

The following is a translation of the VOA TV Persian program “Roundtable with You,” which was broadcasted via satellite on July 3, 2007.

TRANSLATION BEGINS HERE

[Host Ahmad Reza Baharlou]

Good Night! I welcome you to tonight’s program “Roundtable with You” broadcasted from Washington. The Paris Conference, which was conducted as a “unity convention” composed of members of various Iranian opposition groups, started on the 15th of June. This convention once again brought up the name, identity, and the mission of the Iranian opposition in exile. The significance of the “Iran Unity Convention” was in bringing together members of various groups whose presence at one location was thus far perceived impossible due to the level of diversity and ideological disagreements which exist among them.

But, according to the participants, common goals such as creating democracy in Iran, separation of church and state, maintaining the territorial integrity of Iran, and finally, the necessity of replacing the current regime with a democratic system brought these groups together for discussion. Tonight we have as our guest one of the participants of this conference, Dr. Siavash Abghari, university professor and the head of the Department of Economics at Morehouse College. We will once again discuss this development as well as a broader discussion concerning the Iranian opposition in exile, where it stands and what the future has in store for it. I say hello to you Dr. Abghari, welcome!

[Dr. Siavash Abghari]

Greetings to you and your viewers wherever in the world they may be! My love also goes to those who lost their lives for the cause of freedom and justice for our beloved country.

[Ahmad Reza Baharlou]

Dr. Abghari, how did the Paris Conference (or the “Iranian Unity Convention”) succeed in bringing together the Iranian opposition groups in spite their diversity?

[Dr. Siavash Abghari]

Before answering your question, please allow me to briefly point out some of the economic, cultural, political, and social problems and crises that

have spread to all realms of life for Iranians [living inside the country]. This would allow us to reanalyze our role in opposing this totalitarian, atrocious, and brutal regime. I must point out that the authoritarian regime of mullahs and the “Absolute Guardianship of the Faghih¹” have exhausted the country in the course of the past 28 years in spite of Iran’s affluent economic and human resources.

The unemployment rate is 25 percent, the rate of inflation is 25 percent; there are more than 10 million unemployed individuals; another one million unemployed people are added to this number annually; approximately 13 percent of our country’s population is living under the line of poverty; approximately 15 million people are living in very fragile conditions and might at any minute be pushed below the line of poverty. Twenty-five percent of the labor force of our beloved country has outstanding delayed wages, meaning that they may not have received any wage in the past few months or even a year.

Each year approximately 200,000 people of the professional forces of Iran leave the country. That is to say, Iran is ranked first in “brain drain.” Twenty-one percent of the population (meaning more than 14 million people of our beloved country’s population) is suffering from psychological disorders due to the political and economic pressures imposed on them by the Islamic Republic. We have approximately 400,000 drug addicts who inject illegal drugs and about 25 million people who are struggling with addiction.

We must also discuss the executions [of the political activists] that continue to take place in our beloved country, as well as the repression of the youth, college students, women, and educators, the laborers, etc. We could discuss the crisis of prostitution, the selling of body organs simply to make ends meet, and the hygiene crisis in our country. We should point out the crisis of economic corruption, in which Iran is again ranked among the top countries in this regard, as well as in pressure, corruption, usury, and finally the pollution of the environment, and the allocation of natural resources to those with ties to the establishment.

You see that “crises” have spread to all realms of life. All of this is directly linked to the founding of the regime, the ruling authority of the “Absolute

¹ Translator’s note: This is a direct quote from the Constitution of the Islamic Republic – Article 57. “Faghih” means jurisprudent.

Guardianship of Faghih,” and the despotism of mullahs with which we are faced today. Well, this is the problem that our dear country and countrymen are faced with today. Most importantly, we must realize that our countrymen do not deserve this misery. What we are witnessing today is a large prison for the seventy million people of Iran. Beside the 10 percent who may be supportive of this regime, the rest of the 90 percent are prisoners.

This is something that this regime has created for the people of Iran, an economic, cultural, and political hell. If our dear viewers in Iran have any desire to see “hell,” they need not go any further than where they are to experience it first hand. There is no need for them to wait for the coming world. It is the regime of the Islamic Republic that created this mess for the people of Iran in the course of the past 28 years. We (especially those of us living abroad) need to look deep within ourselves, firstly as human beings and secondly as Iranians to support the domestic [political] activists, laborers, educators, the brave women of Iran, the college students, and all those who have participated in this movement.

What is our historic responsibility in this period? What transpired at the “Iranian Union Convention” at Paris was an unprecedented development in the contemporary history of Iran, for it brought together many Iranian opposition groups [notwithstanding their diversity]. All these groups shared a common belief in freedom, democracy, the separation of church and state (particularly that the current regime has deprived people of their religion), and [finally] the territorial integrity of Iran. They moreover believe that none of the existing political factions (violent or “smiling” factions) of this regime could bring democracy to Iran.

In short, all opposition groups assembled together knowing that the freedom and democracy of Iran is directly linked to the establishing of human rights in the future constitution of Iran. This is the only way to lead Iran toward growth and development. We have all the economic and human resources to move toward that direction. The main obstacle is the authoritarian government of “Faghih Rulership,” and we must overcome this obstacle if we are to obtain freedom and democracy. In other words, it is not sufficient to voice our opposition to the current regime of Iran. There are many people who do exactly that. The most important matter in our view is the emphasis on the nature of the regime that will replace the current system.

The future political system of Iran will recognize freedom, democracy, and human rights, and it will enable Iranians to live as “humans” in the world community and benefit from all the blessings the loving soil of our country has to offer. Today only a minor percentage of the population is actually benefiting from this regime. The proponents of the Islamic Republic – those who take advantage of its economic corruption – are estimated to be about 10 million people. I am sorry 10 percent of the population. I apologize. The rest of the population does not believe in the current system.

[Host Ahmad Reza Baharlou]

Dr. Abghari, it is said that one of the factors which has contributed to the schism that has kept the Iranian opposition from holding a dialogue with one another is the apparent and clandestine actions of the Islamic Republic. Why is it that an opposition composed of some extremely intelligent, educated, experienced individuals -- many of whom are politicians, scholars, writers, journalists -- could so easily be deceived?

[Dr. Siavash Abghari]

I must say that for the first time in the contemporary history of Iran, this movement brought together a wide range of opposition groups in one conference to collaborate and unite against the current regime and discuss the future system of Iran. From this viewpoint, this was a novel movement. If we are opposed to the Islamic Republic, the governing system of Iran, we must start with ourselves. We must be willing to discuss our points of view with scholars who may have different political tendencies; they might be right wing, leftist, moderate, republican, or proponents of parliamentary monarchy.

What has to this point served as the main obstacle for the opposition movement was that the various groups of opposition were not willing to have a dialogue with one another. This new movement, however, was able to bring together the various political factions and groups, whether organized or individually, to get together at a conference under one roof without getting into altercations. Instead of fighting one another we ought to try to find a common solution for freedom and the establishment of democracy in Iran.

[Host Ahmad Reza Baharlou]

I am sorry, but my point remains. My question had to do with the deliberate actions of the Islamic Republic in the past 28 years in creating schism among the Iranian opposition groups. Now, why is it that the Islamic Republic succeeded in taking this opposition to its desired direction notwithstanding the fact that the Iranian opposition is comprised of intelligent, educated, and experienced individuals. The various opposition groups have maintained these disagreements. In other words, they are dividing the spoils of war prior to the war itself.

[Dr. Siavash Abghari]

Exactly! Well, firstly the Islamic Republic has tried and continues to try to utilize all the resources of our country – the regime holds eighty percent of it – and spends a portion of it abroad. The Islamic Republic spends about 180 dollars in creating schisms among the opposition groups.

The Islamic Republic has itself created opposition groups and continues to do so. It is present everywhere. We must move forward in this direction wisely and not fall pray to the legerdemain of the Islamic Republic. Unfortunately, the involvement of the Islamic Republic in the opposition is not a myth. We as opposition groups (republican, parliamentary monarchists, socialist, communists, etc.) should all be aware that we are dealing with a national crisis.

We cannot overcome this crisis by individual efforts, for it could only be overcome by a national union. This should be our first step as opposition organizations. We ought to come out of the shields that we have tailored around ourselves and make some fundamental internal changes. If we believe in a democratic Iran with a parliamentary system, there will be people of various groups and parties with often contradictory viewpoints present in that parliament interacting with one another. We must learn to interact with one another now; though, as you pointed out, it might be a rather late effort. If I'm a republican, this political persuasion should not keep me from having interaction with a parliamentary monarchist. The opposite is also true. If I am a proponent of parliamentary monarchy, this should not keep me from having an interaction with someone who may be republican, leftist, communist, or socialist. If we seek freedom and democracy for Iran, we should be able to have a discourse with one another, and not concentrate on eliminating one another from the political scene.

In my view, we have been so busy battling with one another in the past 28 years that we really did not fight the Islamic Republic of Iran. We have not yet been able to agree on the minimum standards and the common goals of the Iranian opposition. Fortunately, this new development has now begun to take shape. We should not allow our group prejudices to keep us from uniting.

Those of us who haven't yet united should do so now. I am disappointed with those groups, organizations, and parties who did not attend this convention. Those dear countrymen could have at least come as spectators and participated in the convention. If they care about the freedom and democracy for our beloved country, they should know what is taking place at the "The Unity Convention at Paris." Unfortunately some of those opposition groups chose not to participate due to their prejudices. If we want freedom and democracy for our beloved country and its people, we must be present everywhere. If we want freedom and democracy for Iran and our dear countrymen, we have no other solution before us. We must realize that in this historical juncture, our country is going through deterioration caused by the authoritarian regime of mullahs. We ought to recognize the public demands, and unite in order to materialize them.

We must support the activists inside the country, the laborers, the educators, the university students, the brave women of Iran, and this civil movement, so that we could gain the support of the international institutions and stop the oppression, execution, stoning, that are taking place in Iran. We should use the international pressure to enable our countrymen to proceed freely and comfortably with their civil movements. This is the responsibility of us five to six million Iranians living abroad. We must take advantage of the freedoms available to us.

[Host Ahmad Reza Baharlou]

Mr. Abghahi, it is always said that the propaganda machine – or the "news distortion machine" of the Islamic Republic -- has from day one always done its very best to misrepresent the Iranians living abroad, including the [Iranian] opposition [movements]. Therefore, it is important for the Iranian people to see that the Iranian opposition groups have put their differences aside. It is important for them to see that Dr. Abghari is concerned about his country, though he may be living at Atlanta. He is not living a life of debauchery in the United States and is not receiving money from foreigners. Of course you know about the utter nonsense that is always

said. Did the Paris Convention address this issue? What actions should we take in order to nullify the propaganda and news distortion machine of the Islamic Republic?

[Dr. Siavash Abghari]

We certainly did address this issue. This was one of the decisions that were made at the convention. We have set out to build relations with international institutions, parliaments, and syndicates, and we seek to act as a conduit for the suppressed voice of our dear countrymen. As someone who has lived the majority of his life outside the country, I desire nothing for myself save freedom and democracy for my country. I want nothing more. I have been able to achieve the things I want for myself in this country. The Iranian opposition -- all those who live abroad -- must address the current crises in Iran.

We must voice the concerns of the laborers, support the student movements, especially since we are approaching the anniversary of the 18th of Tir. We ought to support the movements by women and create legitimacy for ourselves in foreign countries and international institutions as true representatives of the domestic movements. For the first time in the contemporary history of Iran, we were able to build this relationship. We must create this coordination to drive out the regime that has confiscated the "public control" with as little cost as possible. [We must] establish a national government and materialize the demand of the Iranian people.

[Host Ahmad Reza Baharlou]

Since you specialize in trade and economy, I wanted to ask the opinion of the Iranian opposition on the economic sanctions against Iran. Do you support the sanctions; do you believe that this could help materialize the goals of the opposition? Or is it the case that you think the average people are going to suffer from these sanctions. Where do you stand on this issue?

[Dr. Siavash Abghari]

As a personal opinion and also as an economic specialist, I tell you that sanctions, which the western countries have conceived, are not in compliance with the demands of the opposition. The western countries want the Islamic Republic to stop its enrichment of uranium. If the Islamic Republic accepts to do so then all sanctions will stop. They have different demands. Our responsibility is to define wise and clear objectives for the

sanctions. We must move wisely. If there is going to be a sanction, it has to be linked to the violations of human rights in Iran, meaning that if the Islamic Republic is not complying with human rights, it will suffer sanctions, wise sanctions with little repercussion for the Iranian people. I must point out that authoritarian and totalitarian systems, without exception, including the Islamic Republic, need monetary and economic resources to continue their authority and deceive their supporters. They need money for two purposes. First is oppression -- the oppression of the proponents of freedom -- which requires economic resources; and secondly, the "purchasing of supporters," which includes financial aid to those with financial ties to the establishment. The regime of Iran has been able to purchase supporters by granting them special concessions, contracts, etc.

[Host Ahmad Reza Baharlou]

You mention [the domestic] supporters of the Islamic Republic: what do you think of the supporters abroad? Because it is not just the domestic supporters. For instance, according to the Secretary of the Treasury of the United States, the Central Bank Iran and the Saderat Bank send financial aid to Hamas and Hezbollah of Lebanon. Therefore, the Islamic Republic is also after supporters overseas.

[Dr. Siavash Abghari]

That is certainly true. The Islamic Republic seeks to purchase domestic supporters as well as foreign ones. The foreign supporters are terrorist organizations. We see that at the international level the supporters of the Islamic Republic are groups such as Hamas, some factions of Iraqi militia etc. The regime of Islamic Republic has since the very beginning created many international crises in addition to purchasing supporters domestically.

We see that the Islamic Republic created an international crisis with the hostage crisis. It created other crises by the Iran-Iraq war and the fatwa against Salman Rushdie. Today the nuclear issue has given birth to yet another crisis. All these crises were planned ahead with the intention of suppressing the political activists inside the country. This should not be forgotten. This is something that this regime has been doing and continues to do.

The people of Iran are now asking who is more important, those [Iranians] with no shelter, the kids living in the streets, or those in the south of Lebanon and Palestine for whom the Islamic Republic sends financial aid

in order to fuel wars? As the [Persian] expression goes, “A light needed for ...

[Host Ahmad Reza Baharlou]

A light, which is needed for your house, should not be donated to a mosque

[Dr. Siavash Abghari]

Thank you! All this support has been given to terrorist organizations abroad while many people inside Iran are sleeping on the sidewalks. We all recall the story about the worker whose salary was delayed for a year, and he ended up hanging himself from the ceiling because embarrassed of his family. He had not been paid for the services he performed; meanwhile this regime had been helping other countries. What we have to bear in mind is that this regime, like all other totalitarian regimes, alienates its citizens. It alienates them from their culture, alienates them from their history, and seeks to transform them into an Islamic Nation.

Now what does that really mean? It means enslaving people to this regime and utilizing them for their own ends and treating them without human dignity. We are Iranians! We have been through a great deal in the past 1400 years because of Islam and more particularly in the past 28 years because of this regime. We know of the cultural, social, economic, and political deteriorations which [this regime] has and continues to bring us. We must come to ourselves.

Iranians, no matter where they live -- I am specially talking to Iranians living abroad, because those living inside the country under suppression cannot voice their views, even though the majority of them oppose this government -- as freedom loving Iranians, as people who are indebted to that soil, have the responsibility to create opportunities for their voices to be heard and to do everything possible in support of the domestic civil movements. This is our historic mission.

The “National Unity Conference” -- this phenomenal social movement that has now taken place and is peerless in the contemporary history of Iran -- was a step toward that direction. It is my hope that we together overcome these obstacles and unite together notwithstanding our political affiliations while maintaining our political identity. We must create this national unity in order to drive out the despotism of the mullahs and this atrocious and

brutal regime. As Iranians living outside the country, we feel humiliated and constantly ask ourselves why we should live under such tragedy in spite of our glorious historic and cultural background. Why do we have to struggle with such crisis and be constantly humiliated by this regime?

We must overcome this crisis. It is my hope that the National Unity Convention at Paris, which recently took place, unites the entire [Iranian] opposition while each group maintains its political identity. We must agree on some rudimentary foundations of democracy, human rights, and the separation of church and state. This system must be driven out. This is true of its “smiling faction” as well as its violent ones. This regime will engage in various connivances. The Iranian opposition must be aware of that. The regime of Iran may bring another person to the position of power. It could be another person with a smile such as Khatami or someone such as Ahmadinejad. At a different time, they might bring another person to the position of power. The opposition must be aware that no matter which governmental faction the next president belongs to, his one and only mission will be the sustaining of this regime and atrocious and brutal authoritarianism.

We must overcome this crisis. We have no choice but to bring about a national unity. We must bear in mind that fighting an authoritarian regime is the easiest thing one can do, because the regime is withered from within. It is as if termites have eaten all its pillars. We must pay attention to freedom, democracy, and human rights. Mullahs must return to mosques. We must also be united on the territorial integrity of Iran. The most difficult task before us is Iran’s development and growth. The current regime has brought a great deal of ruin to Iran. Development and growth can only be attained via a national unity. People from all walks of life may join in and participate in this development and growth regardless of their political affiliations. Iran is an affluent country which ...

[Host Ahmad Reza Baharlou]

I am sorry to interrupt you. We have many callers on the line and they have some questions for you. We have also received many emails. Allow me to first announce the telephone numbers and then I’ll share with you the questions sent to us by our viewers as well as our dear listeners.

[Interlude]

[Voice of a Male Announcer]

You may contact the program "Roundtable with You" and participate in our discussion. Our telephone number is 202-619-3062. Our email address is roundtable@voanews.com. Our web address is www.voanews.com/Persian.

[Host Ahmad Reza Baharlou]

Farshad from Tehran writes, "one of the Iranian television stations in Los Angeles claimed that there was a representative of Islamic Republic of Iran present at the Paris Convention. Was that really the case? And if that is not the case, then what is in it for these people who spread these rumors? Are they part of the opposition?" With thanks to our dear listener Farshad.

[Dr. Siavash Abghari]

With thanks to dear Farshad! The Paris Convention comprised groups, parties, and individuals who believe in democracy and respect the territorial integrity of Iran. Everyone present at the conference agreed on the fact that this regime must be driven out and that human rights must be established in the future constitution of Iran. We did not consult with any other groups nor did we hold dialogues with them. Whoever was present was a representative of the Iranian opposition groups.

[Host Ahmad Reza Baharlou]

We have an email from Amir from Sarbandar. Well, this may not have much to do with our discussion but since you mentioned that the regime of Iran constantly creates crises, this question might be related to that topic. "It is apparent to everyone that whenever the international community increases its pressures on Iran, the Islamic Republic in turn creates an international crisis. We could see the hands of the Islamic Republic in the bombings which recently took place in London, the reason being that Britain is one of the countries that suggested sanctions against Iran." He moreover adds, "The role of the Islamic Republic in Iraq has become apparent to all governments in west and east.

The same is true in the case of Gaza and Lebanon. My question is, 'When is this hand going to be cut off, so that Iranians can walk with pride?' It should be noted that people do distinguish between us and our regime." Before you respond to Amir's comments, there is a lady from Iran on the line and I don't want her to stay on for a long time. Let her ask her question and then you could respond to both. Greetings dear lady! Please go ahead.

Iran, please go ahead. Please go ahead. Hello! Do you hear me? Please go ahead. Please go ahead.

[Caller #1]
Can you hear me?

[Host Ahmad Reza Baharlou]
Yes go ahead.

[Caller #1]
I am calling from [inaudible] ...

[Host Ahmad Reza Baharlou]
Please go ahead.

[Caller #2]
Greetings! I am not a lady; I am a man! I think there has been a mistake. I want to bring two points to your attention. My first question is why is it that out of the 800 people who were invited to the Paris Convention only 60 to 100 people actually participated? Only 65 to 75 people participated. Why didn't the other 700 members of opposition groups participate? The second point I want to make is that if we are to analyze the Iranian opposition we see that we actually have a good opposition outside the country. I think financial issues are what create schisms among us. Apadana [television station] went out of business because of financial disagreements. Lahzeh [television station] was cancelled because of Mr. Hakha, who played with people's emotions. NITV [television station] had the same fate. Now Mr. Fouladvand who is charging people sixty to seventy thousand dollars every year ...

[Host Ahmad Reza Baharlou]
This was one of those callers! First it was supposed to be a woman. Then the woman turned into a man, and they go on with the same nonsense. Considering the promise I've made to all viewers, we are not going to allow anyone to take this program's time with such nonsense. Now, if you want to say we don't let people talk, then so be it! Dr. Abghari, these people are under the impression that the Iranian opposition is a television station! Is the Iranian opposition really defined as a television station? What I mean to say is which of these Los Angeles television stations do you belong to? The propaganda machine wants to portray the Iranian opposition as those

television stations. Now this last person was one of the members of that propaganda machine saying these television stations are the true face of the opposition.

[Dr. Siavash Abghari]

Yes. Unfortunately this is the kind of propaganda created by the Islamic Republic of Iran. In my opinion, the [Iranian] opposition is not a television station. The Iranian opposition is composed of those groups who are present at the political avenues. I would go so far as to say that those groups who issue statements on behalf of the Iranian people are not part of the Iranian opposition. One must be present at the “political squares”. What took place at the National Unity Convention of Paris was an effort to bring together freedom loving Iranians to support this domestic movement. We support the [domestic] movements and will continue to do so. We will, moreover, make every effort to gain international support, and do so by emphasizing the economic and moral resources of the Iranian community.

We oppose war. We oppose receiving money from foreign countries. The Iranian community has the economic resources to support this movement. This is indispensable for those Iranians who sincerely believe in knowledge and freedom. Those who have internalized this freedom and democracy are willing to pay a cost for it, as the Iranians living inside the country are doing. We seek their presence on the political scene. This is a novel movement. The dear listener claimed that from the 800 people who were invited ... well no. There was no such thing. I, as one of the advisors of this movement and also as one of the people who had discussions with different groups and individuals in the opposition, can tell you that 250 people were altogether invited to participate at this convention, all of whom showed their readiness to attend.

Unfortunately, however, we lacked the financial resources to bring many of these accomplished Iranians who are politically and culturally active outside Iran. Due to financial difficulties we could not provide for their trips. Those dear people could not attend. The dear people who support this movement had a chance to participate. About 150 people attended the convention. We are not going to address every point that is brought up by the propaganda machines of the Islamic Republic or that of opposition groups. This movement has taken shape. It is our hope that those who are looking ahead to the future and are willing to contemplate the freedom of Iran join this movement.

I bring to your attention one historic example, which I hope serves as a lesson for the entire opposition. We must be aware that at the time of the Second World War the United States and Britain united with their ideological enemy, the Soviet Union, in order to oust the ideological regime of Hitler. Now why is it that we cannot unite in spite of the fact that we are all Iranians and all agree on freedom, democracy, human rights, and the territorial integrity of Iran? We must overcome the obstacle that the Iranian opposition has created for itself. We must “shed our skins.” Today’s problems and issues cannot be solved by traditional methods.

We must accept this historical fact, especially if we believe in freedom and democracy. In a free Iran, all people must be able to voice their concerns, even those who are considered to be political minorities, and [they must be allowed] to do so openly and take part in this democracy. This is not to say that everybody should be joining me. Unfortunately, some political institutions have not yet “shed their skins.” We hope that they soon come to their senses and join the national movement, which supports the domestic movements inside the country.

[Host Ahmad Reza Baharlou]

I have to apologize. We have a caller on the line; some of the callers have to pay a lot of money. The agents of the regime are of course exempt since they don’t have to pay! Nothing happens if they stand on the line for an hour. We have a telephone call from Tehran. Tehran, please go ahead. Tehran, please go ahead. If this telephone has problems we could go to another phone call from Tehran. Please go ahead. I think there is a problem in our switchboard. Something may have to be reset. I don’t hear any voice. Well let me do this. Farbod from Saadatshahr writes, “In the past few days, some people had their car gas stolen. So far we were worried about our car stereos being stolen, but now we should protect our car gas from being robbed. This seems to be the fate of this oil rich country of ours.” Now, what do you have to say about this, Dr. Abghari?

[Dr. Siavash Abghari]

Well, I remind that dear countrymen from Saadatshahr of the promises made by Khomeini prior to coming to Iran, saying “we will make water free; we will make electricity free; we will make oil free, etc.” Now please look at what is going on. Look at the turmoil that has befallen the country by this regime. The “hell” which is often talked about could now be seen in Iran.

It's an economic, political, cultural, and social hell. I say to that countryman that as long as the Islamic Republic is in power you should expect nothing but the stealing of our national resources by groups with ties to the establishment. Nothing will ever come out of this regime, save through political, cultural, and social annihilation. We should expect nothing [from this regime]. My suggestion to this freedom loving countryman at Saadatshahr is to create political "nucleuses" composed of people who you really trust. As of this point, we have made contacts with some of the existing centers and "nucleuses" inside Iran. You have to make sure that you are creating "nucleuses" that could be easily discovered. This way, we will have an opportunity to voice your concerns to the world and continue your activities in the domestic realm. These "nucleuses" have to be created. Outside of Iran, too, we are creating similar "nucleuses". It is through the formation of this national unity that we eventually ...

[Host Ahmad Reza Baharlou]

Dr. Abghari, our time is very limited. I want to take one or two phone calls. We have a telephone call from Paris. Paris, please go ahead.

[Caller #3]

Greetings to you! It is evident that the regime [of Iran] has set out to nullify the activities that take place outside of the country by utilizing its elements as well as its "repentants²" and those who come and insult you and the movements that are beginning to form. This is a fundamental discussion. They are prepared. The "repentants" and those working in the intelligence services of the Islamic Republic are prepared. We should not doubt that. In Paris, tens of thousands of people participated in the [inaudible] news by Reuters. Whether you agree with me or not, you should have broadcast the news pertaining to this event. Your reporter (who knows me and I know him) said things along the same lines of [the Islamic Republic]. He called Mujahedin a terrorist organization, while the Mujahedin have come to being by the Iranian people. Right now as you and I speak, they have issued statements from the Evin prison, signed by thirty people. They say that they are prisoners of "Haroon al-Rashid." They have, moreover, said that they do not support the son of Shah. You could see this in every website. Therefore, from my point of view, a journalist should not let his political affiliations get in the way of his reporting. I have to apologize to you, but Mr. Nourizadeh in your television program does exactly that. This is not

² Translator's note: Repentants are some ex-prisoners who became religious while they were in prison.

right. You must remain impartial as journalists and be only committed to telling the truth.

[Host Ahmad Reza Baharlou]

Well, I allowed you to talk as long as you were talking about the activities of your own group. When you start talking about something that involves other people, please bring it up at a time when that person is present, so that he could reply to you. You could say whatever you wish about Mujahedin or any other political organization, but please do not mention the names of those people who are not present here, because your question calls for a response. This is the first rule of our work. We have a telephone call from Germany. Germany, please go ahead.

[Caller #3]

Greetings Mr. Baharlou and greetings to your guest! It is great that the opposition groups are getting together, but Iran's real problem is the religion of Islam. This religion of Islam is a donkey manufacturing factory. This religion has to leave Iran. Once this religion leaves Iran, our country will advance.

[Host Ahmad Reza Baharlou]

Dr. Abghari, please go ahead.

[Dr. Siavash Abghari]

[Well here's what I think about] what the dear countrymen said about the religion of Islam. Religion is a personal belief and we respect it. We do not oppose people's private beliefs. We in fact respect them. I would go so far to say that this government has kept people from practicing their own religion. It has even taken people's religion from them. They want people to follow what the regime wants them to believe. We have people such as Ayatollah Boroojerdi in prison for his disagreement with the government's [religious] perspective. We believe in complete freedom, be it political or religious. One has the right to choose one's own religion. Whether or not someone chooses to ascribe to a particular religion should remain a private matter. We must be civil enough to respect that belief. Acquiring that civility, however, requires the abolishment of the Islamic Republic.

[Host Ahmad Reza Baharlou]

Dr. Abghari, Homayoun from Tehran wrote us something concerning what you just mentioned. He says, "One of the decisions that was made at the

[Paris] Convention, which took place from the 15th to 18th of June, was to completely support the domestic movements. My question is whether the opposition outside the country supports those mullahs whose cases are being tried at illegal courts behind closed doors without having access to lawyers?

[Dr. Siavash Abghari]

Yes! I must say that I believe in establishing human rights in the future constitution of Iran. Therefore we support any person who might be in prison or arrested for his viewpoints or any person whose rights as a human being have been violated. Having said this, we believe in the separation of church and state. This should not keep us from defending the civil rights our country's citizens in the event of political or religious persecution. We must reach that level of civility to support all freedom loving movements and acknowledge that all Iranians have the right to live in Iran as modern people of the 21st century, regardless of their political or religious viewpoints.

[Host Ahmad Reza Baharlou]

We have a telephone call from Tehran. Tehran, please go ahead.

[CALLER #4]

Greetings Mr. Baharlou!

[Host Ahmad Reza Baharlou]

Please go ahead

[CALLER #4]

Greetings to you and your dear guest Mr. Abghari! I called you a few minutes ago and it used to be that those who picked up the lines would tell us when our turn was up. You twice called me an element of the Islamic Republic. We are, however, enemies of the ruling mullahs. I have a question for Dr. Abghari. Why is it that in the course of the past 28 years the Iranian opposition hasn't appointed someone as a leader so that people could get to know that person and follow him? My second question is that young people like myself who are living in Iran don't know very much about the Iranian opposition abroad. How can we familiarize ourselves with the Iranian opposition abroad?

[Host Ahmad Reza Baharlou]

You asked two very good questions. Your questions were very solid questions. I don't know when I called you an element of the Islamic Republic. Mr. Abghari, please reply. I want to hear your response to these two important questions. The first question was why isn't one person appointed as the leader of the opposition and the second is how could the younger generation of Iran familiarize themselves with the Iranian opposition abroad.

[Dr. Siavash Abghari]

Concerning the first question, we believe that a leader would arise from the movement itself. The person with the right ability would show his leadership qualifications. There would be a "Coordination Council" which will manage the affairs. We should not rely so much on one person, though there may be many qualified people for leadership. The appointment of a leader must be with the approval of all the opposition groups. This will have its natural process.

Now regarding the young people such as our dear caller, there are some programs that we are working on in order to create a close relationship with the youth inside Iran. We will have to overcome the censorship that goes on in Iran. The transferring of news is very hard in Iran. Sometimes you cannot know what is happening in the street next to you. This is especially true in the oil crisis that the country is faced with today. As you saw, people get most of their news from outside sources. I hope we will be able to create a news network, through unity, consultation, and national unity so as to be able to transfer the news firsthand. Many of these "cells" have already formed within many cities [in Iran]. We must have very close relationships with the activists inside Iran. We should not forget that this is an obstacle in our way. The atrocious and brutal regime of mullahs is an obstacle for democracy and freedom. Iranians living inside the country are not being treated as human beings.

[Host Ahmad Reza Baharlou]

Thank you very much Dr. Abghari for the time you spend with our viewers and listeners. We conclude tonight's program. Tomorrow is America's Independence Day, the Fourth of July, and I'm not going to be with you. At the end, let me announce what we have lined up for you. We have the program "Shabahand," which will broadcast from Studio 50 with Luna Shad. Luna, please go ahead.

[Luna Shad]

Greetings to you Mr. Baharlou and to your viewers!

[Interlude]

[Voice of a Female Announcer]

Tonight at “Shabahang”

The increase in production of drugs in Afghanistan ...

TRANSLATION ENDS HERE