

Iran-seminarium 22 august 2008

My name is Hans Linde, I'm a member of the Swedish Parliament and its standing committee on foreign affairs. I represent the Swedish Leftparty, a socialist and feminist party.

In Sweden we sometimes say that time heals all wounds. I think that we who have gathered here today now for sure that isn't true. An assault, gross violations of the human rights and oppression creates traumas and wounds that time doesn't heal.

We have learnt from so many authoritarian regimes and conflicts that the traumas live on, the wounds continue to bleed for the victims and their relatives, sometimes for generations.

I believe that the mass murders in Iran in 1988 are one of these examples. Time won't heal the wounds and the traumas for the victims and the relatives, they need justice and redress. As long as the regime in Teheran refuses to do this the crimes of 1988 will overshadow the Iran of today and prevent Iran from taking much needed steps towards democracy and respect of the human rights. A country that refuses to deal with its own history will never be able to be a real democracy. And we see today how Iran continues with executions, torture, imprisonments and gross violations of human rights.

So, what can we do today? I think the first and perhaps most important we can do here today is to continue to talk about the events in 1988, spread the information, deepen our knowledge. The regime in Teheran of course wants us and the world to forget their atrocities. The silence of the rest of the world is the regimes best friend, because behind the silence the assaults and the violations of the human rights can continue. And that is exactly what we see today in Iran.

Only this year at least 172 persons have been executed in Iran, many of them after arbitrary trials. This Tuesday five persons were executed in Iran, one of them was the 20 year old Reza Hejazi, who was only 15 when he committed his crime, a gross violation of the United Nations Conventions for children, a convention that Iran has signed.

Even those who protests against these gross violations of human rights are persecute. During the past weeks a number of Iranian actors and directors have started a campaign against the execution of another young man. The regime in Teheran has answered with interrogations and by freezing the bank accounts of the initiators of the campaign.

Since 1990 at least 24 children have been executed, the youngest one, the girl named Nasrin Sakvar, was only eleven years old when she was executed. We know that at least 71 children are today waiting to be executed in Iran.

This shows the true face of the regime in Teheran, it is still the same regime as in 1988, and it still has blood, plenty of blood, on its hands.

These are just some of the many examples. We get reports every week, sometimes every day, of persecution of the opposition, of trade unions, ethnic minorities, women's and student's movements and so on. It's a fact that very few Iranians can feel safe in Iran today.

It's important that the regime in Teheran never is allowed to commit crimes against human rights without reactions from the rest of the world. As a parliamentarian I'm trying to raise as many cases I can in the Swedish parliament or directly to the regime in Teheran.

Does it help? To be honest I don't know, but I know that if we want to change Iran into a democracy and a country which respects the human rights the first important step is to break the silence both about the events in 1988 and what's happening today.

But talk and protest won't give the victims and their relatives justice and redress, for that the responsible must be prosecuted, in Iran or in The International Criminal Court. For me it's obvious that the mass murders in 1988 must be considered as crimes against humanity. The Rome Statute states that crimes against humanity are, and I quote "particularly odious offences in that they constitute a serious attack on human dignity or grave humiliation or a degradation of one or more human beings. They are not isolated or sporadic events, but are part either of a government policy or of a wide practice of atrocities tolerated or condoned by a government or a de facto authority. However, murder, extermination, torture, rape, political, racial, or religious persecution and other inhumane acts reach the threshold of crimes against humanity only if they are part of a widespread or systematic practice". I think it's obvious that the murders in 1988 were systematic atrocities and the regime in Teheran is to be held responsible for these.

But we must realize that the possibility for trials against the responsible is small. Both because the Iranian regime lack the will to deal with its own crimes but also because the International Criminal Court still has a weak position. That shouldn't stop us for fighting to get the perpetrators prosecuted.

I think that another important step that we can take in Sweden is to stop the deportation of Iranian refugees from Sweden to Iran. It's impossible to see Iran as a safe country for any political refugees and it ought to be our duty to grant them asylum here in Sweden.

But we must also realize that Europe and USA today is focusing on the question of Iranian nuclear weapons and turning more and more a blind eye towards the terrible crimes against the human rights that we see today in Iran. I strongly oppose Iranian nuclear weapons, in the same way as I oppose American or Israeli nuclear weapons. But the risk of Iran developing nuclear weapons shouldn't stop us from protesting against every violation of the human rights in Iran today and demanding that the responsible for the mass murders in 1988 should be prosecuted.

It's difficult to discuss Iran today without discussing the risk of an American or an Israeli attack against the country. I think that we all, although enemies against the regime must protest against a possible war against Iran. Such an attack would be a violation of International humanitarian law but also result in an immense suffering for ordinary Iranians. I'm also afraid that current threats from Washington and Tel Aviv can strengthen the regime in Teheran. We have seen so many times in history how an authoritarian regime can use the threats from a foreign enemy to silence its domestic opposition, increase the violations of human rights and strengthening its grip over its own people.

Freedom and democracy in Iran can only be built by Iranians, never by foreign military attacks. We have a responsibility in Sweden to do whatever we can to support of the Iranian peoples struggle for freedom, democracy and human rights.