

# The Search for Human Rights Within an Islamic Framework in Iran

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## **Introduction**

Since the Islamic Revolution in 1979, Iran has been the source of extensive criticism by international human rights NGOs and U.N. human rights bodies. The purpose of the analysis that follows is two-fold: first, this article seeks to provide a brief overview of a number of developments in contemporary Iran's unfolding debate over human rights and its place in an Islamic society, and second, it seeks to highlight the significance of these developments with respect to improved human rights conditions beyond the theoretical debates.

Generally, Iran's internationally cited human rights violations can be divided into two categories. One category of violations has consisted of those violations traditionally associated with repressive regimes, such as torture, extra-judicial executions, arbitrary detentions and limitations on the freedom of expression of political opponents. Generally, justifications based on Islamic law for these violations have been weak; however, they have been labeled as necessary for the survival of the Islamic state. When these violations have in fact been carried out in the name of provisions found in traditional Shi'a jurisprudence (for example, the imposition of death sentences for "crimes" of apostasy or waging war against God on opponents who objected to the Islamic Republic's political order or interpretations of Islamic law), the state's actions and justifications have been met with skepticism and where political space for it existed, criticism. Rarely have proponents of such measures been successful in convincing observers both inside and beyond Iran's borders that such prosecutions are attributable to a genuine commitment to implementing Islamic law and are thus not politically motivated.

The second category of human rights violations frequently cited by human rights critics involves Iran's codification and implementation of various

provisions found in traditional Shi'a jurisprudence. This is in line with the Islamic Republic's constitutional mandate to derive its laws from the shari'ah (Islamic law). Human rights violations in this category include imposition of the punishment of lashing for infringements of the Islamic moral code, including non-observance of the Islamic dress code or consumption of alcohol; imposition of the punishment of death by stoning for adultery; discrimination against recognized religious minorities in the Islamic Penal Code; the non-recognition of other religious minorities; and various forms of inequality and discrimination against women in inheritance, age of marriage, grounds for divorce, custody rights and in criminal sanctions and remedies in cases of assault or murder. It is with respect to this class of human rights violations that Iran's reformist jurists and intellectuals have made the greatest contribution; their theorizing and exegesis serves as a model for other parts of the Muslim world where civil or criminal laws are also derived from traditional Islamic jurisprudence.

Prior to 1997, the Islamic Republic frequently dismissed criticism of its human rights practices as Western, imperialist, un-Islamic and politically motivated.<sup>1</sup> However, the 1997 election of Mohamad Khatami opened up space for the emergence of a strong reform movement within civil society and the government. Central to this movement has been the debate over human rights in an Islamic society. Khatami and a largely pro-reform civil society have shifted the focus from duties within Islam to rights within Islam, contesting the justifications and bases for human rights violations cited internationally.<sup>2</sup> What has emerged is the prominence of interpretations of Islam and Islamic law that emphasize human dignity, justice, and tolerance.

The contemporary debate over Islam and human rights demonstrates that contrary to popular Western characterizations, there is no single uncontested definition of Islam and its precepts. In fact, Islamic conservatives and revivalists are often accused of internalizing the Orientalist representation of Islam as monolithic, stagnant and inherently averse to human rights.<sup>3</sup> To be sure, Iran's current debate is as much a debate over Islamic authenticity as it is anything else. In other words, it is popularly viewed as a search for what is Islamic and what is un-Islamic. As one observer has posited, what is taking shape in contemporary Iran is a struggle of Islam versus Islam.<sup>4</sup> From a human rights perspective, this point is very significant. Okafor and Agbakwa have identified three fallacies of international human rights dynamics.<sup>5</sup> First, there is typically a heaven-hell binary created in which everything that takes place in the West is presumptively considered in line with human rights norms and everything that takes place in the developing world is presumably in violation of such norms. Second, this leads to one-way traffic of criticism and condemnation. Third, these criticisms take on an abolitionist stance towards

developing countries' cultures and, in the case of Muslim societies, one could add religion and religious culture. As the authors point out, these dynamics inevitably lead to the societies of the developing world frequently taking a defensive posture, and consequently inhibiting the emergence of any meaningful human rights dialogue. The rights-centered movement arising from within Iranian society and the Shi'a religious establishment is thus more effective and sustainable because the three fallacies do not come into play. For those engaged in the debate, what is primarily at stake is reaching the Islamic ideal, not emulating outside models. Calls for the observance of human rights and criticism of existing conditions have originated from within the ranks of the Shi'a establishment itself, as well as from the revolution's faithful. Finally, Islam is not being attacked or discredited; rather, its contours are being contested.

Of course, this is not to say that actors' knowledge and consciousness of international human rights norms do not shape contemporary domestic debates; in fact, they clearly do. Newspapers frequently report on international human rights developments and publish criticisms of Iran's record. Policymakers and officials in various branches of the government regularly engage international human rights issues in negotiations with foreign delegations and in domestic and international conferences. Followers often bring international norms and their apparent incongruity with Islamic law and the Islamic Republic's policies to the attention of clerics.<sup>6</sup> What the Director for International Affairs of the Presidency's Center for Women's Participation states in response to a question regarding to what extent Islamic law must conform to international human rights norms is not only a prescription, but also a description of the dynamics currently at play. "If the question is, should we have the modernization of Islam or the Islamicization of modernity; in actuality it must be a little bit of both."<sup>7</sup>

Interestingly, while purely secular social movements exist, they are in the minority and increasingly one sees the merging of the agendas and discourse of secularists and Islamic reformists. This is particularly true in the case of women's rights, where Islamic feminists and secularists adhering strictly to the international human rights framework have joined forces.<sup>8</sup> However, also of note is the fact that many of the arguments being made by Islamic reformists in Iran share striking similarities with arguments long posited by secularists in response to the cultural relativism challenge both domestically and internationally. For example, international women's rights activists have warned against essentializing culture and religion as they are neither static nor monolithic, and considerations of who defines the essentials of culture/religion as well as the power relations between those who can and those cannot speak for culture/religion provide important insights into the flaws of the relativist stance.<sup>9</sup>

The discourse and methodology applied by Iran's reformists are just one indication of the movement's Islamic roots. As Kurzman has detailed, among reformist scholars throughout the Muslim world, there are three prominent modes of shari'ah interpretation: "the liberal shari'ah," "the silent shari'ah" and "the interpreted shari'ah."<sup>10</sup> In the following, Kurzman's definitions will be adapted specifically to the human rights discourse of reformists. The liberal shari'ah mode finds that Islam explicitly sanctions positions compatible with human rights norms. It finds that respect for human rights is inherent in Islam and in fact pre-dates Western liberalism.

The silent shari'ah mode argues that Muslims may take positions compatible with human rights in the areas that the shari'ah leaves room to do so. This is because in areas not specifically addressed by the primary sources of Islamic law, Muslims must determine the public good. The problem with this mode is that it leaves little room for challenging the aspects of Islamic law explicitly mentioned in primary sources yet considered in violation of international human rights norms.<sup>11</sup>

The interpretive shari'ah mode maintains that despite being divinely inspired, the shari'ah is open to multiple human interpretations, all of which are equally valid. Thus, interpretations of Islamic law that incorporate international human rights norms are just as authentic as traditional interpretations. In contemporary Iran, arguments falling in line with each of these modes (and often in combination) are being invoked by reformist Islamic intellectuals and jurists.

## **Pillars of the Human Rights Discourse of Iran's Reformists**

Broadly, the arguments being formulated by reformist jurists and intellectuals that are of relevance to human rights encompass the following:

- Islam and human rights are not inherently incompatible.
- The essence and most fundamental principles of Islam are grounded in notions of respect for human dignity and human rights.
- Islamic law should be interpreted in accordance with the exigencies of time, place, and context in any given society, and Islamic jurisprudence must be dynamic.
- Jurisprudence is not synonymous with shari'ah, instead shari'ah should be defined more broadly and holistically.
- The relationship between the individual and God is direct.
- Divine will and human agency are not mutually exclusive.

The most influential reformist intellectual of the Iranian Revolution is AbdolKarim Soroush, who presents an epistemological argument in his theory called the "expansion and contraction of religious knowledge." He distinguishes between the shari'ah itself and the understanding of shari'ah

developed by scholars and jurists throughout centuries of Islamic history.<sup>12</sup> While the former is divinely inspired and pure, the latter is fallible human interpretation influenced by varying social realities and other extra-religious knowledge and context.<sup>13</sup> In other words, human understanding of religion, like our understanding of nature and the system of being, is evolving. This is in large part because our understandings of non-religious subjects impact our understanding of religion. Further, Soroush himself takes the normative position that a religious society is a moral society and not necessarily a society that adheres to the strict confines of religious jurisprudence.<sup>14</sup> The implications of Soroush's theory for human rights discourse in Iran are tremendous. First, orthodox jurisprudence can no longer be viewed as the authoritative codification of Islamic law. Second, shari'ah and notions of Islamic government interpreted in line with contemporary thought and knowledge including international human rights norms are not only just as authentic as other interpretations, they enjoy greater justification based on their moral and ethical foundations.

Evidence of the impact of Soroush's thought can be found in the various debates in which Iranian society today finds itself engaged. Although it is rarely acknowledged, the impact can also be seen in the thought of a growing number of Shi'a jurists.<sup>15</sup> Hojjat al-islam Mohsen Saidzadeh, a mid-ranking cleric, has in recent years dedicated much of his scholarship to human rights and particularly women's rights in Islam. Saidzadeh presumes the existence of inherent and universal human rights and finds that human rights are to be placed above specific Rulings found in orthodox Islamic jurisprudence. "Fundamental rights do not fall within the realm of *fiqh* (Islamic jurisprudence) . . . because they are essential (*zati*) and are not subject to debate or explanation. Whether or not a *faqih* (jurist) gives a *fatwa*, whether he agrees or disagrees, humanity has the right to life. Human beings possess an essential dignity."<sup>16</sup>

Saidzadeh argues the roles and responsibilities underlying the distribution of rights in traditional Islamic jurisprudence are socially constructed and consequently must be revisited.<sup>17</sup> This stance is particularly significant in Saidzadeh's work on gender equality. For instance, traditionally, jurists argue that Islamic laws pertaining to women's status and rights are reflective of natural sex differences and corresponding gender roles. One of the most commonly cited examples involves the distribution of labor and economic responsibility in Islamic law. Traditionalists assume women are more fit for domestic affairs due to their emotional/nurturing natures while men are more fit for worldly affairs due to their rational/analytical natures. Accordingly, Islam assigns financial responsibility for and headship of each family to men. The fact that men bear the family's financial burden, in turn, justifies shari'ah

prescriptions for women's inheritance or remedies in cases of assault or murder being half the amount paid to men. Saidzadeh asserts that the assumptions about each gender's nature and accompanying assignment of roles underlying discriminatory provisions in orthodox jurisprudence are merely social constructs. Accordingly, he embarks on the exercise of deconstructing such longstanding Rulings. In doing so, he poses a major challenge to the conventional Shi'a rights calculus. He then goes on to utilize traditional methods of jurisprudential reasoning, deduction, and evidence to make the case that gender equality has jurisprudential precedence and is in fact rooted in the dictates of Islam.<sup>18</sup>

Finally, according to Saidzadeh, primary Islamic sources recognize humanity's agency, freedom and self-determination.<sup>19</sup> This notion is further developed by another jurist crucial to the Iranian debate over human rights in Islam: Ayatollah Mohammad Mussavi Bojnordi, Head of the Islamic Human Rights Commission. Bojnourdi contends broadly that Islam prescribes its adherents to do that which is good, moral and in the best interests of society, and prohibits Muslims from doing that which is undesirable.<sup>20</sup> Yet, religion does not determine what specifically constitutes the good and the undesirable.<sup>21</sup> Islam provides only a number of core principles, such as adherence to justice, which form the parameters for human determinations of what constitutes good and undesirable conduct in a given time, place, and societal context.<sup>22</sup>

Moreover, in these determinations, Bojnourdi maintains that Muslims can look beyond the Muslim world to the opinions of international intellectual elites (*oqala*),<sup>23</sup> parting with the long-held conservative contention that international human rights norms are Western, and thus un-Islamic. For example, he states, "At one time lashing (as punishment) was accepted, but today it is discussed as torture. So we cannot come and say that our shari'ah, which is based on justice and ethics, accepts something that all of the major thinkers of the world consider torture."<sup>24</sup>

Many actors in the debate over the place of rights in Islam, including the three already mentioned, contend that in determinations of the dictates of Islam, general principles of humanity and morality must be accorded primacy over specific provisions found in various sources of Islamic jurisprudence — provisions which they generally contend were intended for or are a product of a different time, place and social context. Another intellectual who caused a great stir in Iran by making such a distinction was Hashem Aghajari. In June 2002, Aghajari, a professor with close political affiliations to President Khatami and extensive revolutionary credentials due to his status as a disabled veteran of the Iran-Iraq war, delivered a speech entitled "From Monkey to Man, a Call for Islamic Protestantism."<sup>25</sup> In his speech, Aghajari argues that Muslims do not

need mediators between them and God. Shi'a Islam's clerical hierarchy is not Islamic; rather it is a model taken from the Catholic church. This clerical hierarchy must be abolished in a move away from "traditional Islam," which is rigid and doctrinal, towards "core Islam" which is in line with Islamic justice and human dignity. He faults Shi'a clerics with the selective acceptance of the fruits of modernity. For example, they are willing to drive luxury cars that the common man cannot afford, but refuse to incorporate human rights into Islamic jurisprudence. Specifically, he calls for respect of minority rights, political rights, and women's rights, finds that lashing constitutes torture, and states that in the final analysis, without respect for human rights, there is no Islam.

There are dozens of other jurists and Islamic intellectuals in Iran making variations of the arguments presented here; Abdullah Nuri, Mohsen Kadivar, Hassan Yussefi Eshkevari, to name a few. Many have paid a heavy price for their challenges to Iran's political and religious establishment. Soroush has been repeatedly attacked by vigilantes allied with the conservatives and now spends most of his time teaching abroad. Saidzadeh was imprisoned and stripped of his clerical garb upon his release. Aghajari's speech resulted in a death sentence, which was subsequently overturned due to widespread student demonstrations and the resulting intervention of the Supreme leader. There is a saying among reformists in Iran that "Since Khatami's arrival, there is freedom of expression in Iran, but there is still no guarantee of freedom after expression."

## **Translating the Debate into Improved Human Rights Practice**

Clearly, one crucial question remains to be addressed: How have these theoretical contests translated into improved human rights practice? Perhaps the most significant change with long-term implications is the fact that "human rights" is no longer a stigmatized phrase policy-makers and intellectuals go to great lengths to avoid for fear of being labeled "Western." In 1999, when asked why amidst all of the references to "people's rights," "citizens' rights," and "women's rights" in the pages of the reformist newspapers for which he served as chief editor, there was virtually no mention of "human rights," Moshallah Shams-ol Vaezin explained that in the same manner that the term "liberal" did, "human rights" was a term that evoked tremendous political sensitivities and could be considered outside the bounds of acceptable post-revolutionary discourse.<sup>26</sup> In 2002, "human rights" is no longer a stigmatized term or concept. In fact, the opposite is true; justifications of rights violations in the name of upholding Islamic principles are now more frequently the subject of suspicion, stigma and critique. This speaks to the rise in legitimacy of the concept of



human rights not only among reformists, but more broadly throughout Iranian society and within Iranian political culture, despite the efforts of conservatives and traditionalists.

Another dimension of this is a visible change in the attitude of Iranian government officials towards the international human rights order. The Iranian government increasingly engages with and takes international human rights debates more seriously. Ironically, this is in part due to its post-September 11<sup>th</sup> interest in using the human rights framework to protect Muslim minority rights in Western countries.<sup>27</sup> The change in attitude can also be attributed to a certain extent to the fact that after repeated resolutions condemning Iran's human rights record, the United Nations Human Rights Commission decided not to extend such a resolution against Iran in 2002. The Iranian government had previously resented the resolutions and considered them politically motivated due to the fact that many of Iran's neighbors had comparable or worse human rights records, yet there was silence on the part of the intergovernmental bodies with regard to those states' human rights records.<sup>28</sup> Now that this dynamic is no longer present, as Mehrpour observes, Iranian officials are more willing to consider international criticisms and distinguish between those they find to be valid and those with which they disagree.<sup>29</sup> One indication that Mehrpour's assessment is accurate is the fact that in July 2002, Iran invited all UN delegations associated with the Thematic Procedures of the U.N. Human Rights Commission to visit Iran and, in February 2003, a team investigating arbitrary detentions was welcomed.<sup>30</sup>

Finally, as Tohidi has described and the interview of Molaverdi demonstrates, with respect to government bureaucrats working in the area of women's rights, internal changes during the course of the revolution have shifted official focus from promoting and exporting revolutionary values to uncovering how international and global human rights trends are relevant to Iran's circumstances.<sup>31</sup>

These developments have opened the way for the pursuit of several initiatives in Iran's reformist dominated parliament to push through the ratifications of additional international human rights treaties. Since early 2002, a serious debate over the ratification of the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) has taken shape. Interestingly, the Center for Women's Participation and reformists like Ayatollah Bojnourdi originally advocated that the convention be ratified without any reservations.<sup>32</sup> However, once it became apparent that conservative opposition to such a ratification was substantial, the government proposed ratifying with the general reservation that Iran would commit to only those provisions that did not contravene Islamic laws and Islamic values. Despite this concession, conservatives found the prospect of Iran becoming



party to a Convention with an object and purpose that challenged traditional Islamic gender dynamics unsettling, and a *fatwa* was issued against CEDAW's ratification. Still, reformists and particularly the women's faction in parliament are aggressively pursuing the introduction of a CEDAW ratification bill and in the process are making use of the arguments of sympathetic jurists and intellectuals to strengthen their efforts. More recently, the question of ratification of the Convention Against Torture (CAT) has also reached the corridors of parliament, with disputes over the compatibility of Islamic law and values with the provisions of the treaty certain to follow.

In 2002, a number of legislative initiatives seeking to bring Iranian laws into greater conformity with human rights standards were either proposed or passed. First, parliament passed legislation that raised the age of marriage for girls from 9 to 15 years of age. The Conservative Council of Guardians rejected the resolution on the grounds that it contravened Islamic law; however, the Expediency Council, a body that mediates between the reformist Parliament and the Council of Guardians, decided on raising the age of marriage for girls to 13. While this was not an ideal outcome, it was indisputably a human rights victory. Legislation that presents guidelines for combating torture, and expands the president's power in relation to the virtually unchecked power of the conservative judiciary have also been proposed in parliament in recent months. Finally, on December 29, 2002, a prominent cleric, Ayatollah Naser Makarem Shirazi, issued a *fatwa* stating that stoning was not the only punishment for adultery, opening the path for parliamentary efforts to ban the practice.<sup>33</sup>

## Conclusion

While Iran is frequently cited as a classic case of non-compliance with international law, it is apparent that international human rights norms and consciousness have entered the fabric of Iran's religious and political culture and institutions. As previous sections of this article have attempted to convey, since the election of President Khatami, Iranian society has been actively involved in defining and redefining the notion of rights both within Islam and in an Islamic society existing within a global context with an ingrained human rights normative order.

Detailing the social, political, and legal transformations Iran has undergone in recent years can, however, paint an overly optimistic picture of the current situation as well as the immediate prospects for Iran attaining high standards of human rights observance. Few would dispute the claim that the challenges and tasks ahead for Iranian human rights advocates remain formidable and the risks of the gains made thus far being curtailed are still quite real. Conservatives have retained control of several key sources of power, the most

important of them for the purposes of the current discussion being the judiciary, the armed forces and the council of Guardians. These institutions have repeatedly been used to impede progress of the reformist agenda.

Even so, this situation does not detract from the significance of the transformations described above. The theoretical debates that have enthralled Iranian society since the election of Khatami constitute an historic conceptual turning point in the search for human rights within an Islamic framework, not only for Iran, but for the Muslim world. Perhaps what is most extraordinary and promising about contemporary Iranian society is that the repression carried out by conservatives has, for the most part, failed to silence the voices of those calling upon the Islamic Republic to respect human rights.

## Endnotes

1. See discussion by Zachary Karabell, "Iran and Human Rights" in *Human Rights and Comparative Foreign Policy*, David Forsythe ed. (United Nations Press, 2000).
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3. Charles Kurzman, "Introduction: Liberal Islam and its Islamic Context," *Liberal Islam, A Sourcebook*, Charles Kurzman ed. (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1998), 3.
4. Genevieve Abdo, "This Aging Ayatollah Could Rewrite Iran's Future," *The Washington Post*, February 10, 2003, available at <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/articles/A42736-2003Feb7.html>.
5. Obiora Chinedu Okafor and Shedrack C. Agbakwa, "Reimagining International Human Rights Education in Our Time: Beyond Three Constitutive Orthodoxies," *Leiden Journal of International Affairs*, Vol. 14, No. 3. 2001, 563–590.
6. See for example, Ayatollah Yusef Sanei. "Questions on Women's Rights" on Sanei's website at [www.saanei.org](http://www.saanei.org) (visited on 03/12/03). One follower of the *ejtibad* of Ayatollah Sanei for example poses the following question: "Considering what is going on in the world, our jurisprudence should be responsive on a global scale with responses which include respect of human rights and honor. On the subject that jurisprudential ideas differ a little with the criteria of human rights in international agreements . . . what solution do you suggest?" When the Ayatollah offers an ambiguous answer, the questioner pursues his point, citing specific areas in which traditional jurisprudence and international norms are in conflict.
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8. Mehrangiz Kar, "Women's Strategies in Iran from the 1979 Revolution to 1999" in *Globalization, Gender and Religion: the Politics of Women's Rights in Catholic and Muslim Countries*, Jane Baynes and Nayereh Tohidi eds. (New York: Palgrave, 2001), 185–190.
9. See for example Tracy Higgins, "Anti-Essentialism, Relativism and Human Rights," *Harvard Women's Law Journal*, Vol. 19 (Spring 1996), 89.
10. Kurzman, "Introduction: Liberal Islam and its Islamic Context." See also Charles Kurzman, "Liberal Islam, Prospects and Challenges," *Middle East Review of International Affairs*, Vol. 3, No. 3, September 1999.
11. Kurzman, "Introduction: Liberal Islam and its Islamic Context," 16.

12. Abdolkarim Soroush, "The Evolution and Devolution of Religious Knowledge" in *Liberal Islam: A Sourcebook*, Charles Kurzman ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 244–251.
13. *Ibid.*
14. "Contraction and Expansion of Women's Rights: An Interview with Dr. Abdol-Karim Soroush" Zanan 2000, available at [www.seraj.org/zanan.htm](http://www.seraj.org/zanan.htm).
15. Charles Kurzman, "Critics Within: Islamic Scholars' Protests against the Islamic State in Iran," *International Journal of Politics, Culture and Society*, Vol. 15, No. 2, Winter 2001, 346.
16. Seyyed Mohsen Saidzadeh, "Fiqh and Fiqahat" *UCLA Journal of Islamic & Near Eastern Law*, Vol. 1, No. 2, 2002, 239.
17. Kambiz GhaneaBassiri, "Hujjat al-Islam Mohsen Sa'idzadeh: A contemporary Iranian Cleric on Fiqh, Women, and Civil Society" *UCLA Journal of Islamic & Near Eastern Law*, 231.
18. Ziba Mir Hosseini, "Hojjat al-Islam Saidzade-Iran" Women Living Under Muslim Laws Dossier 21 (September 21) available at <http://www.wluml.org/english/publications/dossiers/dossier21/hojjat-al-eslam-saidzadeh.htm> (visited on 10/13/2002).
19. GhaneaBassiri, "Hojjat al-Islam Mohsen Saidzadeh . . .," 231.
20. Ayatollah Mohammad Mussavi Bojnourdi, Head of the Islamic Human Rights Commission interview conducted in December 2002.
21. *Ibid.*
22. *Ibid.*
23. *Ibid.*
24. *Ibid.*
25. Hashem Aghajari "From Monkey to Man, A Call to Islamic Protestantism" speech delivered in June 2002 in Hamedan, Iran. Available at [www.iranian.com/opinion/2002/aghajari](http://www.iranian.com/opinion/2002/aghajari).
26. Mashallah Shams ol Vaezin, Chief Editor of Jame-eh, Nshat, Asr-e Azadegan Dailies. Interview conducted August 1999.
27. Hossein Mehrpour, Advisor to the President on Issues of Upholding of Constitutional Rights, Interview conducted in December 2002. See also "Foreign Ministry Spokesman Denounces Detention of Iranians By US" IRNA News Service, December 12, 2002 in which Hamid Reza Asefi, the Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesman states that "Americans are using the September 11th incident as a vehicle for not wanting to adhere to international human rights conventions."
28. Hossein Mehrpour, Advisor to the President on Issues of Upholding of Constitutional Rights, interview conducted in December 2002.
29. *Ibid.*
30. "U.N. Human Rights Team in Iran after 7 Year Absence," *Reuter News Service*, February 16, 2003.
31. Nayereh Tohidi, "International Connections of the Iranian Woman's Movement" in *Iran and the Surrounding World: Interactions in Culture and Cultural Politics*, Nikki R. Keddie and Rudi Mathee eds., (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2002) and Shahindokht Molaverdi, Director of International Affairs for the Center for Women's Participation (of the Presidency), Interview conducted in December 2002.
32. "Modir-e kol-e huquq-e beyn-ol-melal-e vezarat-e omoor-e khareje: Iran az napeyvastan be convensiyon-e raf'-e tabiz aleyh-e zanan motezarar mishavad" Bonyad Daily, February 20, 2002, and Shahindokht Molaverdi, Director of International Affairs for the Center for Women's Participation (of the Presidency), Interview conducted in December 2002.
33. Ali Akbar Dareini, "Iran's Senior Clerics Say Death by Stoning Could be Stopped" Associated Press, December 29, 2002.