



President's Report

Annual General Meeting 2020

Oct 6, 2020

After a fantastic showcase at Heritage Festival 2019, which led that IHSE awarded second place among 78 pavilions for the impactful execution of its cultural tent, it was an exciting and great honour to continue the work as chairperson for an excellent Board of Directors. They all were elected at the AGM on September 13, 2019.

Following the AGM discussions in September 2019 (Please see the President report 2019), the board members were committed to implementing infrastructure improvement on the organization's financial records and governance. In October 2019, through CRA's communication, the board found out the Corporate Return Tax was not filed since 1999. The financial fiscal year changed without informing the Alberta registry and CRA. Based on the available resources and financial loss experience on organizing the Yalda event over the last few years, the board of directors decided to focus on resolving CRA inquiries, financial recording systems and seeking legal advice on reviewing and improving the governance of the organization. Also, we were able to focus on the Norouz event; instead; as a result, we finalized the details of Norouz Gala beginning of December 2019.

A number of global and national events made this year a historic challenging and difficult one for IHSE Board, our members and our community on both personal and professional levels. In November 2019, people worldwide were shocked by Iran's Islamic regime's brutal and barbarian act, killing handers (including at least 23 children – Amnesty International) and arresting thousands of protesters due to an abruptly triple rise in fuel prices. Less than two months later, on January 8, 2020, Ukraine International Airlines flight PS752 was shot down with at least two missiles fired by the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps. One hundred seventy-six passengers and crew died. Among them, 29 children, eight entire families who have no one to represent them. Here in Edmonton, we lost 13 beautiful souls, among them a couple who were returning from their wedding in Iran, two well-known professors, a doctor and brilliant Ph.D. and master students.

Edmontonian lost:

- Four members of the Mousavi Family; Pedram Mousavi (father), Mojgan Daneshmand (mother)- prominent university professors, Darya Mousavi (daughter) and Darina Mousavi (daughter).
- Doctor Shekoufeh Choupannejad and daughters Saba and Sara Saadat.
- Arash Pourzarabi and Pouneh Gorji; both completed their bachelor's degrees from Sharif University of Technology in Iran. They were pursuing master's degrees in artificial intelligence at the U of A.

- Nasim Rahmanifar; received her bachelor's and master's degrees in biomedical engineering from Amirkabir University of Technology, Iran, in 2017 and 2019. She started a master's program in mechanical engineering at the U of A in 2019 and was offered to transfer to a PhD program in 2020.
- Amir Hossein Saeedinia, completed MSc in biomedical engineering at Amirkabir University of Technology in Iran. He was to start his PhD in mechanical engineering at the U of A in January 2020.
- Elnaz Nabiyyi was a PhD student in the Department of Accounting, Operations and Information Systems in the Alberta School of Business.
- Mohammad Mahdi Elyasi was one of the top undergraduate students at Sharif University of Technology in Iran. He came to the U of A and earned a master's degree in mechanical engineering in 2017.

Iranian Heritage Society of Edmonton (IHSE) hosted the Annual General Meeting on Sep 30, 2020, at Blue Quill Community Hall here in Edmonton. I am delighted to report that the total participant was 84 people, the number of people who paid for membership (Sep 1, 2020 – Aug 30 2020) was 79 and the number of people who participated in board election were 79. The minutes of the event is available here.

Below is the summary of work that was done from Oct 1, 2019 – Sep 30, 2020

- **Filing Tax Return 1999 – 2018**
 - Corresponded all the requirements from the CRA and Alberta registry.
 - Corrected the financial year-end timing at both Alberta Registry and CRA.
- **Launching the English version of the website for the website (<http://ihse.ca/>)**
- **Obtaining a shared professional office for the organization (Regus Edmonton)**
 - Phone /mail handling
 - Shared office space
 - Professional Board room/meeting room (must be booked in advance)
- **Liquidation of assets**
 - Sold Some of the hardware (wood stage, stairs, chairs) that were taking space and creating additional storage costs.
- **New Mobil Storage unit (ALTA Storage LTD)**
 - All valuable and useful equipment and assets of the organization moved to mobile unit storage. One of the advantages is that ALTA Storage will drop the storage unit at the event's location and can pick up after the event. This way, the organization does not need to rent a truck and spend hours of intense physical work transporting equipment to the event (heritage festival ground).

- **Flight PS752**

From the beginning of this tragic crime, the board of directors committed to standing beside victims' family and friends, representing our community at large and demanding justice and accountability.

In summary:

- We utilized our new office space to run the first national newsbreak on the day of this event.
- We gathered friends/family of victims in briefing sessions and provided them with a safe and supporting environment to share their memories with their loved ones with media.
- We contributed and partnered on the programming of the Memorial event on January 12, 2020, hosted by the University of Alberta, along with many other volunteers from our community. At this event, the Right Honourable Justin Trudeau, Premier of Alberta

Jason Kenney, president of the University of Alberta, David Turpin and Mayor Don Iveson deliver a solidarity speech for all Canadians.

- We stayed in a farmed and constant communication with the City of Edmonton and other organizations to ensure we have short-term, medium- and long-term plans to ensure this tragic event will never be forgotten.
- We organized a large tribute for the Edmontonian Lost with collaboration between the City of Edmonton and IHSE on February 22 at the City Hall. During the event, Mayor Don Iveson delivered a memorial book which was signed by thousands of Edmontonian in memory of people who lost their lives on Flight PS752 to the Iranian Heritage Society of Edmonton.
- In partnership with Metro Cinema, we organized fundraising to screen "Women without Men" by Shirin Neshat.
- We organized GofundMe Campaign to raise money for the three primary purposes; support Edmontonian lots' family, the expenses of the events related to PS752, and contribute designate U of A scholarship.

- **Chahar-Shanbeh Soori, Norouz Gala, and Nouroz Bazaar**

While all these programs were finalized in December 2019 due to the Covid-19 outbreak, we followed Alberta Health Guidelines and cancelled all the events in March 2020.

- **Optimizing the corporate Governance Structure and Bylaw**

After few months of research and communication with different law firms, IHSE entered into an engagement with DRACHE APTOWITZER LLP, Alexandra Tzannidakis, to provide counsel and representations regarding the charitable registration of the Iranian Heritage Society of Edmonton. This work includes the review and amendment as necessary of IHSE's bylaws and governing documents, the preparation and submission of an application for charitable registration, and any further communications necessary with the Canada Revenue Agency until their final decision on the application. In this process, we reviewed over 11 other bylaws of not-for-profit organizations with similar activities across Canada. As a result, we send the suggested changes to the members and notice of AGM on September 9, 2020.

Summary of changes/improvement of the proposed bylaw were around four main matters:

- **Memberships**
 - Improved the legal mandate and recommendation by Corporate Management Science to avoid and limit the possibility of "Hostile Takeover" and/or protect the society from Corporate "take over" action.
 - Inclusive membership; Impactful and lawful
 - Attract skills and talents far beyond Edmonton and Canada boards in the lawful process, including obtaining additional grants.
- **Governance of the organization and responsibilities toward its members**
 - Increased transparency on major required submission of government documents and duties.
 - The Cooperative Governance Model.
 - Board of Directors' focus will shift to constructive and impactful long-term operational activities vs. annual events and routine activities.
 - Eliminate the influence of personal interest or any financial advantage or contribution between board members and the organization directly and indirectly.
- **Financial standards, obligation, and reporting & Assets Management**

- Enhance and improve the Financial recordings according to the Canadian Revenue Agency standards.

Although Mrs. Alexandra participated in AGM through a virtual platform (Zoom), and we presented all benefits of the proposed bylaw, at the beginning of the event, 52% of participants voted to postpone "voting the new bylaw" into a future Special General Meeting.

Recommendation:

- Historically, the organization has suffered due to a lack of transparency and implementation of governance standards, where the proposed bylaw aimed to reduce this issue.
- After two years serving on the board, I strongly emphasize on avoiding personal interpretation of key terms such as "non-political" or "nonpartisan." Legal terms have a clear definition, the definition of Political Activities is below; According to the Canadian Revenue Agency condemning lawless, inhuman action or raising our voice where we see a violation of human rights is not political activity. It is perfectly aligned with our heritage since 539 B.C., when Cyrus the Great, the first king of ancient Persia, established the world's first charter of human rights.
 - **Nonpartisan and Non-political;** means that the organization is prohibited from supporting or opposing political candidates, parties, including participating in any kind of political campaign-related with any kind of election, and in some cases, other votes like propositions, directly or indirectly, but does not mean that the organization cannot take positions on political issues.
- Continue seeking expert advice on infrastructure and organizational behaviour vs. relying on gathering ideas only among the board members or our community's elder members.
- Join and expand our partnership with other organization, particularly Edmonton Art Council
- Seek legal advice on implementing the process of enhancing the organization structure.
- Continue posting public matters and announcements in English and use Frasi only for internal and unofficial communication; this is not only because the official language that gives IHSE legal authority is English but also acts as an inclusive organization and welcoming people with all other backgrounds.
- Increase traffic to the IHSE website by providing a user-friendly platform and useful information.
- Establishing Annual Norouz Festival at the City Hall: I encourage the board to communicate with all other ethnic associations who celebrate Norouz, such as the Afghani association, Azari association, etc. to organize a Saturday at the City Hall building showcasing the tradition and heritage of Norouz in a collaborative platform. This can create an impactful platform promoting, educating and engaging cross-cultural dialogue between Iranian Canadians and the global community.
- Seek additional funds in the operational budget to improve IHSE events' quality and offer inclusive educational events/ artistic projects.

On behalf of the IHSE Board of Directors, we would like to say a heartfelt thank you to everyone who helped and supported the Edmonton-Iranian community voluntarily in 2019-2020.

Sincerely,



Reza Akbari

President of IHSE

Report on behalf of IHSE Board of Directors