

August 15, 2006

Dear Foreign Minister Manouchehr Mottaki:

There is a very important matter we would like to discuss with you. We are concerned about the government of Iran's current actions toward Defender of Human Rights Center (DHRC) which provides essential work to protect human rights in Iran. In particular, we were alarmed that on August 3, 2006 your government declared the DHRC illegal and threatened its president, Dr. Shirin Ebadi, and her staff with prosecution if they continue their human rights activities.

This center is a member of the International Federation for Human Rights and has been awarded a human rights prize by the Human Rights National Commission in France. In addition, Dr. Shirin Ebadi has been recognized with the Nobel Peace Prize for her work to protect human rights. The world acknowledges and relies upon the important work of this organization and its president.

We are asking the Iranian government to immediately reverse its threat of prosecution against Iran's most prominent independent human rights organization and Dr. Shirin Ebadi. As we understand, the work of the DHRC, as a civil and peaceful association, is legal according to the Iranian Constitution.

We urge you to reconcile the discrepancy of the "permit" that the Iranian government declares is necessary for the organization to function yet seems inconsistent with the Iranian constitution which states that non-governmental organizations that observe the law and do not disrupt public safety do not need a permit. As a party to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, Iran is obligated to uphold this commitment to freedom of association. The DHRC has made every effort to be in compliance with Iranian law and applied for a permit in 2002, which the Iranian interior ministry would not issue or explain why it refused.

The government of Iran also has an obligation to protect Dr. Ebadi and other human rights defenders. The U.N. Declaration on Human Rights Defenders declares that individuals and associations have the right "to promote and to strive for the protection and realization of human rights and fundamental freedoms," and to "complain about the policies and actions of individual officials and governmental bodies with regard to violations of human rights." It further says that states "shall take all necessary measures to ensure the protection by the competent authorities of [human rights defenders] against any violence, threats, retaliation, de facto or de jure adverse discrimination, pressure or any other arbitrary actions."

The silencing of the DHRC would be an enormous set back for human rights around the world. At a time of escalating global violence and crimes against

humanity, we are asking the government of Iran to take a stand for human rights and to serve as a beacon of hope for the people of Iran, the Middle East, and the world.

We entreat you to reconsider the actions taken toward the DHRC and thank you in advance for your attention to this matter of great portent for Iran and world.

In peace,

The Dalai Lama
1989 Nobel Peace Laureate

Jody Williams
1997 Nobel Peace Laureate

Adolfo Pérez Esquivel
1980 Nobel Peace Laureate

Máiread Corrigan Maguire
1976 Nobel Peace Laureate

Rigoberta Menchú Tum
1992 Nobel Peace Laureate

Betty Williams
1976 Nobel Peace Laureate

Bishop Carlos Belo
1996 Nobel Peace Laureate

Wangari Maathai
2004 Nobel Peace Laureate

Elie Wiesel
1986 Nobel Peace Laureate

cc: Mostafa Pour-Mohammadi, *Interior Minister of Iran*
Javad Zarif, *Iran's Ambassador to the United Nations*
Kofi Annan, *Secretary-General of the United Nations*
Louise Arbour, *United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights*
Luis Alfonso de Alba, *President of the United Nations Human Rights Council*
Hina Jilani, *Special Representative of the Secretary General for Human Rights Defenders*