

Rep. Sheila Jackson Lee:

Well, good morning, everyone. We will call this session to order. I am delighted to be joined by any number of members whose names I will call. But let me acknowledge the IWCC co-chairs, and this is our Iranian Women's Congressional Caucus, Chair Congresswoman Sheila Jackson Lee, Co-Chair, Representative Nancy Mace, and the Iran Human Rights and Democracy Caucus, Co-Chairs Representative Steve Cohen, and Representative Tom McClintock, who you are looking at right now.

We will begin with my opening remarks and the opening remarks of Congresswoman Mace who is here shortly. Let us emphasize this is a very important moment here in the United States Capitol on the Hill, on this day, May 18th, 2023.

Thank you for your patience. Thank you for your expression of influence, importance, a heart commitment, and the recognition that those whose lives have been lost will never be forgotten.

To all of you who have expressed and experienced pain of lost loved ones in the fight for freedom, we offer to you our combined commitment to a free Iran.

So, we are very grateful of your presence here today and I will begin by welcoming all of you and indicating that we must collectively in the Iranian diaspora, all Iranians, who are here expressing their desire for freedom and those around the world. As founder and co-chair of the Iranian Women Congressional Caucus, I'm honored to be here today to hold the first joint meeting of the newly formed Iranian Congressional Caucus and pleased to be here with the Iran Human Rights and Democracy Caucus on the situation of women and human rights in Iran, and what Congress can do to help the Iranian people achieve their freedom.

First, I want to say that we want to unify Iranians across America and those across the world who are collectively have a goal. And, that goal is to come and to stand in the sunlight of Iran free to be able to honor their fallen and to also meet their loved ones who have been separated by this, how should I put it, but no less than evil regime.

I'm pleased to present our special guest in just a few minutes. But last month, I introduced H. Res. 310, a bipartisan resolution condemning the inaction by the Islamic Republic of Iran in addressing the poisoning of Iranian schoolgirls, the 'Daughters of the Iranian Revolution', which now has 36 co-sponsors.

This resolution recognizes a bravery and resilience of women who have faced tremendous challenges in their fight for equality and human rights.

We have all witnessed the courage of women and youth leading the 2022 protests in Iran, calling for social freedom and political change. All they asked for was a moment of freedom, dignity, and respect, and they got death, poisoning.

We've all witnessed the courage of women and youth in leading the 2022 protests in Iran, calling for social freedom and political change.

As stated in the resolution, these protests stem from more than four decades of organized resistance against the Iranian dictatorship led by women who've endured torture, sexual and gender-based violence and death.

Just a few weeks ago, I attended the recognition of the existence of American hostages and the reflection on those who've been freed. To see the Washington Post reporter brought tears to our eyes, he represented the symbol of hostage taking, but we left behind so many others.

These are all fights that we have to have for freedom. The uprising last year in Iran started with the murder of Mahsa Amini, a 22-year-old woman, in the prime of her life, ready for leadership, arrested by morality police in Tehran on September 13, 2022, for allegedly violating Iran's strict rules, requiring women to cover their hair with a hijab or head scarf.

Since the protests started in September after the murder of Mahsa Amini, women and men have taken to the streets. Families have taken to the streets, risking their lives for free and democratic Iran. Children have taken to the streets, over 500 people have been killed, over 15,000 arrested. Iranian courts have issued numerous death sentences linked to the protests, convicting people being enemies of God and spreading corruption on earth. I would argue that they are standing in the light of one who also, our God knows freedom.

As a longtime advocate and fighter for justice and equality. I'm inspired by the ongoing revolution led by Iranian women, and I cannot say more about all of you who have come to know, as someone said, over 25 years of never giving up, as our famous civil rights Congressman said; "Never giving in and never giving out, continue to have the spirit of fight, and remembering those who cannot speak for themselves."

That is why we're here, to speak for those who cannot speak for themselves. Despite the torture, the people in Iran are continuing their fight. And so, I wish to join in all that are here, acknowledge my colleagues that have come, and want to make sure that all of them are in fact acknowledged.

So, let me end my remarks by pausing before the introduction of the very special guest and indicate my delight to have my co-chair join me and to work with her in, I think, this important journey, one of freedom, and particularly two women, one a Democrat, one a Republican, seeing the hopes and dreams of women in Iran, and those of you in this room, we could not say no, we had to say yes.

-Cont. after Rep. Nancy Mace's speech:

- Thank you so very much.

I encourage our colleagues as well to co-sponsor our legislation that specifically speaks to H. Res. 310, to this inaction, condemning the inaction by the Islamic Republic of Iran in addressing the poisoning of Iranian schoolgirls.

As I introduce Madam Rajavi, let me acknowledge the presence of Congressman Danny Davis from Illinois, and let me also acknowledge the other members who we know that will join us. And that will be Congressman Weber, Congressman Cohen, Ruben Gallegos. I believe we got all the members; I believe. we want to thank them. Let's thank them for participating today.

Congressman McClintock has graciously indicated that we'll proceed to you, madam. So, let me just say that we are eager to have your continued leadership.

You are our sister. We are honored. It is important for all to know that she's experienced loss by her sister being killed in the 1970s, one sister being killed in the 1980s, that she has been a key leader of the 1980s Women's March Against Compulsory Veiling, a candidate for the Iranian parliament from Tehran in 1980. She received over 250,000 votes despite election rigging. And I would like to say a quarter of a million votes that she received.

She has an engineering degree from Sharif University of Technology, Iran's MIT, and authored several books on gender equality, freedom, and democracy. As I have known her over the years, she's been consistent, a vocal, passionate spokesperson for freedom, and offered a bright light of reason through her 10-point plan for tomorrow's free Iran.

She is not selfish. She wants and is embracing all that all may be able to return to come home to a free Iran led by someone who loves freedom and democracy. She has addressed parliaments in the UK, France, Italy, Belgium, Canada, Norway, Germany, the European Parliament, and the Council of Europe. And we are not a stranger to her. She's not a stranger to us.

Ladies and gentlemen, it is certainly my privilege to be able to bring to us Madam Maryam Rajavi, the President-elect of National Council of Resistance of Iran.

--Cont. Remarks after Mrs. Maryam Rajavi:

Rep. Sheila Jackson Lee:

Madam Rajavi, we look forward to your continued voice speaking for the children who cannot speak for themselves, 120,000. Looking forward to the nonviolent continued protests for the many millions of Iranians crying out for freedom. We look forward for the condemnation of a government who would blind their boys and girls, the future, and the todays of this great cause.

So, thank you so very much. We in the caucuses will continue to be a force and presence here in the United States Congress bipartisan, and we will continue to lift up our seniors and our children together. They represent the history and the future. And we will always be with those who have borne the burden. Bared the burden of loss but have never given up. They're in this room if you're able to see them. The Iranian diaspora is here to support you today. So, thank you so very much.

Let me yield now to Representative McClintock, who is representing the distinguished Iran Human Rights and Democracy Caucus.

--Cont. remarks after Rep. Ruben Gallegos:

I want everybody to know that you've had an amazing showing of members this morning. It is a tribute to you, Madam Rajavi, that your tenacity and determination over 25 years have generated this kind of bipartisan support and respect. And those who are here in this room, faces of whom I've seen over the years, and I've seen tears as well, but yet their tears have not kept them from being present and active and ensuring that there is not silence, deafening silence, but as my colleagues have said, that they have been voices for freedom.

You've heard from a very large number of members in the early mornings. We are overlapping in our meetings, hearings that are going on as we speak. And so, I hope that all of you, and you know that I must mention Ali Soudjani, who is ever-presence and continuous in my life and in my ears. And to my sisters who I've come to know as sisters. And of course, as we call Sister Madam Rajavi, who has been in our life, who has seen death but yet has not taken to internalizing hatred and anger, has taken to pushing out to the world what freedom is needed in Iran and she will not cease until the rightful government is in place and that freedom rings from one end of Iran to the next. The young women and children that are in the streets, they deserve freedom. And so, I want to thank all of my colleagues, allow my co-chair to offer her words. As we say thank you, I know that I will be departing.

And so, I want to yield the closing remarks to the Congresswoman who made history herself in Citadel from South Carolina, Representative Mace.