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Sent: Wednesday, December 24, 2008 1:06 PM
To: Nazanin
Subject: Ahmadinejad- Channel 4- UK

December

24th 2008

To: Mr. Luke Johnson
Chairman
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Re: Alternate Christmas address by Ahmadinejad on Channel 4 News, UK
<http://www.guardian.co.uk/media/2008/dec/24/iranian-president-channel-4-alternative-christmas-message>

Dear Mr. Johnson and the Board of Channel 4,

As an Iranian born Canadian and human rights activist, I am highly offended by Channel 4 News' invitation to Mahmoud Ahmadinejad to give an alternative message to the Queen's Christmas address.

Channel 4 is demonstrating a commitment to free speech which is to be honoured; but it should be aware that it is giving a voice to the person who robs many millions of people of theirs.

Just in the last few days officials of the Islamic Republic of Iran shut down Nobel Peace Laureate Shirin Ebadi's human rights centre and executed 10 people this morning. Iran has the highest number of executions in the world after China and holds the number one spot for child executions. One of the 140 children on death row in Iran, Behnood Shojaee, was supposed to be executed earlier today but his name was pulled at the last minute. These are hardly symbols of "seasonal goodwill".

Why is Channel 4 giving a platform to a President who was not democratically elected and does not represent the majority of Iranians? Next year, should we expect Kim Jung Il address a message of goodwill and cheer on Christmas, or how about Robert Mugabe?

How can Channel 4 host a man that supports the execution of children, gender apartheid, stoning for adultery, the persecution of religious minorities, the death penalty for homosexuals and apostates, dismembering of limbs for stealing, discrimination of ethnic minorities, and the detainment and torture of students, journalists, bloggers and human rights defenders as political prisoners?

How can Channel 4 broadcast a man that humiliates Iranian citizens and the world community with his anti-Semitic remarks and denying the existence of the holocaust?

If Channel 4 is more concerned about ratings than the human rights of the Iranian people, may I suggest an "alternative" to the "alternative Christmas address"?

Ahmadinejad is warping religious values, using Jesus' name to ostensibly spread peace and love, yet back home in Iran Christians are persecuted for being Christian. I suggest Channel 4 interview people like Azita and Ahmad Reza Shafaghat, an Iranian-Christian couple, who were imprisoned and tortured, and then fled Iran to practice their religion in peace. A few years ago, they lived in hiding in Iran until they escaped via mountains in Kurdistan, Iraq and Turkey to get to Greece. The Greek police caught them and sent them back to Turkey where they spent over 9 months in prison. Before they obtained refugee status from UNHCR, I remember the fear in their voice at the prospect of being deported back to Iran. I helped this couple for a year and a half with UK citizen Reza Pardisan to try and get them asylum. Thanks to the gracious support of the Canadian government, they will soon settle in this free country. When they turn on the news, how will Channel 4 respond to why a platform is being given to one of the men responsible for having them, and hundreds of thousands of Iranians, uprooted from their homeland to escape oppression?

This story is not unique. If it is more convenient, an interview can be conducted with an Iranian-Christian family that is being held at Yals Wood Detention Center in the UK and will be sent back to Iran on December 28th unless people living in the free world, like the directors at Chanel 4, take Iran's violations of human rights seriously. The family fears for their life due to the new apostasy law in Iran that calls for the execution of converts from Islam to another religion.

This alternative Christmas message by Ahmadinejad is in poor taste and a slap to the face of billions of Christians and others who are celebrating the birth of Jesus Christ. Under Ahmadinejad's so-called "presidency", dozens of Christians have been arrested and face possible execution, including Ramtin Soodmand, the son of a Christian pastor who was executed in 1990 for the same reason. I get many emails and phone calls from frightened family's worshipping from basements in Iran including the Sunni minority and Baha'is who are forbidden to attend university.

By giving Ahmadinejad the honour of a Christmas address, an alternative to the Queen, conceals the cruel reality taking place in Iran.

Please consider cancelling Ahmadinejad's "Christmas address". Otherwise, please have an Iranian human rights activist speak alongside of him, or at the very least provide a platform to respond to his address.

Merry Christmas and happy holidays,

Nazanin

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