



Submission to the Parliamentary Inquiry into the Partial Suspension of Sanctions Against Iran

From the Jewish Community Council of Victoria (JCCV)

**Beth Weizmann Community Centre
306 Hawthorn Road, Caulfield South, Vic 3162**

The JCCV

The Jewish Community Council of Victoria (JCCV) is the peak body for Victorian Jewry, representing over 52,000 Jews living in Victoria. Victoria boasts the largest Jewish community in Australia. The JCCV is comprised of 54 Jewish community organisations, including educational, welfare, religious, social, youth, sporting and communal organisations. It has acted as the voice of Victorian Jewry for 78 years, and is particularly active in the areas of social justice, community welfare, social inclusion and social cohesion.

Issues of Concern to the Victorian Jewish Community

A. Iran's purported democracy is a sham

The recent Iranian elections, were heavily 'engineered', or manipulated.

The non-elected Iranian Guardian Council is a very important legal institution which vets the candidates for election. The members of the Guardian Council are effectively installed by the Supreme Leader and controlled by him. In this way, the Guardian Council 'disqualifies' the many reformist/moderate nominees, but also any who do not belong to a state-sponsored faction.

The Hashemi/Rouhani faction, after losing many nominees in the vetting process, was forced to take in Conservatives so that it could run as a major coalition for both Parliament and the Assembly of Experts. Therefore, those who went to Parliament and the Assembly on the Moderate/Reformist ticket were actually generally conservatives.

The Iranian government and the official state media lavished praise on the elections as the most popular in the history of the Iranian Islamic Republic. But in the face of emerging

independent reports, pictures and documents, the government and media issued a series of contradictory announcements about the results. Finally, they reported a 62% participation rate.

Meanwhile, many reports from citizens and citizen-journalists from all over Iran reported that in reality only few bothered to attend the polls. A reasonable, but not completely verifiable estimate is a participation rate around a paltry 15%.

It seems that the masquerade of the election process seems to have been part of a deal between the Hashemi/Rouhani faction and the Iranian Supreme Leader to mislead the West, and the USA in particular, to conciliate the Obama Administration over the misconception that the Moderate/Reformist tendency is gaining strength in Iran. This was clearly a tool to encourage and maintain the controversial Nuclear Deal and the new international economic contracts being developed.

B. Human Rights abuses by the Iranian regime

There are number of areas of human rights abuses by the Iranian regime that are of a particular concern to the Victorian Jewish community. The situation suggests a regime that should not be trusted, tolerated or partnered with.

Iran is a leader in public executions. The Iranian Human Rights Documentation Centre attempts to highlight the large number of executions which are unreported. Public executions which we know of are in the range of 2 to 3 people per day. More than half are not officially announced by the Iranian regime.

The Iranian regime also has no qualms about executing minors. As reported in the New York Times, "In a new report, Amnesty International said that it had documented the execution of at least 73 juveniles in Iran from 2005 to 2015 and that 160 juvenile offenders are languishing on the country's death row."

There have also been widespread reports in Iran of persecution of religious minorities, especially Sunni Muslims and members of the Bahaii faith. Reports of discrimination, persecution, imprisonment and torture are common and widespread. We often meet Iranian Sunnis and Bahaii, now living in Victoria, who have suffered this persecution and managed to escape. This sort of regime should not be rewarded for such intolerance and violence against its own people.

The Bahaii International Community reports, "Since the 1979 Islamic Revolution in Iran, Baha'is have been systematically persecuted as a matter of government policy. During the first decade of this persecution, more than 200 Baha'is were killed or executed, hundreds

more were tortured or imprisoned, and tens of thousands lost jobs, access to education, and other rights – all solely because of their religious belief.”

“Government-led attacks on the country’s largest non-Muslim religious minority have re-intensified in the last decade. Since 2005, more than 820 Baha'is have been arrested, and the number of Baha'is in prison has risen from fewer than five to more than 80. The list of prisoners includes all seven members of a former leadership group serving the Baha'i community of Iran. In 2010, the seven were wrongly sentenced to 20 years in prison, the longest term currently facing any prisoner of conscience in Iran. Recent reports indicate that their sentences have been belatedly reduced from 20 years to 10 years, in line with changes to the Iranian Penal Code introduced in May 2013. The constant threat of raids, arrests, and detention or imprisonment is among the main features of Iran’s persecution of Baha’is today.”

While the JCCV and the Victorian Jewish community have been actively engaging with our LGBTI members, actively working towards full social inclusion of Jews of diverse sexual orientation and gender identity, the Iranian regime has been executing gay men slowly and painfully by hanging them from cranes or lamp-posts. While we are concerned for the mental well-being of our LGBTI community members, in Iran they are persecuted, denied any freedom and ultimately executed.

The Iranian regime continues to run a Holocaust Denial cartoon contest each year, which has been condemned by UNESCO. The winner receives a \$50,000 cash prize. The event draws participants from 50 countries according to the Iranian semi-official IRNA news agency. This sort of support and promotion of Holocaust denial speaks to the antisemitism and religious intolerance perpetuated by the Iranian regime.

C. Iranian Foreign policy is threatening and dangerous

Of utmost concern to the Victorian Jewish community, rhetoric amongst the Iranian regime leaders has been vehemently anti-Israel and recently a test missile was launched with the words “Israel must be wiped out” inscribed upon it. These are not the actions of a country seeking peace or harmony in the region.

Leaving any chance of the Iranian regime achieving nuclear bomb capability, even in the long term is outrageous and it must be ensured that they ‘never’ achieve this capability. The technology could and most likely would find its way into the hands of Hizballah, possibly other terrorist groups and given Iran’s support for strife around the region, could be used against a number of countries, including Israel, Saudi Arabia and any Sunni neighbour.

Iran continues its support for the Assad regime in Syria, which has caused enormous bloodshed in a terrible conflict, and continues to act directly and through its support of the terrorist organisation Hizballah to destabilise Lebanon. It was its support of Hizballah in

Lebanon that help expel most of the Lebanese Christians from the south and other parts of Lebanon.

Meanwhile, the Iranian regime has been stirring up internal strife in Yemen which has antagonised Saudi Arabia and led to a serious escalation in conflict in Yemen.

Conclusion

On behalf of the Victorian Jewish community, the JCCV believes that given the summary of concerns regarding the Iranian regime outlined above:

- the Australian Government should cut all and any economic ties with the Iranian regime until it implements true democracy, ceases the brutal and inhumane treatment of its people which is the antithesis to Australian expectations, and demonstrates a real commitment to peaceful coexistence with its neighbours, around the region and around the world'
- sanctions on Iran should not and must not be lifted until that time;
- the Australian Government must not re-open a trade office in Iran, which would only reward it for a violent and offensive foreign policy, an outrageous human rights record and a sham of a democracy; and
- every step must be taken to prevent the Iranian regime from obtaining the technology and any progress towards development of nuclear weapons must be ensured at all costs.

Jennifer Huppert
JCCV President