British MPs join international parliamentarians' in defending Iranian political prisoners

Monday 23 January, 2023

Five British MPs have taken on 'sponsorship' of 6 political prisoners in Iran to highlight their cases and pressure the Iranian government to release and grant them a fair trial.

This was announced after MPs had a meeting with several campaigners for civil rights in Iran.

British MPs are joining several parliamentarians from Germany, Austria, Sweden, France, and Australia, who have tried to highlight the plight of political prisoners in Iran in recent weeks. They have especially been vocal about the imminent danger of the death penalty for a number of prisoners charged with serious crimes in dubious cases.

Caroline Lucas, the Green Party MP for Brighton Pavillion, says: *"We get figures like 18,000 people have been arrested since the killing of Masa Amini back in September. Hundreds have been killed, including 44 children. But we need to know that these are people's friends, their lovers, their husbands, their wives, their kids. And so that's why I think it's so important that parliamentarians do sponsor some of those political prisoners, put a spotlight on them and try to make it even harder for the Iranian regime to do them harm."*

She has taken on the case of Mohammad Ghobadloo and Elham Modaresi and highlights that both of them are in poor health conditions in prison.

Ms Lucas asks other British MPs to join this campaign in defending political prisoners in Iran: *"we know that Mohammad Ghobadloo was due to be executed, we think so last week, but he wasn't. And one of the reasons perhaps that he wasn't was because there's been such a public spotlight on him. So MPs and others can make a real difference by doing this."*

Richard Thomson, SNP MP for Gordon, says: *"As a an elected member of a parliament, a democratic country, I don't think we often realize just how much agency we have in terms of being able to raise the profile not just of events in general, but also the plight of individuals."*

Demanding the release of Ebrahim Rigi, whom he sponsors, Mr Thomson speaks about an "impossibly" large number of prisoners in Iran: *"They're not given independent representation, they're deprived of access to their families. There's a whole range of issues that need to be brought to the fore because the judicial processes and as much as you can call them that being undertaken by the Iranian state fall well short of any established international norms. And that needs to be highlighted."*

Highlighting the lack of fair trial, **Donya, coordinator of the "Be Iran's Voice"** Campaign**,** says: *"We can't even call these executions anymore because of the lack of judicial process. These are lynchings done by lynching committees. So we are appealing to the British public and to MPs to use their platforms to be the voice and raise awareness of the atrocities happening within Iran."*

She appeals to British politicians and the international community to pressure the Iranian regime: *"It's our responsibility to coordinate an international response that condemns these actions further than just words, further than just statements. We need action and we need support for the Iranian people fighting for the basic rights that we enjoy here today. I couldn't do what I'm doing here in Iran right now. And so I'm appealing for a future where one day in Iran, we can stand and speak the way I am now."*

Both Ms Lucas and Mr Thomson echo her voice and believe that the UK government *"has been saying the right things"*, but there could be more action against the Islamic Republic.

Jeremy Corbyn was amongst the MPs who met with the Iranian campaigners and supported their efforts. Mr Corbyn has previously written to the head of Iran's Judiciary, urging him to reverse protesters' convictions of the death penalty and release all political prisoners.

Labour MPs Rachel Hopkins, Colum Eastwood, and Andrew Western have also accepted the sponsorship for Dena Sheibani, Sahand Nourmohammad Zadeh and Amir Nasr Azadani.

For further information and interview opportunities, contact Lily: 07947928687, lily@damavand.media

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1. Three still images of the meeting of the MPs with a group of Iranian human right activists
2. Eight-minute video footage, including 12 soundbites of two MPs and the coordinator of “Be Iran’s Voice” (Shotlist is below)

Shot List

Clip 1. Donya, Coordinator of “Be Iran’s Voice” (00:05-01:05):

“ Iranians are appealing to anyone with a public platform, whether you're an MP or a regular person, to use your freedom of expression in this country and the democratic values and the human rights values that we all know and love in Britain to be the voice of Iranians. Because in Iran the Islamic regime are not only failing to uphold international human rights laws, the Islamic regime are fundamentally failing at upholding their own domestic laws, especially when it comes to judicial processes for children. Mohammad Mehdi Karami, Mohammad Hosseini, who were executed recently, they were executed after only two months of being arrested. And we can't even call these executions anymore because of the lack of judicial process. These are lynchings done by lynching committees. So we are appealing to the British public and to MPs to use their platforms to be the voice and raise awareness of the atrocities happening within Iran.”

Clip 2. Donya, Coordinator of “Be Iran’s Voice” (01:06-02:23):

“Day in and day out, we are seeing the priority of the Islamic regime in Iran and that is the repression of women's rights and Iranian's fundamental human rights. For example, only the other day we found out that Sadjad Heiadary, who was a man who beheaded his 17 year old wife. Firstly, she was married off when she was twelve years old. She had her first child when she was 14. And this man who beheaded his 17 year oldwife has been sentenced to eight years in prison. Whereas Iranians who have been protesting on the street in as little as two months have faced public lynchings. They've been hung from cranes in the morning and left for people to see. The Islamic regime are trying to spread a message of fear and to the Iranian diaspora, not only within Iran, but to the global diaspora. So it's our responsibility to coordinate an international response that condemns these actions further than just words, further than just statements. We need action and we need support for the Iranian people fighting for the basic rights that we enjoy here today. I couldn't do what I'm doing here in Iran right now. And so I'm appealing for a future where one day in Iran we can stand and speak the way I am now.”

Clip 3. Donya, Coordinator of “Be Iran’s Voice” (02:24-02:55):

“Islamic regime officials right now believe that they can ride out the current wave of global condemnation against the illegal force against protesters and their executions. The world has to prove them otherwise. And this is done through having an internationally coordinated response, such as calling a moratorium on the executions and MPs to come out and use their platforms to raise awareness of individuals who are at imminent risk of execution.”

Clip 4. Caroline Lucas, Green Party MP for Brighton (02:56-03:22):

“We get figures like 18,000 people have been arrested since the killing of Masa Amini back in September. Hundreds have been killed, including 44 children. But we need to know that these are people's friends, their lovers, their husbands, their wives, their kids. And so that's why I think it's so important that parliamentarians do sponsor some of those political prisoners, put a spotlight on them and try to make it even harder for the Iranian regime to do them harm.”

Clip 5. Caroline Lucas, Green Party MP for Brighton (03:22-03:55):

“Mohammad was threatened with execution just last week. He's been in prison for several months. He's just 22. He's the victim of a sham trial. He's not been able to have a lawyer that he's chosen to be able to

make his case. He's quite ill. He's not well. You know, his parents, his family are deeply concerned about him. He needs to be released. If there is evidence against him, we'll okay have a trial, but at the moment, there's not been any serious trial at all. It's been a sham."

Clip 6. Caroline Lucas, Green Party MP for Brighton (03:56-04:12):

"Elham Modarresi, 32. She also is in prison. She has a liver condition. She's very unwell. They're not treating the prisoners well. We need to be able to put the spotlight on them to try to make it, as I said, harder for them to come to Harm them."

Clip 7. Caroline Lucas, Green Party MP for Brighton (04:13-04:44):

"I think many MPs still don't know that by sponsoring some of these protesters, they can serve a really useful purpose. As I said, we know that Mohammad Ghobadloo was due to be executed, we think so last week, but he wasn't. And one of the reasons perhaps that he wasn't was because there's been such a public spotlight on him. So MPs and others can make a real difference by doing this. So I'd urge my colleagues to look into it, to take up the cases of some of these prisoners, put names and faces to them."

Clip 8. Caroline Lucas, Green Party MP for Brighton (04:45-05:04):

"I think the British government has been saying the right things. They have expressed real concern. My worry is that the action hasn't followed the words fast enough. So that's why we do need to see the IRGC being properly prescribed. We do need to see more sanctions, more freezing of assets. There is more that could be done to make this a real priority."

Clip 9. Richard Thomson, SNP for Gordon (05:06-05:44):

"As a an elected member of a parliament, a democratic country, I don't think we often realize just how much agency we have in terms of being able to raise the profile not just of events in general, but also the plight of individuals. Now, parliament was visited by a number of campaigners for the civil rights in Iran. And we were presented with a range of individuals who were who had been imprisoned, about whom sometimes very little was known, but all of whom were thought to be under imminent threat of brutality and perhaps even execution by the Iranian state."

Clip 10. Richard Thomson, SNP for Gordon (05:46-06:37):

"So I think what I hope comes out of this is, first of all, foremost that Ebraham Rigi is freed, but he is only one of thousands who are in a similar situation. And I think that by sponsoring it helps to humanize the scale of the crisis because 20,000 people being imprisoned, it's an impossibly large number. So it helps to bring it humanize it, it helps to bring it down to that individual level. It helps people to understand the overreaction and the brutality of the Iranian government in response to the protests. And I hope that in some small way it helps to force the Iranian government to realize that the rest of the world is watching. They are judging the Iranian regime harshly for the manner in which they are treating civilian population that only wishes to exert its fundamental rights and that hopefully we will see better outcomes for some of those who are currently sadly without their liberty in Iran.

Clip 11. Richard Thomson, SNP for Gordon (06:37-07:18):

But I think that first and foremost, quite apart from what seems to be the injustice of that situation, it's about highlighting the broader injustice as well about the mass imprisonments, the threat of executions, and also the way that the trials are being conducted for people who have been arrested are not allowed to choose their own lawyers. They're not given independent representation, they're deprived of access to their families. There's a whole range of issues that need to be brought to the fore because the judicial processes and as much as you can call them that being undertaken by the Iranian state fall well short of any established international norms. And that needs to be highlighted."

Clip 12. Richard Thomson, SNP for Gordon (07:18-07:58):

"I think the British government has said many of the right things. They have rightly condemned the brutality of the state forces, have rightly condemned recent executions. But I think they could do more. They could outlaw and prescribe the Revolutionary Guards common with other, with European Union allies who have already done that. So I think there's a range of other diplomatic steps that could be taken to inconvenience those who are loyal to the Iranian state and who are instrumental in enabling the oppression that is continuing internally within Iran at the moment

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