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- Iran's Neda Is Latest Protest Symbol

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Protest in Tampa over Iranian elections

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Andrea Lypka / MyFoxTampaBay

TAMPA - The protests in Iran over election results and against the recently re-elected Iranian president, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, sparked protests in the Tampa Bay area Tuesday.

About 100 Iranian-Americans and other concerned citizens gathered near Dale Mabry and Spruce streets Tuesday wearing the colors of the Iranian flag: green, white, and red.

They chanted slogans in Farsi and English, including "Human rights for Iran" and "Democracy for Iran." They also wore signs saying "Free Iran," "Death to Khamenei," and "Where Is My Vote?"

They also sang the national anthem and revolutionary songs dating back 30 years ago, to support their relatives and people in Iran.

Nina Goudarzi organized the protest to support her family and friends in Iran. She wore a green shirt saying "Free Iran," and she spoke to the crowd through a megaphone.

Iran today is not what she wants for the Iran of tomorrow, she says.

"I hope this will bring freedom to people who live in Iran so that they can voice their opinion as freely as we can here," she said. "I am more energized than before and I am ready to do this again tomorrow."

The most common image at the protest was the face and the name of a woman: Neda Soltani, the Iranian killed in Iran on June 20. She has become a symbol of the international outcry. Many protestors say that her death gave them voice.

Goudarzi organized today's protest using Facebook and other social media. She even created a Facebook group to support the people in Iran.

"Yes, we may be far away in America or other countries, but this does not mean there is nothing we can do to help," she says on Facebook.

Protestors say they came to the U.S. for freedom and they want the same for Iran. One of the protesters is Ali Haghi. He is a business owner who stopped working earlier today to come to the protest.

"I am here to support my country, my people," Haghi said. "As long as the revolution is killing people in Iran, I am here to support them."

He says he has been in the U.S. since 1997, and he goes to Iran often because his family is still in Iran, including his brother, sisters and aunts. He says he can hardly talk to them now.

"Early in the morning if we call, we can't get through. We talk through email and through Twitter and on Yahoo," Haghi said.

The last time Haghi talked to his family over the phone was two days ago.

"They can't talk that much. It's better if you don't ask them anything because everything is controlled there," he said.

Haghi says he feels his hands are tied and there is nothing he can do. He says he can't sleep and he follows the events in Iran online.

Haghi's brother Parsa also came to show solidarity for the people in Iran.

"My people are getting killed for no reason. There is not freedom. You can't even talk about politics I just want my country

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and my people to be free. I don't want anyone calling us terrorists because we are not terrorists. We are very peaceful people," said Parsa Haghi said.

Michael Samak came to the United States 30 years ago from Iran. He says that recent developments there show the dark side of the regime.

"What goes on in Iran is a sad story for the humanity. I came here to express my regrets and solidarity for the people who are losing their lives and are risking their lives in Iran," Samak said.

Samak says that out of the 29,000 candidates, they selected four and "as far as I know, every single one of them had blood on their hands."

"I am an American citizen but that does not mean that I am attached to the homeland," he said.

Samak say that the fight against injustice has been fought before by Imam Hossein.

"I don't think Iranians will forget this. As Imam Hossein taught them, they will not stand for injustice," Samak.

Regardless of their nationality, protesters say they will continue on Neda's path.

Chris Jones, a Ph.D. student at the University of South Florida came to the event to support his Iranian friend.

"I am a libertarian and I think that everybody should be free," Jones said. "Let's hope that this is a wake up call for everybody and that things will change in Iran and other countries."

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