



HOUSE OF COMMONS  
CHAMBRE DES COMMUNES  
CANADA

# **Subcommittee on International Human Rights of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development**

---

SDIR • NUMBER 152 • 1st SESSION • 42nd PARLIAMENT

---

**EVIDENCE**

**Tuesday, May 14, 2019**

—  
**Chair**

**Ms. Anita Vandenberg**



## Subcommittee on International Human Rights of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development

Tuesday, May 14, 2019

• (1310)

[English]

**The Chair (Ms. Anita Vandenbeld (Ottawa West—Nepean, Lib.)):** I'm calling the meeting to order.

I'm very pleased that we are here this week for the ninth Iran Accountability Week sessions. The foreign affairs committee had one set of panellists already last week, and we will be having two sessions, one today and one on Thursday. This is a tradition in the Canadian Parliament which started nine years ago, in 2012. It's an opportunity—especially this year, given that it's been 40 years since the Iranian revolution—to hold the regime to account.

Traditionally, this is not a study. It is not something where we will be putting together recommendations. It is an opportunity for us to hear from people who have been human rights defenders and people who have been impacted regarding the human rights situation in Iran and to hear about some of the brutality of that regime. That is the purpose of these two meetings.

Today, we will have two witnesses. We will have four on Thursday.

Today's witnesses include Nader Hashemi, who is coming to us by video conference. He is director of the Center for Middle East Studies and professor at the Josef Korbel School of International Studies at the University of Denver.

Welcome, Nader Hashemi.

**Mr. Nader Hashemi (Director, Center for Middle East Studies, University of Denver, As an Individual):** Thank you.

**The Chair:** We also will have—although she has been slightly delayed—Shaparak Shajarizadeh, an Iranian activist who was prosecuted for peacefully protesting Iran's compulsory hijab law. She was profiled by the BBC as one of the 100 most influential and inspiring women in the world. She will be with us shortly.

We will start with the testimony of Mr. Hashemi, and hopefully Ms. Shajarizadeh will arrive before he has finished.

Mr. Hashemi, the floor is yours.

**Mr. Nader Hashemi:** Thank you very much for the invitation. I'm sorry I can't be with you in person, because I normally relish the opportunity at this moment to leave Donald Trump's America to travel to some of the more civilized parts of the planet, but we're at

the end of the academic quarter here, so I'm glad that we can connect via teleconferencing.

I'd like to highlight some aspects of the statement that I circulated in advance, which I think is very germane to the concerns of the committee, but let me say something about the analytical approach that I take in my written statement and my presentation.

The analytical approach that I adopt is sort of a simple one. It's an approach that I adopt in regard to all human rights crises and all attempts to support human rights in other countries. It's an approach which demands at the beginning that we be good listeners, that we don't presuppose to know what the best strategies are and what the best solutions are to support the work of human rights activists in other societies.

In other words, the analytical approach that I take to the question of human rights in Iran is that we should listen and be guided by the courageous work of human rights defenders in Iran who are on the front line of the struggle, who are living in very difficult circumstances and I think have a lot to share with us in terms of what they want from the international community—what they want from Canada—rather than us presupposing in advance that we know what is best for them.

I've studied actually quite closely the writings and statements of many of these human rights defenders. I've interviewed some of them. There is, I think, a broad consensus among many of these human rights defenders within Iran today in terms of what they want from the international community and Canada in particular. I think these broad guidelines—or, if you will, red lines—should be respected. At a minimum, I think they should inform policy debate and deliberations in Canada with respect to the question of human rights.

I think the first broad consensus that exists among most human rights defenders in Iran is that they appreciate and deeply value having a global spotlight directed at Iran's human rights record. They support the naming, shaming and sanctioning of individuals who are directly involved in human rights abuses.

I've heard recently there's some debate in Canada criticizing the Canadian position for excessively focusing on human rights in Iran but not on other countries in the region that have deplorable human rights records, in some cases, worse than Iran's. I think the response to that criticism is that Canada shouldn't roll back its criticism of Iran's human rights abuses but should actually elevate its criticism of other human rights abuses in other countries, many of which we have very close relations with. I think it would be a sad day and human rights activists within Iran would be very disappointed if Canada withdrew its global spotlight on what's happening to them and to other human rights defenders in Iran today.

The second broad point that I think most human rights defenders in Iran strongly support is widespread opposition to and rejection of war, foreign-based regime change policies and the military adventurism by the United States and its regional allies, in other words, a strong repudiation of the Trump-Bolton policy toward Iran, which seems that it's leading us to war today.

The New York Times last night published a report that the United States is considering sending 120,000 troops to the Persian Gulf region. There are increasing hostility and rhetoric on both sides. There's been the recent sabotage of commercial ships in the Gulf region. Iran has threatened to restart its uranium production if it doesn't get sanction relief from Europe. Europe has rejected that ultimatum.

It looks like we are witnessing the slow and steady spiral to another war in the Middle East, with echoes from 2003. This clearly would be a calamity for human rights not just in Iran but throughout the broader Middle East. I think human rights activists in Iran strongly and overwhelmingly oppose these political trends and recoil in horror at the prospects of another confrontation or a possible U.S.-Iran war.

• (1315)

The third point that I think represents a broad consensus among human rights defenders is opposition to broad-based economic sanctions that affect the average Iranian citizen. Targeted sanctions directed at abusers of human rights and high regime officials with blood on their hands are generally welcomed by Iranian human rights defenders.

With respect to sanctions as a result of Trump's new hawkish policy, the effects on Iran's economy are predictable and catastrophic: rising inflation, rising unemployment, a lot of defeat and despair. The IMF is predicting that Iran's economy next year will contract by 6%.

These sanctions are driving millions of Iranian citizens into poverty and have significantly impacted the average person's access to medicine and health care. Let's be clear: It's the average Iranian citizen, not the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps that have been most directly affected by these new U.S. sanctions.

The focus and activity in Iran today among, for example, Iran's sizable youth population, which yearns for political change, is not on mobilizing to resist the policies of the Islamic Republic of Iran, but rather, in light of these new economic sanctions, on survival, economic survival, and, if possible, immigration.

The fourth point is I think there is broad support among Iranian human rights defenders for the Iranian nuclear accord, the JCPOA, because it averts and reduces the prospects of war. It removes economic sanctions and opens Iran up to the international community. In other words, I think there is strong support for diplomacy, because diplomacy could resolve tension and bring Iran into the international community, which could then open the door to more political possibilities for advancing democratic and human rights activism in Iran.

The fifth point is there is a broad consensus among Iranian human rights activists that a non-violent strategy is the only way to improve the human rights crisis in Iran. This will require patience. It's a long-term approach to advancing human rights and democracy. There are no quick fixes. Stated differently, the struggle for human rights and democracy in Iran is a marathon, not a sprint.

There is a lot of understandable frustration among Iranians at the state of politics today, the state of human rights. There's a lot of desire for rapid political change. However, if you're committed to a strategy of non-violent resistance, one has to be committed to the long haul. All alternatives to a non-violent strategy suggest war and a situation that will make the human rights crisis much worse.

The sixth point is that the international community should give name recognition to the courageous work of Iranian human rights defenders within Iran, especially those who are in prison. There are many key figures, many prominent names, such as the courageous human rights activist and lawyer Nasrin Sotoudeh, her husband Reza Khandan, Abdolfattah Soltani, Abdullah Momeni, Mostafa Tajzadeh, Narges Mohammadi, Esmail Bakhshi and Sepideh Gholian.

These are names that should become household names, not just in Canada, but around the world, because when the international community recognizes these names and puts them into the public discussion, it makes it much more difficult for the Iranian regime to oppress these people. It gives them a certain blanket of protection, so that if they're abused, there will be international repercussions in response to Iran's behaviour.

There is a Canadian connection here. We used to have the International Centre for Human Rights and Democratic Development in Montreal. In 2006 this centre gave its most prestigious human rights award, the John Humphrey Freedom Award, to an Iranian political dissident, Akbar Gangi. That elevated his work. It gave him money. It gave him a platform to speak from. It was I think a step in the right direction.

Giving honorary citizenship, for example, to Iranian human rights defenders is a way of supporting and giving name recognition to these people.

A few months ago, French President Emmanuel Macron formally invited Nasrin Sotoudeh, the courageous human rights lawyer, to be part of the G7 Gender Equality Advisory Council. This type of creative thinking should be rigorously pursued by Canada. It helps human rights defenders, and it would be broadly welcomed.

Let me conclude with a few quick observations. I think the question of human rights in Iran directly matters for Canada for three main reasons.

First, it's part of our core Canadian values that define us as a country. I think our moral standing in the world is based on our recognition that Canada is a country that defends and supports human rights norms. Polling in Canada generally reflects support for a human rights foreign policy that upholds and elevates human rights.

● (1320)

Second, Canada has a stake in the human rights crisis in Iran today. Two Iranian Canadians have been killed in Iranian jails, Zahra Kazemi and more recently, Kavous Seyed-Emami. Dozens of other Canadian residents have either been held in jail, have been prevented from leaving or have been harassed. This gives the question of human rights in Iran a Canadian connection, and we have an interest in pursuing human rights in Iran for that reason alone.

Third, Canada is now home to a sizable Iranian Canadian community. There are deep differences among them in terms of what strategy Canada should pursue, but there's a broad consensus that most Iranian Canadians support Canada's elevation of human rights in Iran and supports Canada elevating the work of human rights and pro-democracy activists in Iran.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Unfortunately, you're over your time, but hopefully, we can get back to some of those points in the questions and answers.

We are very pleased to have Ms. Shajarizadeh, who is an Iranian activist and had to flee Iran in 2018. She now resides in Toronto. She's here with us today and is one of BBC's 100 influential women.

Ms. Shajarizadeh, you have eight minutes for your opening remarks.

**Mrs. Shaparak Shajarizadeh (As an Individual):** Thank you so much.

First of all, I want to thank you, the subcommittee, for inviting me here to testify about human rights violations in Iran. I'm so sorry for being late.

My name is Shaparak Shajarizadeh. Many of you on this subcommittee may know my story, but for those who don't, let me begin by saying that I'm not a professor and I'm not a historian. I am a living, breathing example of the human rights situation in Iran.

I'm the mother of a young boy and an ordinary woman thrown into an extraordinary situation. I'm not a professional activist. I never began any movement, but when I was arrested, all that changed for

me. When I was stripped naked, searched and thrown into solitary confinement, all of that changed for me. When I was imprisoned and told that I would never see my son again, all of that changed for me. I'm now a former political prisoner, but in many ways, I'm still a prisoner of the Iranian government.

Two years ago I began protesting the forced veiling of women in Iran. For the past 40 years, Iranian women have been subjected to coercive measures to try to make them cover their hair and their bodies. Women's bodies have been made into a battleground. Iranian women do not have the most basic right to decide for themselves what to wear every day.

My act of civil disobedience consisted of me joining other women in Iran who were placing white scarves at the end of sticks and waving them in the streets. The woman who instigated that peaceful act, Vida Movahedi, is still in prison in Iran. Scores of women were arrested for this act of civil disobedience, and many are still in prison or awaiting trial.

Before I was arrested in Iran, I would only hear or read about the brutality of the regime from people, but when I was arrested, all of those stories came to life for me. The first night of my detention, I was sent to jail in Vozara detention cells. I was forced to get naked and told repeatedly to stand and sit down over and over again. During the interrogations, I was beaten up badly, forced to endure abusive sexual comments and told that I was a spy for foreign countries and the CIA.

I was arrested a total of three times, called to Evin prison for questioning and sent to jail twice in three months. The first time, even though I had made bail, I was sent to solitary confinement for a week. After being on a hunger strike for five days, I was released on bail. The second time I was arrested, they also arrested my husband. Although he had not done anything, in their eyes he was guilty too, because he was failing at his job of controlling his wife, a sentence they said to him over and over again.

You see, when they arrest or detain you, they also terrorize your family. When I was arrested for the third time, they did so when I was with my nine-year-old son. He was with me in the interrogation for six hours. They handcuffed me in front of him while he was screaming and begging them to let us go home. I was sentenced to two years in prison in addition to an 18-year suspended prison term. I knew that I had to leave.

● (1325)

The only light I had when I was in prison was when I was finally allowed to see my lawyer, Nasrin Sotoudeh. She was recently sentenced to 38 years in prison and 148 lashes. Nasrin Sotoudeh is one of Iran's most well-known human rights lawyers. That is the situation of human rights in Iran, a place where lawyers become prisoners. Nasrin Sotoudeh is still in Evin prison, the same prison where Canadian photojournalist Zahra Kazemi was tortured and murdered back in 2003.

I'm sorry, Mr. Hashemi, but I have the same names that you mentioned.

It's the same prison that Canadian environmentalist Kavous Seyed-Emami died in last year. His wife, Maryam Mombeini, had her passport confiscated as she was getting ready to board a plane to British Columbia with her two sons. She is still being held in the country against her will. Why shouldn't a Canadian citizen be allowed to join her two sons in British Columbia?

Evin prison is the same place that Canadian resident Saeed Malekpour has been in for the past decade. In fact, a dozen Canadians have been taken hostage by the Iranian regime in the past 15 years. How can a government just be allowed to keep taking other countries' citizens hostage over and over again? How can Canada even think of being diplomatic with such a government that takes its citizens hostage?

I feel a deep sense of guilt and obligation sitting in front of you here today: guilt because I am enjoying freedom in Canada that others don't have, and obligation because I need to share the stories of those who we often don't hear from, the ones who don't receive Nobel Prizes. I want to speak their names.

When I was in prison, a woman named Mojgan Keshavarz began telling people about me and advocating on my behalf. Because of that, she got arrested and charged with colluding with foreign enemies. She is currently in Qarchak prison.

Yasaman Aryani and her mother, Monireh Arabshahi, were arrested because on International Women's Day this year they were passing out flowers to other women on the subway to celebrate. They are charged with being a threat to national security.

Atena Daemi, a young children's rights activist, spoke out against the killing of juveniles in the country. Iran is the largest executioner of juveniles in the world. On May 1, 2019, Human Rights Watch reported that Mehdi Sohrabifar and Amin Sedaghat were executed on April 25, 2019. They were 15 when they were arrested and were executed two years later at the age of 17. Recently, the United Nations Secretary-General reported that there were 160 child offenders on death row in Iran. These are the things that Atena Daemi was speaking out against, and she has been in jail for the past four years because of it.

Sepideh Gholian, a 23-year-old student and journalist, was arrested last November while reporting on labour rights protests. Aras Amiri was recently charged with working for British intelligence. Rezvaneh Mohammadi was charged with promoting same-sex relations. Arash Sadeghi, Narges Mohammadi, Esmail Bakhshi...the list is long and the charges ridiculous. Arash Sadeghi needs medical care; he has cancer. He is inside the prison and the judge won't let him have the medical care he needs.

It is not just civil rights activists who are under attack. Environmentalists are also being detained. There are currently eight well-known environmentalists being held in Evin prison and for more than 400 days now. One of them, Niloufar Bayani, just turned 33 years old. She is a former graduate of McGill University in Montreal.

●(1330)

I ask that the Canadian government recognize the work being done by human rights activists in Iran, not only by raising the issue at the United Nations, but by designating the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps as a terrorist organization. There was a decision to do so back in June 2018, but we have seen no movement on this for almost a year now. What are you waiting for? The IRGC are the ones who are torturing Iranians who are fighting for the most basic of rights. These are rights that I have here in Canada. Canada can begin by sanctioning the individual architects of human rights violations, and the judges, who are the real criminals in the courtrooms.

I want the people of my country to enjoy the same basic rights that I have in Canada.

**The Chair:** I'm so sorry, but you are over your time.

You could perhaps add some comments in the question and answer session, or you could always submit a written testimony as well.

**Mrs. Shaparak Shajarizadeh:** Thank you so much. I just want to thank you.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

We will have time for just one round of questions—one for each.

We will begin with a seven-minute period for questions from Mr. Sweet.

**Mr. David Sweet (Flamborough—Glanbrook, CPC):** Thank you, Chair.

Ms. Shajarizadeh, no one can imagine what you've gone through. You're a courageous person. Thank you for continuing in your courage to try to defend those innocent citizens of Iran. We greatly appreciate it.

Chair, I hope that all who have been named by our two witnesses so far will be in our statement, whenever we do that, so that we can do our part in what has been mentioned: making sure that they become household names.

Mr. Hashemi, the regime has been in place for 40 years. I did some research on your pedagogical style in challenging your students, particularly in regard to the book *What Went Wrong?* I read that some years ago.

In regard to your statement about being patient, this regime has been in place for 40 years. They have had one of the most horrific human rights records that modern times have known. They export terror. There is a significant link, in the sense that when you export terror, you contravene the human rights of people who are not on your shores. This is well known. I'm certain that the people in Syria may have a bit of a problem with being patient, as well as those in Yemen.

So when you speak of being patient with this regime—and also Ms. Shajarizadeh's comments about not being diplomatic—the horrific treatment that they see are the things in the minds of people in the west. What exactly do you mean by being patient with them?

**Mr. Nader Hashemi:** By being patient with the regime, I didn't mean that we should take the spotlight off of the Islamic Republic. I meant being patient with respect to the struggle for advancing human rights and democracy in Iran. That is a long-term struggle and has to be won in phases. I'm all in favour of shining the spotlight on human rights defenders in Iran and holding the regime to task.

I'm very worried, though, at this moment—if you're following the news—that any sort of coercive military action by the United States could make the situation a hundred times worse. That is a serious danger that we have to be cognizant of and push back against if we're serious about human rights.

That's essentially what I was talking about.

• (1335)

**Mr. David Sweet:** Are you in agreement, then, that the IRGC should be listed a terrorist organization?

**Mr. Nader Hashemi:** I have no problem with that. I'm not sure that's the biggest priority we should be pursuing. If it can in some way advance the struggle for human rights and democracy in Iran, I'm all in favour of it.

My own gut reaction to that suggestion is that there are other initiatives we can be pursuing, and should be pursuing, that are much more meaningful to people suffering in Iran today, particularly those in the prison system.

**Mr. David Sweet:** There are some other things we could do—I agree with you—but Ms. Shajarizadeh specifically mentioned the IRGC and those people who have been incarcerated and abused by the IRGC or the Basij. Recently, last December, I read that 5,000 people were incarcerated because of a protest, and 25 people killed. These were IRGC and Basij initiatives. I think it would send a strong message.

Are you familiar with the document that the Raoul Wallenberg organization published in regard to the names that should be identified under the Magnitsky law so that they can be individually sanctioned?

**Mr. Nader Hashemi:** I've seen that document before. I don't recall the specific names, but I'm strongly in favour of using the Magnitsky Act to identify, punish and penalize human rights offenders. That's something most human rights defenders in Iran would actually welcome. To the extent that Canada can move in that direction, it would be a net gain for human rights in Iran.

**The Chair:** Mr. Anderson.

**Mr. David Anderson (Cypress Hills—Grasslands, CPC):** Mr. Hashemi, I'm a little bit surprised at your position on the IRGC, because they're the ones who oversee the human rights abuses. They're the ones who have been exporting terrorism around the world, in charge of wiping out religious minorities. The international interference that they've been part of is expanding all the time. I'm surprised that this isn't a priority of this government to list them.

I'd like to come back to our other witness. Mrs. Shajarizadeh, there's a state orchestrated media campaign against you. Could you talk a little bit about that?

Last week, someone approached me and said she had been threatened from Iran, a Canadian citizen here in Ottawa. IRGC took

one of her relatives and said to call Canada to stop her activism, because that would make sure that no one got hurt. Can you tell us a little bit about the media campaign against you? Have you been threatened in Canada since arriving here?

**Mrs. Shaparak Shajarizadeh:** Yes. My family, as I told you, my husband was arrested with me. He didn't do anything back then.

Last December, I came here for a press conference to support the Magnitsky sanction. After that, some officers went to my parents' house. My mother was alone at the time and told them to come back later, but they didn't listen. They went to my house and questioned my mom about me and about my husband.

Specifically, they asked many questions about my sister who lives in the U.S. They asked all these questions about when and why she went to live in the U.S. That's why I'm very concerned. I asked her not to go back to our country, because she used to visit my family every year, but after that, we are afraid they would use her as a hostage, because they were asking many questions about my sister in the U.S.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much.

Mr. Levitt.

**Mr. Michael Levitt (York Centre, Lib.):** Thank you very much, and I thank both of our witnesses.

Mrs. Shajarizadeh, thank you for your bravery and courage. I've heard you tell your story a number of times and each time I know that you inspire people and you raise awareness.

We had the pleasure of having Masih Alinejad at the foreign affairs committee last Thursday. She also spoke to us about White Wednesdays and the plight of women standing up in defence of their human rights, of their ability to be free. I know it takes courage to be here. I know it's difficult, but we appreciate all of you that do this, including Dr. Ebadi, who also testified before us last week.

I have the same question for both of you. What can we do as Canadians, as supporters of the Iranian people, to let the Iranian people know we support them, to help them achieve their aspirations to be free, to again have their human rights returned to them along with their freedom, and to hold accountable the abusers, given that after 40 years, the regime and its brutal enforcers the IRGC, the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps, refuse to end the repression? What can we do to change their behaviour toward the Iranian people? What do you think would help?

Maybe we can start with you, sir.

• (1340)

**Mr. Nader Hashemi:** My statement speaks directly to your question. I'd just like to highlight what I think is the broad answer to your question.

If we really want to help the people of Iran to advance human rights and democracy, we should listen to them. I think we should listen much more closely to them than to various political lobby groups who have a lot of influence in Canada and who, I'd like to also mention, tried to prevent me from being with you today. I think that's important. We have to have our eye on the ball, listen to those people who are on the front lines, and be guided by their suggestions and their advice. I could go into more detail, but my statement speaks specifically to that question.

I'll just highlight one concrete suggestion that Canada can pursue, and Ms. Shajarizadeh alluded to this as well, I think. Give honorary citizenship to courageous human rights defenders in Iran. One of the most prominent ones, who has been mentioned in both of our testimonies today, is the courageous human rights lawyer, Nasrin Sotoudeh. She's been condemned to 38 years in jail. She has impeccable human rights credentials. I think that, by giving her honorary Canadian citizenship, it would make it much more difficult for the Iranian regime to keep her in prison, and it would keep the spotlight on her situation. I don't think it would cost anything for the Government of Canada to do this, and I think it would make a big difference. It would send a signal that Canada is very serious about doing something about human rights, not just talking about it.

**Mr. Michael Levitt:** Thank you.

Let me just point out that, when we had testimony last week, as in the previous nine years that we've held Iran Accountability Week on Parliament Hill, it is to hear from those voices, the voices of the repressed.

Dr. Shirin Ebadi, a Nobel Peace Prize winner, testified before us last week and reaffirmed loud and clear, as all the witnesses before us did, the need to continue to push for accountability, especially through both Magnitsky sanctions and the listing of the IRGC. That is something that's been a clear message to Canadian parliamentarians, both in this committee and also in our foreign affairs committee.

Ms. Shajarizadeh, could we have your thoughts, please?

**Mrs. Shaparak Shajarizadeh:** I just have one point for Mr. Hashemi.

I guess it's a great thing to give honourable citizenship to Nasrin Sotoudeh, but she's in—

**Mr. Michael Levitt:** —jail.

**Mrs. Shaparak Shajarizadeh:** —jail. I can't say that all of the human rights activists right now are in jail. Most of our human rights lawyers are in—

**Mr. Michael Levitt:** —in jail, yes.

**Mrs. Shaparak Shajarizadeh:** —jail, and the other ones just keep silent, because they're going to end up in jail. We have other Canadian citizens. Saeed Malekpour is in jail. What can you do for him? He's a Canadian resident, and he is in jail.

Niloufar Bayani is in jail. They haven't even given her an accusation or a sentence. She's has been detained in IRGC prison for more than a year, and she's not even facing a real accusation. The security—I don't know how to say it—the security department said,

“You're not guilty of being a spy”, but IRGC keeps them in detention. What can we do for those citizens?

I guess we have to be more severe towards human rights, the architects of human rights.

• (1345)

**Mr. Michael Levitt:** Thank you.

I have a follow-up question for you. I want to echo something that my colleague MP Sweet said. It was that we've heard about lobbies and proxies of the Iranian regime in Canada threatening human rights defenders, threatening people who are coming to committees like this or other places to share their stories. Talk to us about that. Just tell us briefly, if you can, about the types of threats the Iranian regime is able to place on Canadian shores here.

**The Chair:** In 30 seconds.

**Mrs. Shaparak Shajarizadeh:** The day I had a press conference here, they spread a lie about me being here. After that, they went to my house. They said I was asking for sanction for the people of Iran, and that's why the officers went to my house. The Iranian Canadian consul spread lies about my action. This is what I witnessed myself. They have been doing it for a long time.

**Mr. Michael Levitt:** Thank you.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

The final questions go to you, Ms. Hardcastle. You have seven minutes.

**Ms. Cheryl Hardcastle (Windsor—Tecumseh, NDP):** Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

It's always very difficult during Iran Accountability Week. We hear the emotion, we get frustrated and we have the emotion, but we do know... I'm a member of Parliament who's been here for one term. I've been like you; I've been someone who's been following this issue, as a Canadian, following what I think the mistakes are in our foreign policy and how we should be doing something. I do understand how even words are construed; I know. This is a long game, as we sometimes call it. There does have to be patience in terms of diplomacy.

You inspire us with your testimony. I've been to other groups of women who do the White Wednesdays, and that courage inspires me. I just want to say thank you for that kind of inspiration and energy, which you give all of us for all of our work in international human rights. We've had other people come before this committee, even General Roméo Dallaire, with two fists on the desk—do something about the Rohingya; do something—because he knows; he's lived it. It gets at our frustration and our emotions, but with that, we have to take this logic and say, “What is the government's role here? How do we use Canada's soft power?” This committee has to discuss that.



Mr. Hashemi, in the time I have left, I'm wondering if you can talk to us a little bit about that kind of frustration in how we're trying to help advance this capacity of Iran as brothers and sisters in the global world, and what Canada's role is. You recently experienced a vicious smear that went against another person I had asked to testify. There are some very convoluted issues when we talk about threats and when we talk about lobbies and proxies. Would you talk a little bit about what is happening to you? Maybe discuss the MEK and their mouthpiece organization in Canada and how we should be cognizant of these things as we are taking our government role further.

You can use the rest of my time. My preamble probably took us to three minutes. You can take three minutes.

**Mr. Nader Hashemi:** I find it very difficult to try to use the time that I've been allotted to address the MEK in the context of a discussion on human rights. They are irrelevant to the contemporary struggle for human rights and democracy in Iran. They are basically an extremist cult backed by a lot of Saudi and Emirati money, and by a lot of powerful forces in Washington, D.C., with connections to John Bolton. Let's not get sidetracked by what they are trying to do in terms of manipulating this debate.

Getting back to what you said in your statement, how do we channel the legitimate frustration, the anger and the concern that many Canadians have with respect to the human rights crisis into concrete action? That's the challenge here.

Let me tell you a story that I think applies perfectly to this debate. Yesterday, here in the city of Denver, the centre that I direct at the University of Denver, the Center for Middle East Studies, hosted a former Iranian Canadian political prisoner. You may have heard of her before. Her name is Homa Hoodfar, and she teaches at Concordia University. In 2016 she was on a visit to Iran, and she was arrested by the intelligence services, the IRGC.

She came out of prison, and she told me exactly what happened that led to her freedom. The Prime Minister of Canada repeatedly spoke out and addressed the topic. Canadian civil society was mobilized, and organized and protested in support of her defence. The Canadian Muslim community rallied, not just in Canada but around the world, kept raising her name and put the spotlight on Canada.

I think that if you just study...and if you actually speak to Homa Hoodfar, who is in Montreal—just down the road from where you guys are, relatively speaking—she can tell you what was happening in Evin prison and how she managed to get out of Evin prison. It was because Canada took a very principled, a very focused position on identifying her case and demanding that Iran release her.

I think there is a lot more that we could be doing, that we should be doing. I think we shouldn't get distracted by these very powerful lobby groups that have no interest in human rights. They have their own narrow agenda. We have to listen to human rights defenders.

I think at this very difficult moment in international relations when democracies are declining and authoritarian populism is on the rise, the world is looking for Canadian leadership on this issue, not just with respect to human rights in Iran but everywhere. Canada does have a lot of soft power.

What deeply disappoints me as a Canadian living in the United States is that I see a lot of Canadian politicians very timid to exercise that power, very reluctant to take risks and to provide the type of global leadership that I think human rights activists and defenders around the world would really support.

I'd like to see more of that happening and coming out from Canada, particularly given this very dark and very critical moment that the world is passing through. Canada has a lot to offer, and it's really disappointing to me as a Canadian to see that potential that Canada has not being realized.

• (1350)

**The Chair:** Witnesses, I'd like to thank you both very much, especially for your courage, Ms. Shajarzadeh, and thank you very much, Mr. Hashemi.

As you know, we will be having another hearing on this on Thursday at one o'clock.

With that, we are going to be going in camera momentarily for some committee business, so I'll ask that we suspend for a moment and that those who are not supposed to be here leave the room.

*[Proceedings continue in camera]*

---





Published under the authority of the Speaker of  
the House of Commons

---

### SPEAKER'S PERMISSION

---

The proceedings of the House of Commons and its Committees are hereby made available to provide greater public access. The parliamentary privilege of the House of Commons to control the publication and broadcast of the proceedings of the House of Commons and its Committees is nonetheless reserved. All copyrights therein are also reserved.

Reproduction of the proceedings of the House of Commons and its Committees, in whole or in part and in any medium, is hereby permitted provided that the reproduction is accurate and is not presented as official. This permission does not extend to reproduction, distribution or use for commercial purpose of financial gain. Reproduction or use outside this permission or without authorization may be treated as copyright infringement in accordance with the *Copyright Act*. Authorization may be obtained on written application to the Office of the Speaker of the House of Commons.

Reproduction in accordance with this permission does not constitute publication under the authority of the House of Commons. The absolute privilege that applies to the proceedings of the House of Commons does not extend to these permitted reproductions. Where a reproduction includes briefs to a Committee of the House of Commons, authorization for reproduction may be required from the authors in accordance with the *Copyright Act*.

Nothing in this permission abrogates or derogates from the privileges, powers, immunities and rights of the House of Commons and its Committees. For greater certainty, this permission does not affect the prohibition against impeaching or questioning the proceedings of the House of Commons in courts or otherwise. The House of Commons retains the right and privilege to find users in contempt of Parliament if a reproduction or use is not in accordance with this permission.

---

Also available on the House of Commons website at the following address: <http://www.ourcommons.ca>

Publié en conformité de l'autorité  
du Président de la Chambre des communes

---

### PERMISSION DU PRÉSIDENT

---

Les délibérations de la Chambre des communes et de ses comités sont mises à la disposition du public pour mieux le renseigner. La Chambre conserve néanmoins son privilège parlementaire de contrôler la publication et la diffusion des délibérations et elle possède tous les droits d'auteur sur celles-ci.

Il est permis de reproduire les délibérations de la Chambre et de ses comités, en tout ou en partie, sur n'importe quel support, pourvu que la reproduction soit exacte et qu'elle ne soit pas présentée comme version officielle. Il n'est toutefois pas permis de reproduire, de distribuer ou d'utiliser les délibérations à des fins commerciales visant la réalisation d'un profit financier. Toute reproduction ou utilisation non permise ou non formellement autorisée peut être considérée comme une violation du droit d'auteur aux termes de la *Loi sur le droit d'auteur*. Une autorisation formelle peut être obtenue sur présentation d'une demande écrite au Bureau du Président de la Chambre.

La reproduction conforme à la présente permission ne constitue pas une publication sous l'autorité de la Chambre. Le privilège absolu qui s'applique aux délibérations de la Chambre ne s'étend pas aux reproductions permises. Lorsqu'une reproduction comprend des mémoires présentés à un comité de la Chambre, il peut être nécessaire d'obtenir de leurs auteurs l'autorisation de les reproduire, conformément à la *Loi sur le droit d'auteur*.

La présente permission ne porte pas atteinte aux privilèges, pouvoirs, immunités et droits de la Chambre et de ses comités. Il est entendu que cette permission ne touche pas l'interdiction de contester ou de mettre en cause les délibérations de la Chambre devant les tribunaux ou autrement. La Chambre conserve le droit et le privilège de déclarer l'utilisateur coupable d'outrage au Parlement lorsque la reproduction ou l'utilisation n'est pas conforme à la présente permission.

---

Aussi disponible sur le site Web de la Chambre des communes à l'adresse suivante : <http://www.noscommunes.ca>