



President George W. Bush's Remarks on Democracy in Iran

June 16, 2005

In recent months, the cause of freedom has made enormous gains in the broader Middle East. Millions of people in Afghanistan and Iraq defied terrorists to cast their ballots in free elections. Palestinians voted for a new president who rejects violence and is working for democratic reform, and the people of Lebanon reclaimed their sovereignty and are now voting for new leadership. Across the Middle East, hopeful change is taking place. People are claiming their liberty. And as a tide of freedom sweeps this region, it will also come eventually to Iran.

The Iranian people are heirs to a great civilization - and they deserve a government that honors their ideals and unleashes their talent and creativity. Today, Iran is ruled by men who suppress liberty at home and spread terror across the world. Power is in the hands of an unelected few who have retained power through an electoral process that ignores the basic requirements of democracy.

The June 17th presidential elections are sadly consistent with this oppressive record. Iran's rulers denied more than a thousand people who put themselves forward as candidates, including popular reformers and women who have done so much for the cause of freedom and democracy in Iran.

The Iranian people deserve a genuinely democratic system in which elections are honest - and in which their leaders answer to them instead of the other way around. The Iranian people deserve a truly free and democratic society with a vibrant free press that informs the public and ensures transparency. They deserve freedom of assembly, so Iranians can gather and press for reform and a peaceful, loyal opposition can keep the government in check. They deserve a free economy that delivers opportunity and prosperity and economic independence from the state. They deserve an independent judiciary that will guarantee the rule of law and ensure equal justice for all Iranians. And they deserve a system that guarantees religious freedom, so that they can build a society in which compassion and tolerance prevail.

Today, the Iranian regime denies all these rights. It shuts down independent newspapers and websites and jails those who dare to challenge the corrupt system. It brutalizes its people and denies them their liberty.

America believes in the independence and territorial integrity of Iran. America believes in the right of the Iranian people to make their own decisions and determine their own future. America believes that freedom is the birthright and deep desire of every human soul. And to the Iranian people, I say: As you stand for your own liberty, the people of America stand with you.

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