. The government

falsely justifies these practices on the basis of Iran’s religion

and culture, while they are clearly part of a program to terrorize

Iranian citizens.

Human rights defenders, civil society activists, journalists, as

well as minority, ethnic, and religious groups, all have been facing

growing repression; the authorities continually silencing those who

try to expose and criticize the government’s violence or hold the

government accountable.

The Iranian judiciary has become deeply politicized under the

influence of the state security establishment. The judiciary and

security forces regularly use coerced confessions, obtained under

torture or duress, to issue lengthy sentences on vaguely worded

offences, including ‘‘acts against national security’’ and ‘‘enmity

against God.’’

Over the past 2 years, numerous detainees have risked their

lives and come forward with personal accounts of rape, severe beatings,

sleep deprivation, verbal threats, and other ill treatment by

their interrogators. Right now, an estimated 500 people remain

arbitrarily detained for peaceful activities or for exercising free

expression. Another 500 prisoners of conscience have been sentenced

to lengthy prison terms following unjust trials. In addition,

authorities in Iran are effectively criminalizing human-rights-based

legal representation by prosecuting a number of lawyers who represent

political detainees, including the one you mentioned, Nasrin

Sotoudeh, and Mohammad Seifzadeh, sentenced, in 2010, to 11

years and 9 years, respectively.

Even the creation of an independent human rights organization

has become a crime in Iran. Mohammad Kaboudvand was sentenced

to 10 years in prison for starting the first human rights organization

in Kurdistan. Family members and colleagues of Shirin

Ebadi, Iran’s 2003 Nobel Peace Prize Laureate, have been arrested,

harassed, and intimidated in order to force them to disassociate

themselves from Mrs. Ebadi, who has led the country’s most effective

human rights organization, the Center for Human Rights

Defenders.

Leading human rights advocate Emad Baghi, of the Association

for Prisoner’s Rights, who has shown how Iran’s policy of executing

juvenile delinquents is, in fact, not justified by shariah law, he is

now serving 6 years in prison.

The government continues to impose increasingly severe restrictions

on freedom of expression, association, and assembly, including

widespread censorship of newspapers and the Internet and imprisoning

numerous Iranian journalists, including Bahman Ahmadi

Amouee and Issa Saharkhiz.

Religious and ethnic minorities continue to face discrimination,

as well. In December 2010, Iranian courts sentenced Christian pastor

Youcef Nadarkhani to death for ‘‘apostasy,’’ an offense that has

no basis in Iranian law.

The broadscale discrimination against members of the Baha’i

faith, that you mentioned, has included the sentencing of seven

Baha’i leaders to 20 years in prison each on baseless espionage

charges in August 2010, and denying Baha’is access to higher education.

Sufism followers have also been routinely persecuted and

prosecuted solely because of their beliefs. Furthermore, violent suppression

of the ethnic Arab population in Khuzestan continues.

Dozens of protesters were killed, and many more were injured,

during demonstrations on April 15, 2011. Many have since been

arrested.

Now, despite unassailable evidence of widescale rights violations

by the government, Iranian officials continue to misrepresent their

human rights record, reject calls for reform, and block any attempts

by the international human rights mechanisms to cooperatively

address the crisis in Iran. In this connection, I wish to note

the critical role of the administration for its leadership and support

of the United Nations Human Rights Council resolution that estab-

lished a Special Rapporteur on Iran. It’s something the Iranian

people deeply appreciate.

Two years ago, millions of Iranians took to the streets, in an unprecedented

fashion, demanding respect for fundamental freedoms,

human rights, and democracy. Today, popular movements throughout

the Middle East are making similar calls. Although Iranians

are living under severe repression right now, there is no doubt

their civil and human rights movement cannot be contained in the

long term.

We believe the United States policy toward Iran must give priority

to the dire human rights situation there. In particular, we

recommend the following actions.

Access to information is of critical importance today. While the

Iranian Government engages in broad censorship and implements

severe restrictions on Internet access and broadcast media, the

United States could help Iranian people to gain access to the Internet

and satellite channels as a means to expand communications,

access impartial news and information, and to challenge the government’s

narrative and expose truths.

The U.S. policy should also focus on ending the illegal jamming

of satellite channels by the Iranian Government. Also, I’d like to

give you an example, here. The United States should lift sanctions

on hardware technology—specific hardware technology that would

allow ordinary Iranians to download Internet content wirelessly

through their TV satellite dishes, and should also facilitate providing

such wireless access.

The administration and Congress should also continue to express

clear moral support for the Iranian people, in responding to the unfolding

human rights crisis there. The moral support should be articulated

in a way that does not allow legitimate aspirations of the

Iranians to be falsely portrayed by the government as foreign intervention.

Upholding international legal commitments is not interfering

in the internal affairs of another state.

As noted above, the administration’s diplomacy at the Human

Rights Council, leading to a multilateral consensus on appointing

a Special Rapporteur for Iran, is welcomed and should be strongly

supported. However, this mechanism should be strengthened to result

in tangible improvements.

The United States should also target companies that sell surveillance

technologies to the Iranian Government, which is empowering

its repression. Several European companies are suspected of

such business activities and should be denied access to American

markets.

And finally, the United States should continue to expand its targeted

sanctions against government officials implicated in gross

human rights violations. It should also encourage countries, such

as Canada, Australia, New Zealand, and Japan to adopt similar

travel bans and financial freezes. The U.S. Treasury should put

financial institutions in countries, such as Thailand, Malaysia,

Singapore, and the UAE on notice that any financial services to

sanctioned individuals will result in their losing the ability to engage

in financial transactions through United States institutions.

Thank you all for your attention and concern. And thank you in

advance for concrete steps that you can take to help the people of

Iran realize their fundamental human rights.

I’d like to say that the civil and human rights

movement inside of Iran is alive and well, as you saw in the broad

massive demonstrations, a couple of years ago and subsequently.

However, the reason why you’re not seeing that same outpouring

of popular discontent is because Iran has had, now, 2 years to basically

hone its repression skills, its repression machinery, if you

will. And it has nearly a complete monopoly over mass communications.

And it is basically using the high price of oil to bankroll this

kind of repression on the Iranian people.

And you also have to understand the psyche of the Iranian people.

We’re coming out of 30 years of a recent history of mass violence,

starting with the 1979 Revolution, then, subsequently, the

8-year Iran/Iraq war, leaving hundreds of thousands dead, and

then the mass executions that followed afterward, and the extreme

repressions. These have left the Iranian people deeply scarred and

wishing to see their aspirations for democracy in Iran to come to

fruition in a bloodless way.

They’ve also witnessed what’s going on around them, 800-plus

killed in Syria, thousands killed in Libya, massive repression in

Bahrain. And they have no doubt that their own government is

willing to use the same repression and kill thousands to stay in

power.

And they’re actually showing a sign of political maturity to not

want to start this violence and bloodshed. They basically believe

that any form of transformation that comes with heavy violence

also has the danger of bringing forward another violent and repressive

regime. At the same time, they also understand that the popular

aspirations of the people of Iran, for democracy and human

rights, can’t be stifled forever.

Now, what can we do to help them? We need to try to create an

environment where they can have access to information. We need

to expose these massive human rights violations and also empower

their communications means, which I have several concrete ideas,

if you’d like, I can later address. And we believe that, when this

environment is created, where Iranian people can communicate,

where they have access to information, that environment will again

allow them to collectively raise their voices. But, unfortunately, no

one can predict when. There’s always a chance that an unpredictable

event can spark protests and mass demonstrations again.

The pool of the individuals that they were—I’m

sorry, can you ask the question again?

Well, I think the natural leader came out to be

President Mousavi, as you saw. He was the natural leader. But,

also you saw various voices. You saw President Khatami, the

former President, also speaking out. You saw Karroubi, another

opposition leader, speaking out. So, there are various leaders, but

obviously all of them have been silenced right now.

One of the first things you saw, right after the

elections that same day, was the raiding of Mousavi ’s headquarters

and the arrest of several of his key men. And that’s what’s

basically been happening. There’s been a lot of arrests of the top

opposition, right under the top echelon; even their sons, their

daughters have been arrested. And also the key players in the

Green Movement have been arrested, so that the movement was

brought, basically, to a virtual standstill for a while, it seemed.

But, again, this movement has no natural leaders anymore. It’s

become a movement of everybody who opposes this government,

everybody who wants freedoms, and everybody who wants human

rights respected in this country. So, it has become a very undefined

movement, basically almost a civil rights movement for human and

civil rights.

When you look at the youth of Iran that are in

the prisons right now—the Navid Khanjanis, the Emid Baghis, the

Nasrin Sotoudehs, the Seifzadehs, the Mohammad Koboudvands—

these are all potential leaders in Iran’s future. But, I can’t think

of anybody who has risen right now, other than the leaders that

we’ve mentioned, as a particular figure to be leading the movement.

Yes, we do. There were numerous people arrested.

And, of course, that’s part of our organization’s job, to track them,

to see who’s been released, what sentencing they’re receiving. And

you have to understand, you saw the show trials. Many of these

protestors have been arrested, they’ve been tortured, they’ve been

forced into giving false confessions, they’ve been tried, and they’ve

been sentenced unjustly. In some cases, people have been executed.

And this is basically what’s unfolding inside the prisons of Iran.

There is a judge that we have targeted as part

of the 15 men of violence our organization is targeting as Iranian

officials that are responsible, directly, for the human rights violations

that are going on inside the country. Judge Salavati, we’re

trying to figure actually what his credentials are to be a judge. But,

he is also one of the judges who’s doling out very harsh sentencing—

10 years, 9 years—for protestors. And he is also sentencing

young men to death for protesting, saying that they were

protesting, when they weren’t protesting, in the case of Arash

Rahmanipour, a young 19-year-old who was executed last year, on

claims of enmity with God.

So, there are judges, yes, doling out unfair sentences based on—

for example, another young man, Mohamad Valian was a 20-yearold

who was arrested. And they had taken his picture throwing

three stones at a protest. And they arrested him, and his trial

lasted 7 minutes. And, in 7 minutes, he was convicted, to death.

Now, we were able to launch a video campaign and get that death

sentence overturned to 3 years. But, again, this is what we’re deal-

ing with, a very haphazard, unjust way of sentencing the Iranian

people.

Well, I’m sure there is. I’m sure that speaks to

the level of repression we’re seeing there. It seems like they are

looking around the region and what’s going on in the region, and

upping the ante on the repression in their own country. So, I believe

that, yes, they do understand that they will be subject to

international law, and, eventually, the law of their own country.

Yes. I’d like to speak to the issue of access to information

and safe communications, which are two areas which the

United States must be proactive in and should be focusing on.

With regards to the Internet, we’re strongly recommending investing

in wireless, satellite-based technology. There’s technology

right now inside of Iran which actually would allow the Iranian

people to download the Internet through their television via their

satellite dishes. We need to provide the service for that.

Now, as long as the Internet is carried through fiber optics, we

have to find a way to counter that, because fiber optics will always

allow a government to block it, and always has the ability to be

controlled by the government. So, the sooner that we invest in the

wireless technology, the better.

Now, with regards to satellite television, Iran consistently is jamming

television broadcasts, as well, which is very illegal. It’s

against international law. And, by all means, we should stop it.

And we can stop it, because, ironically, the same satellite company

which is beaming in the programming from outside of the country—

which we were talking about, like ‘‘Parazit’’, which is being

blocked by the Iranian Government—that same satellite company,

which is called Eutelsat, is also the same company that is also providing,

inside of Iran, the state-controlled television and radio

information.

So, the way we need to operate here is, force Eutelsat to basically

hold Iran accountable and hold Iran to international standards.

This is easily doable. What you tell them is, is, ‘‘Either you get Iran

to stop jamming programming from outside the country, or they

lose the opportunity to channel their own programming into the

country, because you can stop—Eutelsat can stop sending programming

into the country.’’ And the U.N. agency, the International

Telecommunications Union, should strongly pressure Iran to stop

its illegal jamming activity, as well.

Yes. I’m sorry, I don’t have that information right

now.

First, if you don’t mind, I’d like to address Senator

Risch’s question. We are, in fact doing research on the companies.

And we don’t want to name them publicly, just yet. But, aside

from Nokia Siemens, which was the German company which was

mentioned 2 years ago, Ericsson, the Swedish company, and

Huawai, the Chinese company, which have been released, we are

doing a comprehensive report.

And we can forward you that information when

it’s done.

And, as far as what to do, I think I mentioned

it. Again, I can’t stress how important it is to help Iranians be able

to access information and have safe communications. Again, there’s

concrete ways that we can actually help Iranians be able to access

the Internet using these wireless satellite-based Internet-access

technologies. And there’s also the ability to lift sanctions on the

hardware that’s needed to use this technology. But, we need to be

providing the proper service for them. And, as long as the Internet,

like I said, is carried in fiber optics, it’s a losing battle for us. The

sooner we can get on the wireless technology and the sooner we can

provide it for the Iranian people, the better.

And again, I can’t stress the fact that there is a company called

Eutelsat, which is the satellite company which is responsible for

feeding Iran all of its own programming and also bringing in programming

from abroad. We must be applying pressure to Eutelsat,

to put pressure on Iran to stop jamming the satellite and the

programming.

But, as far as international institutions, I have to say, we’ve had

the—we very much welcome the administration’s engagement recently

with the Human Rights Council and the assignment of the

Special Rapporteur. That was a very significant achievement, and

we believe it will have significant ramifications and be able to expose

great injustices that are happening inside of the prisons of

Iran. And I think that’s the most important thing, is to be able to

get information out of the country and give information back into

the hands of the Iranian people, empowering them to create the

environment that they need to have their voices heard.