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WASHINGTON, DC – The U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) condemned the continued imprisonment of dissident Iranian Shi'a cleric Ayatollah Mohammad Kazemini Boroujerdi, who, almost five years to the day of his arrest, reportedly suffered a heart attack a few days ago.

“Ayatollah's Boroujerdi's already-poor health has deteriorated and prison authorities continue to deny him access to medical care outside the prison facility where he is held,” said USCIRF chair [Leonard Leo](#). “Pure and simple, this man, who has suffered from a serious heart condition and other physical ailments, has been unjustly detained and treated cruelly and harshly because his views differ from those of the Islamic Republic's leadership,” said Leo.

In October 2006, Ayatollah Boroujerdi, who advocates the separation of religion and state and has spoken out on behalf of the rights of Iran's religious minorities as well as those of its Shi'a Muslim majority, was arrested and imprisoned without charge. He and 17 of his followers initially were tried by a special court with jurisdiction over Shi'a clerics, and sentenced to death on spurious charges, including “enmity against God” and spreading propaganda against the regime. After an appeal, the death sentence was withdrawn and Ayatollah Boroujerdi was sentenced to 11 years in prison. Ayatollah Boroujerdi currently is serving his prison term, and the government has banned him from practicing his clerical duties and confiscated his home and belongings. Ayatollah Boroujerdi's supporters claim that he has suffered physical and mental abuse while in prison.

The Special Court for the Clergy, which is under the jurisdiction of the Supreme Leader and operates outside the confines of the Iranian judiciary, tries members of the Shi'a religious establishment in Iran. According to human rights groups, the court's procedures fall far short of international standards. Not only are proceedings held behind closed doors, but defendants can be represented only by clergymen nominated by the court and they are not required to possess any legal credentials.

“Ayatollah Boroujerdi is a dissident cleric who has a long record of speaking out in defense of the universal rights of all Iranian citizens, including religious minorities,” said USCIRF Chair Leo. “The United States and the international community should call for his immediate and unconditional release, especially given news of his deteriorating health,” said Leo.