

# The 2016 NYC Free Iran Rally: Standing up to Oppression and Human Rights Violations in Iran

*UN Plaza, September 20, 2016*



Images provided by Getty Images- View their report of the protest [here](#).



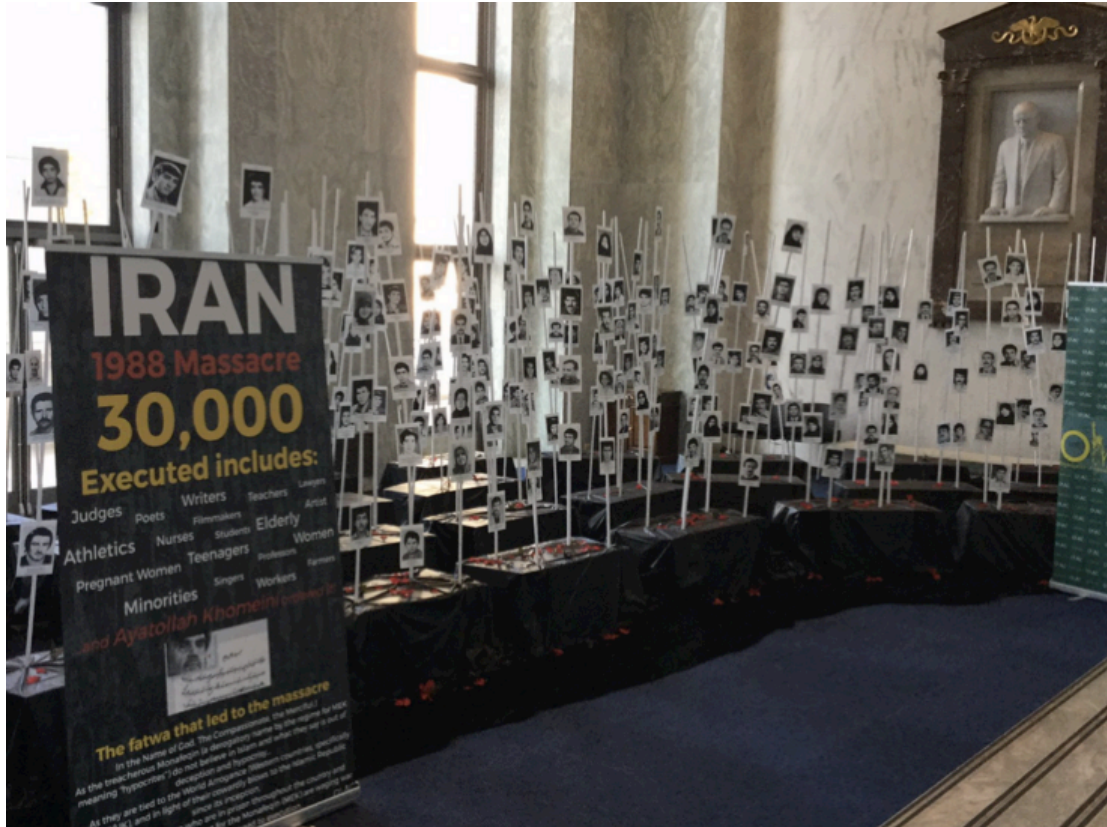
On September 20, 2016, thousands of Iranian Americans gathered outside the UN to express their concern and outrage towards the state of affairs in Iran. An unfit president, oppressive military police, political prisoners, and an increase in executions were their main grievances as they took to the streets in protest. (See official OIAC statement regarding the rally [here](#).)





## Preparation

The movement did not start with the rally. The past week was full of exhibitions, planning sessions, and protests to build up to the big event on Friday.



First, there was the **1988 Massacre Photo Exhibition** on Monday to remember the victims of the 1988 Massacre (see OIAC's press release about the photo exhibition [here](#)). This massacre was a mass execution of up to 30,000 prisoners by the Iranian regime. Despite the horrific nature of the act, many of the political leaders in power at the time of the massacre still hold power today, such as the current justice minister in the Rouhani administration, Mostafa Pourmohammadi. Pourmohammadi ["was the Intelligence Ministry's representative on the Tehran "death commission," and stated that he was proud to have participated in the 1988 Massacre.](#)

*Check out OIAC's blog post about the 1988 Massacre [here](#).*





As preparation for the main event, there were several demonstrations in the streets of Washington all week to raise awareness for the rally and the troubling situation in Iran. Iranian Americans from 40 states came to NY just to prepare and participate in this rally, and this overwhelming support from volunteers was a contributor to the event's success. Social media was also at the forefront of the preparation efforts. In the days leading up to the rally, volunteers shared their experiences of coming together for a great cause on Twitter and Facebook. Below, a Twitter post captures the demonstration on the streets of NYC on the days leading up to the rally.





OIAC also was able to promote the rally through moving advertisements, such as the #No2Rouhani truck pictured here.



As this Twitter follower, Nasrin Saifi emphasizes, not even the rain could stop the dedicated volunteers from preparing for the rally!







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Follow our SM team for news about  
#No2Rouhani Rally #UNGA



Bright yellow outfits and informative signs were the uniform as volunteers raise awareness in the days leading up to the NYC Rally.



## The Morning of the Rally

On the morning of the 20th, Men, women, and children from all over the United States gathered outside the UN to set up the rally. Bright green and yellow was visible from every direction as flags, banners, and signs went up.



According to OIAC, the gathering of thousands “called on the United Nations to hold those with direct involvement in the massacre accountable for this crime against humanity”, especially since many of those accountable still serve at the highest levels of Iranian government.”





## Celebrity Speakers



There were many influential speakers at the rally whose message focused on the horrors and injustices in Iran. Pastor Saeed Abedini, a former political prisoner in Iran, took the stage to express his unity not only with the fallen victims of the 1988 massacre, but with those trapped in Iranian prisons today.

*“We are here to be a voice for the people who don’t have any voice. And we are here to say to the world that if you close your eyes to the human rights in Iran by removing sanctions by talking to the leaders and talking to government, still we stand with the weak, we stand with the people in prison and we’re going to be a voice for them and say that “you’re alive in our heart you’re alive in our voice and we are standing with you.”*

Check out OIAC’s blog post about Iran’s continued habit of arresting of dual citizens [here](#).



Human rights barrister Sir Geoffrey Robertson also joined the rally with a moving and emotional speech. His research into the 1988 massacre led him to detail the horrific findings, stating,

*“They were hung from cranes four at a time, or groups of six from ropes hanging on the front of the stage of the assembly hall. Some were taken to army barracks at night, directed to make their wills and then shot by firing squad. Their bodies were doused with disinfectant, packed in refrigerated trucks, and buried by night in mass graves...without trial, without appeal, and utterly without mercy.”*

*“There has been no reprisal, no retribution, unlike the other (similar) atrocities...The people who ordered it, most of them, are still in high command in Iran.”*

*-As quoted in the [Toronto Sun Times](#) article, [UN proves it's still a farce by welcoming Hassan Rouhani](#)*





Senator Joe Lieberman was another honorary guest whose speech focused on the two-faced nature of supposed moderate president Hassan Rouhani.

*“The fact is that the regime in Iran has more blood on its hands than even the regime in Pyongyang, so we say to the United Nations, don’t be fooled by Rouhani’s smile. And anyway he’s simply a puppet for Khamenei and the IRGC. It is time my friends for a change. It’s time for a change.”*

## Youth Advocates



There was also a strong youth presence at the rally, including a demonstration holding the hashtag #FreeIran that has been active on Twitter in the past few weeks. The different youth advocates took the stage to talk about what a Free Iran means to them, and why democracy in Iran is essential for the next generation.







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Maryam Mirzaei: We r not just a # that the regime can ignore we will bring change to #Iran and create #FreeIran #No2Rouhani



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Kyana: F represents flogging in #Iran but we are here to...

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Young supporters of the rally also performed a moving reenactment of the 1988 massacre of political prisoners.



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#UNGA #No2Rouhani 4 #FreeIran rally.  
commemorating victims of #Iran  
#1988Massacre 30k souls we remember...  
and we seek justice



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## Positive Outcomes of the Rally: Protest of Rouhani and Resolution 159

The rally was viewed as a great success, with a turn out in the thousands and a day full of invigorating speeches and heartfelt cries for justice. Perhaps the most meaningful result of the success of the rally was the subsequent issuance of the House [Concurrent Resolution 159](#) with the purpose of condemning the Government of the Islamic Republic of Iran for the 1988 massacre of political prisoners and calling for justice for the victims.” The resolution was sponsored by Rep. Michael T. McCaul and is currently gathering support in congress.

The day following the rally, there was a [protest of Hassan Rouhani](#) who was speaking at the United Nations. The protest reinforced the idea that Rouhani is unfit to be president, focusing on his dismal human rights record.



Though the memories of the victims of political injustice in Iran will remain for centuries to come, the overall mood of the Free Iran rally was one of hope and perseverance, and it's clear that there is a lot to look forward to in the coming years as Iranian Americans continue to stand up and fight for true democracy in their country.