

# Son of former Iranian leader touts democracy

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Audience members greeted Reza Pahlavi, the son of the late Shah of Iran, with a standing ovation when he spoke of the relentless pursuit for democracy and human rights in Iran at an event Tuesday night at the Elliott School of International Affairs.

Pahlavi - who has lived in exile in the U.S. since the ousting of his father at the time of the 1979 Islamic Revolution - expressed his support for the protests following the disputed 2009 elections and said that it was up to the Iranian people to move toward democracy.

"For those of us who have devoted our entire lives to the cause of democracy and human rights in Iran, we had hoped to avoid this day and these tragic consequences," Pahlavi said at the event, hosted by the International Affairs Society, which drew more than 300 students. "As it turned out, the events surrounding the fraudulent election in June 2009 caused the people of Iran to reach their point of no return, and the regime to abandon all pretenses of faith, national pride and humanity."

The former crown prince of Iran showed his admiration for the unprecedented mass-scale demonstrations against the totalitarian regime that happened for the first time in the 31-year-old Islamic Republic's history. He praised the nameless heroes who permeated the news with video clips, Twitter updates and blog posts that made the international community aware of the events unfolding within.

"The courage and resolve of these everyday heroes in Iran in the face of the tyranny, injustice and brutality of the regime has earned them the admiration of people the world over," Pahlavi said. "And so begins what has been dubbed the first revolution of the 21st century - the Twitter revolution - also called the Green Revolution."

Pahlavi said one result of the Green Movement is that the world has a better understanding of the Islamic Republic of Iran on the one hand, and the true desires of its citizens on the other.

"The black veil has been torn off the face of the regime," he said. "Ultimately, I am confident my country will be liberated from this darkness. The Iranian people will prevail."

The summer of 2009 was a watershed moment for members of the Iranian diaspora, some of whom have never visited their homeland, to raise awareness of the struggle inside Iran. Demonstrations were organized on different continents, signatures were collected and green wristbands in support of the movement became ubiquitous, Pahlavi said.

But Pahlavi asked the international community not to directly interfere nor take away from the legitimacy of the Iranian people's movement. He called for a "proactive role" by which countries impose economic sanctions upon Iran and companies that support the regime. He also asked the world to provide citizens with software to help them overcome the various communication blockages imposed by the government.

At the end of his speech, Pahlavi asked students to bear witness to their generation's "first great struggle for human dignity."

"Your brothers and sisters half a world away use the same Internet you use to take on one of the most brutal regimes in the world, and they take it on with courage and conviction," Pahlavi said. "Your generation uses new technologies in ways that makes me believe totalitarianism will soon be a thing of the past. Where information flows freely, no man can easily deceive and subjugate another. This we have learned from you."

Pahlavi, whose wife Yasmine Etemad Amini attended GW as an undergraduate and also graduated from GW with a law degree, said it was a special pleasure to speak to students from his wife's alma mater.

"I recall the many sleepless nights as she worked to meet course requirements and studying for finals. So, in a manner of speaking, I have been where you are today," he said.

Behnam Taleblu, academic coordinator for the IAS, said the event was the organization's crowning achievement for the year.

"Tuesday's event was the premier speaking occasion of the year for our organization," Taleblu said. "We brought the former crown prince of Iran to GW on our capacity, which took numerous phone calls and rigorous planning."

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