



Days to Remember

International Human Rights Days and
the Pursuit of Human Dignity in Iran

Foreword by Nina Ansary

Center for
**HUMAN
RIGHTS**
in Iran

Days to Remember

International Human Rights Days and
the Pursuit of Human Dignity in Iran

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Dr. Nina Ansary is an internationally recognized Iranian–American scholar, historian and author, whose work has focused on women’s rights issues in Iran. Dr. Ansary is the author of the upcoming book, *Anonymous Is a Woman* (Revela Press/March 2020). Her previous book, *Jewels of Allah: The Untold Story of Women in Iran* garnered multiple awards, including the 2016 International Book Award in “Women’s Issues.” Dr. Ansary holds an MA in Middle Eastern Studies and a PhD in History from Columbia University. She is a board member at the Center for Human Rights in Iran.

FOREWORD

Illustrating International Days: A New Approach to Envisioning Human Rights

International Women’s Day, World Refugee Day, International Day for Street Children, World Environment Day—these and 27 other international days, designated by the United Nations and other international organizations to commemorate achievements and historical milestones pertaining to the promotion and protection of human rights, are explained and illuminated in *Days to Remember*.

Moving beyond the traditional boundaries of communication, this invaluable, uniquely poignant and powerful volume is distinguished by its exquisite array of artwork, inviting the reader regardless of ethnicity, gender, religion or geographical location to visualize complex issues inherent to international days.

The power of artistic expression incorporated throughout, captures the breadth of concepts pertinent to inalienable rights, and enhances the myriad of global challenges applicable to life, liberty and freedom of expression.

The magnificence of this body of work conceived by a female Iranian artist, who asked to remain anonymous, reflects compassion as well as a nuanced understanding of the world’s most urgent human rights issues.

A mosaic of warm, bright, evocative brushstrokes merge with captivating narratives to illustrate the purpose and meaning of each international day and their specific significance in the context of Iran. Delicate yet penetrating, haunting yet inspiring, each painting attaches a visual story to the particular international day presented, to create vivid portrayals of the human condition.

While the topics are global in scope, the formidable obstacles to achieving human rights, as well as distinct signs of optimism, are rendered through the artist's sensitive aesthetic choices within the framework of Iran and presented through the lens of hope—a directive which is in contrast to the somber and dispiriting approach often taken by the news media.

We, at the Center for Human Rights in Iran, support *Days to Remember* and its use of an Iranian artist's brilliant imagery to communicate the challenges applicable to universal human rights enshrined in laws and treaties, with the hope that it will appeal to a diverse audience and inspire solidarity and dialogue beyond borders to bring about urgently needed change throughout the world.

Nina Ansary, Ph.D.

Introduction

The purpose of this book, *Days to Remember: International Human Rights Days and the Pursuit of Human Dignity in Iran*, is to call attention to the days set aside by the United Nations and other international organizations for reflection and action on rights and issues fundamental to the human condition—and to raise awareness of the extent to which the struggle to achieve their promise is still underway in Iran.

Artists—painters, writers, poets, filmmakers, musicians—have long been among the most eloquent voices for human rights, communicating needs and aspirations in ways that reach us, irrespective of political or linguistic boundaries. For this reason, the Center for Human Rights in Iran chose to note these days through works of art, which communicate these issues and the human cost of their neglect through the universal language of images.

Since 2010, the Center has been working with artists, bringing their voices to the conversation on human rights in order to communicate the injustice of rights denied in unconventional ways. We have collaborated with musicians, cartoonists, painters, graphic designers, filmmakers and photographers, enabling us to expand the chorus of voices speaking out for basic human rights and dignity and reach new and broader audiences.

In 2013, the Center published *Sketches of Iran*, a collection of editorial cartoons by prominent Iranian artists with accompanying essays by 40 activists, lawyers, artists and families of political prisoners. That year we also collaborated with Iranian musician to produce a music video on the senseless personal toll of Iran’s inhumane executions. The video was viewed by more than two million people, reaching audiences well outside the human rights community. The Center’s 2017 art exhibition, *Beyond the Ban*, brought paintings, sculpture and photography by leading Iranian artists to an international audience with a New York show that celebrated artistic freedom, tolerance and cultural exchange.

Continuing this approach with this book, the Center asked an Iranian-born illustrator, who requested anonymity, to visualize the issues addressed by these international days. To take broad, complex topics, personalize them and create compelling depictions that reach across boundaries to inspire empathy and resolve—this was the goal of the project.

Each illustration is accompanied by a short essay written by Karen Kramer, previously a lecturer in Middle East politics and economics at the State University of New York at Purchase and now the Center's Director of Publications, which reflects upon the meaning of these international days and their relevance to Iran. They are a source of information and insight, examining such issues as child marriage, literacy, violence against women, religious freedom, poverty, refugees, environmental degradation and political contestation in the Iranian context.

In a deep sense, this book is also a call to action, illustrating the distance between the rights championed by these international days and the current reality in Iran. Each day presented in this book also represents an opportunity to mark the brave efforts of the many human rights activists, lawyers, journalists and others who work to advance human rights in Iran, often at great personal cost. It is our hope that this book will remind us of our shared humanity and destiny, and help to inspire citizens around the world to join in the struggle for human rights, tolerance and dignity for all.

The Center for Human Rights in Iran

New York
October 2019

January 20

World

Religion

Day

Established by the National Spiritual Assembly of the Baha'is of the United States in 1950 as a way to encourage interfaith understanding, World Religion Day is marked annually on January 20. This interfaith understanding is lacking in Iran, where the freedom to openly practice religions other than the dominant Shia Muslim faith is deeply compromised. The Baha'i community is perhaps the most persecuted of all the major religious minorities in the country. Members of this religion are routinely banned from university education and frequently refused employment. Their private businesses are often shut down by the state and their land confiscated. Leaders of the Baha'i community are imprisoned, convicted on sham charges for lengthy prison terms that often reach 10 years. The Christian community too, particularly the Protestant and Christian convert community, faces persecution. Refused permission to build churches for their expanding community, they are often prosecuted for worshipping in unlicensed "house churches" in members' homes. Other religious minorities also face restrictions, discrimination and persecution. Islam was once known as one of the most tolerant faiths, with vibrant minority communities valued and protected in centuries past. It can only be strengthened by returning to this tradition of tolerance.

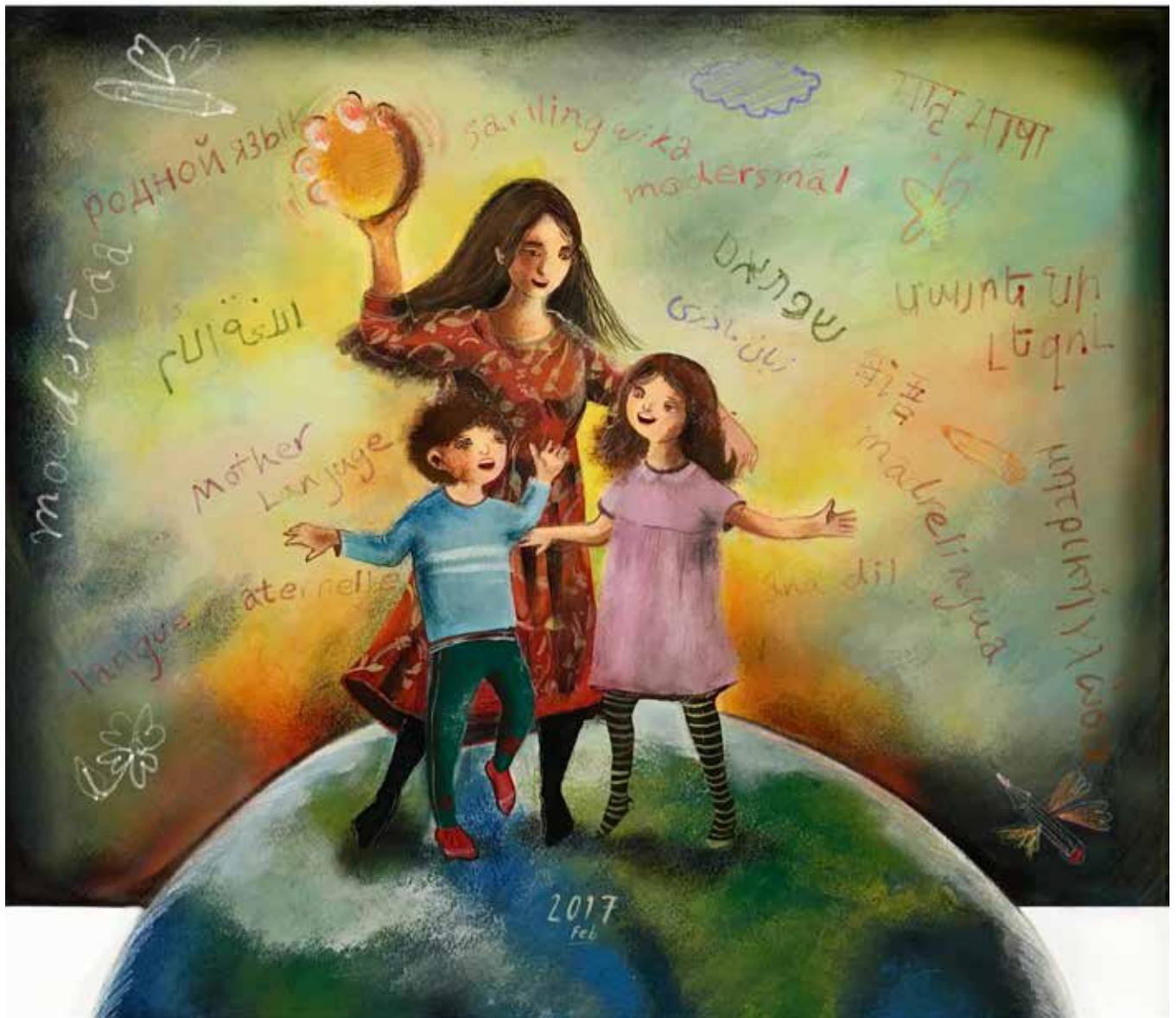
January 20 World Religion Day



February 20 World Day of Social Justice



February 21 International Mother Language Day





March 8 International Women's Day

March 20 International Day of Happiness



April 4 International Day for Mine Awareness and Assistance in Mine Action



April 6 International Day of Sport for Development and Peace



April 12
International
Day for

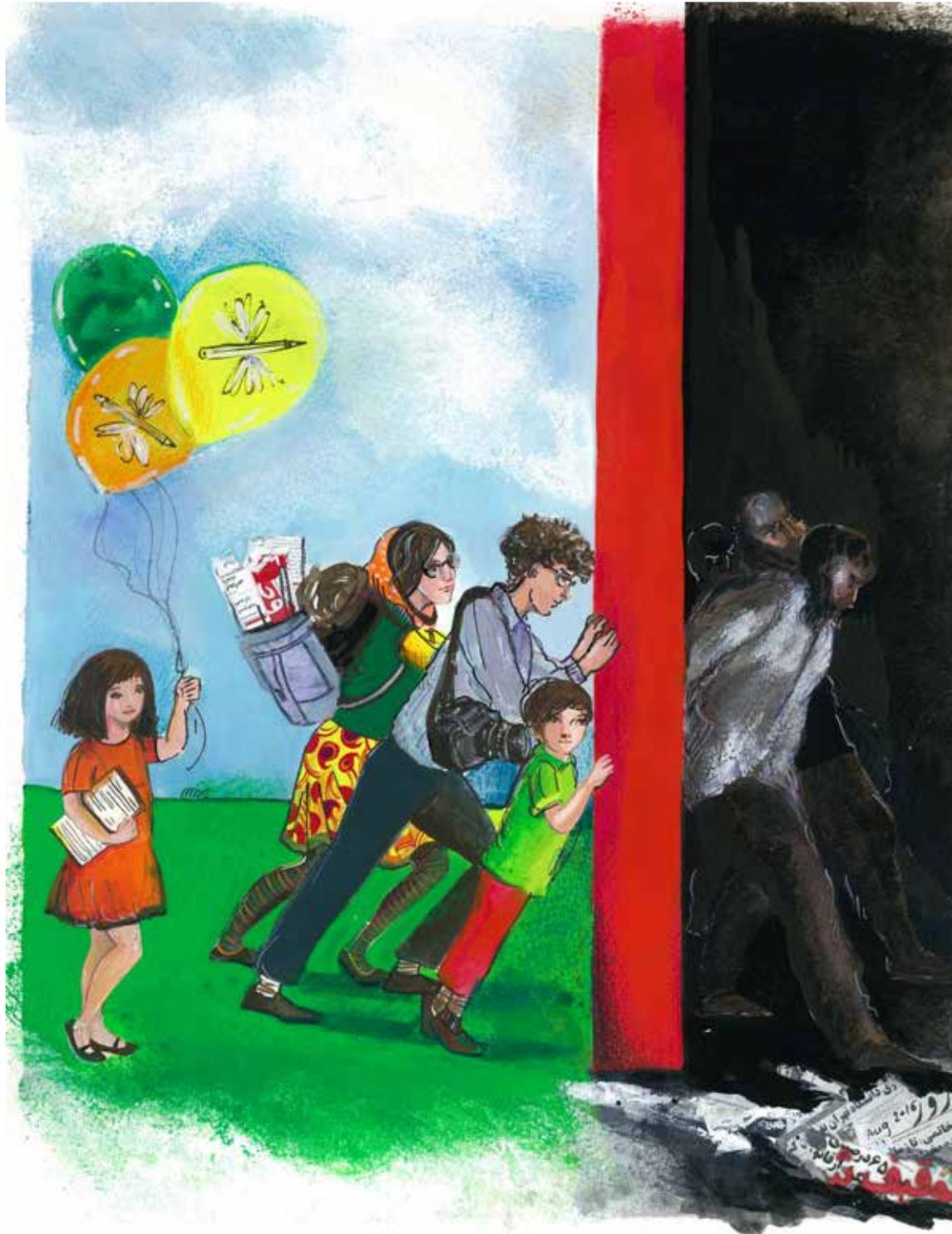
Street Children

The International Day for Street Children, marked annually on April 12, seeks to call attention to the plight of street children worldwide. The UN estimates there are 150 million children living on the streets around the world today, and Iran is not immune to this tragedy. It is estimated that there are some 200,000 street children in Iran, living primarily in urban centers such as Tehran, Isfahan, Mashhad and Shiraz. A significant portion of them are the children of Afghan refugees and migrants. Street children are often employed as trash sifters in large municipalities, where they are routinely exposed to highly toxic materials. This practice is facilitated by the frequent informal contracting out of waste disposal services by municipalities to poorly monitored private companies. These children are often also used as street vendors. Street children typically come from families that suffer from extreme poverty, drug addiction and/or illness. They are highly vulnerable to sexual and physical abuse, drug use, HIV and other diseases. In 2017, the UN affirmed that governments must pay special attention to ensure street children are able to access their rights. Yet the periodic state-mandated round-ups of street children in Iran, in which they are frequently separated from their families, held in crowded and inhumane facilities, and are vulnerable to abuse, do little to address their needs or their rights.



April 12 International Day for Street Children

April 15 World Art Day



April 23
World
Book
Day

World Book Day is marked each year on April 23. Organized by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), it is meant to promote reading, publishing and copyright law. Literacy gains have been impressive during the 40 years of the Islamic Republic. The country's literacy rate is 85 percent (although this figure obscures gender inequalities, as the rate for females is 80 percent while that of males is 90 percent)—but if one isolates the youth population (ages 15-24), the literacy rate is an impressive 97 percent for females and 98 percent for males. Yet literacy should not be viewed in isolation; its advantages are diminished if the citizenry is only allowed to read state-approved content. Censorship in Iran means that despite these literacy gains, the citizenry is not allowed to read content forbidden by the state. Iran's print media is under state control (as is its state broadcasting agency), and publishing houses do not receive the required licenses to publish books that are not approved by the state. Those who circumvent these controls risk arrest. Writers, playwrights and poets have been harassed, arrested and imprisoned for writing, publishing or posting material that is disapproved of by the state. As long as this repression persists, the progress Iran has made raising literacy rates will be countered by a citizenry constrained by state censorship, and the fruits of this rising literacy will not be fully realized.



April 23 World Book Day

April 29

Day of Remembrance for All Victims of Chemical Warfare

On April 29, the world marks the Day of Remembrance for All Victims of Chemical Warfare, a day that has deep relevance to the Iranian experience. During the eight years of the Iran-Iraq war (1980-1988), Iran was subjected to hundreds of chemical weapon attacks by Sadaam Hussein's army, while the world largely looked away. These attacks continued throughout the duration of the war and were directed at both combatants and civilians. Tens of thousands of Iranians overall were killed by these weapons, with casualty estimates ranging from 50,000-100,000. Thousands of Iranians still live with the debilitating effects of these attacks today. The use of chemical (and biological) weapons was banned under the 1925 Geneva Protocol, and their production, stockpiling, and use was banned under the 1993 Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC). Iran is a State Party to both. The continued use of such weapons, including for example, in the Syrian war theatre, represents an abject failure of the international community to eradicate these horrific weapons. It can only be hoped that Iran, itself a victim of chemical warfare, will emerge as vocal force for the total and permanent abolition of their use.

April 29 Day of Remembrance for All Victims of Chemical Warfare



May 3
World

Press Freedom Day

In 1993, the UN proclaimed May 3 World Press Freedom Day, to raise awareness of the importance of press freedom, defend the media from attacks on their independence and pay tribute to journalists who have lost their lives in the line of duty. The 2018 focus has been to highlight the importance of an enabling judiciary that ensures legal guarantees for press freedom and prosecutes crimes against journalists. The need to address freedom of expression online is also prioritized. In all these areas, Iran is deeply lacking. Journalists who write and publish material critical of state policy risk arrest by intelligence and security agents who violate rights with impunity, and imprisonment via a judiciary that colludes in their prosecution and conviction at will. The Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) reported that five journalists were jailed in Iran for their work in 2017, a decline from a high of 45 in 2012—but still five too many. Citizen journalism on social media has mushroomed in Iran over the last decade, but the state has increased its capacity to monitor online content and it arrests those who post content disapproved of by the state. In Freedom House's 2017 Freedom of the Press and 2017 Freedom on the Net reports, Iran scored near-bottom rankings on both, with the country's poor legal environment singled out. A free press serves as a crucial watchdog, informing the citizenry and fostering transparency, accountability and the rule of law. As such, it is essential to good governance and the defense of citizens' rights. Given the urgent political, economic, environmental and social problems facing Iran, a free press—and the protected status of its journalists—is more essential than ever.



May 3 World Press Freedom Day



May 21

World Day for

Cultural Diversity for Dialogue and Development

The World Day for Cultural Diversity for Dialogue and Development, marked each year on May 21, seeks to promote “equitable exchange and dialogue among civilizations, cultures and peoples, based on mutual understanding and respect and the equal dignity of all cultures.” Iran’s cultural mosaic is rich—ethnic Persians make up about 51 percent of the population, Azeris comprise another quarter and there are smaller ethnic groups that include Kurds, Arabs, Baluchis, Lurs, Turkmen and others. Religious diversity is present as well, with the dominant Shia Muslim population joined by minorities of Baha’is, Christians, Sunni Muslims, Jews and others. Yet this diversity is not marked by “respect and equal dignity,” but rather more often by repression and discrimination. The Iranian constitution guarantees equal rights to all, “whatever the ethnic group or tribe to which they belong.” It recognizes only the Zoroastrian, Christian and Jewish religious minorities, but adds “no one may be molested or taken to task simply for holding a certain belief.” Yet in practice, minorities endure discrimination, tend to live in underdeveloped areas where education and health services are lacking, and are often not able to be schooled in their mother tongues. If they speak out publicly against this discrimination or for greater rights they risk arrest. The UN argues tolerance of alternative cultural expressions is critical to peace, stability and sustainable development. It is also a fundamental human right and obligation.



May 21 World Day for Cultural Diversity for Dialogue and Development

June 5
World

Environment Day

Begun in 1974, World Environment Day is celebrated on the 5th of June every year. It is one of the UN's principal vehicles for encouraging environmental awareness. This day, and its call for action to preserve the environment, has particular urgency for Iran, a country that is facing environmental crises on multiple fronts. Air pollution is so severe that major cities are sometimes shut down due to dangerous air quality, and people frequently wear masks when outside. Several Iranian cities have been ranked among the most polluted in the world by the World Health Organization (WHO). Iran's water depletion is catastrophic; its rivers, lakes and wetlands are in precipitous decline, deep wells are emptying the country's aquifers, and 70 percent of the groundwater has been consumed. Thousands of towns across Iran rely on water tankers for supplies and hundreds have been abandoned, rendered uninhabitable by the lack of water. More than two-thirds of the country's land is turning into desert. Meanwhile, improper waste management, including the dumping of hazardous waste materials directly into uncovered landfills where toxic compounds seep into land and water, has resulted in severe land and water pollution. Without meaningful action by the Iranian authorities to address this environmental degradation, the right to clean air, water and land—and indeed the right to life—will be increasingly violated.



June 5 World Environment Day



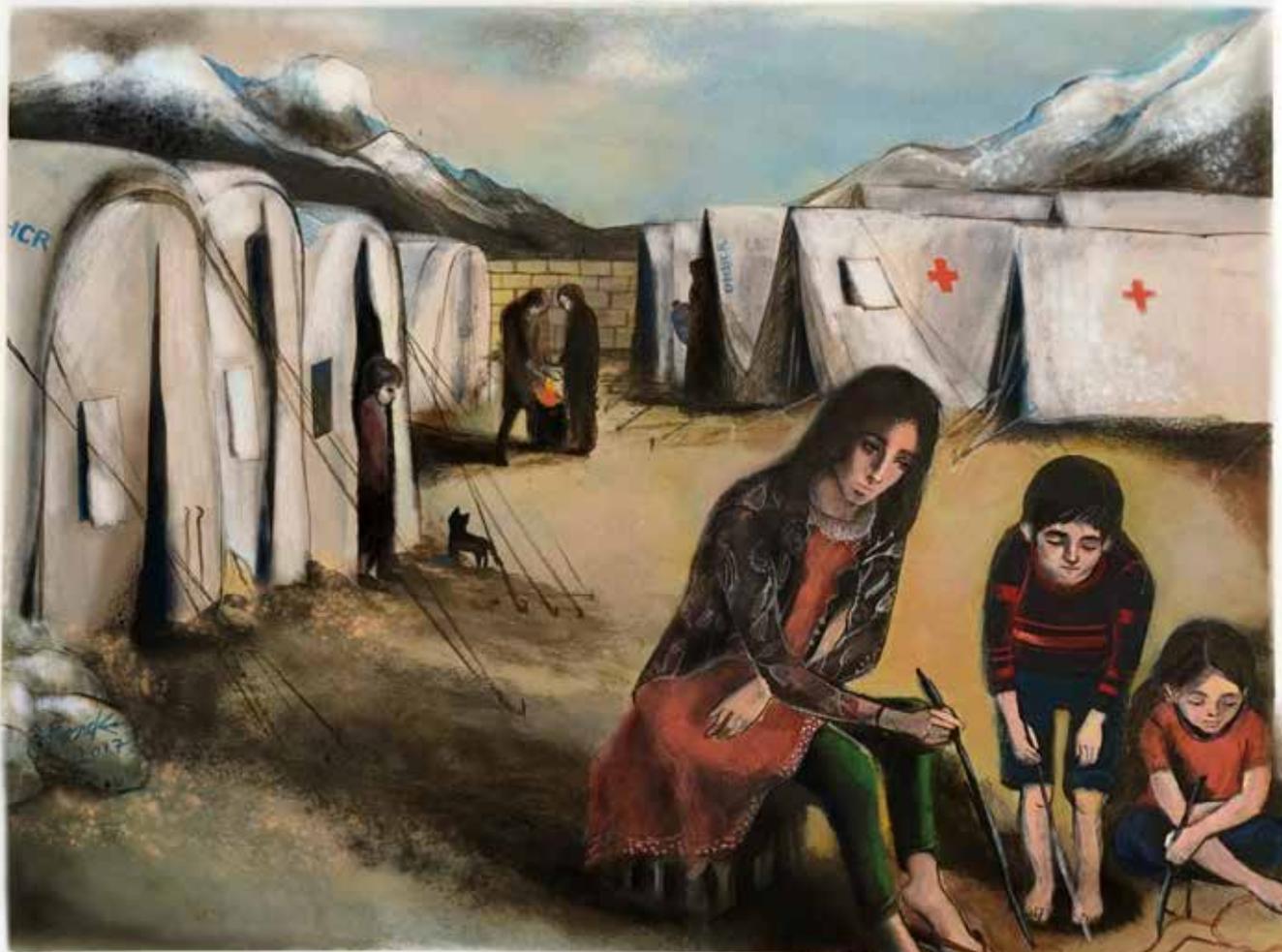
June 12 World Day Against Child Labor

June 20
World

Refugee Day

World Refugee Day, observed on June 20 of each year, is dedicated to raising awareness of the situation of refugees throughout the world. On this day, the UN asks all to commemorate the strength, courage and perseverance of millions of refugees, who may be fleeing war, violence, famine, extreme poverty, natural or environmental disasters or human rights violations. According to the UNHCR, there over 70 million people around the world who have been forcibly displaced—one in every 100 people on the planet—and nearly half of the world's 26 million refugees are under 18. In Iran, the refugee and migrant population is estimated at three million by the UN—two million of them undocumented. The vast majority are Afghans, fleeing violence or extreme poverty. This population is deeply vulnerable and as a result are often exploited through underpaid or unpaid work, unsafe working conditions and squalid living conditions. They are also vulnerable to forced labor. The refugee issue is directly linked to the child labor issue. With employment opportunities limited for the largely impoverished Afghan population (especially for the undocumented), and half the Afghan population in Iran comprised of children, many of these children enter the workforce. Migrant workers can be found in most sectors in Iran but are frequently employed in construction (typically without protective gear, clothing or training). Human rights belong to all people—citizens, migrants and refugees—and as such this population deserves as rigorous and robust protection as all others.

June 20 World Refugee Day



June 26

International Day
in Support of

Victims of Torture

Each year, June 26 marks the International Day in Support of Victims of Torture. The UN states: “Torture is a crime under international law and cannot be justified under any circumstances. This prohibition forms part of customary international law, which means that it is binding on every member of the international community, regardless of whether a State has ratified international treaties in which torture is expressly prohibited.” Thus, while Iran is not a member of the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, it is still bound by its prohibitions. Yet torture persists in Iran—especially during interrogations—and its perpetrators continue to go unpunished. Numerous credible accounts, eyewitness testimonies and medical evidence confirm that torture and even deaths continue to occur in Iranian detention centers and prisons. The authorities fail to investigate these reports of torture or death fully or impartially, and there is no viable mechanism or process whereby victims or their families can bring their grievances to an independent authority to address. Moreover, so-called “confessions” extracted through physical and/or psychological torture during interrogations continue to be used as evidence in Iranian courts to convict. This record, in addition to the fact that Iran imposes punishments such as flogging and amputation that the UN has declared are tantamount to torture, is one that requires urgent attention by world leaders and citizens alike.



June 26 International Day in Support of Victims of Torture

July 30 International Friendship Day



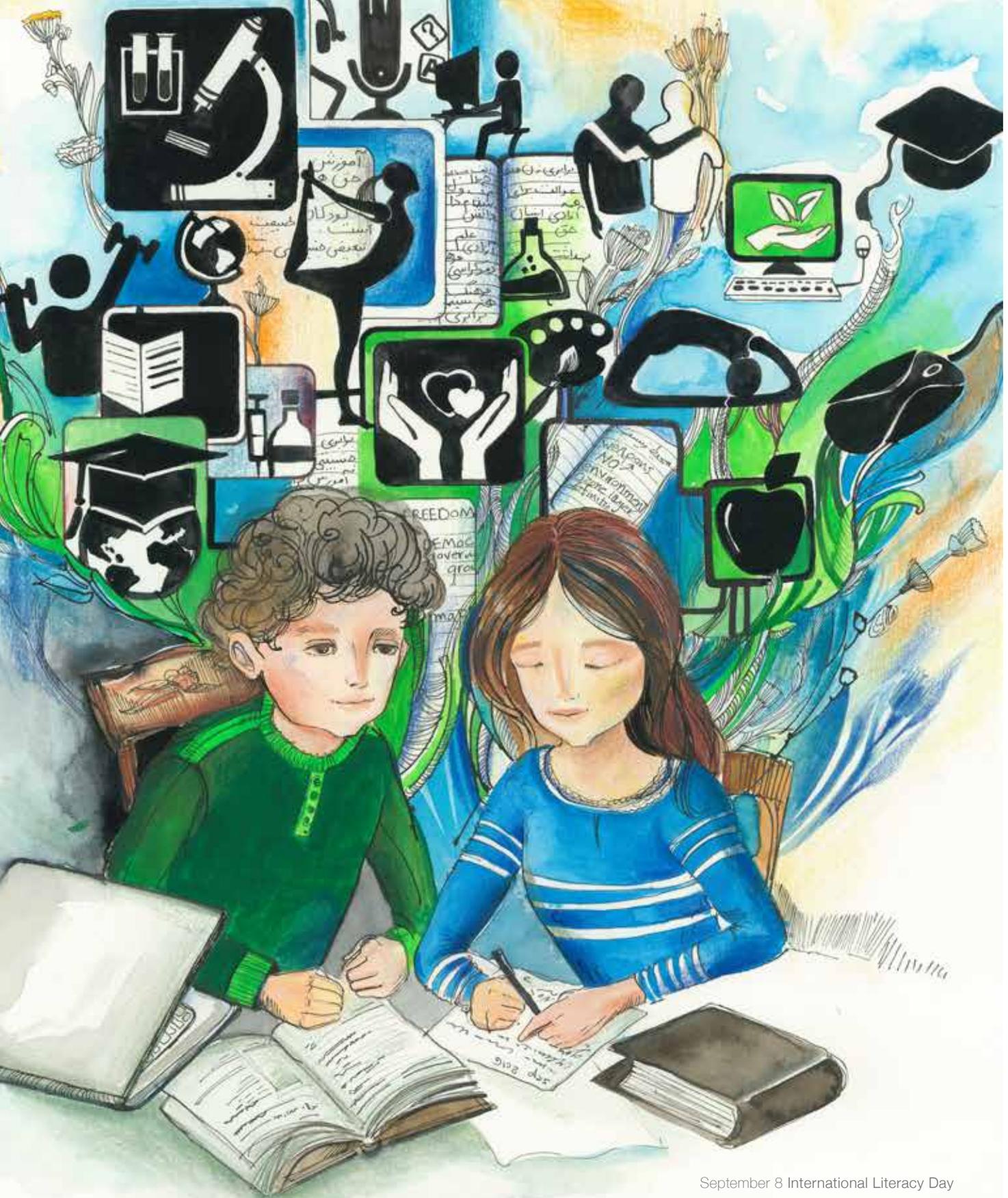


August 19 World Humanitarian Day

September 8 International Literacy Day

Declared by UNESCO in 1966, International Literacy Day is observed each year on September 8 to highlight the importance of literacy to individuals, communities and societies. It is also meant to be a day for governments, civil society and stakeholders to reflect on the world's remaining literacy challenges. Iran has made commendable progress in advancing literacy. Its literacy rate is 85 percent for the nation as a whole (80 percent for females and 90 percent for males), and this rate is set to rise—the literacy rate for 15 to 24-year-olds in Iran is 97 percent for females and 98 percent for males. Educational gains have underpinned these literacy gains. Enrollment in secondary education in Iran was close to 90 percent in 2015 for officially registered females and males, according to UNESCO. These numbers reflect strong progress in literacy and education, as well as a narrowing gender gap in both. Yet the economic growth and employment opportunities that should flow from this development of human capital have been undermined by economic mismanagement and corruption. Indeed, for the 15-24 age group, unemployment is at nearly 30 percent. Similarly, the strong progress in female literacy and education in Iran, which should propel women forward professionally, has been undermined by pervasive gender-based discrimination. Women's unemployment rate, at 20 percent, is twice that of men's. Literacy cannot be divorced from issues of good governance and of equality and justice; without the latter, the ability to read is an unfulfilled promise.





September 8 International Literacy Day



September 21
International Day of Peace

CoM
sep 2016

October 2 International Day of Nonviolence



October 11 International Day of the Girl Child





November 2 International Day to End Impunity for Crimes against Journalists

November 16

International Day for

Tolerance

The International Day for Tolerance, declared by UNESCO in 1995, is observed each year on November 16. The UN says tolerance means “respect and appreciation of the rich variety of our world’s cultures [and] our forms of expression” and “recognizes the universal human rights and fundamental freedoms of others.” This tolerance is lacking in Iran. Religious minorities are prosecuted for the public expression or leadership of their faiths—especially the Baha’i and Christian convert communities—and ethnic minorities such as Kurds and Arabs face broad discrimination. Intolerance based on other aspects such as sexuality or physical and psychosocial disabilities are also rife. In addition, those who differ with the state’s views—be they political or cultural—face intolerance. Iran’s prisons contain hundreds who are there because they questioned the state’s dictates. The UN says tolerance must be viewed “not only as a moral duty, but also as a political and legal requirement” and emphasizes that “States should draft new legislation when necessary to ensure equality of treatment and of opportunity for all groups and individuals in society.” In this too Iran is lacking. Its laws are vague, open to interpretation, filled with loopholes and poorly enforced. Its judiciary, the ostensible guardian of the law, is itself a leading human rights violator, which does not address violations of law by any other arm of the state and commits its own violations with impunity through the denial of due process and unfair trials. The UN notes that “fighting intolerance requires law, education, access to information and individual awareness.” None of these are possible without political freedom, basic civil liberties and protected human rights.



November 16 International Day for Tolerance

November 20

Universal

Children's Day

Begun in 1954 by the UN, Universal Children's Day is observed each year on November 20 to promote the welfare of the world's children. The UN's Declaration of the Rights of the Child states, "The child shall be protected against all forms of neglect, cruelty and exploitation. He shall not be the subject of traffic, in any form" and "shall not be admitted to employment before an appropriate minimum age." In all these areas, Iran fails to comply. Iran is a State Party to the Convention on the Rights of the Child—but has asserted it will not apply any provision "incompatible with Islamic laws or [domestic] legislation." The age of criminal responsibility in Iran is 9 for girls and 15 for boys, despite international law that defines anyone under age 18 as a child. Child marriage is allowed at age 13 for girls (and younger with consent of the father and a judge) and 15 for boys. Iran's laws leave children deeply unprotected from physical and sexual abuse, and Iran's weak and poorly enforced labor regulations result in millions of children in the workforce. The government ratified the Optional Protocol on the Sale of Children, Child Prostitution and Child Pornography, but poor implementation has resulted in continued child exploitation and trafficking. In particular, Iran's estimated 200,000 street children, as well as the children of the country's 3-million-strong migrant population (the vast majority of which are Afghan and often impoverished), are at risk for forced labor, abuse and trafficking. Iran's LGBTQ youth face severe legal and social discrimination (and because of the criminalization of same-sex relations, the inability to seek protection from violence), and children with disabilities face inaccessible schools and services and inadequate protections from violence and abuse. In addition, Iran is the world's leader in executions of juvenile offenders, despite the strict international prohibition against such executions. At least seven child offenders were put to death in Iran in 2018, with more than 90 child offenders on death row, according to Amnesty International. Clearly, there is much work to be done to protect children in Iran.



November 20 Universal Children's Day

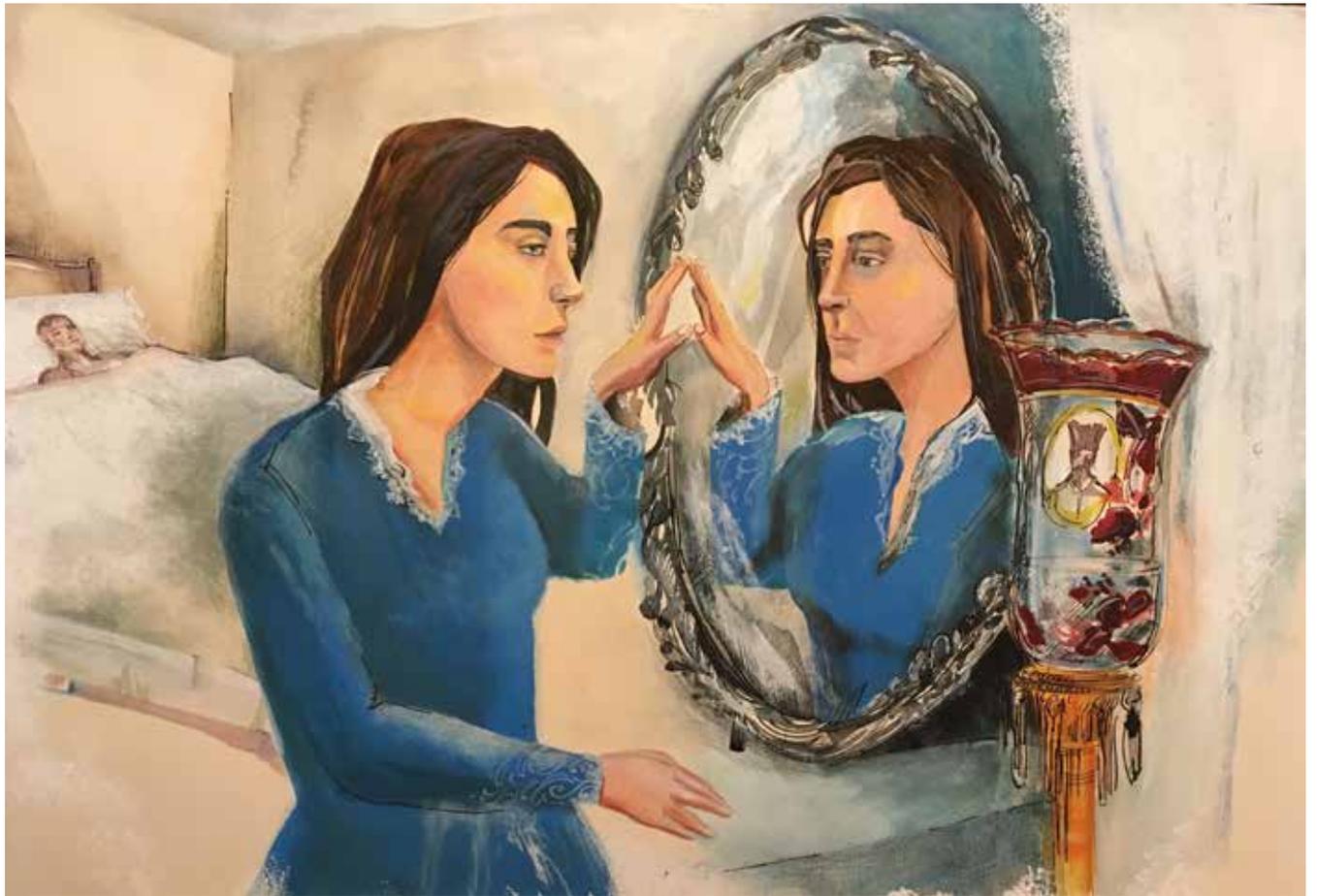
November 25

International Day for the

Elimination of Violence against Women

The UN states: “Violence against women and girls is one of the most widespread, persistent and devastating human rights violations in our world today.” In 1999, the UN designated November 25 as the International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women in order to raise public awareness of the problem. One of the aims of this day is to highlight the degree to which this violence is hidden—a salient factor in the Iranian context, where social stigma makes it difficult for a woman to speak out against domestic violence. Violence against women in Iran is multifaceted and rarely goes punished. Assaults against women protesting forced hijab in 2018, and the acid attacks against women wearing “improper hijab” in Isfahan in 2014, were never followed by prosecutions. The abuse inherent in child marriage is rife, with 20 percent of girls married under the age of 18 and 6 percent married between the ages of 10 and 14. Iranian academic studies estimate two-thirds of Iranian women experience at least one episode of domestic violence during their married life—yet legislation to protect them has been languishing in parliament for years. In some cases, Iran’s laws exacerbate vulnerability to domestic abuse. Iran’s Civil Code forbids a woman from leaving the matrimonial home without the husband’s permission unless she is able to prove in court she is endangered. This leaves Iranian women deeply vulnerable to violence, especially given that if a woman leaves the marital home, she is not given maintenance. The lack of standard mechanisms such as orders of protection to prevent contact between abusers and victims further endangers women. Violence against women requires significantly increased societal awareness and legal protections—in essence, a government and societal-wide commitment to render unacceptable this crime.

November 25 International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women



December 3 International Day of Persons with Disabilities



About the Center

The Center for Human Rights in Iran (CHRI) is an independent nonprofit organization that seeks to promote human rights, tolerance and cultural understanding. Founded in 2008 and based in New York, the Center is dedicated to the rigorous and unwavering pursuit of justice and dignity for all.



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