

## ***How did Peaceful Planet Human Rights Education start?***

Duncan McNair was asked by the organiser of an Iranian discussion group in London to speak at one of their meetings at which the topic was a diplomatic incident in 1952 following the Iranian Government's decision to nationalise the oil assets of British Petroleum in Iran, known as the Anglo Iranian Oil Company.

Duncan's grandfather, Sir Arnold (later, Lord McNair) was the British judge at the International Court of Justice (ICJ) in Den Haag in the Netherlands (the Hague Court) from 1946 to 1955. The ICJ is the Court where countries bring civil actions against other countries.

The Iranian government had been attempting to negotiate a fairer share of the oil revenues with BP but lost patience and nationalised the assets in 1952. The British Government tried to bring a case against Iran at the ICJ and the Court then had to decide whether it had jurisdiction to try the case.

Sir Arnold McNair wrote a highly authoritative personal opinion which made the case for the Court to decide not to accept the case on the grounds that it was a commercial entity, and not a country, that was seeking restoration of its assets. By a majority the Court accepted his view and rejected the application.

The US Government decided it was time for 'regime change' in Iran and sent in a CIA agent to foment a coup. Iran had enjoyed a democratic Government under a constitutional monarchy (like the UK) from 1906. With the American coup, the Shah (King) of Iran became the dictator of Iran and was widely hated by the people as an American puppet. When the Ayatollahs (religious leaders) promised democracy in the Islamic Revolution of 1979, they were enthusiastically welcomed by the people but the enthusiasm was short-lived as the promises of democracy proved false.

In the late 1990s Duncan met Ali Reza Saheb who had been the Iranian Prime Minister's Private Secretary as a very young man in 1952. He said that Sir Arnold had been a national hero in Iran at the time of the nationalisation and ICJ hearing and that had he been invited to Tehran (capital of Iran) to broker a deal and been successful the subsequent history of Iran could have been very different. Imagine the Middle East with Iran now having had a democratic Government since 1906 - a century old tradition of democracy.

This was how the talk at the Iranian discussion group came about, many years later through mutual contacts. The organiser asked Duncan to 'say something about democracy because the Iranian opposition is very fragmented'. Duncan brought the What are Human Rights? booklets to the meeting and they liked both aspects of the comm. Duncan was asked to come back and do a whole evening on the human rights education but suggested it would be better start training instructors in Persian so that it could expand. That meeting was on 14<sup>th</sup> March 2014 and the first human rights education workshop in Persian was on 21<sup>st</sup> April 2014.

By 2016, six series of workshops in Persian, two in Kurdish and one in Arabic had been delivered and the publishers had authorised the translation of the children's programme from Youth for Human Rights International and the adult programme from United for Human Rights into Arabic, Persian, Kurdish, Turkish and Urdu. The materials in these languages plus English are now downloadable from [www.peaceful-planet.org](http://www.peaceful-planet.org). A new series of Farsi workshops, our seventh, started on January 26<sup>th</sup> 2017 and an English series started on 16<sup>th</sup> February 2017.

Duncan McNair,  
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