

# THE RUTHERFORD INSTITUTE

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“For we know that our patchwork heritage is a strength, not a weakness. We are a nation of Christians and Muslims, Jews and Hindus, and non-believers. We are shaped by every language and culture, drawn from every end of this Earth; and because we have tasted the bitter swill of civil war and segregation, and emerged from that dark chapter stronger and more united, we cannot help but believe that the old hatreds shall someday pass; that the lines of tribe shall soon dissolve; that as the world grows smaller, our common humanity shall reveal itself; and that America must play its role in ushering in a new era of peace.”

—Barack Obama, Inaugural Address, Jan. 20, 2009

September 29, 2011

Via U.S. Mail and Facsimile

The Honorable Barack Obama  
The White House  
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue  
Washington, D.C. 20500

Dear Mr. President:

As one who has a familiarity with those of both Christian and Muslim backgrounds, having attended both Christian and Muslim schools as a child, you better than most understand the need for America to play “its role in ushering in a new era of peace,” especially in the Middle East, where religious tensions remain high. In this respect, it is our hope that you will exercise your authority as president by calling on the Islamic Republic of Iran to rescind the death sentence imposed upon Iranian Christian pastor Youcef Nadarkhani because of his alleged apostasy.<sup>1</sup>

Youcef was convicted of apostasy after protesting the government’s decision to teach Christian schoolchildren—including Youcef’s 8- and 6-year-old sons—about

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<sup>1</sup> The Rutherford Institute is a civil liberties organization dedicated to the defense of constitutional freedoms and human rights.

Islam. Over the course of the past two years Youcef has spent in prison, he has suffered various forms of inhumane and irregular punishment, including a denial of access to his attorney, the arrest of his wife, threats to place his two sons in the custody of Muslim families, and the administration of drugs in an attempt to force him to recant his religious faith.

According to a September 29th report by the International Business Times, Youcef has once again refused to denounce his faith in order to avoid the sentence of death. While no verdict had been announced after his fourth and final refusal to deny his faith, it has been suggested by many that he may be executed as early as Friday, September 30.<sup>2</sup>

While we know that Iranian citizens do not enjoy anything approaching the liberties secured in our own Bill of Rights, this particular injustice is the appropriate subject of reproach by the international community—and the United States in particular—on two fronts.

First of all, as a signatory of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the Iranian government must be called to account for its blatant violations of pertinent provisions of that document, including Articles 18 and 19, which provide for “the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; this right includes freedom to change his religion or belief, and freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship and observance,” and “the right to freedom of opinion and expression...”<sup>3</sup>

Obviously, a state in which the crime of “apostasy” is punished by hanging is a state in which “freedom to change [one’s] religion or belief” does not exist. Iran’s glaring hypocrisy must be exposed and condemned in no uncertain terms.

Second, the imposition of the death sentence under these circumstances is in defiance of Iran’s own Constitution, which provides that “The investigation of individuals’ beliefs is forbidden, and no one may be molested or taken to task simply for holding a certain belief.”<sup>4</sup> It is beyond question that Youcef has been molested and sentenced to death based solely on his Christian beliefs, and these actions utterly divest all other Iranian citizens of any confidence they might have in the rule of law. If citizens of Iran cannot depend upon the protections of the most basic human rights provided in

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<sup>2</sup> The International Business Times, “Iranian Pastor Sentenced to Death: Nadarkhani Refuses to Convert.” Last modified September 29, 2011. Accessed September 29, 2011.

<http://www.ibtimes.com/articles/222139/20110929/iranian-pastor-sentenced-to-death.htm>.

<sup>3</sup> Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Articles 18 and 19.

<sup>4</sup> Islamic Republic of Iran Constitution, Chapter 3, Art. 23.

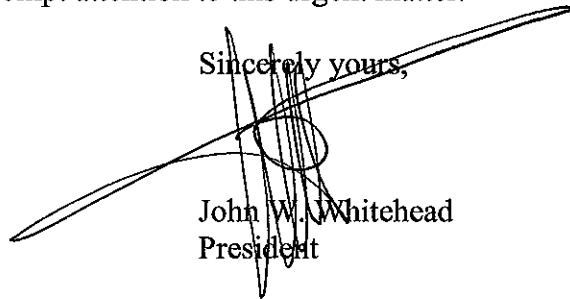
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their own Constitution, then we must offer them the solace of a watching world that is willing to intervene politically.

Surely we cannot stand silently by as this man of faith is martyred. Youcef's imminent execution presents the United States with an opportunity, and, I submit, a duty, as a beacon of liberty, to interpose its influence and authority on behalf of such inalienable human rights as are inherently beyond legitimate government sanction.

Thank you for your prompt attention to this urgent matter.

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'John W. Whitehead', is written over the typed name. The signature is stylized and somewhat illegible due to overlapping lines.

John W. Whitehead  
President

THE RUTHERFORD INSTITUTE

cc: The Honorable Hillary Clinton, Secretary of State  
Ban Ki Moon, United Nations Secretary-General  
Navanethem Pillay, United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights  
The Honorable Richard G. Lugar, U.S. Senate  
The Honorable Barbara Boxer, U.S. Senate  
The Honorable John Kerry, U.S. Senate  
The Honorable Mitch McConnell, U.S. Senate  
The Honorable Charles E. Schumer, U.S. Senate  
The Honorable Joe Lieberman, U.S. Senate  
The Honorable Lindsey Graham, U.S. Senate  
The Honorable Mike Lee, U.S. Senate  
The Honorable Harry Reid, U.S. Senate  
The Honorable John Boehner, U.S. House of Representatives  
The Honorable Eric Cantor, U.S. House of Representatives  
The Honorable Mike Pence, U.S. House of Representatives  
The Honorable Michele Bachman, U.S. House of Representatives  
The Honorable Nancy Pelosi, U.S. House of Representatives  
The Honorable Steny Hoyer, U.S. House of Representatives