



Jonathan Wilkinson

NORTH VANCOUVER'S MEMBER OF PARLIAMENT

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United against a vile regime

The protests that have convulsed Iran the past four weeks have reverberated throughout the international community and continue to have a profound impact on the North Shore of BC's Lower Mainland, where one in ten residents is of Iranian descent.

My constituency office continues to field many, many calls from people intensely worried for friends and family in Iran... from those urging Canada to forcefully condemn Iran's vile theocratic regime... and from some concerned the tentacles of fear that have ruled Iran for over 40 years have crept into our local community.

The images and reports of the protests are agonizing. The resolve and bravery of the women at the forefront of the defence of their most basic human rights is humbling and inspiring.

Acts of courage

Change begins with individual acts of courage.

Thousands of Iranian women are currently risking their lives by walking through city centres without headscarves to defy a regime that has for too long callously demonstrated barbarous cruelty against its own citizens.

It is not clear how many have been killed, but the Oslo-based group Iran Human Rights has said at least 201 people – including twenty-three children – have been killed since the protests began.

More than 5,500 are reported to have been arrested. So full are the prisons that warehouses have been requisitioned as detention centres.

Many of the protesters are Iranian youth, with a senior Revolutionary Guard commander saying the average age of many of the arrested is only 15 years. The country's Education Minister stated that detained school children were being sent to "psychiatric centres" to be "corrected".

The Canadian Government condemns in the strongest possible terms the continued violent crackdown on those protesting Iran's oppression of basic human rights – and, in particular, the rights of women.

Strengthening sanctions

Canada has long had amongst the toughest measures on Iran of any country in the world. We are now going much further by imposing significant additional sanctions that will raise the international bar in holding Iran accountable.

Ten thousand senior members of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard (IRGC) will be banned from ever entering or doing business in Canada – a measure previously used against regimes that committed war crimes or genocide. Canada's approach treats the IRGC as a terrorist entity without interfering in the lives of regular citizens who were merely drafted for mandatory military service in this organization.

We are aggressively expanding targeted economic sanctions against top officials most responsible for Iran's egregious behaviour. Those listed to date include eighty-three individuals and 176 companies.

Declarations of sanctions are meaningless, though, without resources to enforce those sanctions. Canada is investing \$76 million to strengthen our country's capacity to take action against agents of the regime by freezing assets and combating illicit financial activity.

Close to home

The focus of sanctions enforcement will include measures close to home.

I have often heard concerns from individuals within the North Shore Iranian-Canadian community about money laundering and political intimidation by individuals with connections to the Iranian regime who live here in Canada. But there remains concern about publicly identifying them due to the possibility of repercussions for family in Iran.

Let there be no uncertainty about whether Canada has the will or resources to act on concerns such as these. We do and we will.

I have been, and will continue to be, a constant advocate for the Iranian-Canadian community in Ottawa. As the ongoing courage and resolve of protestors in Iran dissolves the regime's grip of fear everywhere, including here on the North Shore, we will work tirelessly to ensure that the tentacles of the regime do not affect Canadian citizens and permanent residents of Iranian origin.

Let history record the sacrifice on the streets of Iran as a turning point. And let us echo the chant of the protestors: *Hoghoghe zanan, hoghoghe bashar ast.* Women's rights are human rights.

Contact us: Constituency Office 604-775-6333

Email: Jonathan.Wilkinson@parl.gc.ca

Website: JonathanWilkinson.libparl.ca