

Statement Regarding Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's Talk at Columbia University's World Leaders Forum 19 September 2007

On Monday, September 24th, 2007 Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad will speak and participate in a question and answer session with university faculty and students at Columbia University's World Leaders Forum. His appearance is sponsored by Columbia's School of International and Public Affairs, which is initiating a year-long series of lectures and events on thirty years of the Islamic Republic of Iran. The SIPA lecture series will include academic experts as well as former officials and critics of the Islamic Republic.

This opportunity for faculty and students to engage the President of Iran came about after Ambassador Mohammad Khazaee at the Iranian Mission to the United Nations initiated contact with Columbia through a member of the faculty, Richard Bulliet, who is a specialist on Iran. The event will be open only to university students, faculty and staff with Columbia University identification and invited guests.

President Bollinger emphasized that such World Leaders Forum events must allow ample time for students and faculty to pose questions that challenge the views expressed by the speakers. John H. Coatsworth, Dean of the School of International and Public Affairs, confirmed that the Iranian president had agreed to this format. Dean Coatsworth will moderate the question and answer period following Ahmadinejad's speech.

President Bollinger will introduce the event by challenging President Ahmadinejad on a number of his controversial statements and his government's policies, including his denial of the Holocaust and his call for the destruction of the State of Israel. The US government has accused Ahmadinejad's government of supporting terrorism and developing nuclear weapons capacity. Human rights groups have charged Iran with suppressing dissent and women's rights. Columbia students and faculty will themselves have an opportunity to question Iran's leader on these and other issues.

Dean Coatsworth stated that "Opportunities to hear, challenge, and learn from controversial speakers of different views are central to the education and training of students for citizenship in a shrinking and still dangerous world. This is especially true for SIPA students, many of whose careers will require them to confront human rights and security issues throughout the globe."