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CORRECTIONS

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PROOF

fatal. Symptoms or signs of mesothelioma may not appear until 20 to 50 years, or more, after exposure to asbestos. Studies show that the Australians most at risk of developing mesothelioma include trades such as carpenters, construction workers, electrical engineers, insulation installers, miners, plumbers and shipbuilders.

At Batlow in my Riverina electorate not only did a devastating hailstorm on 9 November last year wipe out the apple crop and strip trees to the extent they will take years to recover but also a major processor now faces asbestos-related damage to a warehouse. This has real and lasting financial implications for this town, for which apples are almost its sole economic means. Hopefully assistance will be forthcoming to Batlow as it tries to build a future after being hit with more setbacks than could be deemed fair. I commend the motion to the House.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr KJ Thomson):

The time for the debate has expired. The debate is adjourned and the resumption of the debate will be made an order of the day for the next sitting.

Human Rights: Iran

Ms PARKE (Fremantle) (20:51): I move—

That this House:

(1) expresses deep concern to our inter-parliamentary colleagues in the Iranian Parliament regarding serious and systematic human rights violations occurring in the Islamic Republic of Iran;

(2) notes the following from United Nations Secretary General Ban Ki-moon's report on The situation of human rights in the Islamic Republic of Iran released in September 2011, that:

(a) Iran has stepped up its crackdown on human rights workers, women's rights activists, journalists and government opponents;

(b) since the beginning of 2011, Iran has seen a notable increase in the use of capital punishment for political and juvenile prisoners;

(c) Iran has increased discrimination, in some cases amounting to persecution, against a number of religious and ethnic minority groups;

(d) the United Nations continues to hold long-standing concerns in respect of the treatment of the Baha'i community and the trial and sentencing of seven Baha'i community leaders, which did not meet due process and fair trial requirements;

(e) there is limited enjoyment of political, economic, social and cultural rights by, inter alia, Arabs, Azeri, Baloch and Kurdish communities, and some communities of non-citizens; and

(f) since May 2011, security forces conducted raids on the home of individuals involved in the activities of the Baha'i Institute for Higher Education and arrested 15 of its members in various cities;

(3) notes that in recent months there have been:

(a) further reports of the denial of access to Iranian universities for young people on the basis of their political or religious beliefs; and

(b) prison terms of between four and five years imposed on seven Iranian Baha'is in relation to their association with the Baha'i Institute for Higher Education; and

(4) calls on the National Consultative Assembly of Iran as fellow members of the inter parliamentary union and as the parliamentary body of a member state of the United Nations, to:

(a) promote and protect fundamental human rights irrespective of origin, ethnicity, sex, religion, opinion, or other status;

(b) investigate the denial of access to universities for student activists, Baha'is, and others barred from universities for reasons other than academic capability; and

(c) seeks a judicial review of the trials of prisoners of conscience, including the seven former Baha'i leaders, lawyer Ms Nasrin Sotoudeh, and other human rights defenders and lawyers.

The subject of human rights in Iran was last debated in this place on 15 November 2010 after a notice of motion was introduced by the member for Blair, Shane Neumann. Since that time the number, range and frequency of serious human rights violations has increased. In 2011, Iran was cited repeatedly, including by the UN Secretary-General, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights and major international human rights NGOs for violating international human rights law. In September last year, UN Secretary-General, Ban Ki-moon, released an updated report, *Situation of human rights in the Islamic Republic of Iran*. The report outlines eight areas in which the Iranian government is committing serious and systematic violations against the human rights of its own people. These are: instances of torture, cruel and inhuman treatment, and corporal punishment; the application of the death penalty, including by public executions; the execution of juvenile offenders; the use of stoning as a method of execution; the abnegation of women's rights; the serious abuse of the rights of minorities; the failure to protect freedom of peaceful assembly and association, and freedoms of opinion, expression and religion; and the lack of due process rights.

This motion calls upon the National Consultative Assembly of Iran, as fellow members of the Inter-Parliamentary Union and as the parliamentary body of a member state of the United Nations, to promote and protect human rights and to seek judicial review of the trials of prisoners of conscience. Before going into detail on some of those matters, I simply wish to note that Iran, with its impressive history as an integral part of the cradle of civilisation which has produced poets like Khayyam, Saadi and Rumi, brought us Persian rugs and gardens, and made an incredible contribution to international cultural heritage, and traditionally honoured teachers with the highest status in society,

has much to offer the world if it is able to change course and correct its actions.

I would like to pay tribute to the current generation of courageous Iranians, including Nobel peace prize winner Shirin Ebadi and lawyers Abolfattah Soltani and Nasrin Sotoudeh, who have advocated the upholding of fundamental human rights and peaceful democratic change at enormous personal cost. I think it is also important to note that I do not make these criticisms as part of an Iran bashing exercise while ignoring the misdeeds of other countries. I believe I have been even-handed, including with respect to my own country and our allies in pointing out human rights violations where they have occurred.

The UN Secretary-General's 2011 report on Iran found that the application of the death penalty, including on juveniles, has continued and dramatically increased. At the time of Amnesty's 2011 report, at least 600 executions had occurred, reportedly 80 per cent of them for alleged drug offences. Some executions are carried out in public. Iranians authorities claim that public executions are a deterrent to crime. However, international human rights organisations have always maintained that executions in public add to the already cruel, inhuman and degrading nature of the death penalty, and have a dehumanising effect on the victim and a brutalising effect on those who witness the execution.

In January last year, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights expressed grave concerns in a letter to the Iranian government about the death sentences handed down to two young men following their conviction on sodomy offences, allegedly committed when they were minors. It is sobering to note that at a time when this country and this parliament are debating the rights of same-sex couples to marry, which I fully support, gay people in Iran and in a number of other countries are still fighting for the right to life. So, too, women in Iran who speak out for human rights and the right to live without violence, to make their own choices on marriage and employment and to control their own bodies—they continue to face intimidation and harassment. The UN Secretary-General's 2011 report found that there have been persistent arrests of women involved in campaigning for rights, as well as the arrests of journalists and lawyers who speak out on their behalf.

I would now like to turn to the prosecution of religious and ethnic minority groups in Iran. I represented the Australian parliament at an Inter-Parliamentary Union conference in late 2010 at which an Iranian parliamentarian extolled the virtue of Iran's freedom of religion as expressed in its 1979 constitution. It is true that Iran's constitution contains a list of recognised religions—those that existed before the time of the Prophet Mohammed. Notwithstanding

the apparent tolerance towards those religions in the constitution, Human Rights Watch in its 2012 world report on Iran has documented cases of severe discrimination and persecution of Iran's religious and ethnic minorities, including Sunni Muslims, converts to Christianity and Arabs.

But the Iranian state has perhaps been most savage in its oppression of the Baha'is, who are the largest non-Muslim religious minority in Iran and who are not recognised in the constitution because Baha'u'llah, the founder of the Bah'ai faith, came after the Prophet Mohammed. As I have noted previously in this place, there are many people of the Bah'ai faith living in Australia, including in my electorate of Fremantle and surrounding areas. I would like to acknowledge the presence of Natalie Mobini and other Baha'is in the Speaker's gallery tonight.

Baha'is believe in the unity of religion and humankind, and in harmony between science and religion. They have an elected leadership and promote equality between men and women. In my experience, they are gentle and peace loving people, so it is difficult to understand the degree of hostility by the authorities in Iran towards them. During debate on the previous motion, the member for Blair noted there were at that time 50 Baha'is being held in prisons across Iran due to their faith. That number has doubled over the past year. These prisoners include the seven Baha'i leaders who were arrested in 2008 and have been held in appalling conditions ever since. They have each received sentences of 20 years after brief court sessions, characterised by a lack of due process, as noted by the UN Secretary-General. Several of these prisoners have immediate family members who are Australian citizens—brother, sister, aunts, nephews and nieces, who wonder if they will ever see their loved ones again. Indeed, the oldest of the prisoners, Mr Khanjani, has already suffered the loss of his beloved wife, who has passed away since he was imprisoned.

Among the Baha'i prisoners are a group of educators, referred to in the motion, who have been sentenced to prison terms of four and five years for the purported crime of providing education to young people who are barred from accessing Iran's universities on the basis of their religion. The Baha'i faith highly values education and when it became clear, following the early years of the Islamic revolution, that the regime was determined to prevent Baha'i students from accessing tertiary education, the Baha'i community in Iran took the remarkable and creative step of establishing its own informal mechanism to enable them to study. They used the services of Baha'i lecturers, who had all been sacked from public universities, first providing study programs by correspondence and later through small classes

conducted in homes around the country and even through on-line courses.

In May 2011, the Iranian authorities launched a concerted attack against the Baha'i Institute for Higher Education, conducting coordinated raids on 39 homes across the country, confiscating property and arresting 16 individuals. Seven of those people were sentenced in October 2011 for 'membership in the deviant Baha'ist sect, with the goal of taking action against the security of the country'. One of these prisoners has a brother who is an Australian citizen, a longstanding resident of Dubbo, who is desperately worried for him. The member for Parkes spoke about his case in this place in June 2011. These cases represent only a handful of the 100 Baha'is currently held in Iranian prison. The prisoners themselves represent only some of the more than 500 Baha'is arrested since August 2004 and those arrested, in turn, only represent a tiny portion of the many thousands of Baha'is who have been subjected to physical assaults, intimidation and questioning, property searches and confiscation, monitoring of their bank accounts, movement and activities, denial of work and education and even the desecration and destruction of graves and cemeteries.

Last November Canadian senator Romeo Dallaire, the former UN peacekeeping force commander who defied orders to leave Rwanda during the 1994 genocide, told a Canadian Senate inquiry that Iran's current actions against Baha'is reminded him of what he witnessed in Africa:

The similarities with what I saw in Rwanda are absolutely unquestionable, equal ... and in fact applied with seemingly the same verve ... The alarming increase in incarceration among the Baha'is and, most particularly, among their leadership; the disproportionate sentences and unreasonable bail and the vile propaganda that paints Baha'is as cultish and part of a Zionist conspiracy to undermine the Islamic state of Iran is all ... false. It is all an instrument to excuse the deliberate actions by that government to destroy that religion within their boundaries.

He also said:

Make no mistake these are not only indices of past and present persecution; they are warning signs of mass atrocities, of genocide. Let us not witness another one, fully conscious of what the consequences are.

I conclude by simply noting that the abuse of human rights in Iran today is utterly unacceptable and unworthy of a once great nation. I urge Iranian parliamentarians to look to their hearts and consciences to remedy this situation and to support their own people's efforts for change. I thank all members who are making a contribution to this debate tonight.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr KJ Thomson): Is the motion seconded?

Ms Saffin: I second the motion and reserve my right to speak.

Ms O'DWYER (Higgins) (21:01): I stand today in support of the motion of the member for Fremantle. I stand together with somebody from the opposite side of the chamber in condemning the abhorrent and repugnant human rights abuses that are currently occurring in the so-called Republic of Iran. There must be no more serious and heinous act in this world than a government turning on its own people and committing violent atrocities on its own citizenry. The very institution that is designed to defend the rights of its people turns persecutor on those that it is expected to protect.

The Arab Spring, at its inception, gave us all hope and anticipation of a positive cultural and political revolution across the Middle East. The optimist in all of us was hoping that democracy would sweep across northern Africa and into the Persian Gulf in a tidal wave of freedom. We did not want Israel to continue to stand as the lone beacon of democracy in the Middle East. Alas, on the ground, the Arab Spring has not matched the anticipation. For all of the hopes that we had, the people of Iran, Syria, Libya and Bahrain have been met with bullets, aggression and brutality. It is only the acts of the desperate and despicable that unleash the might of its armed forces on its own people, and we have witnessed that. The Arab Spring gave us hope of democracy and the young Iranians on the street gave us hope for change, but we have seen the acts of a true despot in that of the President of Iran, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad.

One needs only look at a number of his public statements to discover the depths of this so-called leader's depravity. On the state of Israel he has stated that it 'must be wiped off the map' and that 'with God's grace this regime will be annihilated and Palestinians and other regional nations will be rid of its bad omen'. On the Holocaust he has said:

Some European countries insist on saying that Hitler killed millions of innocent Jews in furnaces and they insist on it to the extent that if anyone proves something contrary to that they condemn that person and throw them in jail ... we don't accept this claim.

He went on to say that they, being Germans or Europeans:

... have invented a myth that Jews were massacred and place this above God, religions and the prophets.

On Zionists—read Jews—he has said:

The Zionists and their protectors are the most detested people in all of humanity, and the hatred is increasing every day.

And he has said:

The world powers established these filthy bacteria, the Zionist regime, which is lashing out at the nations in the region like a wild beast.

Finally, on the 60th anniversary of the state of Israel's independence, he said:

Those who think they can revive the stinking corpse of the usurping and fake Israeli regime by throwing a birthday party are seriously mistaken.

Any one of these statements on its own warrants an immediate condemnation, yet this despicable vitriol is left unchallenged and has been left unchallenged too often and for too long. It is now that the world is starting to take notice of Iran. It is only after the tragic loss of life that the world is paying the attention it should have paid many years before. These words of a tyrant lead to deeds of a tyrant. It should come as no surprise that the owner of such vile words could be a perpetrator of such vile acts. The only question that remains is: how many people must continue to die before the international community stands against such repression?

In Australia during this time one must ask these questions. Who stands conspicuously quiet? Who stands silent while these human rights are abused? It is not those sitting directly opposite me. It is, in fact, the Greens, those people who suggest that they are the champions of human rights and the keepers of the moral chalice, those professed keepers of all that is right and ethical. Where, I ask you, is Senator Brown condemning these actions? Where is Senator Hanson-Young on her soapbox demanding justice? Where is the member for Melbourne, Adam Bandt, in this chamber supporting this motion? Where are the Greens protesting in the streets? Most importantly, given all that we have learned about the boycott, divestments and sanctions scheme that grew from the Greens local council movement in Marrickville, where are the calls for the boycotts of Iranian companies or even of Syrian ones, to be truly consistent? No, all that is simply reserved for Israel.

Interestingly, the Greens also profess to be strong champions of human rights, particularly for those who are homosexual. Yet it is the country of Israel, the only democracy in the region, that legislates rights for women and homosexuals. In fact, in a recent poll conducted by GayCities.com in conjunction with American Airlines, Tel Aviv was rated the best gay travel destination of 2011. Yet here the Greens condemn Israel and not Iran.

Could you imagine if the Prime Minister of Israel had prayed for the 'annihilation' of the Palestinians? How many motions would the Greens have moved by now? How many press releases, demonstrations and media conferences would they have called? I conducted a search on the Greens website. I typed 'Iran' into their search feature, 23 results were returned and in those results there was not one mention—not one, single, solitary mention—of the atrocities that have taken place, of the abhorrent preachings of the President of Iran or of the blatant human rights abuses posed against ethnic minorities, women and homosexuals. However, if you type in 'Israel' you will

find pages and pages and pages—in particular pages as to how you can be involved as well in the BDS movement. This is a truly sad state of affairs and it is of great concern in particular to me that the Greens do not stand with us in this chamber against such violence against human rights workers, women's rights activists, journalists and government opponents.

The Greens seem to quote the UN when it suits them and ignore them when it does not conform to their agenda. And make no mistake: the Greens agenda on Israel is well and truly on show. It is incumbent upon all of us who, at times, take our freedoms for granted to stand up for those who do not share the same freedoms. I call on all members of this parliament, including the Greens—so including Senator Bob Brown—to support this motion and to highlight the atrocities and depravity of the Iranian government and to stand up for the fact that these depravities must come to an end. For too long we have turned a blind eye to the signs that have been staring us in the face, and we must not accept what is unacceptable. I call on the Greens to stand with us in this chamber and support the human rights that are being abused in Iran and to make a very strong and public statement about it.

Mr DANBY (Melbourne Ports) (21:11): I commend the member for Fremantle on her motion on human rights abuses in Iran and agree with much of the sentiment expressed by the member for Higgins. Parliamentary colleagues, we all recall the stolen Iranian elections of 2010, a fundamental offence to all democrats around the world. We should have known that day when suddenly, in an abandonment of all precedence, the Iranian ministry of the interior picked up the ballot boxes in Iran and suddenly a government that was so unpopular, by contrast with the candidates who were popular, was the subject of a reversal of all predictions happening particularly in certain regions. We remember the images of young people in green attire, protesting against the corrupted and rigged elections. Since that time the Iranian regime, led by Supreme Leader Khamenei and his grotesque Premier Ahmadinejad, has perpetrated systematic abuses of human rights against the Iranian people.

The crackdown on dissidents and human rights activists has been so intense that last month alone we saw journalists Saeed Madani, Parastoo Dokouhaki, Marizeh Rassouli, Mohammad Soleymaninia, Sahameddin Bourghani, Fatemeh Kheradmand, Arash Sadeghi, Ehsan Houshmand and Hassan Fathi detained. Seeking to consolidate its power over the Iranian people, the ayatollah regime of Ahmadinejad and Khamenei have engaged in what the United Nations has described as:

... practices that amount to torture, cruel, or degrading treatment of detainees, the imposition of the death penalty in the absence of proper judicial safeguards,—

the abuse of—

the status of women, the persecution of religious and ethnic minorities, and the erosion of civil and political rights, in particular, the harassment and intimidation of human rights defenders and civil society actors.

Late last year I rose in this House to speak about the crackdown on human rights activists in Iran, including the shocking report that an Iranian actress, Marzeih Vafamehr, had been sentenced to jail and 90 lashes for a film that had been in part critical of the regime. It was a film that had an Australian connection, being supported by an Australian film authority. One of the few creative sectors left in that benighted country has been its film industry. I also spoke of the political science student, Payman Aref, who was jailed for a year by the regime and received, shockingly, 74 lashes for criticizing the president. These abuses are characteristic of a regime intent on crushing any opposition to its right to rule. Of course, we have all known over the last years of its terrible abuse of people of the very gentle Baha'i religion. Perhaps the most disturbing human rights violation perpetrated by this regime is that women and under age people, some as young as 16 years of age, are executed despite Iranian laws outlawing this. It is a regime that employs the dreadful Basij—thugs, who are very much like the SA in 1930s Germany—to beat and torture members of the public, to stab the famous young Iranian woman, Neda Agha-Soltan, who bled to death in the square after the elections.

Charges against the Iranian regime include the fact that Supreme Leader Ahmadinejad accused people of warring against god, one of the so-called terrible crimes practised by dissidents. We must remember that those in power are not representative of the great Persian civilization, of its people and of the current generation. We mourn for them and for the great civilisation which is being defamed by this outrageous regime.

Ahmadinejad has also detained opposition leaders Mir-Hossein Mousavi and Mehdi Karroubi. Bloggers and journalists are constantly detained, imprisoned and denied proper treatment. The power of the regime is manifest not only at home but also through its use of violent fanatics in Lebanon, Hezbollah, and in Gaza, Hamas. We have seen the violence over the last few weeks in Syria, Iran's ally. We see precisely the tactics the Iranian regime has used against its own people in Hezbollah and the Revolutionary Guards have been used as snipers to gun down civilians in the streets of Derra, Homs and Aleppo. It is incumbent upon all of us to remember the great words of Vaclav Havel:

The salvation of this human world lies nowhere else than in the human heart, in the human power to reflect, in human meekness and human responsibility.

We have a responsibility, as men and women in parliament, to speak out against these injustices and stand up for the voiceless. *(Time expired)*

Mr SIMPKINS (Cowan) (21:16): I appreciate the opportunity to speak on Iran for the second time in a week. This motion is about human rights in the Islamic Republic of Iran and I would say that there is very little that constitutes human rights in that nation. Indeed until the establishment of a liberal democracy I cannot see much hope at all.

What we know about Iran is that the current leaders were pretty much the junior officers of the Revolutionary Guard in the period shortly after the 1979 overthrow of the Shah. What we also know is that it is a country of failure—economic failure and failure to even achieve the hopes they had for their own revolution. Perhaps the fact that President Ahmadinejad, being the best known of the leadership group, acknowledges that the nation has been a failure is not that positive a factor. It is certainly my view that, in acknowledging their failures, what they seek is to revive the revolution and get back to its basics. The revival they pursue is firstly through regional leadership and that they seek to achieve through a foreign policy triumph.

It is of course hard to achieve regional leadership when you do not have a model that others could be inspired by. A basket case of an economy is no inspiration. A Shia Islam dominated nation is again not the leader that the mainly Sunni Middle East will seek to follow, and of course with Iran not being Arab, they are again not easily able to win hegemony in the region. However, all such uninspiring and unsuccessful regimes turn to the usual prescriptions to overcome pathetic failure. In the Middle East that is hatred and threats towards Israel and domestically of course finding local scapegoats for the Iranian government's inability to create a working and effective society that governs in the best interests of the people.

Briefly I would remind the House that in the near future Iran will have developed a nuclear warhead that can be placed on the missiles they already possess. Iran as a nuclear power is not the sort of threat that we want in the Middle East or elsewhere in the world. The time for direct action to alleviate that threat approaches and negotiation and talk is only an Iranian ploy to gain time, in my opinion.

This motion, however, is about human rights in Iran and I will therefore devote the remainder of my contribution towards that. As I said before, it is always a hallmark of failing governments to blame their own failings on a group within society that can be a scapegoat for them. For the last 150 years the Baha'i have been persecuted in Iran and their human rights abused, including in more recent times the arrest and jailing of the leadership in Iran, known as the Baha'i seven. Other notable Baha'i have been arrested in recent months. It of course goes beyond that with

ethnic groups also facing restrictions on full participation in Iranian society.

It is my view that so much of what is going on in Iran relates to the maintenance of power in the hands of the ruling elite. They always need someone to blame for their own failings and they always need distractions, and this is what drives so much of what is going on in Iran. Of course the means by which this persecution takes place and is allowed to take place is through sharia law—the system of religious law that is medieval in its positioning and barbaric in its outlook. It is hard to see a purpose for it in the world but it is always there in these nations that do not work on any level. It empowers ruling groups with the means to suppress minority ethnic elements and even women who do not have the same opportunities in education or in any part of mainstream society. Clearly nations that adopt sharia law are the nations that will never advance and in general terms will move backwards despite having wealth through oil, gas and other natural resources.

To be clear on this matter I would like to be specific about how sharia impacts on the rights of women in Iran, thereby demonstrating its retrograde and backward nature. It is surely barbaric when women's rights activists are targeted for suggesting that women should be able to inherit the estate of her husband, that her testimony in court does not equal a man's, or that she should be able to fully seek a divorce and that a mother should be allowed custody of her own children.

Part of this motion has specifically mentioned the United Nations' *Report of the Secretary General on the Situation of Human Rights in Iran*. While I greatly value the details in that report, I also find irony in the fact that the United Nations' Durban 2 World Conference against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Racial Intolerance was so badly abused by the very subject of this motion being Iran.

This Iranian regime are a failure. They have failed economically. They have failed to govern in the best interests of their people. They persecute their political opponents in order to maintain their position of power. They attack those who hold different religious views. They attack journalists who hold them to any form of account and they do all this because they like power and, as do all such regimes, they govern for themselves and everything is focused on maintaining their positions of privilege and power.

Iran is a nation where the people are held back and their government is guilty of abusing human rights. I condemn them and look forward to when a liberal democracy can be established to properly look after the rights of the people of Iran.

Mr KELVIN THOMSON (Wills) (21:21): I strongly support the motion moved by the member for Fremantle. When I was one of Australia's

parliamentary delegates to the United Nations General Assembly late last year, I heard a representative of the Iranian government respond to criticism of its treatment of the Baha'i' by claiming that the Baha'i organisation in Iran was political rather than religious in character, that it was illegal, and that its organisation had been 'closed'.

This quite blood-curdling response clearly displays a contempt for the basic concepts of freedom of speech and expression, including freedom of religious expression. In countries such as Australia religious minorities enjoy a very high degree of freedom of religious expression and observance. As far as I am concerned, it is absolutely unacceptable for members of those religions to deny the same freedoms to religious minorities in other countries, including Iran. Religious minorities who enjoy freedom of religious expression in Australia, the US, the UK, Japan, Europe et cetera should provide the same freedom of religious expression in countries in which they are not a minority.

In light of the upcoming Iranian presidential elections, scheduled for 12 March, Iranian bloggers and media workers are once again the target of crackdowns and arrests by Iranian authorities. This may mean we will see a repeat of the unrest during the aftermath of the previous fraudulent presidential elections. According to Amnesty International:

... Iranian authorities are once again choosing to restrict freedom of expression and association in an apparent attempt to disrupt public discourse and potential criticism of the authorities' record in various spheres including human rights and economic performance in advance of the start of the election campaign.

Amnesty's report, titled *Iran: Wave of arrests in run up to parliamentary elections*, lists the names of individuals who have been incarcerated for convictions such as 'acting against national security', 'spreading propaganda against the system' and criticising the Iranian regime.

Such arrests are by no means without precedent. Students, women and political activists are regularly the target of arrests and are subject to gang rape and both physical and psychological torture during their imprisonment. According to Ahmed Shaheed, the new UN special rapporteur on the human rights situation in Iran, Iranian authorities have secretly executed hundreds of prisoners. According to Amnesty International, Iran has the world's highest per capita execution rate. In the year 2011, the Iranian regime executed 488 people for drug related offences compared to 2009 and 2010 where 172 and 166 executions were recorded respectively.

Social freedoms are restricted. According to Iran's Islamic laws, men and women are not permitted to interact unless they are related. If a man and a woman

are walking in public and are approached by the morality police, they must justify their relationship to the authorities, who may or may not be satisfied with their response. Seventy per cent of Iran's 70 million population is under the age of 35. It is commonplace for the morality police to interrogate the youth on their choice of hairstyle and clothing as well as their choice in music.

I believe we should be more supportive of the Iranian opposition. I am mystified as to why we continue to list Iranian opposition groups the PMOI and the MEK as terrorist groups. It is a free gift from us to the Iranian regime. Do we get anything back from Mahmoud Ahmadinejad in return? No. He is as outrageous as ever.

While I am on this topic, it is important that the office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees is able to resettle the residents of Camp Ashraf in democratic countries rather than them being left to the tender mercies of either the Iraqi or Iranian governments. Neither of those governments is trustworthy in relation to this matter and the UN and the nations of the world have an obligation to ensure there is no more violence here.

Finally, let me praise and salute the courage of the Iranian people who resist their violent leaders. I marvel at the courage, the gutsiness, of those Iranian people who refuse to submit and who constantly find ways to defy the regime, despite the threats to their personal safety.

Mr SIMPKINS (Cowan) (21:26): I seek leave to speak on this matter again.

Leave granted.

Mr SIMPKINS: I welcome the opportunity to again echo the remarks of the member for Fremantle with regard to the situation in Iran and the terrible state of human rights in that country. I recently, in the last couple of weeks, had the opportunity to visit Israel. As part of that visit, not far from Haifa, I visited the headquarters of the Baha'i faith. One of the things that happens when Iran seeks to persecute the Baha'i is they constantly refer to the link between the Baha'i and Israel, as if there is some sort of conspiracy. As we know the headquarters of the Baha'i is within the land of Israel but they are not associated with the Israeli government. They are a faith that have sought to further their own interests. Most of them are located within Iran, there is no doubt about that, but the scapegoating that I referred to in my last contribution is clearly about the maintenance of the current regime in Iran.

It is a regime which, as I said before, fails comprehensively in every sense of the word. When you have the resources that Iran has, there is no reason why they should not succeed. And, yet, the reality is that since 1979, since the Islamic revolution, the country

has continued to fail. They cannot run an economy. That is one thing but the way they seek to legitimise their position and the governing of the country comes down to scapegoating. It comes down to finding reasons why they have failed, and it is always about blame and, at the heart of it, it then becomes about asking, 'How do we maintain our regime?' Again, it is focused internally on who they can persecute, who they can hold responsible for their own failings—and the Baha'i are right up there on that list, as are a number of other minority groups that exist and which have been referred to by previous speakers. Externally they seek to demonise Israel; they seek to unite the remainder of the Islamic world in their persecution and their pursuit of Israel.

In the end, all the Iranian regime has really got is the base of power. They are looking for nuclear weapon opportunities, and they will seek to lead the Islamic world through that means. They do not have a legitimate claim over that part of the world, and whilst they might have great ambition they do not have any real claim for the hegemony that I spoke about before.

Debate adjourned.

ADJOURNMENT

The SPEAKER (21:30): Order! It being 9:30 pm, I propose the question:

That the House do now adjourn.

Iraq

Mr RUDDOCK (Berowra) (21:30): Today I wanted to participate in a debate in another chamber on a motion moved by the member for Fowler on the Sabian Mandaeans but, because of a diplomatic visitor, I was unable to be present in the chamber to participate in the debate. I wanted to note my support for his raising this issue. It is not the first time that he has done so. In fact, I spoke on a motion in very similar terms on 30 May last year.

At that time I noted that I had had a long association with the Sabian Mandaeans, the Assyrians, the Chaldeans and other Aramaic speakers generally. They were not necessarily constituents of mine but I was particularly interested in the plight of many of the original Christians and also the followers of John the Baptist—the Sabian Mandaeans. Having played such a significant role in those countries in the Middle East, it was tremendously disappointing to see them under pressure at particular points in time and suffering as a result of persecution. I noted in my previous speech that I had had meetings with the Middle East Council of Churches, particularly in Jordan. I had been told, in a very concerned way, that they were very worried about what was happening to Christians in many Middle Eastern countries. It would be a disaster if we came to a point where Christians, where all that early