



**Women's Foreign Policy Group
Carnegie Scholar Islam Series Event
Washington, DC
February 15, 2008**

Dr. Abdulaziz Sachedina

Professor of Religious Studies at the University of Virginia,
2005 Carnegie Scholar

Researching and Writing about Human Rights in Iran

Patricia Ellis: Good afternoon and welcome to our members, guests and friends. I am Patricia Ellis, President of the Women's Foreign Policy Group which promotes global engagement and women's leadership and voices on pressing international issues of the day. We are really pleased that you could all join us today for a continuation of what has been an extremely popular series that we've done, the Carnegie Scholars Program Series on Islam where scholars from across the country have been selected and funded by the Carnegie Corporation of New York to do in-depth research on all different facets of Islam. And what has been so special about this program series, and you will see today, is that we have the opportunity to get an in-depth, very nuanced look at different aspects of Islam.

Today, it's about human rights and Islam and researching and writing in Iran but from a historical, cultural and political perspective which we don't get on a daily basis. So, it's a very unique opportunity. Most of the scholars, as is our case with our speaker today, will publish books at the end of their research. His will be coming out early next year. But we'll keep everyone posted on that. We're extremely pleased to re-launch this series with Dr. Abdulaziz Sachedina. He's Professor of Religious Studies at the University of Virginia and we were pleased that he could join us. He was a 2005 Carnegie Scholar and he is the author of the book, *Islam and Human Rights: a Clash of Universalisms*. He travels a lot and that's another reason why we're lucky to have him today. He's recently back from Amman, Jordan where he gave a speech, "Will Globalization Allow Democratization?", a question on a lot of people's minds. Professor Sachedina was last in Iran in November. He teaches there regularly at Beheshti University of Medical Sciences in Tehran where he is a Distinguished Professor of Bio-Medical Ethics. He also teaches, from time to time, at his alma mater—one of his many alma maters—Ferdowsi University of Mashhad.

This is the second program that we've done that relates to Iran lately. The last program was part of our Author Series. It was done right here with Barbara Slavin, the Diplomatic Correspondent for USA Today, who discussed her book on U.S.-Iranian Relations.

Before I open the program, there are a few other things I want to mention. I wanted to recognize two of our board members who are here: Donna Constantinople and Gail Kitch. We are very pleased for their support. I also wanted to mention a couple of upcoming events. We will be cosponsoring an event on March 6th in conjunction with International Women's Day, which is actually March 8th, with Congresswoman Barbara Lee in California. And for those of you—I imagine there are some who visit New York—we also will be holding another Carnegie Scholar Series Program up there. It is a panel on Women in Islam. We're looking forward to that.

We are extremely excited about our program today given the timely nature of what our speaker is talking about. In addition to what I mentioned at the beginning, I wanted to share a few other things about Dr. Sachedina. He has studied in India, Iraq, Iran and Canada and obtained his PhD from the University of Toronto. He speaks seven languages. He has been conducting research and writing in the field of Islamic law, ethics and theology for more than two decades. In the last ten years, he has also focused on social and political ethics including inter-faith and intra-faith relations, Islamic bio-medical ethics and Islam and human rights. The books he has published include: *Islamic Messianism: Human Rights and the Conflicts of Culture*, *The Just Ruler in Shiite Islam*, *The Prolegomena to the Qur'an*, *The Islamic Roots of Democratic Pluralism*, *Islamic Biomedical Ethics: Theory and Practice*. Please join me in welcoming Dr. Sachedina.

Dr. Abdulaziz Sachedina: Thank you very much for the opportunity to speak to you today. The topic that I have chosen to speak about is not only timely for any particular nation and community, it is timely for all human beings to ponder and consider how to increase our awareness about the rights of human beings as human beings whether they happen to be men, women, religious, nonreligious, ethnic—any human being. I have been not only academically interested in the topic, I believe that I am a very serious feminist also. Because I have been fighting for the rights of women from within the tradition that otherwise might not have seen it that way. As such, I am quite a controversial figure and I'm not regarded as a usual traditionalist or fundamentalist in any sense. I am quite radical in my interpretations.

I think that one of the things that I've done and I've tried to understand is ethics in the context of human rights. Because, for me, the question of human dignity is not academic; it's real. And I'm not only speaking here as a professor of religious studies at one of the best universities in the country, the University of Virginia. I am speaking here as a human being and appealing to you – as fellow humans – to travel with me without any prejudices or pre-understanding. It's extremely important for us to remain open-minded when we deal with cultures that are complex and little known to us as outsiders. We are very quick to pass judgments on certain cultures, on certain peoples. What academia has taught me is that you need to be very careful before you draw your conclusions.

Human rights is not a normal issue. It's a very important issue in the world today. If we do not engage people to promote and defend human rights, then we are failing as members of the human community. We cannot remain indifferent to any country, to any community, that does not respect the human rights of their fellow humans who happen to

be different. My one concern is not simply pedagogical. I teach a course on Islam and human rights. My concern is a very real concern. And let me now explain to you why it is that I go on that path and not go on the usual paths that are found to be in the works of secular intellectuals. They're almost celebrities for us. I'm worried about that kind of scholarship which has what I call credibility gap in the local native cultures. When you can't convince people on the grounds of what's wrong there how can you even talk about that issue with them, then? You see where I am coming from?

I am concerned about the rights whether they are the rights of the women, religious minorities or anyone who is deprived of equal citizenship in any country for that matter. I was speaking to Prince Hassan in Oman that if we don't work hard on the human rights issues then our democracy is simply a mockery because democracy really means protecting the rights of minorities. Whoever might be minorities—it could be the whole population of women who are reduced to minorities by the culture. It doesn't matter who you define to be a minority but how do you get that across? That secular scholarship, on that issue, will want to deny any role—any positive constructive role—in religion of encouraging to accept human dignity at the level of humanness of all persons. Because the religious communities are notoriously exclusivists, that they divide the world between believer and nonbeliever. They see it that way and therefore those who don't form part of the believers' community are somehow reduced to less human. That's how the communities are. You talk to anybody. My student comes to me in my office at the University of Virginia and says, "Mr. Sachedina, this book says that you are condemned to hellfire." He was holding the Bible in his hands. This can happen in an American university. Why can't it happen in other places? Not that he threatened me with anything; he was worried about me salvation. He simply told me, "This book says, John says, you're condemned to hellfire."

Imagine how many more there are in the world today that say that you are less human because you are not a member of their community? "Oh, you happen to be a woman, you are less than a man. That's how my country teaches me." There are many, many ways in which human beings can discriminate against one another. Then we come to this tradition of this scholarship that hold important keys of authenticity. You go to the religious establishment. You talk with them. "What is your conception of a human being? Do they have human dignity or do they not have human dignity?" For the first time, the Human Rights Commission in Tehran invited me to speak to them on the real issues connected with the rights of human beings. What is it that we're searching for in Iranian culture, which is a rich culture, which is quite a humanitarian culture? But, it's also religious. It lends very easily itself to discrimination, between believer and nonbeliever and this is what we're concerned about. When it comes to depriving the rights of others we don't need to find any better excuses than religion. Because we say, you don't have that dignity. And I had to be very clear – it was a very interesting discussion at the Human Rights Commission in Tehran, which is supported by UNESCO. By the way, there is, for the first time, a chair in human rights and democracy at Beheshti University under a very capable leadership of Professor Arjomand, who is very forthright in his comments and his discussions and again, this credibility gap is extremely important for us to understand.

Traditional scholarship is very apologetic, oh, Islam has given all the rights that human beings need – how about the rights of citizenship? There's no conception of citizenship in Islamic law – how do you handle that in the context of the modern nation-state? If you deprive another person of the right to be an equal citizen what is left for human rights to talk about? You see the issues, they are foundational. They will tell me, oh no, only those who have faith have dignity – and those who do not have faith do not have dignity. I said no, that's not correct. The Qur'an is making very clear – “we have made all children of Adam without any distinction honorable, with dignity”. The Qur'an does not make that distinction, why are you making that distinction? Oh, we are following the *Shariah*. So the problems there are of foundational issues that connect human beings to other human beings as fellow humans – how do we find them? Traditional scholarship then – I have examined books from Egypt, from all Arab-Persian world. All those books are talking about self-glorification of some sort. We have all those rights guaranteed – there will be no UDHR universal declaration of human rights document to guide us because this is your century, that is imperialistic, that is secular. Now this time, my whole conversation has been to break down those barriers.

I'm a believer – I believe that God has put me on this earth with a mission. However small it might be, however little it might be, I believe that I will make a difference – and I did. 2005, it was what we call a breakthrough. I was invited in Qu'm for the first time to speak to the religious establishment about human rights and the foundations of human rights. To the leaders, what I meant to say is that we need to speak to the people who are going to make decisions about the people – how this tradition is going to be interpreted. And if you don't challenge them, you can sit in your university and do long, long lectures – people in universities are working – but they don't have the credibility. The moment you wear this necktie you lose credibility with the people who are religious and especially in Iran, you can't even wear this necktie anymore, you know. Because it's secular – it's an emblem of secularism. So you avoid even looking like the westerners so to speak. What else are you supposed to do? These are only externals that I am talking about. Internal issues are foundational issues which we don't want to discuss anymore. The human rights aid workers today are telling us, “please don't bring foundational metaphysical issues to bear upon rights at all – we are looking for the instruments of human rights, we want to promote human rights”. I am saying that if you don't have the conversation with the right kind of people, how are you going to change the world? What have we achieved, at the end of the 60th year of the Human Rights Declaration, 1948 – this is 2008. So we are currently sixty years in, we're finding all these arguments – and we find that, okay, we need to do something and by the way, I must tell you that I am a full-hearted supporter of UDHR. That document needs to be implemented. Now what are the issues, I cannot go into all details at the moment – I have a book coming out – but I've not been negligent, I've not been oblivious about the very fundamental issues that we're confronted with. That how exactly do we conform with culture? What are the cultural requirements? What are the cultural issues that are important for us to bear in mind? Can we really handle human rights the way we think we can? Or is the western standard the only standard to be accepted? These are the questions that they are raising for us. But for my question – is Islam capable of guaranteeing – there are two basic

issues, with which I am concerned: human dignity and human moral agency. In other words, what I am looking for is like what the Catholic theologians worked very hard to bring about: the kind of understanding of a foundation built upon what we call natural law. I know that many, many secular scholars do not want to connect this whole thing to the post enlightenment or enlightenment era, except that they don't want to talk about natural law, natural rights – fine. But what I am saying, in order for us to have any kind of breakthrough, we will have to bring in what I call political theology. It will have to be part of the question of our conversation. Other such conversations have not yet begun but by the right kind of people we are talking about, people who have no influence whatsoever – the human rights issues, we are not talking to the right kind of people. And the reason is very simple, because we think that they don't understand our language.

But I challenge everyone to read this Persian document that they publish from Qu'm. They are raising important issues and they are all foundational. Can Islam really guarantee human dignity? Can it guarantee human citizenship? What kind of issues are there for Islamic law, which is not seen as compatible? They all agree that the present formulation of judicial traditions are not compatible to the human rights values. They do not speak of inequality of human beings – women are discriminated, minorities are second class citizens. So they know the issues and they are willing to talk about the issues from the theoretical as much as practical aspects. Let me tell you – nobody says that human rights are not important – in Iran, democracy, democratic culture – has deep roots now. Nobody can threaten what I call the foundations of democracy and I'm using democracy very carefully here – it's not voting. I don't believe voting to be any emblem of democracy at all. This free voting does nothing. I think it's the accountability of the public officials to the public, accountability of the government to the public that makes a system democratic. And so far, we don't see it in any part of the world. We don't find that the governments are accountable to the public, especially in Iran, the religious establishment does not regard itself as accountable to the public. It is accountable to God, to the norms and value system, but it is not accountable to the public. How can you then rule over the public when you're not accountable? It's a crisis at the moment – it's a very critical issue that the religious class understands quite well that it cannot be treated as a privileged class at all. Once you stand for election, that means you are going to stand as equal candidate as another, whether you wear this kind of clothes or that kind of clothes – that makes no difference. You're under scrutiny, you're under public scrutiny. The last election that I was there, when Ahmadinejad was elected, when Hashemi Rafsanjani appeared with Ahmadinejad on the debate, it was very clear that Hashemi was no longer a member of a religious class, he was another candidate for election. And he was treated as a candidate and that I think says a lot about the Iranian culture. That it is very much democratic in its presuppositions. It wants to see that people who hold offices are held accountable. How well they do it and how exactly that would happen is a matter that is too detailed and I cannot really go into those details at the moment but certainly, I will tell you one experience that I have had. My book, entitled *The Islamic Roots of Democratic Pluralism*, was translated under Khatami's government, and it was submitted to the Ministry of Religious Guidance at that point; but no permit was given for its publication, because both the terminology – democratic pluralism – were unacceptable culturally. Now I could have insisted that, no, I want to keep the title, as it was translated

into Persian, I kept on saying *inaudible* – pluralism, democracy. I concocted all kinds of Persian equals and nothing worked. Nothing worked until my true readers of the text in Persian translation, they were telling me that, look, you have an important message, if you don't know how to use the language that the Persians speak, then it will not go through – you can't use that language, especially if you want people to really read it and say okay, you have a message to give about democracy, about pluralism. So I changed it – we made it *Principles of Social Coexistence in Islam*. It gets to the same roots. By the way, the same things, even in Arabic translation, in the Turkish translation, the Turkish translation was the easiest one because they use the same term, they use it in Turkey. But when it came to Arabic and Persian, there was a problem of what I call the legitimacy of the culture.

Human rights are at the moment at a crossroad of getting a kind of recognition, within the tradition. And there is a general consensus in the public that women's rights must be protected, the rights of the minorities because they are being violated. While in Mashhad, Sunni communities, Sunni students would come to me and say look, they destroyed our mosque because we happen to be Sunni. I said that's not acceptable. So I went myself and I spoke to the mayor – I said why was that mosque destroyed? For what reason? There's freedom of religion, there should be – they are Muslims, like us. They should be able to pray in the mosque. He said no, Al Qaeda had controlled the mosque and they were using it as a base. I still said, I don't think the destruction of the mosque was justified in any case – you could have killed innocent people, who you thought were a threat to the security of the state. In other words, you can't destroy religious institutions. You need to provide a better justification of how you control terrorism, how you provide the security of the nation. I think if that's what you are working with, then that's what you do. In other words, there is a struggle and I don't deny that the struggle is very deep rooted. There are some prejudices about how the society should be, how the family should be. Women, Iranian women, are fighters, they are survivors – they know how to fight their battles and they know how to deal with their men the way they should be dealt with. I'm being very, very clear here – there are problems, and I don't deny it. Whether for the minorities, for the women, for the ethnic minorities, they all have problems. And it is true whenever religion turns into an ideology, then it creates those kinds of discrepancies between the other and the ideals and the realities on the ground. What I have done in my book is that I have teased out for the first time the foundational issues and I have tried to convince my fellow Muslims, especially traditional authors and traditional leaders that there is a possibility to work out a thesis, a theory of natural law in Islam. It is there. Look at it, look at this one and this one, read! There is also religious pluralism to be discussed. In other words, these were not new topics five years ago, six years ago. They have now become part of the legitimate discourse in the public.

While I'm teaching for example, Islamic biomedical ethics, biomedical ethics is another international issue – we are talking about women's health care, women and how they are treated, what kinds of experiments are being done in the pharmaceutical industry. Are they taking care of the women patients? Are they doing enough to protect women as a subject? What are the issues there, what are the issues for the children, for example? They are somehow connected to what I call human rights issues. Biomedical ethics is not

simply dealing with how you've become a virtuous physician in the health care institution – rather, it is dealing with the issues in which people could be easily discriminated. “Oh, what is your name? Oh, it's Jon. Oh, okay, you're Jon. Here, go in the waiting room.”. You know you're discriminated against on the basis of your name. And there are people for example who would use different names for themselves. How do you get around this and to bring about what I call a revolution in the radical interpretation of the tradition, which can then become the source of what I call the native cultural legitimacy for international documentation?

These international documents at the moment are suffering from several problems. The United Nations, they are working – WHO, UNICEF – they are working very hard to get across. Unfortunately – and let me be very honest and frank about it – they're not working with the right kind of people. They are not working with the right kind of people, just as when we drafted the document, we ignored them – we ignored the traditional theologians whether they were Christian or Muslim – we are doing the same thing today. Oh, they are religious, they are narrow-minded, we will not talk to them. No, they are the ones who we need to talk to in order for any changes to be legitimized. Max Weber was totally right – in traditional society you need charismatic authority to bring about what I call the legitimacy for change and transformation. Human rights attitude is a change of the way you look at other human beings. Would that come? Would that be possible?

I think I'm very optimistic. From all the discussions and all the debates that are going on. There were three major conferences in Mofid University in Qu'm. Mofid University, by the way, is known for its radical views. It is Mofid University in the city of Qu'm. Therefore, the religious establishment is not oblivious to its influence in society. There were three international conferences and three holdings that came out on Islam and human rights in general, on foundational issues and legal issues. Professor Mohsen Kadivar, who we invited at the University of Virginia, had his passport confiscated for a while, but then it was released. He is one of the most critical figures in the modern human rights discourse in Iran – he is one of the most daring clerics, I would say. I haven't seen anybody like him, who is thoroughly grounded in the tradition and he critically evaluates the tradition for its failure to support human rights, for its failure to control discrimination. That's the kind of discourse that has emerged from within the tradition. We can criticize as much as we want from outside – that's what we do, we point fingers. And the moment we do it, we are making the democracy and human rights an issue that is ignored. At the moment, Mr. Bush says something for example, criticizing Iran as being an axis of evil and this and that, who suffers? Democracy and human rights suffer. They are the ones that are ignored. Okay, this is what they want, so we will not do it. As part of the opposition to us, the people are deprived from expression of their own needs for protection. And this is where I think we need to be very much alert. When we do this – when we do criticize those cultures and those countries – I think there's a lot to criticize, I do not deny that, there's a lot to criticize. There's a lot that I would say, is very much desirable, but I am more worried about, as I said, moral agency of human beings. Am I so stupid that I cannot decide what is good and what is bad for myself? Do I need, all the time, a constant kind of control over me? No, I don't need that. And the second issue is

that I have dignity, as a human being, as a human person – can I be deprived of that? No I can't be deprived of that. I mean if those two battles can be won, at the level of what I call traditional scholarship, at the level of other kinds of help that we can give. I think we will do a lot of good service. And part of the reason that we invited Professor Mohsen Kadivar to come to University of Virginia was to really give him an opportunity to teach and to talk to the people in the law school to discuss these issues with the people who are concerned with human rights and to tell them exactly how those problems can be really addressed within the culture. What we need to be is extra sensitive to the cultural values of the people. Now I don't mean to say that we need to endorse anything blindly. But we need to have enough equipment, enough preparation, to understand those cultures on their own terms, rather than imposing our terms on them. Because once we do that, we are creating a conversation. We need a dialogue – the moment we stop dialogue, we're hurting the human rights of those who are vulnerable to all kinds of abuses and there are many who are abused – I've seen it with my own eyes.

I'm talking about Iraq; I've been to Iraq myself. I was imprisoned during Saddam's time in Iraq. They promised me a visa at the airport – I had gone without visa – but you can see that kind of system. Had it not been for my Canadian passport at that time, I would never have been able to fly out to Kuwait or some other place. So you can see what the dangers are of working in the field, sometimes. And yet, when the Constitution of Iraq was being drafted, I was consulted. Not only once, but many times. Now, our constitution's lawyers were worried about human rights violations. So they said: we will not let anyone use the word Islam in the Iraqi constitution. I said that's not our right to say – it is their right to determine what they want to use as their identity. What we want to make sure of is that there is an idea of citizenship that includes men and women, Muslims and non-Muslims, as equal partners in the nation. That's what we need to show them. They can use any term they want. When I was in conversation with Abdul-Aziz al-Hakim, Mohammad Bakr, the other fellow *inaudible* – I was in conversation with them, I said, look, if you don't do that, there's no way for you to build what we call the foundation of the modern nation-state, which is citizenship. It's not believer/non-believer, this distinction that the *Shariah* is making! You'll have to make a provision for citizenship. And it should be extra religious not based on religious understanding it should be outside religious communities that people should be able to unite as citizens of this country. And they agreed, because first of all, they had in the Constitution that they would use Islamic *Shariah* for legislation and I said, *Shariah*, Islamic *Shariah*? If you're talking about this judicial tradition that was inherited from the past, it has a lot of problems. Because the past decisions were made under different socio-political conditions and the conditions today are different. They accepted that, by the way. And the Constitution increased in understanding of what I call the *Shariah* as a system of value rather than *Shariah* as a system of law. They were willing to concede it. I think that conversation is extremely important both in the case of Iran and many other countries that we are dealing with. But we need to really inform ourselves much better than what we are doing at the moment. Our problems are not geared towards careful analysis – we are very journalistic when it comes to human rights, we want to do it very quickly, we want to condemn and do all these things. What I am worried about is that we are actually burning the bridges rather than holding them tight so that we can walk over them and have a

conversation with them and convince them that there is something about human beings that needs to be protected. And that's the very dignity of human beings. Thank you very much.

Ms. Ellis: Okay, I'm going to open it up for Q&A, I'm going to try to get everybody, as I said, keep the questions and comments brief and I'm just going to open it up and, you'll be next, and introduce yourself. I'm going to start. How do we make a breakthrough? You said we have to get the dialogue going – if people are so polarized, how do you do it? And you said you had a chance to speak before the human rights commission but if you are working on human rights issues as an academic, etc., mostly you will not have this access, but you have the knowledge. So how do you make these connections and get things going?

Dr. Sachedina: I think one of the important issues in the cultures in which we are working is identifying the right kind of connections that we need. This is very important. Sometimes you are talking to the people who are not the right kind of people to talk to. Many a time because of the language, the linguistic problems, we don't talk to the right kind of the people. We talk to those who can talk to us in our own language. What we really need to do is to, I think, trespass the boundaries that we draw, the linguistic boundaries, and be able to penetrate as an insider. This dichotomy between outsider and insider – it's really important to keep in mind that our ability to talk to the cultures will not come if we remain aloof and connected only to the few with whom we can have a conversation. Many a time that's what we do – academic work is done, as you know, within an ivory tower. We are not connected with communities at large. And many of us shy away from the communities, whereas, I think, we need to really speak to the leaders of the communities who have an influence. I think my nine months I spent in Qu'm were worth my nine years in academic research. I was with the leaders who could influence things. Even when Haleh [Esfandiari] was held up, I called Qu'm immediately and said, look, this professor is an Iran-loving woman, she's not the enemy of Iran, don't put her in that category, you will hurt yourself and her. My point was, and I spoke to directly to some people in high position in Qu'm who could have influence with judiciary. In other words, you always need to identify the right kind of people but unfortunately sometimes the right kind of people are not always in Tehran University. They are not in Beheshti University. They are in the seminaries, who have an enormous influence in training people and reaching out to people.

Question: Chris Schaffer, Consultant. Thank you Professor, for your very interesting remarks. You had given us a nice quote from the Qur'an if I understand you correctly, you said here's the sort of foundation for everyone, and it seemed from your remarks that – I guess my question is, in getting the dialogue together, is it about reaching a consensus about what the Qur'an means? Or do you shift and talk about the system? If that's the case, then how do you... substantial powers in any system aren't going to want to redefine issues, so how do you couch it in a way so that it moves them? You said identify the right people, but if it's not narrowly focused on the Qur'anic text how do you identify the issues so that they are compelled to see it differently?

Dr. Sachedina: You see they are dealing with a system that claims to be religious. We are dealing, in many parts of the Muslim world, even if you read Kuwait's Constitution, it reads that the laws in this country will implement what the *Shariah* says; even the human rights documents signed by the Muslim countries in 1994 in the Cairo Declaration, even healthcare, by the way, I was examining all these documents – all the documents are saying that we will follow what the *Shariah* says. Here it is for us then, to make an argument to perhaps reach that kind of conversation: Is there something else besides the *Shariah* that informs your world view, that informs your belief system? Is everything in the *Shariah* or is it something else, somewhere else? This is what I've been able to do in my biomedical ethics teachings, because biomedical ethics issues were always dealt with from the *Shariah* point of view. And I said no, that's not what I do in the hospital. If I'm a physician in the emergency, and if I'm a man, the *Shariah* says I can't treat a woman as my patient. But I am in the emergency, the woman comes and she needs my help: what am I supposed to do, follow the *Shariah* or follow my conscience? And for the first time they are saying yes, you are right – the *Shariah* does not solve all the problems we are faced with today, especially the problems of what I call the moral dignity, the moral worth of human beings. That kind of interpretation – once it is accepted in the seminary culture – then you can expect it to go in the state culture. Because there, it is not Church and State, but Seminary and State; these are the power centers. The Mosque is not powerful; it does not have any power at all. It is the seminary that has power, and it negotiates space with the government and it interferes with what the government does, even Saudi Arabia for example, where the king is absolute – he cannot still ignore Abdul Aziz al-Bas for example; he cannot ignore that figure because he is so important. In other words, you really need to inform ourselves more with political theologians – we're not used to it, by the way, in our secular culture. We aren't really much used to bringing religion in that way. In that culture, by the way, religion does make a difference. You can make a new argument, you know. I teach, my goodness, I walk on a tightrope sometimes when I criticize. I taught a course at Mashhad University during Khatami's period on Islam and human rights and dignity and I was encouraged by the Chancellor there, please teach a course on that issue, on that subject. And there were a hundred students in that class and eighty percent were women, because they wanted to know what were their rights, and rightly so. It was such an open discussion, I was amazed with the openness; but what was important for me was, to give them what I call the credibility of what I was doing because I am also educated in Najaf, I am also educated in Mashhad, and those are my *inaudible* that I am educated in a seminary. So I'm not a university professor who has no connection with seminary; I studied with Ayatul al Milani and I studied with some other teachers too. And all these things then matter in the culture – they provide you with what I call the necessary protection to open the discourse, to make it available; otherwise, you're controlled. There's no way for you to really express – my experience has been a very open acceptance.

Question: This is Tulin Daloglu from the *Washington Times*. It's been a great pleasure to listen to you in person and I have many questions for you. First is, many of the Muslim nations ...okay, then I'll skip to the second one. The Archbishop of Canterbury has suggested that *Shariah* law be applied...

Dr. Sachedina: No, I read the whole article. It's the media that picked it wrong. It's the media that distorted what he said, unfortunately. I have his speech, I may have brought it with me – it doesn't say. It says that it is unavoidable that Muslims religious communities would wish religious law to be part of their life, even if they are living the west. That's why the Archbishop was very, very careful in what he said – it wasn't an uncalculated or irresponsible remark, the *Shariah* should be implemented in the UK, I don't think so. From his speech that I read, and it is all online by the way you can go check it out, it is online available, Archbishop's speech, he said in the present society, in the secular society, do religious communities have a right to say that I want to live with my own – I'm a follower of Halakha, I'm Jewish I want to follow my Halakha, in my marriage and my divorce, what should I do? Should I really follow the civil law that you have in the country? Or I'm Muslim, I want to follow my *Shariah* law to get married, to get divorced, what are the problems? I think what he said was that the civil society cannot ignore the emotions and the connections and the commitments these religious communities have. But this is what John Locke said in his political theory. He said the same thing, that ultimately, religious communities would have to come in the public sphere and explain what they want and see that they can be accepted if there are no conflicts and no chaos in the society. In other words, we need to build overwhelming consensus. We don't want to ignore those issues. The Archbishop, he didn't say that the *Shariah* should be implemented.

Question: Teresa Barger, Cartica Capital. There's a strain of thought in Christian political theology that one of the roots of pluralism comes from a commandment, and specifically, it is love thy enemy. And if you love thy enemy you have to figure out why God loves your enemy and what is there that is divine in your enemy; and therefore, this is a very powerful element to create a pluralistic political society. Can we find – I know that there isn't obviously that commandment in the Qur'an – can we find some equivalent, or some cognate for that, where we can see room for political plurality?

Dr. Sachedina: Sure, I've dealt with the question of Islamic roots in my book, *Islamic Roots of Democratic Pluralism*. And I have not imposed categories from outside. My language was not acceptable, but the categories are really native. Because the Qur'an did accept the existence of the Peoples of the Book, the only problem is that the Islamic law treated them as second class citizens. But the Qur'an did have pluralism – it did not say Christianity could not save. As being the youngest of the three Abrahamic traditions, Islam is most suited to the pluralistic ideas. The problem is that the legal system constructs itself with the power that it has and when it aligns with the politics, it somehow overlooks its own theology, public theology. That's what my work has been, and now that my work has – by the way, that book has been published in Farsi just recently, it was published in Qu'm, just last week I got the news that the book was finally endorsed for publication – what my job mission has been is to bring Muslim theologians back to their sources, saying, look, it is there, you are denying it for your political ends, for your – I don't know – your own aggrandizement, etcetera, etcetera. Dr. *inaduble*, the one in the human rights commission said you're absolutely right – that we have the makings of it and we are somehow politically saying, no, that's not possible. We need to give a privileged position to the Muslim population over other populations. So there is

what we call an internal mechanism which is far more conducive to pluralism and plurality. By the way, the other important issue to keep in mind, is the total absence of the church in Islamic tradition. It makes it easier to negotiate with religious and spiritual destinies, without church interference. There are no denominations – Shiite, Sunni are political divisions; they are not denominations.

Question: Sanam Anderlini. I wanted to ask you to what extent you think the dynamism you see in Iran is due to Shiite tradition and the fact that there is a tradition of debate and discourse in Shi'ism or whether it is now because we now have religious leadership in government and so they have to be accountable or whether it's because the public has become more aware of their own religious rights, and therefore they are holding them accountable. What's going on and how does it compare to say Egypt or Pakistan or other areas?

Dr. Sachedina: Let me make it very clear that I think that I've found the religious leaders the most pragmatic when it came to political decision making. We are living in a global society, and what's happening in other parts of the world is accessible to us online, on television, on CNN, BBC, it's everywhere. And therefore, I think people are aware of their rights, people are aware. And religious leaders are not stupid – they are very sharp. I found them to be more Machiavellian than anybody else. They know exactly where their interests are, it's like any other human being, you know. I know as a professor at the University of Virginia, if I don't do certain things I'll not survive – there's the administration or it might be academic. But I know very well where we stand. I think as a human – horses don't behave that way, I think, but we do. Shi'ism can be quite narrow if it is not given the chance to bring reason as a substantive partner to revelation – in other words, you have trends, there's not only one trend. Now when you then look at the Egyptian situation, and the other situation, let me make it clear that what gives Iran an advantage over other parts of the Muslim world is both the culture and the free inquiry in the tradition which is also making the religious leaders more independent of the common control whereas in Egypt and Pakistan and other places you really have religious leaders being controlled by the government. They are part of the government bureaucracy. Once you begin to receive your checks from the government then you can't open your mouth against the government, can you? That's what happens, you know? So I think we need to keep that in mind, that religious leaders, nobody has been able to centralize the community – the Sunni community – the way Ayatollah Khomeini was capable of doing the way Shi'ism can do it, because of its notions of charismatic authority. In Sunnism, the politicians are important – Hosni Mubarak is the one who ultimately make the decision, that's how they handle all the decisions. Ghazali, the great thinker, says you hand over the decision to the political decision makers – you don't do it because you will create a chaos as people; he was very much anti-democratic in that sense. Ibn Jamaa'ah, these are all great political thinkers, but they never thought in those terms, that people have the authority to really do things. Only in one area of the law, did they allow people to rebel – that whenever they found the ruler was unjust, the people could rebel against unjust authority. But that also was conditional.

Question: Daniel Robinson from the National Iranian American Council. Thank you very much for your talk here. Listening to your talk here, I was heavily reminded of de Tocqueville and integral elements in the creation of democratic pluralism in societies. My question is, given all of the rhetoric, especially with all of the rhetoric from the United States and especially with the difficulties with trying to negotiate and speak to the right kind of people, especially some of those who aren't in positions of government, how can we overcome that credibility gap given all of these constraints that we have? As much as we try to say that we don't suffer a moral deficit even though there's plenty of data to suggest that because of Guantanamo as well as other issues, how can we break past that?

Dr. Sachedina: Yes, I got your question. I think that's a usual question – I think from the State Department, some young secretaries I don't know who they were exactly but they came to consult me on how to select the right kind of the people. I think that one of the problems we are faced with is the expatriates from those countries, who mean well. I don't mean to say that they don't mean well, but they're not as well-informed as they claim to be informed. There's only secondhand and third-hand and fourth-hand information; and we rely on them. I remember when I was consulted by Mr. Wolfowitz during the Iraq invasion – my words were dissenting. All the Iraqis were against me. But these Iraqis were living in this country. They had not visited Iraq for thirty years or forty years, I don't know how long they were here. Whereas I visited Iraq constantly, I took groups of Americans for visitation to Iraq. That's where I was educated; some of my best teachers were there. So you really have a problem of misinformation, or, not of misinformation; sometimes I get these proposals given by expatriates, I'm consulted sometimes, by Fulbright, by organizations, to give my review and I do see this discrepancy between those who come from inside the culture, who know it everyday and those who are here for such a long time that they own an imaginary, what I call, recollection of their own situation and therefore there is a tendency either to diminish the information or to exaggerate the information. And I remember I was working with Sanam and we wanted to work with Iranian women and what the charitable organizations can do. I've found that women who are waging peace in the Middle East, especially in Iran, there are so many charitable organizations run by women. Women are the ones who are serving the situation in the country, providing the services that the government fails to provide otherwise. So I think that if you don't go in the field, if you don't go and stay with them, then you have this credibility gap and this is a real big issue for us. We depend too much on people who know so little about the culture and the peoples that they talk about. Simply because I happen to be Tanzanian who has never visited Tanzania since I left it, what can you expect me to tell you about Tanzania? But I could make a claim. That's what, you know, what academia is all about, we claim things.

Donna Constantinople: Well, I don't want to involve you in what we have now in our presidential race. But I can't help but ask this question – it has to do with your remark about the power of language. What happened when President Bush did use his “axis of evil” language? And now we have a candidate or more that talks about speaking with our enemies and a new, fresh look at how we should proceed in the world place. To what extent do you think a fresh, American leader might have in the Muslim world?

Dr. Sachedina: Yes, let me tell you anecdotal information will help enormously. I was there in 2001 – I think the statement was made in 2001? 2002 – and I was there because my function has been in Iran to work as a bridge between America and Iran and to a large extent I succeeded, breaking those barriers. Because America is seen as an enemy and all of a sudden you speak good things about America and it changes. I am an American and they know it. I come with my American passport. Yes I am a human being, I am global because I speak different languages but I am still legally American. And I do tell them that no, that's not what you describe about America, that's not correct. In the beginning they used to oppose me but then, you know, they started accepting me, what I was saying. Then came this "axis of evil" speech and everything was destroyed. So this is what you're talking about. I think that if we are truly Christians, are Biblical, and I believe the values of this country's foundation are deeply Christian, our humanitarianism, our ability to see things. Despite what the secularists might say, they know deep in their heart that this is what we have learned from our traditions here – charity, our ability to forgive and move on. All these things are part of us, to talk to enemies is also part of our tradition. We cannot use the language Mr. Bush is using for those countries. You know something, I am an outsider in Iran; if I were a careless speaker in that culture, they would throw me out. Because nobody wants to hear that, nobody wants to be insulted when you speak to them, even if you are a professor, so what? You can't insult people. You can't tell them, oh, you're not democratic – that's how Ahmadinejad was elected, by the way. Mr. Bush said, "Oh, Iran can never be democratic". And they said, "Really? Let's go and vote." They didn't want to vote. The university – I was there! – the university said we will not vote for him. Why not, well, we don't like him. And they all went. And they voted, because we criticized. Iranians have their own self-respect. You can't deprive them of that, by saying these things about them and generalizing their culture has never been helpful. All Americans are that and I keep on saying, no, not all Americans are the government of America so remember that all the time. So we are, you know, trying to struggle and I think anybody, any of the candidates who says we need to talk to our enemies are following the right tradition of this country.

Question: My name is Mishwa Samani from the Women's Freedom Forum. I'm a human rights activist and I was a political prisoner for five years in the Iranian jail. I was arrested when I was eighteen years old because I was very outspoken, because I didn't want to be considered as a second class citizen and because I believe I have the same rights as you have, so that was why I was arrested. To me actually the problem is that we should differentiate between democratic Islam and fundamentalism. To me, Iranian regime is part of the fundamentalist, extremist Muslims. To me it is a misogynist regime – they are very anti-women. My question is that, as you said, Iranian women are fighters and survivors so I consider myself a fighter and a survivor because I am among the women of Iran. 120,000 people have been executed in the last quarter of a century just because they were outspoken. My question is that, you said that we have to open dialogue. With this kind of misogynist, fundamentalist regime, how we can have dialogue, with whom?

Dr. Sachedina: You have already defeated your purpose of standing firm in what you believe as a human person. The moment you do this, you will be defeating your cause. And let me tell you, that the fighters and survivors are in Iran, not outside Iran. They are

the ones who are fighting day and night discrimination. They are the ones who are struggling with the system and to describe and to generalize the total regime as misogynistic is not helpful at all. I think I have no particular liking for religious establishment – I think human beings were born free to negotiate their spiritual destiny, they must be allowed to do that. And nobody should intervene. Even the Prophet has no right, according to the Qur'an, to interfere between humanity and God. That should be left to human beings. That's why I believe it. At the same time, once you have a conversation and dialogue with the people you totally disagree with, then I always have found that there's a crack that you make. And once you make that crack, you have slowly an opening. If you don't do that, you'll be defeating your cause. Your cause is noble, you need to fight it all the time, you need to be aware of it so that people don't take you for a ride. Have you seen how women drive in Tehran? I haven't seen more aggressive drivers in the world, than women drivers of Tehran because they know that the men don't give them the right of way. And they know how to deal with them. You saw that movie? That they showed how this Iranian woman went to vote and what kind of problems that created? But she voted. That's the struggle I am talking about. Despite all the difficulties, she fought back the system. And if you don't fight back with the system, then you see...you're talking about fundamentalist regime, but these are also men who have wives and daughters and many of these are quite willing to fight and put their lives in danger.

Question: Professor, my name is Ed O'Brien, I'm the director of an NGO called Streetlaw Inc. My question is really what do you think about the development in Turkey regarding the ban on the headscarf in universities and what do you think should be the law in a country regarding the wearing of the Hijab?

Dr. Sachedina: Hijab, the wearing of the headcover, I think one of the issues that has really prompted up several times is that I have a problem personally when religion is imposed – I don't like anybody to tell me this is the way you need to dress. I want to be left alone, but I also want to respect the rights of the people to make a decision. If I, as a woman, say I want to cover myself, I should have that right to determine. I think Turkey went overboard in its system, so to speak. Like France, it's very much frightened with the whole notion of what we call ostensible public show of religiosity. I think secularism might want to draw those lines and say, keep your religion in the private institutions, in the privacy of your home, but as a civil right of mine, I think I should have the right to make a decision about what I want to wear and I think that law that has been passed by the Turkish parliament is in the right direction. You can't suppress people in any ways, don't force them to do something like Iran is doing for example, *inaudible*, and don't disallow them from doing what they want to do. If I want to wear it this way, let me wear it this way. So I do believe in the personal freedom of individuals to make those decisions; unfortunately the politics of the region are such that there's a lot of fear that this might turn to a fundamentalist women's movement, I don't know why that should be a problem or not but it's for the women to speak about really. But I think the law that was passed in the parliament is in the right direction to leave people free to do what they want to do.

Question: Roya Boroumand and I am from the Boroumand Foundation. I do respect what you do and I think what you do is extremely important, to actually have a dialogue, with those people who have influence in Iran but I was wondering, based on our uninformed experience, we are covering Iran through diplomatic media inside Iran, not just through abridged information and we've done that for a long time. And we've been able to look at how people who are fighting inside Iran and who are in prison or out of prison have to come to exile and so I was wondering how you think if all we do outside Iran is live in relative security where sometimes we get killed but oftentimes we can talk, don't we have a role to play so that we give security and visibility to people who work inside Iran. And so if we only have a dialogue – people like you have a dialogue with people like them – who is left to protect the women's rights activists inside Iran?

Dr. Sachedina: I think there are also women actors, I should not credit only men who are in the dialogue situation, there are also women who are challenging. One of the most striking women I have found – and I disagreed with her publicly by the way – this is the daughter in law of Ayatollah Khomeini, Fatemeh Tabatabai, and she spoke about the human dignity and she described human dignity being enjoyed only by those who are rational and I said, that's not acceptable. That means insane human being has no dignity? There are women who are also in the dialogue, but what I want to really emphasize is that our work is not to be seen as not producing the result from this part of the world, because what we write with responsibility is not ignored in Iran. It's not ignored in Iran – they know exactly what Sachedina is writing. They know exactly what you are writing, I don't think they are ill-informed. I went to the archives in the human rights commission office and there were all kinds of translations being provided by everything that is written outside about human rights situation. When you criticize it, for example, it's known within the country, there is a lot of interest in knowing. Iran is a society that is very much worried about its image. It's very much – how am I being perceived, it's a very important issue for Iran. It's a very soft culture. It's very mild, it's not a loud culture. But in its own ways it mixes quiet expression to be a very important expression. I think women, in my opinion... because my wife when she comes with me, she goes to the women's seminary and she challenges the seminarians because the teachers of women's seminaries are so narrow-minded in their training. So you really have... when I talk about dialogical mode, I'm really talking about the possibilities of opening up the gate. I'm not saying that I have reached that, I don't think so. What I have done is that I have told them that you need to talk to us, you can't avoid talking to us. If you don't listen to us, it is your own perdition; you will be destroyed. There'll be nothing for you to save. This is what I mean by dialogue otherwise dialogue remains you know, it's like interfaith dialogue. Where are we today with interfaith dialogue? We are still killing one another.

Question: I've been working with seminaries in Pakistan, especially madrasahs and I find that we ... let's just start the dialogue within the communities. My issue is that every time we make major progress within the madrasah environment, there's something that comes out that really puts a damper on it. What is it that you recommend?

Question: I'm Heba Bassily from the Embassy of Egypt. I wanted to thank you, Professor, for this interesting presentation with a lot of inspiring comments. Moving

forwards with this issue of human dignity and discussions on building human bridges of understanding which is integral for understanding our parts of the world and improving relations between our parts of the world and the West. I just had one comment, in your reference to the religious discourse in Egypt and other Sunni populations, there was some sort of deduction in the comment which was not representative of the pluralism that exists in the societies and cultures. My question is actually related to this bridge between these two different points of view between the international discourse and the traditional religious discourse. What is the framework for bringing these worlds together?

Dr. Sachedina: I don't think we can really control the executive branch of the government from making those statements that are for home consumption, international consumption and that may sometimes be very irresponsibly hurting the cause when they are actually trying to promote themselves; so there are problems. And I don't think – I don't have access to them, do you have access to them? No, so really we can't do much. We need to become maybe the Secretary of State or one of the Presidents or something like that. My comments about Egypt and the Sunni revolt were in comparison with Iran; and in comparison, there is no centralization of religious authority. I have worked with *inaudible* in Cairo in increasing what we call the dialogue between the Jews, Christians and the Muslims; and there was always this whole question of who exactly is in charge because there is no *inaudible*, there is no central authority that is recognized by everyone as a source of reference. And I think there is a weakness and that's the weakness that I'm referring to. Pluralism, we have *Hanafi*, we have *Shaafi*, we have *Maliki*, we have different kinds, but ultimately what I'm talking about is the ability of one religious figure to come about and bring about what we call, provide a meeting point.

I am not naïve when I'm using the word dialogue – dialogue presumes one thing; and that is the equality of the two partners of the dialogue. There can be no dialogue if the two partners who are engaging in dialogue are not equal. The moment I treat you as less than me, I can't have a dialogue – it's a monologue. That means I am not treating you my equal. I think I do submit to the religious clothes, the religious garb, always as a source of distinction and I think it makes the other person look very different from what you are. One person is in a suit, the other person is in the robes. And generally in the Muslim community at large clothes do matter. What you wear as a religious leader matters for the people; that's what I've seen. However, rational you may be as a modernist it is ultimately the religious person with their religious garb that can make a difference. I am searching for a source of conversation rather than dialogue. I have used the word dialogue – dialogical mode can take different levels. My search is for conversation at the moment. If only I can open up the conversation between secularists and religious, between university academics and the seminarians, if I can encourage that and encourage them on one particular issue of human rights, then that conversation is worth everything that you spend for it. I am not a maximalist in my expectations – I am a minimalist in my expectations. Human beings are being tortured while you and I are talking at this time in different parts of the world – it could be Guantanamo Bay, it could be somewhere else – but it's there. If we are going to search for a solution to promote then we need to work on the instruments that we use to promote human rights. What are the instruments? Government. Government is a major instrument that can really defend the rights and

promote the rights. How many governments are committed? At least in the Middle East I know not many governments are committed to the promotion of human rights or to even defending them. So then ultimately who fights for them? Who fights for them? The people need the education and need the courage to fight back the systems and that's what I see as the most promising aspect – of people becoming aware of their moral capabilities and of their dignity to fight back the systems that are encroaching upon their most basic freedoms. If we can do that, if we can start the conversation, if we can make the other party aware and say please rethink – human beings are suffering, they are being tortured by you, by your system – then we have achieved a lot. Whether they will change overnight or not, I don't believe in overnight changes. Even *madrasah* curriculum I don't think we can do much unless the curriculum is overhauled. If it doesn't become humanitarian, if it doesn't stop demonizing other human beings who are not part of your faith, it is going to fail. Any *madrasah* curriculum that does not recognize pluralism as a foundation for its training of religion will suffer failure.

Thank you very much.

Ms. Ellis: Thank you very much, I want to thank the Professor for taking the time and for all his insights and for the great discussion and for the great questions. We will be having other programs relating to the Carnegie Islam Series so if you are interested, make sure we have your names and contact information and thank you so much again.