

THE RUTHERFORD INSTITUTE

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INTERNATIONAL OFFICE
CENTRAL AND EASTERN EUROPE
Budapest, Hungary

February 24, 2006

The Honorable George W. Bush
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue
Washington, DC 20500

Via U.S. Mail and Facsimile (202-456-2461)

Dear Mr. President:

If ever there were a time for the United States to take a stand for basic equality and women's rights, the case of 18-year-old Nazanin presents us with such an opportunity.

On January 6, 2006, the Republic of Iran sentenced Nazanin to death for the so-called crime of defending herself against three male attackers. In March 2005, Nazanin, who was 17 at the time, and her niece were attacked by three men in a park in Iran's capital of Tehran. The girls' attackers pelted them with stones, wrestled them to the ground and assaulted them. In attempting to stave off her attackers, Nazanin stabbed one of the men in the chest, resulting in his death. Nazanin was subsequently arrested, charged and convicted for the death of the rapist and has been sentenced to die by hanging.

Nazanin's plight is not uncommon in Iran, which has been criticized for its treatment of women and use of capital punishment and where more women are reportedly executed per year than in any other country. Since 1979, when the Ayatollah Khomeini assumed power, Iran's penal system has been marked by so-called "Revolutionary Law," which is derived from Islamic and Sharia law and is particularly brutal in its treatment of women, especially those who are found guilty of breaking the law and condemned to die for their purported crimes. According to an Iranian doctor who has witnessed many state executions of women, they are commonly raped by guards prior to their execution. Ostensibly, this practice ensures that the woman is not a virgin when she dies, thus preventing her from entering paradise.

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Death sentences imposed on females in Iran are typically carried out by hanging or stoning. When a sentence calls for death by stoning, the woman is buried up to the shoulders, covered over the head and beaten to death with stones of a size dictated by Iranian law. Death by hanging typically involves either the use of a hydraulic crane or a low platform to ensure a slower, more painful death. A strong thin rope or steel cable in the form of a noose is placed around the neck to crush the larynx, inflicting as much pain as possible and prolonging the moment of death.

Such a brutal death is what awaits Nazanin unless the United States exercises its moral leadership and calls on Iran to show clemency to her. America has long been a champion of human rights in word, if not always in deed. And although America's reputation as a defender of human rights has been tarnished by allegations of detainee abuse, Nazanin's plight presents the Bush Administration with an opportunity to stand by its much-avowed commitment to human rights.

As president of The Rutherford Institute, a nonprofit civil liberties organization dedicated to the defense of human rights and constitutional freedoms, I call on you to lead the way in raising an outcry over Iran's inhumane treatment of Nazanin. Just as international pressure succeeded in granting Sufiyatu Huseini clemency from an unjust death sentence, so the international community—led by the United States—must take on the burden of advocating Nazanin's cause. Huseini was charged by Nigerian officials with the crime of adultery after having been raped and was sentenced to death by stoning. However, as a result of international pressure and several months of negotiations, she was granted clemency.

As a signatory to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, Iran must stand by its commitments to respect the fundamental human rights of women and to treat all persons deprived of their liberty "with humanity and with respect for the inherent dignity of the human person."

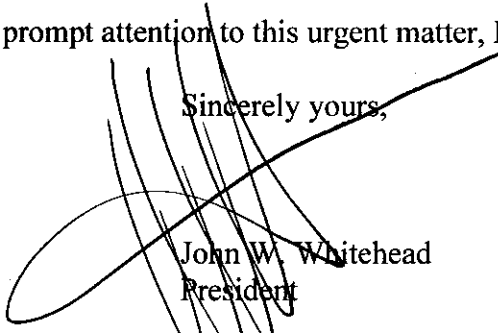
First Lady Laura Bush has been vocal in speaking out against the severe repression and brutality of women in Afghanistan. And she is to be commended for admonishing our nation to take a stand. As Mrs. Bush stated, "Civilized people throughout the world are speaking out in horror—not only because our hearts break for the women and children in Afghanistan, but also because in Afghanistan we see the world the terrorists would like to impose on the rest of us. All of us have an obligation to speak out. We may come from different backgrounds and faiths—but parents the world over love our children. We respect our mothers, our sisters and daughters. Fighting brutality against women and children is not the expression of a specific culture; it is the acceptance of our common humanity—a commitment shared by people of good will on every continent."

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I respectfully request that you take this opportunity to act on the obligation to speak out against the horror being enacted against women in Iran, particularly on young Nazanin. To turn a blind eye to the travesty of justice being meted out to Nazanin would be to render meaningless anything the United States were to say about women's rights internationally.

Thanking you for your prompt attention to this urgent matter, I remain,

Sincerely yours,



John W. Whitehead
President

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cc: Kofi A. Annan, United Nations Secretary-General
Ms. Louise Arbour, United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights
Mr. Ernst Hofstetter, Director, U.S. Interests Section in Iran
Mr. Ali Jazini, Director, Interests Section of the Islamic Republic of Iran
The Honorable Richard G. Lugar, U.S. Senate
The Honorable Joseph R. Biden, Jr., U.S. Senate
The Honorable Chuck Hagel, U.S. Senate
The Honorable Lincoln Chafee, U.S. Senate
The Honorable John E. Sununu, U.S. Senate
The Honorable Barbara Boxer, U.S. Senate
The Honorable Russell Feingold, U.S. Senate
The Honorable Rick Santorum, U.S. Senate
The Honorable Sam Brownback, U.S. Senate
The Honorable Henry Hyde, U.S. House of Representatives
The Honorable Ileana Ros-Lehtinen, U.S. House of Representatives