**Betraying Iranian Women**

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April 28, 2010, the Islamic Republic of Iran was elected to the United Nation’s Commission on the Status of Women (CSW). Possibly the world’s worst abuser of women, the Shariah-ruled country in which the fate of women and girls is left in the lecherous hands of misogynistic mullahs had been given membership on a commission founded to protect women’s rights and promote their equality. There was little media coverage of the announcement. And there has been little effort to prevent or denounce this obscene situation. But a few voices in Congress, some women human rights leaders, and, most poignantly, Iranian women themselves, have challenged the moral equivalency and cowardly silence of those that have failed to support women’s rights in Iran.

Iran’s CSW election was not surprising for the United Nations, whose moral vacuity remains proudly unmolested on First Avenue and the Palais des Nations. After all, Libya has chaired the Commission on Human Rights and Sudan has graced the Human Rights Commission with its presence during the most ferocious years of the genocide it has perpetrated in Darfur. But for the United States, it was a new low to remain silent in the face of such an outrage.

Iran was elected by acclamation. (Remember vote by acclamation? That was how Barack Obama got the Democratic presidential nomination, when between clenched teeth Hillary suspended the roll call.) In the case of Iran, it meant that none of the UN member states, including the U.S., asked for an open vote on Iran’s election to the women’s commission. Some say that this was a quid pro quofor Iran withdrawing its bid for a seat on the UN Human Rights Council. So human rights abuser Iran will only make UN policy on women’s human rights, not humanhuman rights. The women of Iran are not greatly relieved by this devil’s bargain.

In past years, the U.S. worked to prevent abusers of women, genocidairres, and other assorted miscreants from achieving such positions of authority on UN commissions. American delegations to the UN encouraged the delegations of other countries to take a stand and to work together to present alternatives to objectionable candidates and to objectionable text in resolutions.

This was not an easy task. Dr. Mark Lagon described the challenges faced by the Bush Administration at the UN in an April 19, 2005

testimony at a subcommittee hearing of the House International Relations Committee (now House Committee on Foreign Affairs). Then Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for International Organization Affairs, Lagon explained that “some of the most egregious violators of human rights work through their regional blocs to gain nomination and election” to UN commissions “in order to protect themselves and their ilk from criticism.” The UN Commission on Human Rights (CHR) was being “increasingly confronted with bloc voting. . . shifting the CHR’s focus away from bedrock civil and political rights, and toward economic, social, and cultural rights.”

If

the United States could not prevent such elections or resolutions, it could at least be counted on to speak out about such injustices, even when criticized for acting “unilaterally.” For example, in the spring of 2004, in the midst of horrific genocide in Darfur, the UN Commission on Human Rights passed an insultingly weak resolution on Sudan. As Lagon later told students at Georgetown University’s Institute of International Law and Politics, the U.S. tried to revise and/or replace text to more accurately respond to the atrocities taking place. When this failed, the U.S. opposed the resolution. A few days later, when Sudan was reelected to the Commission on Human Rights, Lagon said “the U.S. delegation reproached the body by walking out of the meeting and issuing a public, very critical, statement.”

Under the Obama Administration the U.S. delegation has twice

walked out of speeches by Iran’s president, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad. The most recent walkout occurred on May 3, 2010, at the UN Conference on the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty. But walking out on the Iranian dictator’s sound and fury about “the Zionist regime,” aimed, in part, at America, is less difficult than a public reproach of the UN body for approving Iran’s CSW election.

Writing in Commentary the day after the election, Jennifer Rubin

raged, “The U.S. couldn’t muster a word of opposition — not even call for a vote… why? Because our policy is not to confront and challenge the brutal regime for which rape and discrimination are institutionalized policies. No, rather, we are in the business of trying to ingratiate ourselves, and making the U.S. as inoffensive as possible to the world’s thugocracies. …It is what this administration does and how they envision raising our status in the world.”

Thankfully, “making the U.S. as inoffensive as possible to the world’s thugocracies” is not the approach of some members of the U.S. Congress. U.S. Senator Kirsten Gillibrand (D-NY) released a

statement the day after the election in which she said, “Allowing Iran to sit on the commission, a nation where gender equality is only a dream and where women are subject to inequality in all aspects of their daily lives, makes a mockery of the commission’s work.”

Thaddeus McCotter, a Republican member of the House of Representatives from Michigan, also vehemently

denounced Iran’s election the same day. McCotter declared, “By electing the Tehran butchers to its Commission on the Status of Women, a morally rancid United Nations has salted the wounds of the Iranian freedom movement’s regime-murdered martyrs.” The congressman went on to blast this outrage in aninterview on Fox News in which he said that the moral relativism of the UN had allowed Iran to “get elected to sit as a predator monitoring the prey.” McCotter will also introduce a congressional resolution condemning Iran’s election. Hopefully, many other members of congress will join on the resolution as co-sponsors.

No corresponding calls denouncing Iran have been issued by the major feminist organizations, however. The National Organization of Women (NOW) is too busy gloating over the Wal-Mart lawsuit, cheering Democratic congressional delegates, and experiencing ecstasy over President Obama’s U.S. Supreme Court nominee to go about the messy and thankless job of defending the rights of women under Islam. On the other hand, the women’s rights group Equality Now does fight against the evils that affect women under Shariah in Iran and elsewhere, such as

female genital mutilation (FGM), rape, sex trafficking, and child marriage. But perhaps because they work too closely with the disease-ridden United Nations, Equality Now focuses on the symptoms rather than the disease.

Women’s ministries and commissions of left-leaning and “progressive” evangelical churches have also let down the women and girls of Iran by not protesting Iran’s farcical election. The feminists of

such groups make careers of attempting to shatter every stained glass ceiling that they encounter. But given the opportunity to respond to the life-long suffocation of women under Shariah’s oppressive ceiling, they are silent. Officers and staff of these ministries spend their days issuing statements against gender inequality, sexual violence, and the perceived iniquities of misogynistic patriarchal Christianity, but the UN is their friend! And the progressive evangelicals of trendy organizations like Sojourners blog and twitter in their usual self-important, self-righteous way about America’s greed, evil, and injustice. But there is neither a tweet nor a blog post expressing outrage over Iran’s ascendency to the UN commission.

Other than the resolution pending in Congress, there have not been many efforts to support the women of Iran. But on May 5, 2010, a group of women leaders sent an

open letter to Secretary Clinton protesting U.S. silence over the election of Iran to the women’s rights commission. The letter called on Clinton to “denounce Iran’s election. . . as an appointment that shocks the conscience of civilized societies” and demanded to know why the United States failed to request an open vote. “We await your public and clear condemnation of this outrageously sexist and insensitive decision by the U.N.,” the letter concluded.

Letter signers range from Ayaan Hirsi Ali to Wafa Sultan, Anne Applebaum to Diana West. They are international human rights and women’s rights specialists, attorneys, scholars, columnists, media figures, women in the arts, and activists of all sorts. Experience for experience they match and surpass the leftist feminists. But unlike their counterparts in liberal land, the letter signers “get it” and their integrity requires them to enter the realm of the so-called politically incorrect and intolerant on behalf of women living under Shariah.

The most courageous effort to prevent Iran’s CSW election came from Iranians themselves. On April 27, 2010, 214 Iranian women’s rights activists inside and outside Iran sent an

open letter to the United Nations urging that Iran not be allowed CSW membership. Supported by “the global sisterhood network” and endorsed by over a dozen other organizations, the Iranian activists told the UN that “for the sake of women‘s rights globally, an empty seat for the Asia group on CSW is much preferable to Iran‘s membership.” They reminded the UN that “discrimination against women is codified in [Iran’s] laws, as well as in executive and cultural institutions, and Iran has consistently sought to preserve gender inequality in all places, from the family unit to the highest governmental bodies.” Iran will certainly use the opportunity afforded to it on CSW “to curtail progress and the advancement of women,” they warned.

Not long after the UN failed to heed this warning and elected Iran to the CSW, the official Iranian news agency (IRNA) demonstrated the accuracy of the Iranian activists’ prediction when it stated that “Iran’s membership in the Commission on the Status of Women is important because “Iran’s views about the position of women,” through this podium, “can help reflect Islamic views about family and women.” The International Campaign for Human Rights in Iran also

reported IRNA’s claim that efforts against their candidacy were by “hostile groups and western media” trying to prevent Iran’s membership in the CSW through “poisonous propagation.” IRNA then boasted “their efforts were ignored by members of ECOSOC.” A sad indictment of all of the member nations of the UN.

The U.S. and other nations of the free world let down the Iranian people when they stood by and did nothing as the regime crushed the election protesters last year. Some brave Iranian freedom fighters are still

paying the cost for that defiance. Five political prisoners were hanged in secret on May 9, and twenty-seven others are awaiting execution. Now by remaining silent about the election of Iran to the CSW the U.S. has failed to support the people of Iran again.

But this will not deter courageous Iranians. They will find encouragement from those who have decried the UN’s outrageous election. And it’s not too late for the U.S. to help. By supporting legislative efforts like Mr. McCotter’s resolution, the U.S. could, as that resolution’s last sentence says, “reaffirm its solidarity with the Iranian people in their continuing struggle for freedom and human rights, including equal rights for women in Iran.”