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Thursday, 27 September 2007

### **UISA\* statement against Lee Bollinger's insult to Iranian President**

On Monday 24th September 2007 the Iranian President, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad spoke at the University of Columbia following an earlier invitation in 2006 by that university which was extended this year during Mr. Ahmadinejad's time in New York to address the United Nations General Assembly.

The introductory remarks by the university dean, Lee Bollinger, referring to the Iranian President by such words as a "petty and cruel dictator" or "the mind of evil" or "astonishingly uneducated" before the guest had even begun to speak, however was an insult to the intelligence of the audience and has undermined the professionalism and integrity of one of the leading universities in the United States.

The hostile words which were designed to alleviate the pressure by the Zionist lobby on the university in the days and weeks ahead of the speech, demonstrated a clear lack of understanding by the law professor of the internal affairs of Iran and its society and a complete disregard for the history of illegal US interventions against Iran in the past three decades.

By attempting to simplify the complexities of a region drawn in bloodshed by the US and repeating without the slightest challenge, the official line of allegations made by his government against Iran, Lee Bollinger's words resembled a degree of arrogance and mischief that one would only expect from officials of the Bush administration and their short-sighted followers in the Academia.

But perhaps the lack of substance and total submission to the administration's hypocrisy, should come at no surprise. Two years ago Mr. Bollinger, in a similar event with General Pervez Musharraf of Pakistan, who seized power in October 1999 in a military coup, referred to him as "a leader of global importance [whose] contribution to ... the international fight against terror remain remarkable". The warm welcome to the 'allied' but unelected General of the country whose intelligence services sponsored and continue to sponsor Al-Qaida despite the atrocities of 9/11, and its despicable record in human rights, free speech and democracy, show Mr. Bollinger's degree of disregard for these values.

A unique opportunity for both the students and the faculty members of Columbia university to discuss serious issues of mutual concern regarding the three decades of hostility between the US and Iran and the future relationship between these two important players in the international arena, was reduced to baseless allegations and accusations that spoke volumes of the influence of the media not

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only on the masses in the US but also on the intellectual elite who are supposed to think independently or at least adhere to a basic degree of research.

We do not go along with some of Ahmadinejad's remarks at the university of Columbia and the rhetoric language he used but cannot ignore the fact that unlike what Bollinger and his so called 'experts on Iran' had hoped, his inflammatory remarks boosted President Ahmadinejad's ratings at home while Ahmadinejad's responses to the questions of the students served the purpose of his acceptance of this invitation in the first place.

It is time for the free-minded academics in the US to review America's foreign policy and distance themselves from the shallow media frenzy that surrounds the case of Iran in the corporate media of the West. Scrutiny of issues that are evidently and grossly distorted, not only is their professional responsibility but it also contributes positively to the healing of old wounds and the formation of a safer world for all humanity.

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\* The United Iranian Islamic Students Association (UISA) is the largest Iranian student body outside Iran with branches in major cities of Europe and North Americas which is mainly comprised of postgraduate Iranian students and researchers.

