

Washington, Apr 5th 2021

STATEMENT FROM HOSTAGE AID WORLDWIDE AND FAMILY MEMBERS OF HOSTAGES & CURRENT HOSTAGES ON THE EVE OF INDIRECT NEGOTIATIONS WITH IRAN ON LIFTING SANCTIONS AND THE US RE-ENTRY INTO THE JCPOA

On the occasion of Siamak Namazi's 2000-day imprisonment as American hostage and in the advent of the Vienna meeting on April 6 to revive the Iran nuclear deal, Hostage Aid Worldwide renews its call on the Biden administration to unequivocally prioritize the release of American hostages held in Iran in the administration's intended indirect negotiation with Iran in Vienna.

With a track record of hostage taking since its inception in 1979, the Iranian regime rather than abandoning this heinous activity after the conclusion of the nuclear deal in 2015, has taken it to a new level. The Obama administration's January 2016 exchange of prisoners left Siamak Namazi behind. To this day Siamak Namazi still remains in Iran's Evin Prison. In addition to Siamak Namazi, there are at least three other Americans under Iranian custody or banned from leaving Iran today, including American businessman Emad Sharghi, who was re-arrested after Biden was elected president. Under the Iran nuclear deal, the Iranian regime has also taken a number of Western citizens hostage. At least 4 German, 2 French, 3 British, 1 Swedish, and 2 Austrian citizens remain under Iranian custody today.

To this day, the Biden administration has refused to unequivocally acknowledge the American citizens detained in Iran as pawns for political gain as *hostages* and insisted on referring to them as "wrongfully detained Americans." The Biden administration has stated on several occasions that the release of "wrongfully detained Americans" from Iran is its top priority. However, since President Biden was sworn into office, not a single American was released from Iran, despite multiple concessionary gestures the administration has made to Iran to restore the nuclear deal and lift sanctions.

On Tuesday, April 6, the Biden Administration including officials who were involved in the 2013 negotiations will again enter into indirect negotiation without the release of American hostages. It is crucial that they seize the opportunity to learn from previous mistakes when some hostages were left behind pending planned goodwill gestures from Iran which never materialized. In his PBS interview, when US Envoy on Iran, Robert Malley, was asked whether there would be a deal if American prisoners are not released, he dodged the question and repeated the official line that it is the priority of the US to get them home. Unfortunately, the administration's position on the Iran nuclear deal vis-à-vis American hostages in Iran indicates the release of American hostages is anything but a priority and the nuclear deal can be restored without American prisoners released. It is the view of Hostage Aid Worldwide that this approach will be unhelpful and risks ransom creep during and after the negotiations.

Hostage Aid Worldwide asks the Biden administration to act on its promise and prioritize the release of All hostages in its dealing with Iran: the administration's restoration of JCPOA must be conditioned on the release of American hostages and Iran's commitment to end hostage taking.

As a conclusion, we would like to reiterate the 3 main points that we believe this administration should include prior, during, and after any negotiations with Iran based on the basic American values.

- 1- The release of all American hostages as well as those from our allies as a prerequisite to the start of any nuclear negotiations with Iran.
- 2- The halt of negotiations if any new hostage incident takes place during the negotiations.
- 3- Any final agreement should have a snap back clause in case of any hostage taking incident after signing.

Signed on behalf of Hostage Aid Worldwide and the following hostages and family members:

Barry Rosen | Board member and former hostage US Embassy Tehran (1979 – 1981)
Nizar Zakka | Board member and former hostage in Iran (2015- 2019)
Kylie Moore | Board member and former Hostage Iran (2018-2020)
Xiyue Wang | Board member and former hostage in Iran (2016 – 2019)
Ana Diamond | Former Hostage in Iran (2014 – 2019)
Saeed Malekpour | Former Hostage in Iran (2008 – 2019)
Sam Goodwin | Board member and former hostage in Syria (2019)
Richard Ratcliff | Husband of Nazanin Ratcliff (Current UK Hostage in Iran since 2016)
Vida Mehrannia | Wife of Dr. Ahmedreza Djalali (Current Swedish Hostage in Iran since 2016)
Family of Massud Mossaheb (Current Austrian Hostage in Iran since 2019)
Family of Jamshid Sharmahd (Current US-German hostage in Iran since 2020)
Family of Anousheh Ashouri (Current UK hostage in Iran since 2017)
Families of 8 current US and western hostages (Names not disclosed for safety reasons)
Geoffrey Dive | Board member, Advisory Board Chair
Daren Nair | Advisory Board Member
Ali Arab | Board member, Treasurer

QUOTES FROM HOSTAGES & FORMER HOSTAGES AND THEIR FAMILY MEMBERS

Richard Ratcliffe, UK (husband of current hostage Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe –since April 2016)

“This week 5 years ago Nazanin was abducted on holiday in the wake of the JCPOA, as leverage for Iranian funds held under sanctions, and as part of the unexpected growth in Iran’s hostage taking that surrounded the 2015-16 nuclear deal.”

“In the 5 years since, we have watched FM Zarif’s repeated marketing trips to the UN and international conferences, his silver promises repeatedly unkept, the goalposts moved once again.”

“On Tuesday, it is back to Vienna. The British government has been telling us their understanding from Iran is that progress on the JCPOA will lead to Nazanin’s release, who brazenly is still held even after the end of her sentence.”

“This seems naive - to presume it will go differently this time. In fact it seems worse. We have warned the UK Foreign Secretary that the West’s JCPOA strategy risks ransom creep. Whereas Nazanin was once taken to cover a 500 million dollar debt, she now risks becoming collateral in a trillion dollar sanctions negotiation, and she is not the only one.”

“The failure to address state hostage taking head on means that it has continued to grow as Iran looks for leverage, and different factions compete in elections.

“Western diplomats should be in no doubt when they sit down on Tuesday, that the hostages need to come home first. Else more lives will be collected, and it will continue to become more complicated to bring them home.”

“Mistakes were made by many governments in how the hostage issue was handled in 2015-16. Tuesday is a chance to make amends, and to end the naivety.”

Mariam Claren, Germany (daughter of current hostage Nahid Taghavi – since Oct 2020)

“Talking about JCPOA without talking about the human rights violations, torture and mistreatment of dual national political prisoners and first securing their release is a silent agreement to these crimes against humanity”

Sherry Izadi, UK. (wife of current hostage Anoosheh Ashoori – since Aug 2017)

“Securing the release of dual nationals held hostage in Iran, including my husband Anoosheh Ashoori, requires a coordinated and prioritised initiative by the United States, the UK, and other European states, to confront Iran and to hold it to account for its human rights violations. There is no hope of an end to this hostage diplomacy so long as diplomatic efforts remain sporadic, unilateral, and fragmented. Iran must be forced to understand that its actions will have punitive consequences that go beyond mere words.”

Barry Rosen, USA (former hostage 1979-81)

“For over 40 years Iran has been taking hostages as part of its hostage diplomacy and it must end now. The Biden administration has the power to release those Americans now held in Iran and to prevent Iran taking any in the future”

Nizar Zakka, USA (former hostage 2015-2019)

“Hostage Aid Worldwide is extremely concerned that if the US administration does not prioritize the release of all hostages including citizens and dual nationals from US and our allies taken by Iran as a means of exerting leverage, the approach to negotiations will be counterproductive and even encourages ransom creep. It would be unconscionable to leave hostages behind again as happened in 2015”

Ana Diamond, UK (former hostage 2014-19)

“This week marked the 2000th day Iranian-American citizen Siamak Namazi is behind bars on unfair charges in Iran. He wrote one of the earliest pieces about the negative impact of sanctions on humanitarian trade with Iran. Unfortunately, the Iranian Revolutionary Guards’ Intelligence Unit seems to punish those who do the most to ease living for ordinary Iranians. The Revolutionary Guards will do anything they can to hold onto their grip of power, and as proved in the past, that included taking numerous dual-nationals hostage during the height of the JCPOA between 2014-2016. Unless the Biden administration demands the release of all American hostages in Iran ahead of any further development with the JCPOA, their comments about prioritizing imprisoned American lives abroad risks being considered as mere virtue-signaling and performative solidarity. The restoration of the JCPOA cannot and should not go ahead at the expense of American lives languishing in Iranian prisons for no fault of their own.”

Anonymous, USA (current hostage since 2016)

An American family, on behalf of her husband hostage in Iran since 2016 urges the Biden administration to do more and take real tangible actions for the release of American Citizens and American LPRs taken hostage in Iran. (name not disclosed for safety reason)

Saeed Malekpour, Canada (former hostage 2008-19)

The Islamic Republic keeps western hostages all the time, Countries must unite about these kind of cruel actions

Vida Mehrannia, Sweden (wife of current hostage Ahmadreza Djalali – since April 2016)

Ahmadreza is an innocent father, medical doctor and scientist, who is being tortured and kept as a hostage for almost 5 years now, while his health deteriorates rapidly

Fanak Mani, Austria (daughter of current hostage Massud Mossaheb – since 2019)

We ask the Austrian government and the European Union to demand the immediate and unconditional release of Austrian citizen Massud Mossaheb, taken hostage in Iran since 2019.