

Where



- Afghanistan
- Armenia
- Azerbaijan
- Balkans
- Belarus
- Georgia
- Iran
- Iraq
- Kazakhstan
- Kyrgyzstan
- Moldova
- North Caucasus
- Pakistan
- Russia
- Tajikistan
- Tatar-Bashkir
- Turkmenistan
- Ukraine
- Uzbekistan
- Our Affiliates

RFE/RL Radio
In 28 Languages

PRESSROOM

RFE/RL's Luke Allnutt In 'San Francisco Chronicle'

The editor in chief of RFE/RL's English-language website argues that society's concern with the spread of digital media is no different than previous generations' apprehension about technological innovation.

More

More Articles

Worth Watching



Family History
A Soldier's Last Stand



Activist Art
A Spiritual Temple In Tatarstan



FEATURES

Interview: Journalist Says Liberty Prize Belongs To All Iranians Fighting For Democracy



Akbar Ganji, Iranian journalist and political activist, said the prize is "moral support" for Iran's opposition.

May 13, 2010

WASHINGTON -- Akbar Ganji is a prominent Iranian journalist and writer who was jailed in the Islamic republic for six years because of his criticism of the Iranian establishment, his exposure of a state role in the assassination of dissidents, and his efforts toward advancing democracy in Iran.

On May 13, Ganji's work is to be rewarded at a ceremony in Washington, D.C., where he is to receive the Cato Institute's biennial Milton Friedman Prize for Advancing Liberty.

Ahead of the ceremony, RFE/RL correspondent Golnaz Esfandiari and Radio Farda broadcaster Mohammad Zarghami met with Ganji, who told them in an exclusive interview that his prize belongs to all those fighting for democracy in Iran.

RFE/RL: What is the significance of this award and other similar awards and prizes for Iran's democracy movement?

Akbar Ganji: Fortunately, in recent years different NGOs and civic organizations have honored many Iranians who are fighting for human rights. It is a kind of moral support for the movement. Most of these prizes are not financial [eds.: the Milton Friedman Prize is a \$500,000 cash prize].

For example, in 2006 I was awarded a prize for freedom of expression [the John Aubuchon Freedom of the Press Award] at the same institute in which we are now speaking [the National Press Club]. It didn't include any financial help, it was a picture that you can see on the wall.

These [awards] all contribute to moral support showing that the [Iranian] regime is condemned as a violator of human rights, and that those who are fighting for liberty, for human rights and freedom of expression receive support. This is not moral support for [just me]. If I'm given such an award it's because of the Green Movement. This prize, in fact, belongs to all of those who are fighting [for democracy] inside the country, for those who are in jail. And I hope to be active for the same [cause]."

"If I'm being given such an award it's because of the Green Movement."

RFE/RL: After you were released from prison in 2006 and left Iran you told RFE/RL that you would return to Iran. It's been six years now. Are you still hoping to be able to return in the near future?

Ganji: It's a daily wish of all Iranians living abroad to be able to go back to their country one day. But predicting [the time] is very difficult. You either have to be God or his prophet and I'm neither one. I'm an ordinary person and it is still my wish to return to Iran. It's the wish of every Iranian. It's our country, and we all have to go there.

RFE/RL: You fought for human rights and democracy in Iran for years and you paid a heavy price. Do you feel you can be as effective now that you are outside the country?

Ganji: There is, of course, a big difference between fighting [for democracy] inside and outside the country. The goals might be the same but the real fight takes place inside the country. You need a social movement for the transition toward democracy, and you cannot create a movement from outside the country.

But even when you're outside, you can transfer the message of the movement to the outside world. You can help those inside, you can inform -- there are many things that can be done. It's not black and white, it's colorful. And just as the movement is colorful the fight is also colorful. Any ways that are morally defensible must be used to fight the Iranian regime.

RFE/RL: You said that the Iranian people and the opposition movement do not support the principle of "velayat faqih," the rule of the supreme jurist. Ataollah Mohajerani, who was culture minister under former reformist President Mohammad Khatami, has been quoted as saying in a newspaper interview that the Green Movement supports velayat faqih. What is your reaction to his comments? And is he a spokesman of the Green Movement?

Ganji: Everyone is free to express his or her opinion and no one can claim that he is the spokesman of the movement. [Opposition leader Mir Hossein Musavi] has clearly said that the movement does not have a spokesperson outside the country. Musavi has always said that all Iranians are the spokespeople of this movement.

- Print
- Email
- Comment
- Share:

Related Articles

- Akbar Ganji: My Advice For Iran's Green Movement
- Zahra And Millions Like Her Call For Change What Are The Iranian Opposition's Demands?

Editors' Picks



Persian Letters
A Video Game Ahmadijanejad Would Love To Play



Andijon Massacre
Don't Ask -- And Certainly Don't Tell



Legal Limbo
Confession Of Jailed Journalist Aired On Transdniester TV



Kazakh President
One Step Closer To Being 'Leader Of The Nation'



U.S. Visit
Karzai's Political Juggling Act Arrives In Washington



Taboo Issues
Should Girls In Iraq Go To School?



Cannes
Festival Kicks Off With Films From Iran, Ukraine, Russia



Commentary
Iran's Navies Flex Their Muscle

Most Popular

Most-Viewed Articles

- WATCH: Nick Clegg Speaks Dutch (The Horror! A Eurocrat In Downing Street)
- Swedish Muhammad Cartoonist Attacked At Lecture
- When It Comes To Andijon, Don't Ask -- And Certainly Don't Tell
- Kazakh President Handed 'Leader Of The Nation' Status
- UN Report Warns Of 'New Wave' Of Emigration From Armenia
- Conservative Cameron Becomes Britain's New Prime Minister
- Former Kyrgyz President's Supporters Take Over Government Buildings In South
- Ukraine Prosecutors Reopen Tymoshenko Criminal Probe
- U.S. Revives Nuclear Energy Pact With Russia, Citing Cooperation On Iran
- Cannes Film Festival Kicks Off With Entries From Iran, Ukraine, Russia

Disaster Tourism
Welcome To Chernobyl

The movement doesn't belong to anyone. It doesn't have an owner, and anyone can express himself or herself. When I speak here, I'm expressing my personal views. But I think I have a role in the movement as one individual, like any other Iranian. Naturally, as Musavi said, every Iranian is the spokesman of the movement. I can also in these general terms be the spokesman of the movement.

“ I think I have a role in the movement as one individual, like any other Iranian. ”

There are different interpretations: Iran's population is young, we have about 50 million people under the age of 35 and for me it's not acceptable at all that this young generation would accept anything like velayat faqih. The behavior of this generation is such that the regime is cracking down on it and repressing it all the time. Their lifestyle, the way they dress, the food they eat, the way they rest, everything -- where in this new generation can one see anything that would be in line with the establishment? I don't think at all that the people of Iran are in favor of velayat faqih.

People's views are respectful and they are free to express their views, and we can debate each other. I can demonstrate that the number of those who want politics and government to be separated from religion is much, much, much greater than those who support this regime.

RFE/RL: Do you think that the Green Movement's lack of a centralized leadership and designated spokesman outside the country -- combined with the different voices coming from within the movement -- can be confusing for supporters and others?

Ganji: No, not at all. The movement is shaping up gradually, meaning that as the movement continues, it will have a stabilized leadership and we need time. It's not to our benefit for this regime to collapse today. You need an experienced democratic force that will be able to replace the regime.

The experience with the 1979 revolution should not be repeated, where a dictatorship worse than the current one comes to power. We need this to continue. We need [opposition figures] to express their views and stances very clearly. I can't say, for example, [one thing] tonight, another thing tomorrow, and something else another day. As time passes people will show their true faces.

[Print](#) [Email](#) [Share:](#)

[Comment on this forum](#)

Most E-Mailed Articles

1. Kazakh President Handed 'Leader Of The Nation' Status
2. Public Opinion On Nazi Collaborators Gets Revision In Balkans
3. Uzbek President Orders Closure Of Private Notary Offices
4. Censorship At Tehran's Book Fair
5. WATCH: Nick Clegg Speaks Dutch (The Horror! A Eurocrat In Downing Street)
6. Interview: What's On Agenda As Medvedev Heads To Syria?
7. Putin Consoles Families At Scene Of Siberian Coal Mine Tragedy
8. Russian Military Says Pirates Likely Dead
9. Books About Zen, Baha'i Faiths Banned At Tehran Book Fair
10. Opposition 'Committee To Protect Ukraine' Launched

Most-Viewed Multimedia

1. A Soldier's Last Stand
2. Photos Of The Week: May 1-7
3. The Life Of Josip Broz Tito
4. At Work In Bosnia's Minefields
5. Nostalgia For Yugoslavia's Tito

Most Commented

1. Public Opinion On Nazi Collaborators Gets Revision In Balkans
2. WATCH: Nick Clegg Speaks Dutch (The Horror! A Eurocrat In Downing Street)
3. Ukraine Prosecutors Reopen Tymoshenko Criminal Probe
4. 'Ahmadinejad, The Liar, Is Our Guest Today'
5. Detente And Modernization
6. Iraq On Air: Should Girls Study?
7. When It Comes To Andijon, Don't Ask -- And Certainly Don't Tell
8. Censorship At Tehran's Book Fair
9. Kazakh President Handed 'Leader Of The Nation' Status
10. Confession Of Jailed Journalist Aired On Transnistria TV