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Persian Constitution of 1906 is Focus of Sept. 16-17 Conference

ORANGE, Calif., Sept. 8, 2006 Chapman University will host a 2-day conference focusing on the centennial of the Persian Constitutional Movement and the 1906 Persian Constitutional Declaration on Saturday and Sunday, Sept. 16 and 17. The event is presented by Chapman's Center for Global Education, the Iranica Institute and California State University, Fullerton. The conference, which is free and open to the public, will take place in 237 Kennedy Hall, at the corner of Glassell and University Drive in Orange. Registration begins at 9 a.m. Saturday, with welcoming remarks at 9:30 a.m. For more information on the conference, the public can call 714-744-7858.

The conference will examine various aspects of the year 1906 in Persia (today's Iran) a pivotal year, for it was the first time in that region that civil liberties and a secular constitution were introduced. Twelve scholarly experts from across the U.S. will present papers. An exhibition and sale of conference-related books will take place concurrently in an adjacent room.

It's important to know that this first experiment in democracy in Iran occurred 100 years ago, said Dr. Kamran Jabbari of the Iranica Institute. Today, as the United States is involved in exporting democracy to various areas of the world, it seems few people remember that Persia today's Iran did this in 1906. The Persian constitutional movement was, for a brief time, able to establish a constitutional monarchy similar to those in England, Belgium and the Netherlands the first such democracy in the Middle East. The experiment was short-lived. When the reigning monarch Mozafaredin Shah Qajar, who had agreed under pressure to the constitutional reforms, died in 1907, he was succeeded by his son Mohammad Ali Shah Qajar, who eventually suppressed the democracy movement and returned Persia to autocratic rule.

Dr. Jabbari pointed out that one American had an important role in the Persian constitutional movement of 1906. H. C. Baskerville, a young Presbyterian missionary teaching English in Tabriz, resigned his position to take part in the fighting against the monarchy, on the side of the constitutionalists. He was killed in 1909 in the fighting and became a Persian national hero even today there is a statue of him in one of the museums in Tabriz.

Conference speakers include Dr. Elton L. Daniel of the University of Hawaii (who will speak on The Iranian Constitutional Revolution in Comparative Perspective), Dr. Hafez F. Farmayan of the University of Texas at Austin (Reflections Upon Persian Constitutional History), Dr. Hamid Dabashi of Columbia University (The Role of Expatriate Intellectuals in the Making of the Constitutional Revolution of Iran), and Dr. Willem Floor of the World Bank (Modern Theater and the Diffusion of Ideas of the Constitutionalist Movement), among others.