



DEMOCRACY COALITION PROJECT

DCP hosts Congressional briefing on U.S. leadership at the HRC

On April 14, the Democracy Coalition Project, the Open Society Foundations and Freedom House held a congressional briefing, sponsored by Congressman Russ Carnahan, on the pivotal role the United States has played in addressing gross human rights violations at the UN Human Rights Council (HRC). The event was convened to highlight the importance of continued U.S. engagement with the HRC amidst a climate of budget cuts and Congressional opposition to U.S. support for the United Nations.

The event, *US leadership at the UN Human Rights Council: Featuring Voices from the Ground - Iran and Burma*, was comprised of a distinguished panel of prominent human rights defenders from Burma and Iran, as well as current and former ambassadors to the HRC. The speakers discussed recent accomplishments of the body, including the appointment of a special rapporteur on human rights in Iran, an unprecedented mandate on the right to freedom of association and assembly, and the Council's swift action on Libya and Cote d'Ivoire.

Hadi Ghaemi, Executive Director of the International Campaign for Human Rights in Iran, called the new mandate a "great victory" for human rights defenders in Iran. "They [human rights defenders] thought this would have been an automatic response by the international community and they couldn't understand what it was about their situation and their rights that the Council had been completely silent since June 2009," said Ghaemi. "Having that UN expert...is first and foremost reaffirmation of their struggle and their situation" and "secondly, it...gives them a megaphone to the international community."

Criticisms of the HRC, such as its membership and the disproportionate focus on Israel, were also addressed. "The world is not made up of countries with stellar human rights records. Our goal is to influence the world in the right direction. Walking away wouldn't help," said U.S. Ambassador to the UN Human Rights Council, Eileen Donahoe.

To the critics who claim the HRC is just a "talk shop", Donahoe disagrees. "We are changing the topic of conversation...and bringing attention to priorities such as freedom of association and the situation in Iran," Donahoe said. "We are in a battle for the dominant narrative in the world and we are winning; words do matter."

To review summaries of the comments from each panelist, please click on their name below.

PANEL SPEAKERS:

Eileen Donahoe, U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations Human Rights Council

Hadi Ghaemi, Executive Director, International Campaign for Human Rights in Iran

Dr. Thaung Htun, Representative for UN Affairs, National Coalition Government of the Union of Burma

Carlos Portales, former Chilean Ambassador to Geneva and Director, Program on International Organizations, Law and Diplomacy, Washington College of Law, American University

Moderator: Paula Schriefer, Advocacy Director, Freedom House

Opening and Closing Remarks: Dokhi Fassihian, Executive Director, Democracy Coalition Project