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The week of June 20 marks the second anniversary of the murder of Neda Agha-Soltan, a 26-year-old Iranian who was slain during demonstrations in Tehran against her country's fraudulent June 12, 2009 presidential election.

Captured on video, Neda's death sparked global revulsion against one of the world's worst human rights abusers – the government of Iran. It also symbolized a democratic movement's brave resistance to tyranny. Across the region, this resistance stirred hearts and minds, helping sow the seeds for the Arab Spring.

The aftermath of the election and Neda's murder also spurred the United States and the world community to take action against the abusers -- action that must continue if freedom is to prevail in Iran and the Middle East.

Since seizing power in 1979, Iran's radical Islamist theocracy has been a particularly egregious abuser of the fundamental freedom of religion or belief, detaining, torturing, and executing people based on religious identity.

Religious minorities are systematically targeted. The Baha'is have been labeled as "heretics" and have suffered severe repression. Since 1979, Iranian authorities have killed more than 200 Baha'i leaders, while dismissing more than 10,000 from government and university jobs.

Officially recognized minorities, including Christians, Zoroastrians, and Jews, face repression. Religious services are subject to arbitrary raids, with members threatened, and leaders and worshippers imprisoned. State-run television broadcasts anti-Semitic messages, while the government has hosted conferences and cartoon contests denying the Holocaust.

Iran's government also oppresses minority Sunni and Sufi Muslims, sometimes harassing and imprisoning their leaders. The regime has imposed harsh prison sentences as well on reformers from the Shi'a majority.

The government's extremist interpretations of Islam also have led to women being assigned

inferior legal status and to the imprisonment of female advocates seeking to repeal laws that repress and discriminate against them.

Since the June 2009 election and Neda's death, conditions have worsened, with authorities executing peaceful protesters and reformers for "waging war against God."

This surge in abuses has driven the U.S. and the world community to respond.

In July 2010, President Obama signed the Comprehensive Iran Sanctions, Accountability, and Divestment Act (CISADA) which requires the President to impose travel bans and asset freezes on severe human rights abusers, including religious freedom violators. The U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF), on which we serve, had called for this action.

In September 2010, the President issued an executive order sanctioning eight Iranians for committing serious human rights abuses after June 2009. Three more Iranian officials and three governmental entities have since been sanctioned.

In May 2011, Rep. Ileana Ros-Lehtinen (R-FL), along with co-sponsor Rep. Howard Berman (D-CA), introduced the bipartisan Iran Threat Reduction Act, which seeks to strengthen economic sanctions, both for nuclear deterrence and to prevent further human rights violations.

The international community has also taken action. In March 2011, the UN Human Rights Council agreed to create a new Special Rapporteur on the Human Rights Situation in Iran to investigate and report on Iran's human rights abuses, another longtime USCIRF recommendation. In April 2011, the EU sanctioned 32 officials responsible for human rights abuses.

After years of rhetoric without action, these new acts are welcome, but more must follow. Abusers must be sanctioned, and those they've abused must be set free. To that end, U.S. Senator Mark Kirk (R-IL) recently launched the Iranian Dissident Awareness Program, a bipartisan, bicameral effort to spotlight and support imprisoned dissidents, including religious minorities, student activists, women's rights advocates, and human rights defenders.

Likewise, USCIRF has highlighted prisoners including seven Baha'i leaders, two of them women – Fariba Kamalabadi and Mahvash Sabet; Christian pastor Yousef Nadarkhani; Shi'a Muslim cleric Ayatollah Mohammad Kazemini Boroujerdi; and Sufi Muslim leader Morteza Mahjoubi; as well as women's rights activists like Nasrin Sotoudeh and renowned blogger Hossein Derakhshan.

The United States and the international community should intensify their demand that Iran's government release all victims of its human rights abuses immediately.

The name, "Neda" means "voice" in Persian. As we mark the second anniversary of Neda Agha-Soltan's death, we must not only be a voice for the voiceless but a harbinger of freedom – including freedom of religion -- for her country and its people.

[Dr. Don Argue](#) is Vice Chairman of the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF). [Ted Van Der Meid](#) is a Commissioner of USCIRF.