Introduction and policy recommendations
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One of the most common features of contemporary history is the power and role of young people who often lead movements aimed at changing society. In the case of Iran it is no different. The 1979 revolution was the direct result of revolutionary ideals and actions of Iranian youth, in particular those studying at universities and schools. The 2009 post-election uprising was also led by many Iranian youth.

According to Iran's 2006 national consensus, 27% of Iran's population fall between the ages of 15 and 29, the parameters set by the United Nations to define youth. The increase in the proportion of youth to the rest of Iran's population came after the high number of births during the 1980s. Iranian authorities, cognizant of this phenomenon and hoping to maintain their status quo, instituted a number of bodies designed to harness the potential of this segment of the population. On the one hand are the Islamic Republic Guards Corps, the Baseej and their subsidiaries as part of the militant arm of the administration. On the other are the High Council of Youth and the National Ministry of Youth and Sports as well as ideologically cleansed universities resulting from the 1981 Cultural Revolution led by the then head and founder of the Supreme Cultural Revolution Council and the current Spiritual Leader, Seyed Ali Khamenei. In the words of the father of the revolution, Ayatollah Khomeini, the Islamic Republic is "not afraid of economic sanctions or military intervention" but they are "afraid of Western universities and the training of [Iranian] youth."[1]

While the government maintains a strong position regarding its influence on Iran's youth and the apparatus and machinery of the Islamic Republic may have influenced the mindset and lifestyle of some of its youth, some reports[2] indicate that a large number of Iran's youth, although maintaining a strong sense of nationalism, are in fact enamoured with Western liberal ideals including freedom of expression and press, equality regardless of gender, religion, race, language, respect for rights of sexual minorities, equitable access to higher education, sports freedom for both genders, employment rights and social welfare for all regardless of ethnic or religious background.

Accordingly, one of the main challenges for foreign policy makers and Iran revolves around understanding the thoughts and aspirations of Iranian youth. However, while the West maintains a clear strategy towards nuclear negotiations with Iran, it remains entirely unclear towards Iran's greatest asset – the Iranian youth – who have steadily maintained their position over the past three decades, as potential key agents of change.

It is in this light that the current issue of Iran Human Rights Review is focused on Iranian youth. It is hoped that the views expressed in this issue of the Review will assist policy makers with their strategies and plans regarding Iran, with greater focus on the role Iranian youth play within and outside the borders of Iran. Young people are of utmost importance to the stability of both Iran and the region, for lack of access to basic human rights coupled with the Islamic Republic's emphasis on 'cultural engineering' based on the state's application of Islamist ideals provide conditions propitious to a culture of sectarianism and violence among them that can potentially be a dangerous addition to Iran's nuclear activities.

With the current state-sponsored changes in curricula and quotas in Iranian universities and colleges, the prevalent culture of espionage through the tangible presence of the intelligence and military forces – either

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[1] 18 April 1980 Friday prayers sermon by Ayatollah Khomeini

[2] For example The political impact of Iran's youth and the future of the Iranian Democracy published on March 16, 2010 ,Major J. Prokopowicz, United States Army; Visiting Research Fellow, Pax Americana Institute.http://www.paxamerica.org/2010/03/16/political-impact-of-irans-youth-and-the-future-of-the-iranian-democracy/ and Youth subcultures in post-revolution Iran by Mahmood Shahabi, published in Global Youth? Hybrid identities, plural worlds by Pam Nilan and Carles Feixa, Routledge, 2006
http://books.google.co.uk/books?hl=en&lr=&id=ZewAxSZVt98C&oi=fnd&pg=PA111&dq=Iran+youth+western+ideals&ots=5uCu5fatU-&sig=Z-Zd-J5GngKgWFKuvzNM0gb-KWo#v=onepage&q=Iran%20youth%20western%20ideals&f=false

as students or among the academics – and discriminatory admission policies based on religion[3] or gender[4], the quality of education available to Iranian youth is far from ideal. Iranian youth face insurmountable barriers to training and education, especially at higher levels, due to policies enforced through the Ministry of Science, Research and Technology, Ministry of Intelligence and Iranian paramilitary apparatuses banning or limiting academic freedom based on ideology, ethnicity, gender or religious affiliation. Consequently, more and more Iranians find it difficult to access higher education and exercise academic freedom. Under such circumstances critical thinkers who are able to employ their creativity in various fields related to sustainable development of Iran are unable to develop and progress.

Consequently, Iran is the world leader in brain drain. More than a quarter of Iran's university graduates are among those who leave the country each year. There are a number of factors contributing to this phenomenon. In addition to the quest for postgraduate studies at international universities and proportionally high rate of graduate unemployment, two other factors that stem from domestic codes are the cleansing and Islamification of educational institutions during the 1980 Cultural Revolution as well as a noticeable rate of imprisonment, torture and executions of youth since the earliest days of the Revolutionary courts.

While some of the best-trained Iranian graduates shine and flourish with the freedom to think and express their views once outside Iran's borders others, due to the increasingly difficult and limited access to information and education when in the country, now find it difficult to function productively in the West either academically or professionally. One main reason for this struggle is the lack of freedom in access to education and information in Iran. Another reason is the promotion of some of the less constructive social values imbedded in entertainment aimed at Iranian youth. A close look at both satellite and other types of television programming, in light of the domestic challenges imposed by the Islamic Republic on Iran's young citizens, shows that even the most popular programs are void of any educational value and are instead focused on pure entertainment, much of which encourages a culture of anti-intellectualism, social complacency, sexism and violence.

The articles in this issue of the IHRR examine a wide range of challenges affecting the youth in Iran today. Combining experiences, statistics and insights, each reflect realities faced by grassroots level Iranians. We have endeavoured to include information from the heart of Iranian communities and cities. It in this light that due to security reasons four pieces are authored anonymously or under pseudonyms. Other contributors are former prisoners, victims of domestic abuse and human rights activists who are known for their long-standing dedication to the struggle for human rights in Iran. Almost all point to the fact that the best path to policies on Iran must revolve around human rights laws, standards and education at this juncture in Iran's history.

As the new generation of Iranian youth move into adulthood, they face a new series of obstacles unknown to their predecessors who enjoyed some degree of social mobility. Consequently, the current culture of economic, social, gender, religious and ethnic inequality, coupled with moral bankruptcy manifesting itself in rampant nepotism, corruption, elitism, exclusion and violence is shaping the emergence of an oligarchy, composed of political and economic elite who are either directly or indirectly involved with the State and the promotion of its agenda, both inside and outside Iranian borders. Their legitimacy and means are purely based on their allegiance to key figures within the current government, and their power lies in their material means amassed through Iran's tyrannical system and channelled outside its borders. Today, it is essential for policymakers to empower all youth and possibly engage those young Iranians who may be caught in the emerging oligarchy in a discourse based on universal human rights, social cohesion and the rule of law. This may be the surest foundation for reassurance of this group of young Iranians to realize that there is a place

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[3] For a closer look at the case of the Baha'i minority, the primary target in this regard since 1979, please see: http://news.bahai.org/human-rights/iran/education/
[4] In an interview with activist Zeinab Peighambarzadeh in March 2012, the history, current trends and government quotas and bans on female university applicants is explained at: http://www.edu-right.net/talk/39-talk/881-zeinampeighambarzade-interview

for them in Iran's future, should they choose to become agents of positive social and political change.

In a country as diverse as Iran, the emergence of any power structure will have to be representative of Iran's diverse population and committed to the promotion and protection of their equal rights and the complementarity of rights and responsibilities. It must necessarily draw upon and further develop the learnings and achievements of Iranian youth thus far and accommodate a human rights-centred discourse in order to empower Iran as it too transitions towards sustainable development goals and remove all obstacles on the path to democracy and the rule of law.

Iranian youth and the future Iran stand in need of a system that combines the legacy and virtue of Iranian history and identity and applies it to the needs of Iran of today. Focused on maintaining Iran's diverse ethnic and religious youthful communities, foreign policy makers can include the following considerations in drafting and implementing policies regarding Iran:

- Maintain emphasis on basic human rights as enunciated in the International Bill of Rights[5] which Iran is a signatory to in all negotiations
- Provide for safe and speedy collaboration on basic rights of youth, such as access to safe food and water, basic education, and housing and medical and professional expertise in combating addiction.
- Facilitate participation of Iranian youth in distance-learning education and training aimed at improving Iran's socioeconomic development
- Facilitate safe access to the worldwide web and the internet[6]
- Provide support and opportunities for Iranian activists among diaspora to engage in training and delivery of infotainment and edutainment of Iranian youth
- Provide for speedy translation and digital access to latest articles and books on academic research, particularly in fields such as law, human rights, nonviolence, women's studies, religion and rights and the social sciences
- Encourage a culture among Iranian youth to understand the vital and complementary role of legislation and education with regards to the universal rights of women and the right to personal belief through broadcast programming
- Continue engagement with Iranian state officials in protecting Iranian youth, emphasizing the right to life and due process of law to decrease the number of executions
- Iran's participation in global processes focused on social cohesion and protection of its minorities must be included as a prerequisite in international negotiations
- Explore efficient ways and means of implementation regarding the essential role of human rights in codes, instruments and institutions responsible for youth affairs with Iranian authorities

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[5] The Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights with its two Optional Protocols and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights.
[6] For suggestions on how this can be achieved please see IHRR: Access to information