

September 19, 2007

The Honorable Mohammad Khazaee
Permanent Representative of the
Islamic Republic of Iran to the United Nations
622 Third Avenue
New York, NY 10017

Dear Ambassador Khazaee:

I write to you today concerning an issue of importance to the entire human family, Muslim and non-Muslim. The regard of Humane Society International for Islam and its billions of faithful believers could not be higher, and it is for this reason that we ask that you consider our appeal, and that you convey our views to your home government at the earliest opportunity.

We deeply regret reports that police authorities in Iran are taking steps to suppress petkeeping and to confiscate dogs from individual citizens. Islam is one of the strongest religious traditions when it comes to its prohibitions on cruelty to animals, and millions of Muslims throughout the world understand their religious duty to take responsibility for the well-being of all creatures.

As an historian of the human-animal bond, I can attest to the fact that the keeping of animals is universally common, in virtually all cultures in all times and places. For this reason, I do not agree with the assessment that this practice is an expression of westernized values.

With particular respect to dogs, I would like to point out that in Sura 18, the story of the men in the cave, there is a strong indication that Allah sees and approves of dogs in our lives. In Sura 18:22, especially, it is manifest that the dog was counted right there along with the believers.

In Sura 4:36 and Sura 2:29, moreover, there is further evidence of Allah's will concerning all of creation, including animals.

Respecting the sensitivity of your government to outside criticisms, we are only trying to communicate our view that a better solution can be identified and implemented in Iran. We do not wish to impose our view of what direction that solution might take.

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We do want to encourage a different and more constructive solution, however, and I will say this much. Whatever the prohibition on the keeping of animals in one's house within Islam, that shouldn't preclude the practice of keeping them in separate quarters, and providing them with the basic regard and care that the Qur'aan requires.

By adopting a more positive approach, Iran could set an example for Muslims throughout the world, millions of whom are trying to harmonize their deep feelings for dogs and other animals with their religious convictions.

Sincerely,



Bernard Unti, Ph.D.
Senior Policy Advisor