



CIVICS IN REAL LIFE

A Fight For Natural Rights

Civics is all around us. There is a lot to know about the government and how "We the People" interact with the government and each other. Let's help each other expand our civic literacy.

Ever since Americans first raised the cry of "No taxation without representation", we have insisted on having a voice in our government and its need to protect life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. Promised in the Declaration of Independence and guaranteed in the U.S. Constitution, America's founding ideals of natural rights and consent of the governed are highly cherished within our constitutional republic. It is the belief in these words that historically has led to protest and acts of civil disobedience when "We the People" felt injustice and inequality must be addressed by their government. The Framers ensured that the U.S. Constitution provided protections that makes possible the redress of grievances. However, when natural rights are violated, the redress of grievances is not always a right guaranteed by other forms and systems of government. So, how can the United States raise awareness over the fight for natural rights and highlight the oppressive actions some governments take to silence their people?

To help answer this question, let's examine the volatile situation in Iran. Iran is entering its seventh week of protests and demonstrations sparked by the death of 22-year-old Mahsa Amini.

On Tuesday September 13, 2022 Mahsa Amini was traveling to visit family in Tehran when she was arrested by Iran's morality police who deemed her attire inappropriate. According to Iranian law, women must always wear a long coat/tunic over their regular clothes and are required to cover their heads with a scarf. The police took her into custody to complete a "re-education" program and while in their custody she went into a coma and died. The incident sparked outrage, public protest, and demonstrations throughout the country. Demands of the Iranian protesters range from an easing of restrictions and more guarantees of rights and freedoms to the death of Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei and an entire regime change. Women have played a large part in the protests, removing and burning their hijabs which has become a symbol of the protest. These events mark the largest public display of outrage and protest towards Iran's clerical rulers since the 1979 revolution.



On Sunday October 30, 2022 the protests entered a more violent phase. Iran's Revolutionary Guards and Basij forces began using tear gas and shooting into crowds of student protestors. The Iranian government will also begin holding public trials for protestors, some being charged with offenses that carry the death penalty.

With Iran's history of crushing dissent, the United States has taken actions to show support for the protestors and attempt to punish the regime for its repression of rights. Numerous sanctions against the country and specific individuals have been issued. The U.S. government has used technology firms to help the Iranian people access information after the Iranian government shutdown their Internet. Talks with Iran regarding nuclear deals have ceased, and the United States will co-host an informal U.N. Security Council gathering to promote ways of looking into Iranian human rights abuses. According to the U.S. Special Envoy for Iran Rob Malley, "Our policy is to defend and support the fundamental rights of Iranian citizens just as we want to support the fundamental rights of citizens across the globe...we are on the side of fundamental rights and those fundamental rights being respected."



To Think and To Do

"Let us now begin a major effort to secure the best - a crusade for freedom that will engage the faith and fortitude of the next generation. For the sake of peace and justice, let us move toward a world in which all people are at last free to determine their own destiny." (President Ronald Reagan, June 8, 1982)

"Every time we see a flash, a glimmer of hope, of people longing for freedom, I think we have to point it out. We have to shine a spotlight on it. We have to express some solidarity about it." (President Barack Obama, October 14, 2022)

Examine the presidential quotes. In your opinion, does the United States have a responsibility when it comes to supporting the fight for natural rights around the world? What actions should the U.S. take or not take?

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