



**COUNCIL OF
THE EUROPEAN UNION**

Brussels, 26 September 2012

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NOTE

from: General Secretariat of the Council
to: Delegations

Subject: Summary record of the joint meeting of the **Committee on Foreign Affairs (AFET), the Committee on Development (DEVE) and the Subcommittee on Human Rights (DROI)** of the European Parliament, held on 25 September 2012

The meeting was chaired by Mr Brok (AFET, EPP, DE), Ms Striffler (DEVE, EPP, FR) and Ms Senyszyn (DROI, S&D, PL).

The five nominations are :

- **Mr Ales Bialiatski**, Belarus, human rights defender ;
- **Mr Joseph Francis**, Pakistan, founder of the Center for Legal Aid, Assistance and Settlement ;
- **Ms Victoire Ingabire Umuhuza, Mr Déogratias Mushayidi and Mr Bernard Ntaganda**, Rwanda, opposition representatives ;
- **The Pussy Riot**, a Russian punk group (represented by Nadezhda Andreyevna Tolokonnikova, Yekaterina Samutsevich and Maria Alyokhina) ;
- **Ms Nasrin Sotoudeh and Mr Jafar Panahi**, Iran, human rights lawyer and film director.

The nominees were presented by their proponents (according to the Article 6 of the Statute of the Sakharov prize nominations must secure the support of at least 40 MEPs or a political group).

During the short presentation and exchange of views various sponsors spoke about the merits of their nominees. In particular Mr SARYUSZ-WOLSKI (EPP, PL), sponsoring Mr Bialiatski, pleaded for a European human right defender as in the past out of 33 prizes only 9 were given to candidates from Europe. He stressed that in his view the prize should be awarded as recognition of outstanding moral standards and not out of foreign policy considerations or as a compensation for martyrdom. He called for a free vote of every MEP on the basis of their beliefs and not party discipline. Mr TANNOCK and Mr VAN DALEN defended the nomination of Mr Francis, who assists the victims of blasphemy laws in Pakistan. Mr MEYER (GUE/NGL, ES) said that giving the award to the Rwandan opposition would send a positive message on reconciliation. Mr Werner SCHULZ (Greens/EFA, DE) stressed that the actions of Pussy Riot should not be considered as blasphemous but rather as an artistic expression that "broke through political concrete" and got international attention on the situation in Russia. Ms FLAUTRE (Greens, FR) said that it was very important that the Sakharov prize be given for the first time to Iranians as a sign of recognition of Iranian civil society. Mr MICHEL (ALDE, BE), expressing his reservations on the Rwandan nominees, supported the Iranian candidates and stressed that their nomination was particularly relevant in the current international context.

More detailed information including justifications and biographies is in the [Annex](#).

Timetable for the award procedure :

9 October 2012 : AFET/DEVE vote on three finalists


26 October 2012 : Conference of Presidents' decision on the 2012 laureate

10 December 2012 : Joint AFET/DEVE/DROI meeting with the laureate in Strasbourg

12 December 2012 : Prize award ceremony during the Plenary Session in Strasbourg.

Next meeting(s)

- 9 October 2012, 15.00 (Brussels)

	
EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT	2009 - 2014

*Committee on Foreign Affairs
Committee on Development
Subcommittee on Human Rights*

13.9.2012

NOTICE TO MEMBERS

Subject: **SAKHAROV PRIZE FOR FREEDOM OF THOUGHT 2012**

Members will find attached the list of candidates in alphabetical order, as well as the justifications and biographies received by the Secretariat, for the Sakharov Prize for Freedom of Thought 2012, which have been nominated pursuant to the Sakharov Prize statute by at least 40 Members of the European Parliament or by a political group.

DIRECTORATE GENERAL
FOR EXTERNAL POLICIES

SAKHAROV PRIZE FOR FREEDOM OF THOUGHT 2012

Candidates proposed

by political groups and individual members in alphabetical order

	Candidate	Activity	Nominated by
1	Ales Bialiatski	Ales Bialiatski is a freedom fighter and human rights defender currently imprisoned by the Belarusian regime. He has been a committed civil society activist fighting for freedom of thought and expression in Belarus his entire life. Ales Bialiatski founded the Viasna Human Rights Centre, a non-governmental organization which provides financial and legal assistance to political prisoners and their families.	MEP Jacek Saryusz-Wolski and 82 other MEPs
2	Joseph Francis	Joseph Francis is the founder and director of the Center for Legal Aid, Assistance and Settlement (CLAAS). Founded in 1992, CLAAS addresses the needs of victims of Pakistan's blasphemy laws, through legal assistance and other means trying to help victims with shelter (safe houses) and with relocation, if necessary.	European Conservatives and Reformists Group

3	<p>Victoire Ingabire Umehoza</p> <p>Déogratias Mushayidi</p> <p>Bernard Ntaganda</p>	<p>All three of the following imprisoned Rwandan opposition representatives have tried to put an end to the cycle of violence by fostering dialogue and reconciliation.</p> <p>Victoire Ingabire is an active advocate in several political movements of the Rwandan diaspora. In 2010, she was forbidden from running for presidential elections in Rwanda and has since then been in prison being charged with attempts against state security and espousing a genocide ideology.</p> <p>Déogratias (Déo) Mushayidi, chairman of the political party the Pact People's Defence (PDP), was kidnapped in Burundi. He is serving a life-sentence in Rwanda where he has been deported from Burundi.</p> <p>Bernard Ntaganda, founder of the social party Imberukari, was imprisoned the very day candidatures for the presidency of Rwanda had to be registered.</p>	<p>MEPs Willy Meyer, Rosa Estaràs, Santiago Fisas, María Muñiz, Ana Miranda and 37 other MEPs</p>
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4	<p>Pussy Riot represented by Nadezhda Andreyevna Tolokonnikova, Yekaterina Samutsevich and Maria Alyokhina</p>	<p>The acts of protest and the arrest of these three young women, taken with the conditions of their detention – which border on torture – and their sentencing to two years in a labour camp, have done far more to focus the world’s attention on the unscrupulous restriction of civil rights and the absence of the rule of law in Russia than did the earlier murders of journalists or the new repressive laws.</p>	<p>MEP Werner Schulz and 45 other MEPs</p>
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5	<p>Nasrin Sotoudeh</p> <p>Jafar Panahi</p>	<p>Nasrin Sotoudeh is an Iranian lawyer and human rights advocate. She has represented imprisoned Iranian opposition activists and politicians, following the disputed June 2009 presidential elections, as well as juvenile offenders facing the death sentence. Nasrin Sotoudeh was arrested in September 2010 on charges of spreading propaganda and conspiring to harm state security and has been imprisoned in solitary confinement in Evin Prison.</p> <p>Jafar Panahi is an Iranian film director, screenwriter and film editor. He first achieved international recognition with his feature film debut "The White Balloon" in 1995. The film won the Caméra d'Or at the 1995 Cannes Film Festival, which was the first major award won by an Iranian film at Cannes. His films are known for their humanistic perspective on life in Iran, often focusing on the hardships of children, the impoverished and women.</p>	<p>Group of the Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats in the European Parliament</p> <p>Group of the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe</p> <p>Group of the Greens/European Free Alliance</p> <p>MEPs José Ignacio Salafranca, Elmar Brok and 11 other MEPs</p>
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Ales Bialiatski

Nominated by MEP Jacek Saryusz-Wolski and 82 other MEPs



Ales Bialiatski (Belarus) is a freedom fighter and human rights defender currently imprisoned by the Belarusian regime. His great civic courage in the fight for fundamental and universal democratic values is a source of inspiration for many across the globe. His virtuous and unflinching commitment to the cause of freedom of thought and expression in the face of shameless persecution inflicted by the Belarusian authorities is a true reflection of the philosophy of Andrei Sakharov.

Mr Bialiatski's contribution to the promotion of peace and democracy has been recognised widely, including by the United Nations and in his Nobel Peace Prize nomination. The European Parliament, which already expressed its support for Mr Bialiatski in the Resolution of 15 September 2011, would, in granting him the Sakharov Prize, prove that his persistent fight for freedom in the last remaining dictatorship on our continent, is exemplary and one of universal importance. It would also, I believe, give Mr Bialiatski even more strength to carry on with his work in the defence of European values.

Profile of Ales Bialiatski

Mr Bialiatski has been a committed civil society activist fighting for freedom of thought and expression in Belarus his entire life. He is an academic (he holds a PhD from the Belarusian Academy of Sciences) and a member of the Belarusian Writers Union. Mr Bialiatski founded the Viasna Human Rights Centre, a non-governmental organization which provides financial and legal assistance to political prisoners and their families.

His outstanding devotion to the cause of truth has been recognized in the past: he received the Homo Homini Award and the Per Anger Prize for his efforts in promoting human rights and democracy.

On 24 October 2011, Mr Bialiatski was sentenced to 4.5 years in prison for alleged tax evasion. The sentence was condemned by the United Nations, and calls for his immediate release came from many countries. Amnesty International declared Mr Bialiatski a prisoner of conscience and the International Federation for Human Rights, which he is Vice-President of, launched an international campaign for his release. In 2012, Mr Bialiatski was nominated for the 2012 Nobel Peace Prize.

Joseph Francis

Nominated by the European Conservatives and Reformists Group



Joseph Francis (Pakistan) is founder and director of the Center for Legal Aid, Assistance and Settlement (CLAAS).

Mr Francis is a Catholic and father of four children who all live outside Pakistan. In June 2011, the UK's Queen Elizabeth II granted him the Honorary Award of the Most Excellent Order of the British Empire.

Founded in 1992, CLAAS addresses the needs of victims of Pakistan's blasphemy laws, through legal assistance and other means. CLAAS takes on between 100 and 200 blasphemy cases per year.

The organization has a multiethnic and multi-religious staff and works with blasphemy law victims irrespective of their ethnic or religious background: Muslims, Christians, Hindus and other groups.

The Pakistani blasphemy laws are a set of legal provisions from the country's Penal Code (Art. 295-B and -C) that make defiling the Koran or insulting the prophet Mohammed punishable with life imprisonment or even the death penalty. There is widespread abuse of these laws as people try to settle personal scores with them or use them as an instrument of religious hatred. Every year several dozen people are convicted under the blasphemy laws by lower courts. Eventually they are always acquitted by Pakistan's higher courts, but often the victims still have to flee from persecution in their communities. Several innocent victims have been murdered in prison or after being released.

Mr Francis and his organization do more than just offering legal assistance. They also try to help victims with shelter (safe houses) and with relocation if necessary. He regularly speaks out against the blasphemy laws in the Pakistani and international media. Mr Francis also travels regularly to Europe and North America to share the story of CLAAS and to raise funds. He is aware of the possibility of his nomination for the Sakharov Prize and has gladly accepted it.

Mr Francis has been to the European Parliament twice. The first time was in November 2011, on a personal visit to Mr Peter van Dalen. The second time was in March 2012, when Mr van Dalen organized an exchange of views on the Pakistani blasphemy laws with Mr Francis. On this second occasion many Members have heard from Mr Joseph Francis himself an impressive story of working with innocent victims of the blasphemy laws under very difficult circumstances that include death threats.

More information, including on the blasphemy cases CLAAS is working on, can be found under <http://www.claasfamily.com>.

Victoire Ingabire Umuhoza, Déogratias Mushayidi and Bernard Ntaganda

Nominated by MEPs Willy Meyer, Rosa Estaràs, Santiago Fisas, María Muñoz, Ana Miranda and 37 other MEPs

Rwanda has witnessed, during recent decades, a cycle of systematic violence aimed at excluding a great part of the population from the governance of the country. Cleavages in Rwandan society, both of ethnic origin or based on regionalism, have brought about disastrous effects on the country and its population.



Victoire Ingabire Umuhoza (Rwanda) was forced into exile in the Netherlands, following the Rwandan genocide. She very quickly became engaged in community life. Ms Ingabire became a founding member of the Contact non-profit organization, then of Dialogue and Charity Actions where she was co-Director until 2000. She was also co-Director of URAHO, an organization of Rwandan women exiled in the Netherlands and was also a founding member of the PRO JUSTITIA – Rwanda, then CEO of the ZWALU association, a platform gathering all expatriate women in the Netherlands. Later on she helped in the creation of HARAMBE, also a platform for African women in the same country.

Simultaneously Ms Ingabire was an active sponsor of the Inter-Rwandan Dialogue, an effort to bring together Rwandans of all ethnic origins in order to discuss the future of their country.

Ms Ingabire went back to Rwanda on 16 January 2010, in order to run for the presidential elections to be held in August. She was not only banned from participating in those elections but was also detained in October 2010 and charged with attempts against State security and espousing a genocide ideology, a crime defined by the UN human rights Committee – as well as by the majority of organizations for the protection of the same - as an infringement of liberty. She is currently being kept at the infamous central prison of Kigali. Before being arrested Ms Ingabire was subject to even worse humiliations by the regime’s security forces.

After she announced her intention to run for the presidential elections, her aged mother, living in the Netherlands, was charged with genocide and condemned *in absentia* to a heavy imprisonment term.

Ms Ingabire is a symbolic example of peaceful combat for the defence of citizens’ fundamental rights. Her innermost conviction affirms that only a nation living in reconciliation will be able to put an end to the political culture of exclusion and violence that has defined the history of Rwanda for far too many years.

By striving for the stability of Rwanda, she is simultaneously working for the same result in the Great Lakes region.



Déogratias Mushayidi (Rwanda) was born in 1961 at Sake in South-East Rwanda. Mr Mushayidi is a Tutsi who escaped the genocide, during which he lost many members of his family. Albeit being himself a victim, he refused to caution the deadly crimes committed by the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF), the Tutsi movement in power in Rwanda since 1994. A former representative of that military-political movement in Switzerland from 1990 to 1994, and even having brilliant prospects within the RPF, it was shocking news when Mr Mushayidi resigned from his post of RPF assistant Secretary General. He condemned the army of that movement, which boasted that it had stopped the Tutsi killings, for itself becoming a war-machine aimed at slaughtering Hutu communities having nothing to do with Tutsi extermination.

In Belgium, where he is a refugee, Mr Mushayidi has worked actively in favour of a dialogue among Rwandans of all ethnic origins.

Having been kidnapped in Burundi in March 2010, Mr Mushayidi was deported to Rwanda against all international conventions. At the conclusion of a trial without any witnesses for the prosecution he was sentenced to life imprisonment for attempts against the security of the State as a result of his articles and his political views.

While returning to Africa to obtain official recognition of his political party in Rwanda, the Covenant for People's Defence Pact (PDP Imanzi), Mr Mushayidi was aware of the risks he was running.



Bernard Ntaganda (Rwanda) was born in 1969 in the township of Ntongwe (Gitarama). Beginning in his youth Mr Ntaganda was spurred on by love for his brethren, and the defence of human rights and fundamental freedoms

On this basis he made the choice to study law. After secondary school he began his political career. Mr Ntaganda was appointed assistant Mayor in charge of judicial and political affairs in his native township. At that time he was 21 years old. With the arrival of a multi-party system in 1991, he became a member of the Social Democratic Party. Mr Ntaganda was chosen as head of his party in the National University of Rwanda (1993), then at the Gitarama prefecture and afterwards as a member of the PSD political bureau (2001-2008).

On 14 December 2008 Mr Ntaganda took the initiative of convening in Kigali numerous colleagues of the democratic opposition. Together, they carried out a critical assessment of the political situation in Rwanda. They remarked on the absence of an opening in the political arena, non-respect of human rights and the absence of an independent justice system, absence of freedom of expression, drastic inequality at the economic level, and absence of a project of society to overcome it and provide an answer to the people's basic needs.

Following multiple attempts to neutralise his party, on 24 June 2010, the RPF sent Mr Ntaganda to prison. This was the same date that candidatures to the presidency of the Republic (elections being called for 9 August 2010) had to be registered. During his imprisonment, he was regularly beaten and held in total isolation. On 14 October 2010, Mr Ntaganda had to be taken to intensive care due to torture inflicted on him.

Despite the ill-treatment inflicted on him, as well as on other responsible officers of his party and of the democratic opposition, the democratic youth IMBERAKURI want to show that the seeds of democracy sown by their president are alive and growing.

On April 22 2012, Mr Ntaganda was sentenced, with no possibility of appeal, to 4 years in prison for the mere fact of having founded an opposition political party.

Pussy Riot represented by Nadezhda Andreyevna Tolokonnikova, Yekaterina Samutsevich and Maria Alyokhina

Nominated by MEP Werner Schulz and 45 other MEPs



Pussy Riot (Russia) represented by **Nadezhda Andreyevna Tolokonnikova, Yekaterina Samutsevich and Maria Alyokhina**, through a courageous, spectacular and creative performance in the Cathedral of Christ the Saviour in Moscow on 21 February 2012, succeeded in giving voice to the pent up political criticism of the autocratic power system in Russia and of the blurring of the lines between that system and the Russian Orthodox Church, in a setting where it was bound to have an impact.

The acts of protest and the arrest of these three young women, taken together with the conditions of their detention – which border on torture – and their sentencing to two years in a labour camp, have done far more to focus the world’s attention on the unscrupulous restriction of civil rights and the absence of the rule of law in Russia than did the earlier murders of journalists or the wealth of new, repressive laws. The band provoked the system of “managed democracy” to the point of unmasking itself: President Putin’s statements, suggesting that the women had learned their lesson and indicating that he was expecting a mild sentence stand as evidence of the arbitrary administration of justice and make clear who the highest judge in Russia really is.

The women are accused of “hooliganism motivated by religious hatred”, although there is no indication of that to be found in the video of their Punk Prayer or the accompanying text describing the political motives for the performance. Their imploring punk prayer: “Mother of God, o Virgin, drive Putin out!” is of a piece with the slogan “Russia without Putin”, chanted by thousands at the mass demonstrations before the presidential elections. Their performance was not aimed at religion: on the contrary, it picks up on a tradition within the Russian Orthodox Church of uttering a quick prayer to Mother Mary in the hope that she will help ward off evil. The target of the band’s protest was President Putin, who is venerated by the Church’s clergy like a heaven-sent saint, and the patriarch of the Russian Orthodox Church, who called on believers to vote for this president and to stay away from the protests.

The three women are the subjects of an unparalleled smear campaign in Russia’s state-run and toe-the-line media which amounts to a modern witchhunt. The state prosecutor claimed that they were possessed by demons and had performed a devilish dance in the Church! This ignores both the artistic aspect of the political performance and the fact that radical forms of protest are necessary at a time when the Russian state is shifting noticeably back towards totalitarianism and it is difficult make oneself heard to rouse people to resist. While many are disappointed and have opted for internal exile, Pussy Riot has protested publically and effectively against paternalism, perpetual control, hypocrisy and small-minded morality. Their shrill prayer reflects the secret desire of many that Russia should free itself at long last from the Putin regime and his secret service caste.

The EU has been working to find a common set of values with Russia for years and Russia has entered into international commitments along those lines, but this case shines a spotlight on the blatant discrepancies between pretension and reality. We find in the court’s decision the untenable assertion that feminism contributes to religious hate. Here we hear the disquieting consonance between the Kremlin and the clergy, and their intent to denigrate the successes of Western emancipation and prevent them from penetrating further into Russian society.

This affair offers a telling example of how Russia is sliding backward into archaic times: justified criticism of chief priests, scribes and Pharisees is dismissed as blasphemy, its utterers persecuted, much as Jesus of Nazareth experienced long ago. Yet, Pussy Riot has fearlessly and creatively championed values embodied by Andrei Sakharov: freedom of thought and the independence of science and art.

Nasrin Sotoudeh and Jafar Panahi

Nominated by the Group of the Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats in the European Parliament, the Group of the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe, the Group of the Greens/European Free Alliance, MEPs José Ignacio Salafranca, Elmar Brok and 11 other MEPs



Nasrin Sotoudeh (Iran, Tehran, 1963) is an Iranian lawyer and human rights advocate. Ms Sotoudeh has represented imprisoned Iranian opposition activists and politicians following the disputed June 2009 presidential elections as well as juvenile offenders facing the death sentence.

Ms Sotoudeh was arrested in September 2010 on charges of spreading propaganda and conspiring to harm state security and has been imprisoned in solitary confinement in Evin Prison. In January 2011, the Iranian Revolutionary Court sentenced her to 11 years in prison in addition to barring her from practicing law and from leaving the country for 20 years. According to Ms Sotoudeh's husband, Mr Reza Khandan, following international pressure, her sentence has been cut to six years, and the bar was reduced to 10 years.

Ms Sotoudeh took the Bar (Kanoon Vokala) exam in 1995 but was not permitted to practice law for eight years. After earning her lawyer's credentials in 2003 she became one of the most active members of the Iranian Law Society. Her work has included defending juveniles, women and prisoners of conscience; she has also been committed to protecting abused children by preventing their return to their abusive fathers. Ms Sotoudeh has defended human rights campaigners and political activists, including Nobel Prize laureate Shirin Ebadi, journalist Isa Saharkhiz and Heshmatollah Tabarzadi, leader of the banned Democratic Front of Iran. Ms Sotoudeh is a mother of two.

By sacrificing her own freedom and persisting in her belief in the fundamental principles of justice and the unbreakable right to a fair trial, Ms Sotoudeh has become a symbol of those Iranian citizens, human rights defenders and lawyers who have become victims of the Iranian authorities' effort to prevent citizens, particularly those critical of the regime, from being able to access appropriate, competent legal representation. A basic right and indispensable for a fair trial guarantee. By making lawyers pay the price of their own freedom for exercising their profession, the Iranian authorities are further undermining an already deeply flawed justice system.

With lawyers behind bars and threatened, clients - often victims of human rights violations - are left defenceless at the mercy of the authorities. By awarding the Sakharov Prize to Ms Sotoudeh the European Parliament will send a strong message of support and encouragement to the Iranian people, in particular those in need of legal representation, that they will not be forgotten and have our full support in their struggle for human dignity, justice and respect for their basic human rights and fundamental freedoms.



Jafar Panahi (Iran, 1960) is an Iranian film director, screenwriter and film editor most commonly associated with the Iranian New Wave film movement. After several years of making short films and working as an assistant director for fellow Iranian filmmaker Abbas Kiarostami, Mr Panahi first achieved international recognition with his feature film debut "The White Balloon" in 1995. The film won the Caméra d'Or at the 1995 Cannes Film Festival, which was the first major award won by an Iranian film at Cannes. Mr Panahi was quickly recognized as one of the most influential filmmakers in Iran. Although his films were often banned in his own country, he continued to receive international acclaim from film theorists and critics and has won numerous awards. His films are known for their humanistic perspective on life in Iran, often focusing on the hardships of children, the impoverished and women.

After several years of conflict with the Iranian government over the content of his films (including several short-term arrests), Mr Panahi was arrested in March 2010 along with his wife, daughter and 15 friends, and was later charged with committing propaganda against the Iranian government. Despite support from filmmakers, film organizations and human rights organizations from around the world, in December 2010 Mr Panahi was sentenced to a six-year jail sentence and a 20-year ban on directing any movies, writing screenplays, giving any form of interview to Iranian or foreign media and from leaving the country.

In the middle of the controversy and court appeal, Mr Panahi broke the ban imposed on him on making films and made the documentary feature "This Is Not a Film" in 2011 in collaboration with Iranian filmmaker Mr Mojtaba Mirtahmasb. This film was made for 3,200 Euros and shot on a presumed digital camcorder and on an iPhone. It was shot in four days over a ten-day period in March 2011 and its title was inspired by René Magritte's painting "The Treachery of Images".

In the film, Mr Panahi sits in his apartment making phone calls about his court case, watching TV news stories, interacting with his neighbours, talking about his past films and describing scenes from the film that he had begun shooting when he was arrested. Ten days before the opening of the 2011 Cannes Film Festival, "This Is Not a Film" was announced as a surprise entry into the festival. It was smuggled out of Iran on a USB thumb drive that had been hidden inside a cake.

"Panahi's films redefine the humanitarian themes of contemporary Iranian cinema, firstly, by treating the problems of women in modern Iran, and secondly, by depicting human characters as "non-specific persons" – more like figures who nevertheless remain full-blooded characters, holding on to the viewer's attention and gripping the senses. Like the best Iranian directors who have won acclaim on the world stage, Panahi evokes humanitarianism in an unsentimental, realistic fashion, without necessarily overriding political and social messages. In essence, this has come to define the particular aesthetic of Iranian cinema. So powerful is this sensibility that we seem to have no other mode of looking at Iranian cinema other than to equate it with a universal concept of humanitarianism", said Stephen Teo. Mr Panahi says that his style can be described as "humanitarian events interpreted in a poetic and artistic way". He says "in a world where films are made with millions of dollars, we made a film about a little girl who wants to buy a fish for less than a dollar (in *The White Balloon*) – this is what we're trying to show." Mr Panahi has stated that "in all of my films, you never see an evil character, male or female. I believe everyone is a good person."

In an interview with Mr Anthony Kaufman, Mr Panahi said: "I was very conscious of not trying to play with people's emotions; we were not trying to create tear-jerking scenes. So it engages people's intellectual side. But this is with assistance from the emotional aspect and a combination of the two." Some Iranians have criticized his work, claiming that his films "don't draw a realistic picture of Iran, or that the difficulties encountered by women in [his] films apply to only a certain class of women".