

Press conference for the release of imprisoned students in Iran, in support of Students for Freedom and Equality

Friday 15th February 2008
Queens Park, Toronto

Speech by Justin Trottier, Executive Director, Centre for Inquiry Ontario

I am happy to have been invited to speak here in support of the release of equality and freedom seeking students that have been imprisoned in Iran.

I am representing the Centre for Inquiry, a thinktank and educational organization that defends science, reason, secular ethics and free inquiry in all areas of human endeavour. As a secular activist, very recently a student secular activist, I feel a deep connection to these students fighting for a secular, open society in Iran. The campaigns we fight here – to end government funded religious schools, to defend the broadest range of free discourse against those who would undermine it and censor ideas they find offensive, to keep religious arbitration and sharia law out of our country – those are worthy battles, but they really pale in comparison to the uphill battle our colleagues in other countries, especially Islamic fundamentalist nations, are struggling with. ...

Amnesty International and other groups recognize that students have really been at the forefront demanding for greater human rights in Iran in recent years. The courage these young colleagues show in the face of such adversity is truly staggering. Their message to us is to never give up even when a cause seems hopeless because the defense of the cause and the values behind it is a worthy goal in itself. I hope we will heed their advise and continue to support all initiatives and all individuals that wish to advance a secular, free, equal, pluralistic and democratic societies wherever they are.

About the Press Conference, from the Organizing Committee in Defense of Imprisoned Students in Iran

Islamic Republic of Iran has been persecuting and arresting tens of students in the past 2 months. There is nothing unusual about it because suppression is the trade mark of the regime. The first week of December is traditionally Student's Week when thousands of students protest against the Islamic regime.

This year too, escalating its attacks the regime arrested many students. They are jailed in horrendous conditions, tortured physically and psychologically and paraded for TV viewings in order to humiliate them and create yet more atmosphere of terror. A 23 year old jailed student, Ebrahim Lotfallahi, from Sanandaj was killed after being in jail for 10

days. Families of the jailed students are denied visits and many of them do not have any news of the where about of their children.

Student's movement like other progressive social movements in Iran demand freedom, equality and an end to suppression and overthrow of the regime. All students and political prisoners must be freed now.

We urge all to join us and support the movement to free the students and political prisoners in Iran. Join our pres conference.