

### **Point of No Return**

“No fear, no tremble, we are all united!”

“United we stand! Divided you fall!”

“We don’t want our votes back; we want our country back!”

The air was filled with a sense of energy, anticipation, uncertainty, excitement, and hope. Traditional Iranian lion-and-sun flags were flowing above the crowd with anti-Islamic Republic posters propping up everywhere. The recent and unexpected uprising of Iranian people and the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the 1999 student demonstrations which was brutally crushed by the Islamic Republic revolutionary guards make it morally, socially, and politically impossible not to join the global efforts by those in exile in support of their native countrymen, who continue to face government crackdown and savagery.

The recent resistance and bloodshed has not only shown the world how unwanted the Islamic Republic regime is in Iran, but it has also brought hope to those living in exile. During the past years, many exiles seemed somewhat confused with respect to the regime in Tehran. Many had either accepted its existence or were in denial. Yet many more were afraid of being vocal about a regime that has held Iranians and their nation’s wealth hostage to its backwards and inhuman ideologies, because they did not want to jeopardize their loved ones back home or their own ability to travel to and from Iran without provocations.

But yesterday walking through the crowd of Iranian-Americans at Freedom Plaza downtown Washington, D.C., was surreal. Men, women, young, and old were coming together from all corners of Pennsylvania Avenue. Strangers smiled at each other and nodded as if they could read each other’s minds – “Could it be real? Could Iran be free soon?” It has been a long time since many exiles no longer seem confused, fearful, or hopeless.

Tomorrow has never been more important and that is how the past few weeks have felt since the fraudulent elections in Iran. It may be difficult to truly fathom how Iranians feel, who have been risking their lives to challenge the illegitimate theocracy in Tehran, but their brave, continuous resistance proves that the alternative is unacceptable and unbearable.

The question remains – what’s next? Time will tell. For now, attending rallies and demonstrations is a must, because it is necessary to feel and fight for what is at times taken for granted in America -- the desire not just to live but to live in freedom.

***Sheda Vasseghi, Washington, DC  
July 10, 2009***