

Effectiveness of International Actors in Debate of Human Rights in Iran 1990-2008

¹Hassan Davoodifard, ²Jayum Anak Jawan Ph.D.

¹PhD. Student of Politics and Government, Department of Government & Civilization Studies,
University Putra Malaysia (UPM)

²Professor of Politics & Government University Putra Malaysia (UPM), 43400 UPM Serdang,
Selangor, Malaysia.

Abstract: The Islamic Republic of Iran's (IRI) discourse and practice on human rights issues has raised much criticism in national and international levels. While Iranian government has had its own human rights perspective in treating its citizens, many international human rights organizations have campaigned to influence the behaviour of Iranian government and people in terms of development of human rights values in Iran. This study seeks to explore the role of international human rights actors related to promoting of human rights values in Iran from 1990-2008. It focuses on the role of international human rights actors such as European Union (UN), and international nongovernmental organizations (INGOs) such as Amnesty International (AI) and Human Rights Watch (HRW), and domestic Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) involved in promoting human rights in Iran. The findings of this study demonstrate that human right actors have played a significant role in the human rights situation in Iran. It also shows that the Iranian government and society have been affected by efforts of human rights actors after 1990.

Key words: Iran, Human Rights, International Actors, Human Rights Organizations.

INTRODUCTION

Nowadays, international human rights organizations have changed to major actors in the struggle to achieve human rights values, and try to safeguard, defend, and propagate individual rights. To this aim, international human rights organizations try to support any change in the governments' treatment and behaviour towards citizens, in terms of human rights, and make these changes possible. Iran's government, as the case study of this research, has signed and ratified several international human rights document. Upon ratifying these international treaties, it has to take the responsibility to accept their proposed laws and execute their legal regulations considered for individuals. Essentially the IRI considers and executes its own laws, bylaws and regulations in treating its citizens and has not accepted all international human rights conventions yet.

This contradictory behaviour for Iran's government with regard to human rights issues has provided the opportunity for international human rights organizations – which act like international actors to promote human rights – to play a role in affecting Iranian government's behaviour in the context of human rights. To develop and promote human rights values, international human rights actors rely on external pressures, but pay attention to the Iranian domestic demands for the improvement of human rights in the country. Connecting these two factors, these international organizations try to make Iran's government accept international laws and regulations so that they can change Iranian government's current treatment and behaviour in terms of human rights. Thus, there is an ongoing fight between international human rights actors and Iran's government. These struggles, whether in part of international actors to force Iran's government to change its behaviour or in part of Iran's government to maintain its current behaviour dealing with human rights issues, provide a new and researchable opportunity through which a study of international human rights actors becomes possible. It also gives us a chance to see the role these actors play in shaping Iran's government's behaviour and the society's viewpoint on the issue of human rights values.

1.1 Theories:

Rationalism (Realism and Liberalism) and constructivism are two main theories that can explain the relations between international actors and human rights issues in both domestic and international arena. Realists

Corresponding Author: Hassan Davoodifard, PhD. Student of Politics and Government, Department of Government & Civilization Studies, University Putra Malaysia (UPM)
Tel: +60-173063125
E-mail: hassan.davoodifard@yahoo.com

emphasize the superiority of power, interests and security in international relations. Realists believe the states are unwilling to apply human rights issues in their policies because the states as main actors don't sacrifice their own national interests for improving human rights in other countries (Kennan, 1997).

Liberalism is more open to the effects of international human rights actors. Two core assumptions of liberal theory, according to Moravcsik (1995) are as follows. First, for liberal private groups and individual are the fundamental actors within international politics. Second, the domestic interests of individual impress government's policy. In the liberal view the people create the governments and they have mutual actions with various parts of their own society and international organizations. Human rights organizations as international actors are important because they are interwoven in a network of relationship with people and governments. They influence governments because governments understand the advantage of international cooperation and the role of IGOs and NGOs involvement in their relations with other states.

By the later 1990s, constructivism (Christopher & Daniel, 2007) had become the third important theory for international relations' interpretations, including the study of human rights issue. Constructivism posits that governments feel coerced to listen to the concerns of international actors such as human rights organizations, their population's demands, and the concerns of NGOs. This would be possible by cooperation with various human rights organizations including international and national NGOs in government proceedings (Moravcsik, 1995; Bernasky, 2004). Constructivist theory emphasises the importance of international human rights actors and the independent role of human rights values to shape and play in domestic and international policies. In constructivism intuition the governments are like other social beings and therefore susceptible to procedure of learning and reflection in accepting the international values by influence of international actors (Levesque, 2005).

Recently, international relation scholars have been increasingly interested in processes of promotion of human rights values (Sikkink, 1993; Sikkink & Keck, 1998; Schmitz & Sikkink, 1999; Reus-Smit & Price, 1998), but the most groundbreaking and influential works related to this arena of literature previously is Risse, Ropp, and Sikkink 's work (1999), entitled "*The Power of Human Rights: International Norms and Domestic Change.*" Risse Ropp, and Sikkink have introduced a theoretical framework whereby the national government's behaviour of human rights values could be changed in internal level. The Spiral model of human rights norms established by Risse, Ropp, and Sikkink (1999) has illustrative operation because it can explain various pendulous movements in Iranian government discourse and practice of human rights values.

Human rights situation in IRI is critical and commands the attention of the rest of the world. International human rights actors are trying to play a constructive role in moving IRI toward a greater respect for the human rights of its people. This article will be concerned with the Risse, Ropp and Sikkink's (1999) work to identify the relationship between Iranian state and its NGOs of human rights and the international actors that are playing a role to promote human rights values in IRI. This study examines the role of international human rights actors as external pressures on Iran's government and people. It also focuses on internal demands for more human rights by Iranian population and NGOs that are supporting and linking with international organizations to protect and promote human rights in IRI. Examining the political situation of IRI regarding to civil and political rights during three presidency periods from 1990-2008 will be presented by explaining the role of international human rights actors on Iranian government discourse and practice of human rights values.

To understand more about the action of human rights actors and the promotion of human rights values, I explain the spiral model first, and then to employing this theory this study will chose the international human rights actors. Second step is to show what efforts the international human rights actors have made to influence the Iranian government behavior. This study try to show whether this human rights actors especially the EU's foreign policy have been able to make a connection with offender government regarding its human rights issues or no. In third how the INGOs involved in the human rights debate of Iranian state. What reaction the Iranian government has had to international pressures for development of human rights values and domestic social demand for more rights and freedoms during 1990 until 2008.

1.1.1 Spiral Model:

Thomas Risse, Kathryn Sikkink and Stephen Ropp (1999) proposed a theory of the stage through which international human rights actors have positive role on domestic states in acceptance of human rights values. They advocate the spiral model (I have summarized spiral model in figure 1) as a tool by which governments and individuals accept the international human rights values as their own. This research uses spiral model developed by Sikkink, Risse and Ropp. So, what is the spiral model? And how will this study use the spiral model to attain its purposes?

Risse, Sikkink, and Ropp (1999) have illustrated the spiral model in five phases as a progressive process. Phase one is the social mobilization and transnational networking; it begins when a sovereign country signs an instrument containing international human rights norms following which domestic non state actors can gain a political space to create transnational networks to legitimize their demands from the government. Phase two is regime's denial of the applicability international values. In the second phase, the government though a signatory may deny the applicability of the international values. Phase three is tactical (diplomatic) concessions. In this phase, when the domestic government feels pressures from international actors try to reduce such pressures through releasing some political prisoners or ratifying the international human rights documents. Phase four includes expanded transnational pressure until the human rights values are accepted and embodied into the nation's rhetoric and institutions. In this stage the actors' pressures continue until the government is compelled to allow the incorporation of international human rights values into its national legislations. This may be expanding the national Constitutional guarantees in accordance with such values or bringing about changes in domestic legislation through legal reforms. The fifth phase is marked with implementing the human rights values consistently in the practice of the government. This phase is a stage through which states consistently implement the international human rights values in their domestic practices.

In general, the spiral model is useful for this study. The spiral model will provide an explanation of the dual influence of internal and external pressures on Iranian state. Regarding these process of acceptance of human rights values, I will refer to the three presidency terms of IRI from 1990 to 2008. By focusing on human rights situation in Iran, and engaging with the international human rights actors' pressures I will be able to determine which one of the spiral models' phases has been and is appeared in Iran in terms of its human rights status.

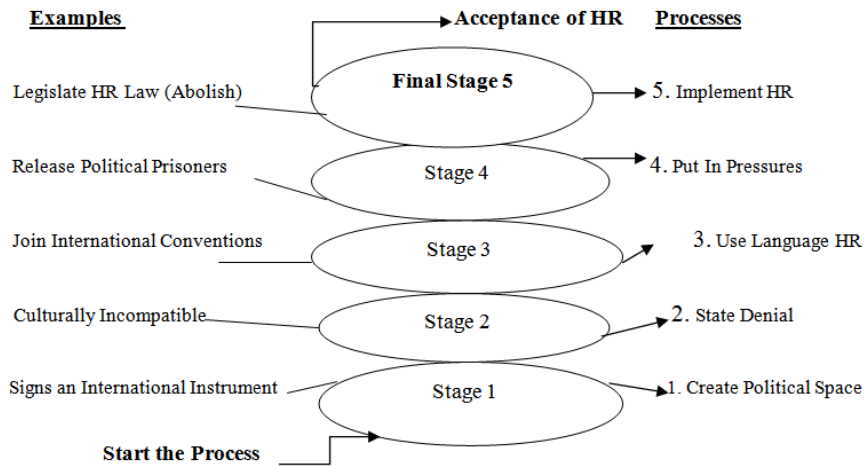


Fig. 1: Summary of Risse, Sikkink, and Ropp's Spiral Model of Human Rights

1.2 Iranian Revolution in 1979:

The Islamic Republic of Iran happened around thirty one years after the ratification of 1948 UDHR. The religious leader of Iranian Revolution in 1979, Ayatollah Khomeini by emphasizing three slogans – Independence, Freedom, and Islamic Republic – overthrew the secular regime of the Pahlavi monarchy (Abrahamian, 2000). The Iranian people supported the Revolution because it had a very powerful populist appealed by its attention to ideas such as freedom and social justice. By appearing the Iranian Revolution the Iran's political, judiciary and the legal system of last regime was changed entirely. Since the Revolution the Iranian government has been called as Islamic government and the legal system of Iran has been based on Islamic religion. The Supreme Leader or Rahbar held the greatest power and determined the main policies in IRI. He is elected for life time by a group of religious experts who were elected by the people. Since 1989 Ayatollah Ali Khamenei has been serving as the second Supreme Leader of IRI. According to the IRI's Constitution the President is elected by a nationwide election for four years and the Supreme leader appoints the head of judiciary branch (Naserzadeh, 2002). The IRI's political system has held its legitimacy based on the Islamic religious principles. Since the Revolution the religious viewpoint of Iranian government about the laws and fundamental liberties have created various challenges in Iran and international legal systems.

Today, after three decades of the victory of the revolution, there are some international attempts and domestic demands to develop and promote human rights values including social, political and civil rights. To

shed more light on the socio-political situation of Iran, this research focuses on the years between 1990 till 2008. Three reasons are behind such decision: firstly, from 1990 to 1996 people started to ask for obtaining rights due to the policies made by Hashemi's administration. Secondly, these legal requests found deeper meaning with Khatami's presidency from 1997 to 2004. And thirdly is the fact that people's eagerness along with their demands to a more open political atmosphere for expressing their rights was opposed by suppressive reactions in part of Ahmadinejad's administration that came to power in 2005 narrowing down the political atmosphere in the country. Here, I will review the Iranian socio-political context from 1990-2008, regarding to three presidency terms to show how Iranian government has dealt with human rights values in the national sphere. In this way, on the one hand, the viewpoints of IRI about human rights values become clear and, on the other, human rights' status comes under evaluation based on international human rights standards.

1.2.1 Demands for more Rights and Freedom 1990-1996:

After 1979 Revolution, the Islamic Republic relied on the idea that human rights issues are internal issues with no ground to be discussed in an international level. To preserve its ideology and to continue its survival (Kurzman, 2001), the revolutionary government started to violate human rights as an unavoidable necessity, and to achieve its aim it took a religious and revolutionary approach to subjects like freedom and rights and made use of them to its benefits (A. Mokhtari, 2004). This perspective and the negative viewpoint of the IRI towards human rights values remained unchanged till the closing years of 1980s. The 1989 was the years of Hashemi's first term of presidency. At this time Iran's nation were still living with mottos about obtaining more rights and freedom and wished for a more moderate government. It was in such situation that Hashemi's administration got aware, to some extent, of the fact that major mottos of the revolution like freedom had not come to reality.

In 1992, Mohammad Yazdi, the head of judiciary system, stated that the compulsory presence of attorney in court was a prerequisite for showing respect to human rights values and an evidence, in a vaster perspective, of the fact that the government of IRI rules according law. As he continues, nobody in the Islamic Republic is persecuted for having certain beliefs, and all courts and judiciary subdivisions are ordered to execute all political and media trials at the presence of attorneys and acceding to justice (Dabashi, 1993).

Such words in part of the head of Hashemi's government's judiciary system, reveals the fact that Iranian government had doubted human values till then. This happened whereas Iran had already accepted and ratified both international human rights conventions – International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights – without considering any exception or certain condition (S. Mokhtari, 2004). Although Iranian regime changed in 1979, Iran was expected and bound to execute international human rights treaties. Though under such circumstances, no independent national organization existed to watch human rights' status in Iran before 1993.

In 1993, Hashemi was elected for his second run of four years presidency. In his second incumbency, Hashemi Rafsanjani intended to make a better atmosphere for political activists. In a television program in November 1995, he announced, "we would like to witness stronger parties in Iran, and it would be better for us if the country contains important and serious parties" (Somea, 2001). This need that Hashemi felt for a more open atmosphere for political parties and their activities can be considered as a positive action taking place in his second term of incumbency.

Of other positive actions and behaviours of his administration in his period we can mention the collaboration of his administration with international human rights organizations. From the time of revolution, in 1979, the IRI had no collaboration with international human rights organizations. In 1991, the special envoy of Human Rights Commission – Reynalo Galindo Pohl – was not allowed to enter Iran following which Iran's official's collaboration with UN's Human Rights Commission came to a halt. In 1996, for the first time, Iran's government agreed with the United Nations' envoy's trip to the country and as a result Maurice Copithorne was sent to Iran. In a rarely seen occasion, Iran's government let the agents of Fact Finding Committee of HRW to enter and visit the country in 1996. This collaboration with international watchers and organizations, though limited, was a positive and pleasing (lucky) change in the views of human rights national and international activists.

Besides, Hashemi's administration founded the first national human rights institution "Iranian Islamic Human Rights Commission" in Tehran in 1995. Yet, in relation to supporting policies administered by Rafsanjani's government to make more open atmosphere for political activists and to collaborate with international human rights organizations, two reasons can be taken into consideration. Practically speaking, Iran's government showed no intention to collaborate with international human rights organizations till 1990s. However, after 1990, President Rafsanjani prepared an open atmosphere for political activists and human rights

activists, in general, and let international human rights organizations visit Iran. Susan Tiefenbrun (2007) knows government's policies as the first reason for creating such situation. These policies, as she states, created a wave of people's requests for obtaining their rights. In continuation, she reminds us of concrete programs that included educational program for adults, and vaster and unlimited availability of public education for both sexes.

This permeable environment along with public education programs made the population more aware of their rights. This was while Iran's population was a young one with youngsters making 70% of the population. Beside, 22 million students have been and are studying in Iran (Bazargan, 2002). Step by step, this population of young students got more familiar with their rights and asked for more freedom. They created collective movements to obtain their rights and this caused the dehiscence of human rights movement in Iran. As Farhi (2001) states, for the first time, men see women raising their voices in the streets asking for their rights and participating in political movements while the government agrees with them. These human rights movements, either made by women or by students associations, emphasized substantially the human rights values – existing in international treaties signed by Iran's government – and asked for the execution of human rights laws.

The second reason for the permeability of the county's political atmosphere and Hashemi's attention to human rights values was the issue of legitimacy (Hawkins, 1997) of the political system inside and outside the country. In a national level, Hashemi had come to the conclusion that after one decade of the occurrence of Islamic revolution, Iran's nation's request for freedom was nothing more than a motto. Hence, the attention that was due to be paid to the execution of these mottos. Accordingly, he expressed his contentment of the existence of more political parties and founded the first national governmental organization of human rights during his second term of his incumbency. This Rafsanjani's policy had two effects.

The first effect of this policy was that it gained a higher legitimacy for the Islamic Republic, and the second was that it made the created movements by Iranian people asking for their rights, officially recognized and legalized. In the international level, Hashemi had found it out that collaboration with human rights organizations fortifies the legitimacy of the IRI and eliminates – or at least diminishes – the negative viewpoints of international organizations in terms of human rights' violations in Iran. That is why, in 1996, he executed his policy regarding collaboration with UN's Human Rights Commission's envoy. Following this positive policy in Rafsanjani's interactions with international human rights organizations and the gradual betterment of internal political atmosphere made students association, and even women, stronger asking for more rights they relied on international conventions. These domestic groups willingly wanted to be in better situation of human rights and freedom.

Accordingly, the issue of human rights became a public issue around the country. In such situation, Rafsanjani's administration inevitably paid attention to human rights. But this was not the end of human rights' story in Iran. It was more a beginning for the IRI to encounter a huge wave of protests and requests for more rights coming from Iran's nation and international organizations. Consequently, Iran's government had to rely on a reformist figure in 1997 election, and this reformist was Khatami.

1.2.2 President Khatami 1997-2004:

The open atmosphere for social movements struggling for more rights for groups like women and students in Iran, created at the time of Hashemi's presidency, encouraged Iranian citizens to look for a reformist to achieve their rights. President Khatami's victory in the election of 1997 was a sign of relief and calmness for the Iranian people in their struggles for achieving their legal demands of more liberties.

Again like the first years after revolution, Iranian people put forward demands like freedom and justice. President Mohammad Khatami was a liberal cleric who struggled for establishing a civil society, human rights and fundamental liberties (Amuzegar, 1998). Unanimous with people, Khatami understood people's demands for more rights. Thus, he put freedom and equality at the top of the issues he talked about in his public speeches. Khatami was interested in promoting and expanding public and political freedom, things that rarely were mentioned in previous decades and even were not common in human rights discussions after 1979 Islamic Revolution. During Hashemi's Presidency, people mostly expressed their legal demands though making street demonstrations, but after Khatami won the election in 1997 and due to relative more permeable political atmosphere in the society a movement for freedom and equality was born in the press.

Khatami's administration gave more freedom to newspapers and this led a surprising increase in the numbers of publications. In the absence of independent political parties, a large number of independent newspapers and magazines played significant roles in the political stage of the country and changed into a ground for discussing a variety of human rights issues. Newspapers introduced the principles of democracy

and human rights subjects, while simultaneously criticized social and cultural traditions that were prevalently believed and executed in the country for a long time. In this way, the media created a general awareness in the society and transformed into a tool for mobilization in the hands of reformists who were in search of more respect for human rights values in IRI.

More important than that was the fact that Khatami's period was the only period, after the Revolution of 1979, in which human rights issues were considered as significant issues. Even clerics like Montazeri, Nouri and Yousefi Ashkvary (S. Mokhtari, 2004) supported debate on human rights in Iran. In 2001, Khatami was elected as president for the second time. From 1997 to 2004 Khatami tried to pave the way for making lasting political reforms. During the two terms of his presidency more than 200 independent newspapers and magazines were founded (Jordan, 2008). Khatami created a new dimension for the reformist movement in the political and social context of Iran. From the time he came to power, his famous motto – Dialogue among Civilizations – (Khatami, 2002; Holliday, 2007) in foreign policy and his emphasis on the public liberties and human rights values in internal affairs have affected people both in the country and around the world.

Khatami developed Iran's foreign policy and made a better picture of Iran on the international scene. As for internal policy, he talked about the accordance existing between religion and freedom and paid attention to the observation of the Constitution and government's obligation in executing laws (Amuzegar, 2004). The new gesture and expression in relation to political freedom and observation of individual's rights pleased not only Iranian population but the leaders of western countries, international human rights organizations, and non-governmental organizations. Accordingly, during the period between 1997 and 2004 the IRI paid attention to the expansion and defending individual rights and national non-governmental organizations like Defender of Human Rights Centre found the permission to appear.

1.2.3 President Ahmadinejad 2005-2008:

People's enthusiasm during Khatami's presidency and in the open political atmosphere of Rafsanjani's period came to a standstill when, in 2005, Ahmadinejad came to power as a representative of religious and conservative clerics. Mahmoud Ahmadinejad let conservatives disagree with reformists' actions and abort whatever they did. With Ahmadinejad coming to power, the political and social atmosphere of the country got narrower; that is, all the branches of the state came to be dependent on each other in comparison to the past. In such situation, judges were judging according to the interpretation that the government made of the law and not according to the law itself. This led to unjust convictions, especially for political and human rights activists that were criticized by AI and HRW. Compared to the time of Khatami's administration, newspapers have been witnessing more disturbances and annoyances in the period from the time that Ahmadinejad has been elected as president in 2005. As Reporters without Borders reported in 2006, Iran stands 162 among 168 countries in terms of freedom index. At the present time, there is no fully independent newspaper in the country and reformist publications are shut down. In such situation, there is a lack of law for providing media's freedom and the media are greatly vulnerable to Ahmadinejad's administration's pressures and are randomly shut down by the government (Human Rights Watch, 2008).

From the time Ahmadinejad has come to power, IRI has adopted a suppressive policy towards reformists, intellectuals and even human rights activists. He has blotched out the open atmosphere Khatami created for the media and forced the Islamic Human Rights Organization that Hashemi had found earlier to prepare reports according to the government's will. However, this Ahmadinejad's suppressive policy with regard to freedom, and observation of the human rights made the country's human rights movements more active than before. Although the policy of Ahmadinejad's government has been a suppressive one and all the branches of the government like judiciary, executive, and legislator branched were collectively under his command, his policy has increased the presence of organizations and human rights activists who are independent from the government and severely criticize government's suppressive policy.

In international stage, on the other hand, Ahmadinejad's government – unlike Khatami's – could not present an acceptable image of the IRI in terms of human rights issues to the world. This is why the present Secretary General of the United Nations, Ban Ki-Moon, seriously condemned Iran's government's behaviour and the status of human rights in the country in 2008 (Memarian, 2008). Today, Ahmadinejad's administration's policies and treatment in terms of human rights are watched by non-governmental human rights organizations, and human rights activists are more connected to international human rights organizations than before.

Due to delimiting policies of Ahmadinejad's administration and to achieve their legal demands, human rights activists ask for the support and aid of international human rights organizations, and when Iran's government does not pay enough attention to the demanded rights and freedom put forward in the Iran's

society, human rights activists in the country turn to international organizations for support. More important is that the reports of human rights activists in Iran are confirmed and supported by international organizations. In 2008, Iran was condemned by the United Nations based on the statements and reports of Iranian national non-governmental organizations of human rights.

1.3 Iran and Human Rights Actors:

1.3.1 European Union and Iran's Human Rights Issues:

Until 1990, the EU did not have a clear policy in regards to human rights issues in IRI. For a period of about 18 years, from 1990 onward, the relationship between EU and IRI were more developed. Today, EU is the largest economic partner of Iran (Naghizade, 2003). During last two decades the EU has been interested in promotion of human rights values and democratic principles in Iran.

The EU is engaged in human rights dialogues, as instrument of the EU's external policy towards the third world countries, to have a constructive and positive relationship with these countries (European Union, 2007). The aim of the EU is to support dialogue of democracy and human rights in national sphere throughout the world. The EU member states have, for many years, been keen to maintain and develop a dialogue with Iran. Although the EU has been criticizing human rights in IRI, for the first time, the IRI and EU established their "Comprehensive Dialogue in 1998" to converse large spectrum of issues for establishment of mutual cooperation. The EU found the Khatami's presidency as an opportunity to discuss human rights issues. Consequently, the EU and Iran have held human rights dialogues for almost three years, guided by programs of the EU Council (International Federation for Human Rights, 2004). The human rights dialogue with IRI has been one of the EU's tools to promote human rights values in Iran. The first meeting of the EU and IRI human rights dialogue, focused on the "prevention of torture and discrimination" in 2002 (International Federation for Human Rights, 2004).

The EU believes that connecting with Iranian government is a way to encourage the Iranian people especially the reformist's groups in their reform activities. Since 2002, the EU and Iranian government have been interested in the negotiations of human right values and they have held four sessions of the human rights dialogue. During the course of these dialogues, the EU discussed extensively about the draft legislation on torture and its necessary compatibility with the "International Covenant against Torture" as well as the violations of women rights. The human rights dialogue has been as a way in determination of the EU's concerns to Iran's human rights situation. During dialogues period the EU focused on IRI's cooperation with international organizations, the judicial system, improvements of "civil and political rights, the prevention and eradication of torture, and the prison system." It has encouraged the Iranian government to join the international human rights declarations and demanded the changes in IRI's legal system.

The EU has used the dialogue in the past to raise the people in Iran, for example, during the dialogues period many participants in different level were joined with these dialogues comprising the government, the judiciary branch, and civil society activists. The EU's Commissioner, Chris Patten, visited Iran in 2003. He declared to better economic relations with EU, Iranian government has to respect human rights values and declared "the EU wanted to see concrete progress in field of improving human rights in Iran", especially on women's rights (Saba, 2003).

The EU behaviours regarding to human rights in Iran have been as encouragements policies and condemnations statements. The EU has commended the Iranian population for their efforts to achieve the educational and social rights, and it has critically condemned the Iranian government violations of the civil and political rights. EU believes that the most important groups that have been under Iranian government's pressures are students, journalists human rights defenders, women rights activists like One million signatures campaign and other Iranian citizens who wanted freedom of expression and opinion.

In the closure of one of the most important Iranian NGO – Defenders of Human Rights Centre – the EU condemned its closure and urged the Iranian government to allow national NGOs act freely. Regarding the violation of human rights values in Iran, EU condemned the sentences against a number of bloggers and journalists (European Union, 2007). To encourage human rights movements in Iran, the European countries awarded their annual human rights prize to at least six Iranian human rights activists and dedicated more than \$5 million to contribute human rights process in Iran since 2000 (EUropean Union, 2004).

Furthermore, the EU continued other efforts to express its human rights concerns in Iran after 2004. Introducing the constitutional provisions that allow human rights violations to occur and EU's repeatedly worries statements about violation of individual right have supported raising a public awareness of human rights situation in Iran society. The EU has tried to show a clear picture of human rights situation in Iran through its annual reports. All EU member states supported the resolutions against IRI at the UN General

Assembly in 2005 and 2006 through which called the IRI to respect the human rights values and commit its international obligations.

The main areas of focus of the EU are the promotion of political rights and civil liberties. Once Iran became a target country, the EU tried to support Iranian independent civil society more than before. In 2003, the project in support of human rights began to be implemented in IRI. This project has contributed to increase the quality of Iran's human rights activists as a network, and has been a part of the EU's contribution to strengthening Iranian's civil society. Iranian human rights activists have been supported to benefit from this program in several ways such as participating in seminars in Europe, and helping Iranian human rights defenders to make links with international and regional human rights organizations to put more pressure on Iran government.

To encourage Iranian population and to promote human rights values, the EU has supported the Iranian political prisoners and human rights defenders for their activities. In the case of Hashem Aghajari, - a university lecturer - along with UN and USA, the EU immediately condemned his death penalty punishment. While after Khatami presidency the dialogue between EU and IRI came in halt and the Iranian government was unwilling to continue the negotiations, in 2005, the EU's demanded IRI to resume and continue the human rights discussion. The Council emphasized that IRI has to be responsible about its international obligations regarding to juvenile executions and urged the Iranian government to permanently realising Akbar Ganji – who was released in 2006. The EU condemned Ganji's detention and violation treatment in prison and called on the IRI to release all individuals who are imprisoned because of their political activities or for their expressions.

The EU has supported Iranian NGOs and human rights activists and has tried to ensure bridges between Europe and Iranian human rights debates. From 2005 onward, the level of connection of Iranian human rights movements and civil society with EU has been faced with difficulty because the Ahmadinejad's government has made disturbs for domestic activists and independent organizations struggling to upgrade human rights situation. But the relationship between EU and Iranian human rights activists is in progress. Today, a good relation does exist between EU and human rights activist in Iran. A good evidence for such a claim is that the EU has granted at least six Annual Prizes of human rights to Iranian human rights activists since 2000. In a nutshell, although the EU has not used a negative conditional clause against Iranian government, for its poor human rights situation, and the policy of the EU towards Iran was halted and dominated by negotiations over Iran's nuclear programs in 2005 (making human rights concerns a secondary matter), the EU has sought to effectively deal with human rights in Iran in debate and practice especially during Khatami presidency.

Regarding to the efforts of EU, after 2000 and especially during the period of dialogue, we could see some changes in Iranian government's discourse and practice of human rights. The EU through its policies tried to encourage the Iranian government to sign the international human rights documents. During Khatami presidency, IRI has signed the "Statute of the International Criminal Court" (ICC) in 2000. Of other EU efforts was to engage with officials of judiciary branch as the main authority in implementing the basic human rights values. In this regard EU Commissar Patten successfully met Hashemi Shahroudi (2008), the head of IRI's judiciary system. Shahroudi and Patten discussed about the execution by stoning as a punishment that was implementing in Iran and Shahroudi mentioned that the execution by stoning would be replaced with other means of punishment.

The EU urged IRI to report its annual human rights situation to the ICESCR and ICCPR committees. While Iranian government did not report to international organizations almost for a decade, in a positive gesture, Iran has reported to the "Committee on Elimination of Racial Discrimination" (CERD) in 2003, which led to CERD's examinations in August 2003. The Iranian officials have been trying to show a good picture of the human rights situation in Iran. As evidence Shahroudi (2008), stated that all security forces, police and judiciary officials must respect the provisions during the arrestment and questioning of individual. Khatami's administration by emphasizing the compatibility of human rights values with Islamic values tried to pass the Convention on the Elimination of all form of Discriminations Against Women (CEDAW) in Iran's parliament. But Guardian Council strictly opposed the IRI's ratification of this international women's rights declaration. The reason of the Guardian Council was that the declaration had been incompatible with the principles of Islam.

In general, member states of the EU have been unanimous in their assessment of Iran's human rights situation. The EU has generally influenced Iran's human rights issues in three levels. Governmental level (dialogue) which was an instrumental means affecting judiciary system in implementing human rights provisions. In the international level these states repeatedly supported the UN's issuance of resolutions against Iranian government because of its violation of human rights values. The third level includes the EU's

encouragement policies towards Iran's human rights activists and nongovernmental organization to maintain an active human rights movement relating to promotion of human rights values in Iran. This lets us believe that the EU could help more to bring about human rights change in IRI through conditional clauses, political dialogue, and mutual cooperation projects.

1.4 Definition and Functions of Human Rights NGOs:

To give a practical definition, NGO can be described as, an organization which is active on political and social issues, created by private citizens, not profit making, and separate from government and with transnational scope (Gordenker & Weiss, 1996). The main function of human rights NGOs is that through their works they have set the human rights values as global standards (Welch, 2001b). NGOs have more opportunities and space than intergovernmental organizations in criticizing national governments because they are independent from governments both politically and financially. This study relies on this function of NGOs to determine the role of NGOs fighting against human rights abuses in Iran. I refer to two important international human rights organizations, Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch and explore their role on debate of human rights in IRI.

1.4.1 The Efforts of Amnesty International for Human Rights in Iran:

Amnesty international was founded in May 1961 when Peter Benenson, as a lawyer, had written an article about prisoners in British's newspapers. His aim was to support the prisoners through publishing articles and to encourage the readers to support the prisoners against offending governments (Clark, 2001). Since then many human rights protector groups were established in the world to condemn such violations in any circumstances. For Amnesty International Iran government has been one case that has violated the values of human rights for a long time. Regarding to this AI's vision, it has been documenting the violation of human rights in values in Iran since its emergence in 1960s. AI has criticized the inconsistent policies and behaviour of Iran government regarding to human rights at various committees. AI has catalogued reports, articles, news, and urgent actions on Iran in its library (Amnesty International, 1965). It has repeatedly focused on the Iranian individuals who are imprisoned because of their beliefs and political ideas. AI urged the Iranian government, security officials, and judiciary system to respect the international human rights obligations regarding to arrestment of people for political reasons.

In addition to the support of political prisoners, AI (2003) has repeatedly introduced the vaguely provisions in existing Iran's legal system. It has emphasized that charges like "insulting the holy sanctities" and "endangering national security" have been used by Iranian government to ban the activities of Iranian population like human rights defenders and other political activists. AI has clearly mentioned, that IRI has to reviewed and repealed the vaguely provisions in accordance with international human rights laws, because such Iran's vaguely legislation extremely restrict and violate the fundamental rights and liberties of Iranian population.

Since 1979, AI has focused on the violation of human rights in IRI as a particular case. Although it releases the annual reports of world's human rights situation, in some cases the AI has compared the Iran's human rights situation to other countries. For instance AI has opposed the death penalty and execution by stoning as terrible and unusual punishments in any circumstances and declared that Iran has been the second country in implementing death penalty with at least 94 executions in 2005 (Amnesty International, 2005). It has declared that such punishment by IRI and other states is as inhuman punishment.

The implementation of execution by stoning in Iran has attracted many attentions to this punishment. The execution by stoning in Iran is based on the Islamic laws. AI has condemned this punishment through all its annual reports and has urged the Iranian government to unequivocally enact a law of alternative sanctions to ban stoning as a legal punishment. In this manner domestic groups also have constituted a protest campaign "Stop Stoning Forever" to pressure the Iranian government in ending this unaccepted punishment. Pressures from this national campaign and AI could be the cause of government official statements like that of Jamshidi (2008), the judiciary spokesman, in which he declared that "stoning in Iran had been halted." The courageous efforts by AI and Stop Stoning Forever Campaign have helped save five people who were sentenced for stoning punishment since 2006 (Sadr, 2008).

In parallel with these above-mentioned efforts to affect human rights in Iran, AI additionally urged the Iranian government to allow the UN Special Reporters and other international human rights agencies to visit Iran. More importantly, AI continues to appeal to the governments to include human rights issues in their interactions with IRI, including trade relation. AI regularly demanded EU to take action and called on EU's member states to pressure Iranian government to improve its domestic human rights situation. Ironically, Iran

government does not legalize the work of AI. AI's information, data and reports appear to be taken seriously and credible for international governmental organizations like EU and UN. There has been no report from the Iran government to confirm that its actions were influenced by the work of AI, but clarifying the incompatible Iranian provisions with international human rights values, condemnation of implementation of awful punishment by Iranian government, and cooperation with Iranian domestic human rights activists and organizations are the positive and helpful functions of AI to develop human rights values in Iran.

1.4.2 Human Rights Watch and Iran's Human Rights Issues:

The initial aim of Human Rights Watch in 1978 was to investigate the situation of human rights in Soviet Bloc countries regarding to their compliance in implementing the human rights provisions of the Helsinki Accord (Paczynska, 2004). Around ten years later the watch committees around the world was joined together and created HRW in 1988. Like AI, it has a world scope mission to defend and protect human rights values. The HRW vision is extending beyond the national borders. Indeed, whenever there is a violation of human rights values, HRW condemns the human rights offender states through its report and efforts to recognize the oppressors.

Human Rights Watch has been and is one of the most effective NGOs related to promotion, protection, discovery and collection of information for human rights values. Nowadays, HRW is well known and its reports are credible for both national and international organizations. HRW has been interesting to contribute the development of human rights values in Iran through documentation of violations and visiting the country. HRW has categorized over five hundred reports and human rights documents, pamphlets, positive suggestions regarding to Iran's human rights situations in its website. After a long time of IRI's denial, HRW ultimately visited Iran in the late of Rafsanjani presidency period in 1996. The main subjects that HRW was discussing during its visit were about the IRI's human rights policies (Hicks, 1996) especially freedom of expression and association.

HRW took this permission journey by IRI as an opportunity to visit government officials, civil society activists, and especially political prisoners. HRW during its mission successfully interviewed parliament members, writers, political activists, lawyers, and journalists in Iran. In an interesting case HRW was allowed to place a private meeting with Amir Entezam one of the longest-term political prisoners in 1996. HRW has recommended to the Iranian government to allow domestic human rights activist in monitoring human rights situation. It demanded IRI's cooperation with UN's human rights monitors and other independent nongovernmental organizations (Bonyade Bromand, 1997).

Since 1990 HRW has been keen to make a link between the Iranian domestic activists and international human rights organizations. This important happened in 1996, when Shirin Ebadi became the HRW's representative of monitoring human rights because of her efforts for legal reforms in Iran (Bonyade Bromand, 1997). HRW has called Iranian government to reform or abolish those legislations that restrict the people's rights of expression to respect its international obligations, as well as human rights values.

During the dialogue between Khatami's government and EU, HRW declared its readiness to send its representatives to participate in their human rights negotiations. The Iran government did not allow the HRW and AI's delegates to attend the dialogue on human rights issues between EU representatives and the officials of Iran government. HRW stated its regret because of IRI's denial and argued that the dialogue between EU and IRI could be a substantive progress and significant new opportunity in development of human rights in Iran (Human Rights Watch, 2004).

From 1996, HRW has had a well practical relationship with a number of prominent Iranian activists, domestic NGOs, and human rights lawyers who are monitoring the human rights practice and providing information about human rights situation in Iran through their reports (International Campaign for Human Rights in Iran, 2008). Through interviews, phone calls and emails, HRW has contacted Iranian political activists, women's human rights campaigners, and journalists in IRI and outside it.

Ebadi and other human rights activists established "Defenders of Human Rights Centre" (DHRC) in 2000. When DHRC was closed during Ahmadinejad presidency in December 2008, the "International Campaign for Human Rights in Iran" and HRW repeatedly condemned its closure and called on Iranian government to immediately allow the national NGOs and especially DHRC to act freely. HRW declared that the IRI has to be responsible regarding to restrictions on the domestic NGOs because of its international commitments (International Campaign for Human Rights in Iran, 2008).

As Kenneth Roth (2008), the executive director of HRW declares: "The closure of DHRC is not just an attack on Shirin Ebadi and her colleagues, but on the entire international human rights community of which she is an influential and important member." Although the office of DHRC was closed, its founders like Ebadi

have continued their human rights activities in defending prisoners of conscience and reporting the human rights abuses. Sarah Leah Whitson, the HRW's Middle East director argues that "Instead of seeking to silence women's rights advocates who draw attention to the urgent need for reform, the government should move to repeal Iran's discriminatory laws" (Human Rights Watch, 2009).

HRW has addressed important human rights abuses and repeatedly demanded improvements for human rights in Iran (Human Rights Watch, 2008). In general human rights watch was successfully able to visit Iranian government officials as unprecedented event. It urged IRI to open its doors to international NGOs in debate about human rights issues. In the Iranian society HRW focused on the Iranian domestic human rights activists in the subject of civil and political rights and in this regard it honoured Ebadi as a human rights monitor in 1966. Through national human rights activists, HRW has succeeded in investigating and exposing IRI's violations, gaining public international support for condemning the Iran government's violations, and challenging Iran government to end abusive practices.

1.5 Iran's Governmental Organization of Human Rights:

IRI launched the only governmental human rights organization, so-called "Iranian Islamic Human Rights Commission" (IIHRC), in late 1995, four years after the first international meeting of national institutions on protection and promotion human rights, "Paris Principles", in 1991. This meeting urged and encouraged all "states to establish national institutions for the promotion and protection of human rights" and to actively realize their domestic efforts to develop human rights issues.

IIHRC is as official body of Iran's judiciary system that is governed by Iran government. IIHRC as a national governmental institution of human rights has to monitor the human rights situation in Iran impartially. Although it has criticized the Iranian government in some cases like prosecutions of journalists and the closure of newspapers, but it has not clearly condemned the IRI's violations and repressive policies regarding to political activists and human rights defenders. Indeed IIHRC has issued partial statements in criticizing domestic human rights conditions and not all aspects of human rights violations in Iran.

Today IIHRC is known as a national and regional human rights institution and a member of "Asian Network on National Human Rights" (ANNHR) institutions with other 27 members. Since its establishment the IIHRC has sent its representatives to participate in the international and regional human rights conferences and meetings. For instance, the IIHRC participated in 13th Annual Meeting of the Asia Pacific Forum – held in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia – wherein it "stated that the IIHRC make efforts to protect human rights defenders and promote the registration of such organizations in accordance with the Iranian Constitution and national law" (Asia Pacific Forum, 2008). Being a member of this regional human rights network could affect the human rights debate in IRI. In the closure of DHRC an Iranian NGO on December 2008, the ANNHR condemned this action and wrote to IIHRC and expressed its deep concerns regarding to the closure of the DHRC.

The IRI has been interesting to express its Islamic version of human rights values through participation in international human rights meetings. The use of "Islamic" word that has applied in "Iranian Islamic Human Rights Commission" clearly could show the IRI's perspective of human rights values. At least, the establishment of IIHRC could mean that Iran government has come around the validity of human rights issues rhetorically, and in this manner the domestic NGOs also could refer to such governmental organization to continue their actions and to promote and develop the rights of individual in Iran.

1.5.1 Iran's NGOs of Human Rights:

Since 1990s, many Iranian nongovernmental organizations such as International Campaign for Human Rights in Iran (ICHRI), Defenders of Human Rights Centre (DHRC), Women Human Rights Campaign (WHRC), Stop Stoning Forever, and National Peace Council (NPC) have emerged to promote and protect human rights values in Iran. These NGOs have published hundreds of articles, journals, and pamphlets related to the human rights issues in Iran.

Like international NGOs, the Iranian NGOs of human rights have a permanent staff that can dedicate themselves entirely to progress their humanitarian objectives. The Iran's nongovernmental organizations of human rights like HRW and AI are independent from any government and self-funding and focus on the unjustly imprisoned and demand to release political prisoners and prisoners of conscious. As it is stated in their website, the Iranian NGOs defend the universal perspective of human rights and try to protect such values as human dignity in Iran's society.

Human rights activists in Iran believe human rights values are indivisible and compatible with national and Islamic values. The Iran's domestic NGOs have emphasized the IRI has to agreed all of rights recognized

by international human rights document and declarations, especially political and civil rights. The encouragement of victims of human rights abuses and identifying the Iran's domestic provisions in contrast with international human rights values are other aims pursued by Iran's NGOs. These NGOs have been seeking to open up a channel for development of fundamental rights and civil liberties in Iran through their efforts and good connections to other like-minded NGOs in a common language of universal human rights documents.

Although Iranian domestic human rights activists have just been more vocal since the late of 1990s, especially during Khatami presidency and after, today some of Iranian human rights NGOs like DHRC are internationally recognized. In this regard, DHRC along with 190 other members is a formal member of the "International Confederation of Human Rights Societies." The DHRC works in three main missions that mentioned in its bylaws: "pro bono representation of political and ideological defendants; supports of families of political and ideological prisoners; and sustained and orderly report of human rights violation cases in Iran" (Kayhan, 2008).

The reports of Iranian domestic NGOs have been credible and reliable for the main international human rights organizations. When none of international human rights agencies like UN, AI, and HRW have been prevented to visit Iran especially after 2004, many international organizations relied on the national NGOs especially DHRC's reports. An example is Ban Ki-Moon, the UN's Secretary General, who referenced the reports of the DHRC in the assessment of IRI's human rights situation at the UN General Assembly's meeting in December 2008. Accordingly, UN has issued a resolution against IRI because of the violation of human rights in 2008. This encouraged the domestic NGOs and human rights activists to continue their efforts for social changes in Iran. In this way, there appeared some changes in Iran government policies in relation to human rights issues, and NGOs have made a public atmosphere of raising awareness of individual rights in Iran's society. This study focuses on one of the most important Iran's nongovernmental organization of human rights that is "Women Human Rights Campaign" to determine national NGOs' role in improvement and promotion of human rights in Iran.

Women's rights and gender equality have been a key demand and battleground in the confrontation between Iran government and women activist since the establishment of IRI in 1979. Subsequently, a kind of women mobilization regarding to their rights has been formed during 1990s that gradually became as a resistance movement for equal rights. In the early of 1990s the women movements was without leader, but by the late 1990s, women rights activists in Iran were among the most organized groups working for more rights and fundamental liberties in Iran. One of the reasons of this is related to international events in which the gender equality gained a worldwide advocacy in 1990s. For instance, the 1995 Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing actively focused on the rights of women without any discrimination compared to men throughout the world.

Another event that has internationally affected the Iranian women's movement for their rights was the EU policies that emphasized the rights of women after 1955. The EU Commission has addressed the importance of women equal rights through programs like "A Road for Equality between Women and Men" and "Campaign on Women's Human Rights Defenders." It was for the first time that EU emphasized gender equality as an element in its international policies. EU focused to highlight specific protection needs of women's rights especially in Iran. Iranian women have been called for attention to such international advocacy to gain their rights.

In the internal stage, too, President Khatami emphasized the improvement of women rights situation from 1997 to 2004. Women used these positive national and international conditions as opportunity. Since 1997, and especially over the past 4 years, the Iranian women's activists have largely been trying to raise general awareness about their unequal rights, in national and international sphere. Iranian women in the way of fighting for their rights have established many national campaigns, such as the "One Million Signature Campaign", the "Campaign to End Stoning Forever", and other protest groups that campaign for women's attendance at national soccer matches. Today, Iranian women human rights activists are the most active groups for more rights and liberties even in Middle East (Tohidi, 2009).

Iranian women have established these domestic organizations, and have called their campaigns "the change for equality". Ebadi (2008) states that the aim of "One Million Signature Campaign" is to collect one million signatures in support of Iranian women petition to pressure Iran's Parliament to review and reform the current unequal laws which discriminate women rights in IRI. The women's Campaign has a website in six languages: Persian, English, French, Italian, Spanish and Arabic (Ebadi, 2008). Many international institutions, especially human rights one, have declared their support for Iran's women campaigns.

EU human rights commission, AI and HRW have supported the Iran's women campaign when campaign's activists have got arrested. They have done this by writing letters to Iran government and judiciary officials

requesting their immediate release, and their fair treatment in prison and in court. By establishing such organizations and connecting to the international organization, Iranian women have gained some unexpected developments in their rights. By 2006, Shirin Ebadi – the head of the Campaign and the representative of HRW in Iran – reported that 65% of the university students in Iran were female.

Iranian women were more successful in 2008. When Iranian women were informed that the Iranian parliament had decided to pass a Family Protection Law that would violate women rights, a group of Iranian women activists engaged the members of the country's parliament in discussion about the "family protection" bill. The Iranian women declared that this legislation is an anti women's bill and an opposing atmosphere were created in society to protest the bill. The women's opposing coalition was formed through internet articles, interviews, and direct personal interactions. They protested to two specific provisions, article 23 and 25 which make it easier for men to take on a second wife (Amini, 2008). The women wanted the parliament to remove the bill from the agenda because it is detrimental to all women and families (Langroodi, 2008). Though their campaigns the controversial family protection bill has now been removed from the agenda of the Iranian parliament.

Iranian women are campaigning for their equal rights in peaceful ways. They believe the Iran government will notice their demands and understand that it cannot keep women under control for ever to discriminatory laws because on one hand, large groups of them are involved in various activities in society, and on the other, women's campaign has a good connection with international human rights organizations and participates in the international conferences, seminars and meetings. As, Ebadi, and a group of women from Iran's "One Million Signature Campaign" participated in Cape Town, South Africa in 2008, where more than 2200 women's rights activists from about 150 countries have gathered to participate in a conference on women's rights development (Ebadi, 2008). Through such activities the Iranian women have become more successful to continue their efforts in demanding equal rights and pressuring the government.

In the international sphere, also Iranian women have been successful. Being the first Muslim woman, Ebadi, was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 2003, because of her actions in developing human rights values and legal reforms in IRI. Beside, in 2008, the "One Million Signature Campaign" won Simone de Beauvoir Prize for its efforts regarding to women's equal rights and liberties. These recognitions by international community encouraged Iranian women to continue their struggles with government in achieving their rights (Ebadi, 2008).

1.5.2 Iranian Government and Social Demands of more Rights:

Iranian government's violation of human rights in national level has raised a new wave of domestic movement regarding to the improvement of their rights. The Iranian domestic human rights movements like women movement are seeking to realize their demands through their own national activities and by linking to international human rights actors. In the denial of their rights by Iranian government human rights activists bypassed the government and connected to the international human rights actors. EU, AI, and HRW have been successfully linked to the Iranian government, political activists, and women human rights defenders, prisoners of freedom of expression to impress the Iranian government and society regarding to the debate of human rights values.

The Iranian women's movement demanded civil and political rights through establishment of NGOs. The women's NGOs were positively working on challenging the Iranian government to accesses gender equality. Iranian women's movement for equal rights as a social demand in Iran's society, that has taken part in the wide coalition has had positive results from its internal solidarity with national and international human rights actors. A family protection bill has been stopped at the parliament because of the pressures from civil and women's rights activists. The significant of the women's movement is that, it has been as unprecedented victory of the women's movement in Iranian parliament since 1979 Revolution. This change is important because the women's movement has now attained such authority that they can engage more the NGOs established to demand the improvement of human rights in IRI and change the government policies about their entitled rights as human.

A characteristic of human movement in Iran is that this movement has been gradual and accommodated with the Iranian social and political situation. It has been gradual because the women have been seeking to pursue their equal rights since 1979 Revolution through negotiations with Iranian government and raising awareness among people. And ultimately they could establish their NGOs and acceded in some rights in this way. The Iranian women groups like lawyers have discussed the current situation of women's rights through publications on internet and periodic meetings and demanded the legal reforms regarding to women rights situation.

Although one of the important Iran's domestic NGOs was closed during Ahmadinejad presidency in 2008, today Iranian society is familiar with the human rights issues, in this regard the contributions of international human rights actors has been an instrumental tool facilitating women in requiring their demands and publicizing the debate of human rights nationwide. The Iranian human rights activists were able to interweave the human rights debate on the national political practice and rhetoric. The entrance of human rights debate in government policies could be determine through the mutual dialogue between EU and IRI, speech of Khatami, Iran Parliamentary discourse, debate of human rights issues in media, and campaigns of national human activists through domestic NGOs. For instance the reformist's parliament from 1977 until 2004 had been interested to discuss and legislate some provisions in improvement of women rights situation. While the previous law of the age of marriage for girls was the 9 years, the Iranian parliament passed legislation raising the age of girl's marriage from 9 years to 15 years in 2002 (Mokhtari, 2005). Such concrete actions by Iranian government could determine that IRI policies about human rights is moving closer to principles of international human rights laws and specially gender equality.

1.6 Assessment of Iran's Human Rights within the Spiral Model:

The spiral model is presently set for analyzing Iranian human rights process. This analysis will specify the Iranian spiral model of human rights that would be progressive or regressive from 1990s to 2008. In general, through explanation of the role of international human rights actors and the Iran government's discourse and practice, that I have already described, the Iran's human rights situation in spiral model could show many pendulous movements. It was clear that IRI has not yet reached stage five since 1979 Revolution. Stage five is the final phase of the spiral model when the government is committed to the acceptance and implementation of human rights values where its behaviour is consistent with its policies in practice. But how has the IRI been standing within the spiral model from 1990 to 2008? And where does the IRI appear now within the spiral model?

This study has made it clear that repression and violations, especially in the case of Women Rights and Freedom of Expression has occurred. However, the first phase of the model began with violations and repressions by Iranian government since 1979 Revolution. Also, after 1979 the Iranian government has refused to sign the international covenant of women rights. This type of violations and denial of individual rights by Iranian government paved the way for the international human rights actors to expose the Iranian situation of human rights in some ways.

While IRI was infringing upon its population's rights, the Iranian population could start to link – Stage One – to international human rights organizations. Thus, that they could put pressures on their repressive government or at least confronted it because of its human rights infringing. In this regard, the reason that Iran government denies the validity of human rights – Stage Two – have been that the IRI believes in human rights as internal issues, and relies on Islamic criteria for individual rights. Because of such behaviours held by Iranian government, the EU criticized IRI through a “critical dialogue” during 1990s.

In the reaction of international pressures, Rafsanjani put the country in Stage Three of the spiral model – tactical concessions. In Stage Three, the international human rights actors rise against the violation of human rights values, so the offender government might concede some tactical concessions. An example is a rhetoric acceptance of the value of human rights without actually modifying its actions in practice. That was why soon after taking over as the president, Rafsanjani strengthened human rights rhetoric in the country. As previously mentioned, the first and only governmental institution of human rights was launched during Rafsanjani presidency in 1995. International human rights organizations like UN representatives were allowed to visit country in 1996; subsequently the Iranian population was encouraged to demand more rights. In this stage the IRI formally adhered to human rights principles in order to keep and strengthen its ties to European countries or to avoid criticism from other international human rights actors like AI and HRW.

After Rafsanjani, President Khatami came to power. Khatami tried to implement the human rights values in practice. He emphasized human rights values by introducing a number of amendments to the Constitution, opening the real space in favour of political activists, especially human rights activists, to demand their rights and to create NGOs. Khatami established the “International Centre for Dialogue Among Civilizations” during his presidency. The khatami's administration tried to pass the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discriminations against Women as the main international women rights protector declaration in the Iran's parliament. Because of positive perspective of Khatami, EU for the first time was able to connect the IRI about human rights issues after two decades since 1979 Revolution. The EU and Iran's human rights dialogue with government and judicial officials took place in Khatami's tenure.

According to these events, IRI's spiral model was supposed to be well on its way to Stage Four from 1997

to 2004. Stage Four determines the offending government's policy that uses the language of human rights values and joins the international conventions or does solemnly cooperate with the international human rights actors. Khatami had a positive perspective regarding to the validity of human rights values and argued that such values are compatible with domestic values and especially Islamic ones. In this phase, after 1997, the interactions between the Iranian government, IRI judiciary system, EU, AI, and HRW included dialogue, and a public awareness of human rights values among Iranian population. But, Iranian government did not receive substantial pressure – such as EU's negative sanctions – from international organizations to upgrade human rights situation in Iran.

In reality, the changes in regime's policies towards human rights were because of the efforts of international actors along with Khatami's own consistent perspective of human rights values. The obstacle that Khatami and his administration, as a reformists group, faced with in their way was a body of conservatives who oppose any change in IRI policies, especially human rights issues like ratification of women human rights declaration. But the important point is that the arrival of Khatami as the president stimulated diverse activists like students, labours, and women to demand their rights through the flow of media freedom and the subsequent increase in the number of NGOs struggling for human rights.

After the Fourth Stage we have to see more positive actions from repressive government to move forward to the Fifth Stage. An instance could be the enacting of the new laws or abolishing previous provisions in national legal system that can promote and improve domestic human rights situation. But, here, an incompatibility between the spiral model and the Iranian case is seen to be originated since 2005 and the beginning of Ahmadinejad presidency. As it was mentioned elsewhere, Iran's spiral model seemed to move to the Fourth Stage during Khatami Presidency. Khatami's administration never denied the validity of human rights values. Its engagement with international human rights organizations and EU's human rights dialogue continued for several years.

Unfortunately, when Ahmadinejad came to power, IRI's spiral model process appeared to be back in its Third Stage. His coming to power in early 2005 was related to the support of conservatism those who forcefully denied any political and social reforms demanded by human rights activists. The Iranian government came to be very strong after 2005. The evidence to prove this claim are the repressive policies leading to the accesses to information through internet and the enclosure of one of the most important national human rights NGOs (DHRC) in 2008.

Thus, the result of IRI's assessment within spiral model shows that there has been a regressive move within the IRI's spiral model after 2005. But these repressive policies, in Ahmadinejad's administration caused human rights defenders and activists in Iran to rise to power with great concern, and create more domestic NGOs. Contrary to the time of Rafsanjani's presidency, the Iranian domestic human rights activists have relatively grown in strength and numbers through the efforts of international human rights actors after 1996. Now different types of organizations are trying to make changes in Iran government's human rights policies. The international human rights actors, along with national NGOs, have dealt with promotion of human rights within the Iranian context. Their role has been significant and positive in the engaging Iran government and people in the debate of human rights issues.

1.7 Conclusion:

In relation to the promotion of human rights values in Iran, both Iran government's policies and the efforts of international human rights organizations have been significant. As a promising consequence, for the first time, IRI launched the only governmental human rights organization so-called, "Iranian Islamic Human Rights Commission" in late 1995. The first sign to determine the role of international human rights actors in IRI is that, whether these actors have successfully connected the Iranian government regarding to human rights issues. The answer is yes, the EU, AI, and HRW preferred to contribute to Iran's human rights issues through establishment of national organizations and meetings with judiciary officials after 1990 and especially during Rafsanjani and Khatami presidency. The establishment of IIHRC has been opportunity for beginning a new debate on human rights issues in IRI. This unprecedented establishment was a significant step that eliminated the government's perspective that took individual's demand for their rights as taboos and strengthened the transparency of the process of human rights debate in Iran. Human rights discourse, then, turned to a new perspective. The linkage between Iranian state and international human rights actors has had advantageous outcomes. On one hand, these pressures were a big step that, at least, pushed Iran government forward and let the domestic NGOs of human rights appear, and on the other, for the first time, they could bring Iran government to make discussions in the context of dialogue of human rights issues, and affected the improvement of human rights values in the Khatami's tenure.

The debate of human rights IRI began in Rafsanjani presidency. It developed in Khatami's presidency, and regressed through Ahmadinejad administration since 2005. Today, the debate on human rights issues is known as a public discussion among the Iranians. This is made possible through mixing the efforts of EU, AI, HRW and domestic human rights activists in IRI. The combination of pressures by human rights actors will strengthen Iranian population's desire to demand accountability for their rights, reform, and the creation of domestic NGOs to protect and promote the human rights values in IRI through supporting the international actors and according to international human rights values.

Totally, the initial change of Iranian government's perspective, evolution of the population's viewpoint regarding to the human rights issues, and especially the emergence of domestic NGOs are challenging Iran government to take a more constructive policy towards its human rights behaviour. This is the commencement of a beginning of great change in the promotion and development of human rights values in Iran's society. Any positive movement in IRI's policies, statements, perspective, and practice toward human rights means that IRI is coming close to universal stance of human rights. And it is a significant step for human rights actors to pressure the Iran government to engage more when it comes to implementation of international human rights values.

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