

Administration of Barack Obama, 2011

Videotaped Remarks on the Observance of Nowruz

March 20, 2011

Today I want to extend my best wishes to all who are celebrating Nowruz here in the United States and around the world.

Each year of my Presidency, I have marked this holiday by speaking directly to the people of Iran. That is what I would like to do once more.

This is a holiday for the Iranian people to spend time with friends and family, to reflect on the extraordinary blessings that you enjoy, and to look forward to the promise of a new day. After all, this is a season of hope and renewal. And today, we know that this is also a season of promise across the Middle East and North Africa, even as there are also enormous challenges.

I believe that there are certain values that are universal: the freedom of peaceful assembly and association; the ability to speak your mind and choose your leaders. And what we are seeing across the region is the insistence on governments that are accountable to the people.

But we also know that these movements for change are not unique to these last few months. The same forces of hope that swept across Tahrir Square were seen in Azadi Square in June of 2009. And just as the people of the region have insisted that they have a choice in how they are governed, so do the governments of the region have a choice in their response.

So far, the Iranian Government has responded by demonstrating that it cares far more about preserving its own power than respecting the rights of the Iranian people.

For nearly 2 years, there has been a campaign of intimidation and abuse. Young and old, men and women, rich and poor, the Iranian people have been persecuted. Hundreds of prisoners of conscience are in jail. The innocent have gone missing. Journalists have been silenced. Women tortured. Children sentenced to death.

The world has watched these unjust actions with alarm. We have seen Nasrin Sotoudeh jailed for defending human rights; Jafar Panahi imprisoned and unable to make his films; Abdolreza Tajik thrown in jail for being a journalist. The Baha'i community and Sufi Muslims punished for their faith; Mohammad Valian a young student, sentenced to death for throwing three stones.

These choices do not demonstrate strength, they show fear. For it is telling when a government is so afraid of its own citizens that it won't even allow them the freedom to access information or to communicate with each other. But the future of Iran will not be shaped by fear. The future of Iran belongs to the young people, the youth who will determine their own destiny.

Over 60 percent of the Iranian people were born after 1979. You are not bound by the chains of the past: the distracting hatred of America that will create no jobs or opportunity; the rigid and unaccountable government; the refusal to let the Iranian people realize their full potential for fear of undermining the authority of the state.

Instead, you—the young people of Iran—carry within you both the ancient greatness of Persian civilization and the power to forge a country that is responsive to your aspirations. Your

talent, your hopes, and your choices will shape the future of Iran and help light the world. And though times may seem dark, I want you to know that I am with you.

On this day, a celebration that serves as a bridge from the past to the future, I would like to close with a quote from the poet Simin Behbahani, a woman who has been banned from travelling beyond Iran, even though her words have moved the world: "Old I may be, but given the chance, I will learn. I will begin a second youth alongside my progeny. I will recite the Hadith of love of country with such fervor as to make each word bear life."

Let this be a season of second youth for all Iranians, a time in which a new season bears new life once more. Thank you. And *Aid-eh-Shoma Mobarak*.

NOTE: The President remarks were videotaped at approximately 3:40 p.m. on March 18 in the Library at the White House for later broadcast. The Office of the Press Secretary also released Arabic and Persian transcripts of these remarks.

Categories: Addresses and Remarks : Nowruz, videotaped remarks.

Names: Behbahani, Simin; Panahi, Jafar ; Sotoudeh, Nasrin; Tajik, Abdolreza; Valian, Mohammad..

Subjects: Egypt : Democracy efforts; Holidays and special observances : Nowruz; Iran : Democracy efforts; Iran : Human rights issues; Iran : Political unrest and violence; Libya : Democracy efforts; Middle East : Peace and democracy efforts.

DCPD Number: DCPD201100192.