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Rename the streets for Neda Agha-Sultan

By Emanuele Ottolenghi

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On a rainy afternoon in Brussels, the Place du Luxembourg opposite the European Parliament is empty, save for a small group of stubborn Iranian activists chanting slogans against the Islamic Republic. Above them, on one of the Parliament buildings, two giant posters bearing the face of Burma's most famous dissident, Aung Sang Suu Kyi, call for her immediate release.

The contrast could not be starker.

Europe's policy towards Burma is hardly effective—the military junta seems impervious to sanctions and public embarrassment alike. Still, a daily view of a woman's lonely heroism is a meaningful act of defiance, and shows how little it costs our free societies to keep our consciences clear, even as our policies have little consequence for Burma's impoverished and brutalized population.

When it comes to Iran, Europe by and large has still to undertake even such cheap and symbolic gestures. After the Islamic Republic rigged its elections and crushed the ensuing protests this summer, the veneer of order has returned to its streets. But underneath, the embers of revolt still burn. It is time for Europe's democratic institutions and civil society to send a message.

The Parliament could easily pair the Burmese dissident's picture with a photo of Neda Agha-Sultan, the young Iranian woman who last summer was shot in the chest by a government goon as she protested peacefully against sham elections. Her death has become a symbol of the struggle for freedom and against tyranny in Iran. Honoring her sacrifice would befit the Parliament and, more importantly, would offer passersby a reminder of what is at stake in Iran.

Will the Parliament embrace this idea? Some members privately despair that "there is not enough courage in this house" even for such a small challenge. Let us hope they are wrong, but it's true that so far, freedom-loving nations and their governments seem

to have turned their backs on those in Iran who need more from "change" than an empty electoral slogan.

While many European leaders have spoken honorably against Tehran's summer crackdown and the elections that mocked democracy, Europe's policy was never regime change—a dirty word for many Continental policy-makers, given its association with former President George W. Bush. Rather, Europeans always emphasized that their goal with Iran was to induce a change in behavior, rather than to undermine the regime and support its overthrow. Thus, there was no withdrawal of EU ambassadors from Tehran when British embassy workers were arrested there. As the current holder of the EU presidency, the Swedish government insisted that its ambassador attend Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's swearing-in ceremony in August, and later instructed its representative not to walk out during the Holocaust-denier's U.N. speech in September.

As for America, its decision to engage the mullocracy comes at the price of supporting Iranians' hopes for democracy - see the recent decision to cut federal funding to the Connecticut-based Iran Human Rights Documentation Center.

So it seems that while our governments seek to ease the nuclear standoff with Iran, we can expect little in the realm of promoting democracy and decrying human rights abuses. Nevertheless, there is much that civil society could do to ensure that even while our governments sit down with Ahmadinejad's henchmen, Iran's democrats know they have not been entirely forgotten in the West. Which brings us back to Agha-Sultan.

Without waiting for national legislators to formulate grand strategies, local authorities could proceed to rename streets after Agha-Sultan to commemorate her sacrifice. Leaders of Europe's capital cities could specifically redub the streets that host Iran's embassies. This may seem impractical sometimes—Iran's embassy in Rome is on the ancient (and very long) Via Nomentana. In Brussels, the embassy is on Avenue Franklin Roosevelt. In London it is on Prince's Gate. Nevertheless, renaming the address of the embassy can be done without changing the names of historic sites. In the 1980s under President Ronald Reagan, the U.S. did just that: The former Soviet embassy in Washington D.C. was located on the miles-long 16th Street, but lawmakers changed the name of the single block hosting the embassy to 'Sakharov Plaza,' ensuring that every time they fetched their mail, the Soviets would know that the famed dissident had not been forgotten. European capitals could similarly ensure that the Islamic Republic's embassies have a new address: "Neda Agha-Sultan Plaza, Iranian martyr for freedom."

And if capital cities cannot go through the trouble, let smaller cities across Europe make the gesture, from Inverness in Scotland to Siracusa in Sicily, from Tromsø in Norway to Cadiz in Spain—all places where governments' hesitancy, and the *raison d'état* that prevents paying tribute to a life cut short by tyranny, are alien concepts. These are places where the initiative of a solitary councilman could make a difference.

Renaming streets is not the stuff of revolutions. It will not bring democracy to Iran tomorrow. But it would be a powerful symbol for those left behind there, who must surely feel that the world has moved on from those incredible weeks in June. So let a

thousand streets be named after Neda, and tell the Iranians confronting their oppressors that they are not alone.