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Film Highlights Mullahs' Human Rights Abuse in Iran

Feb 14, 2006
VOA

A recent documentary film focuses on the lack of human rights in Iran. "A Few Simple Shots - a Documentary on Human Rights Violations in Iran" was produced by independent Iranian filmmaker, Joseph Akrami. Several years ago, he says, he was forced to flee Iran because of his growing opposition to the Islamic government. VOA's Deborah Block spoke to him about his reasons for making the film.



Through first-hand accounts in Farsi and English by Iranians who say they were tortured for their beliefs, filmmaker Joseph Akrami chronicles human rights abuses by Iran's Islamic fundamentalist government.

"I was caught and arrested on the street carrying a leaflet from an opposition group," says Minoos Homily in the film. "As a result, I spent several years of my life in prison."

Now living in Canada, Mr. Akrami says human rights violations in Iran are among the world's worst.

"You cannot oppose the Iranian government because if you oppose Iranian government you are not opposing a person, or some people, you are opposing Islam," said Mr. Akrami.

In November 2005, the United Nations General Assembly passed a resolution, for the second year in a row, deploring Iran's treatment of its own people. The U.S. State Department says the Iranian government's poor human rights record has worsened and the right of citizens to change the government is severely restricted.

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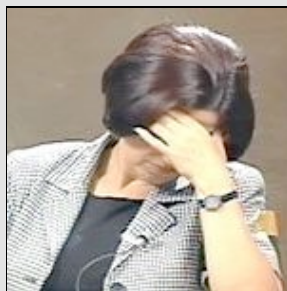


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Mr. Akrami blames the Mullahs, the country's religious leaders, who do not tolerate any kind of opposition. "The mullahs are behind all this suffering. I believe if you don't get rid of them, if we don't have these people -- or these kind of monsters, I believe we'll have a better living standard."

All the Iranians in Mr. Akrami's 90 minute film now live in Canada. He also interviewed Canadian human rights groups, United Nations representatives, and immigration lawyers such as Mary Tatham.



"Procedures in the revolutionary courts are abysmal. There is no right of counsel. There is frequently no right of appeal," she says.

In this year's annual report, a private U.S. watchdog group, Human Rights Watch, says Iranian authorities have subjected people imprisoned for peaceful expression of their political views to torture and ill-treatment.

Mr. Akrami shows the faces of those whom he says are some of those Iranians, including members of opposition movements, journalists, and students.

"By being in a [political] demonstration," the director explained, "or for instance, writing something about the Iranian regime in a newspaper, or even talking [about the government] in the schools."

Human Rights Watch says, because the Iranian government launched a campaign in 2000 closing many newspapers and imprisoning journalists, the few remaining independent newspapers practice self-censorship. Although many writers have left the country, or are in prison, Mr. Akrami says those who remain find it difficult.

"So that's the reason that a lot of artists, filmmakers, and writers are suffering because they don't have freedom of expression. They cannot express themselves and that's the reason they get in trouble."

Human Rights Watch is critical of the Iranian government for persecuting Iran's ethnic and religious minorities. The U.S. State Department also objects to the Iranian government's treatment of religious minorities. Mr. Akrami's film shows freedom of religion outside the fundamentalist Muslim faith is non-existent.

Maurice Copithorne is a Canadian United Nations Special Representative on the human rights situation in Iran. "All other groups are unrecognized minorities and this is where a fair amount of suffering occurs."

Akrami says there is only one way to stop the human rights violations in Iran. "I'm trying to bring international attention that there is a time for change, and Iranian regime has to go."

The Mission of Iran to the United Nations - the official representatives of Iran in the United States - did not respond to several requests for comment on Mr. Akrami's film.

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