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**Advancing the Rights of Persons with Disabilities:
A US-Iran Dialogue on Law, Policy, and Advocacy**

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Table of Contents

Preface and Acknowledgments.....	5
Project Introduction - Iran and America: A Dialogue on Disability.....	7
<i>Allen Moore and Sarah Kornblet</i>	
An Overview of the Situation of the Disabled in Iran.....	15
<i>Mohammad Kamali</i>	
United States Ratification of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities: Would it make a Difference?.....	21
<i>Janet E. Lord & Michael Ashley Stein</i>	
The International Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and its Applications in the Iranian Internal Regulatory System	29
<i>Ali Saberi</i>	
The New World of Inclusive Education: A Review of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and the American Experience	35
<i>Allison deFranco</i>	
Let's Disable Her Further, Shall We? The Cast of Gender on Disability Rights in the Iranian Context	43
<i>Hengameh Saberi</i>	
Autism and Disability Discourse and Policy in the Comparative Perspective	51
<i>Ari Ne'eman</i>	
The Role of Non-Governmental Organizations as Reflected in the Social Movement of the Disabled in Iran: Achievements and Obstacles.....	61
<i>Soheil Moeini</i>	
Assessing the Policy Divide between Veteran and Non-Veteran Americans with Disabilities.....	67
<i>Michael E. Waterstone & Michael Ashley Stein</i>	
About the Authors.....	73
The Stimson Center.....	76

Preface

The Stimson Center project, *Iran and America: A Dialogue about Disability* (“*The Dialogue*”), held in partnership with the Harvard Law School Project on Disability, BlueLaw International LLP, and Iranian partner organizations, assembled civil society leaders, academics, and other experts for a US-Iran cross-cultural dialogue on disability law and rights. *The Dialogue* laid the groundwork for an enduring community exchange that has culminated in this informational volume, “***Advancing the Rights of Persons with Disabilities: A US-Iran Dialogue on Law, Policy, and Advocacy***” with articles written by participants and intended for use by both countries as they determine how best to implement the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (“The Convention”).

The Dialogue has afforded a unique, open platform for creative thinking on how to integrate the content of the Convention into a country’s policy and legal system. Participants met for two sessions over the course of a year, in Istanbul, Turkey. The first was an initial planning meeting in August 2010, and the second in March 2011. At the March workshop, 11 Iranian and US disability rights advocates and experts from academia, non-governmental organizations, and law and policy organizations convened for an in-depth discussion of matters surrounding disability rights and the status and future of the Convention in both countries. The March Session began with background presentations on the history of disability rights in both countries, including the current status of those rights.

In the course of these meetings, participants from both countries shared personal and professional experiences and offered candid accounts of challenges posed due to a variety of factors. Those factors included ignorance of the law in the general population; weak laws; lack of legal enforcement; and a lack of resources to implement “required” change. Several themes were addressed, including similarities and differences of law and implementation practices among countries; the social debate surrounding disability rights through the lens of an individual’s career, education, or family; and the effects of war on persons with disabilities, including the distinct advantages that disabled veterans in both societies receive relative to other persons with disabilities. Disability support mechanisms were another recurring theme, more specifically, looking at structures already in place, and exploring the effectiveness of forging new advocacy collaborations with organizations working locally, regionally, and globally on issues surrounding disability rights.

Beyond the two sessions in Istanbul, participants continue to utilize important ideas and lessons learned to spread knowledge and awareness to others. This volume is the project’s final product and is produced in both an English and Farsi edition.

The Stimson Center remains grateful for its partnerships with BlueLaw International and the Harvard Law School Project on Disability. Experts from these organizations continue to provide invaluable knowledge and have helped to expand the project’s network and increased visibility on the *Dialogue’s* efforts. Funding for this project was provided by the United States

Institute of Peace. The opinions, findings, and conclusions or recommendations expressed in this publication are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the views of the United States Institute of Peace.