

HON. ROLLIN A. VAN BROEKHOVEN, JD, LL.M., DPHILL, DLITT, DPS, LLD
12 September 2022

President Joseph R. Biden
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W.
Washington, DC 20500

Dear President Biden,

We, members of the International Religious Freedom Roundtable, are concerned about Iran, the dictatorial rule of the country, especially as it leads to the suppression of religious freedom and the persecution of religious and ethnic minorities, all of which fall within the scope of violations of human rights. Moreover, we are especially concerned about the planned visit of President Ebrahim Raisi to the United States for the meeting of the 77th General Assembly of the United Nations.

Article 1 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights provides: “All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act toward one another in a spirit of brotherhood.” Article 2 further provides that: “Everyone is entitled to all the rights and freedoms set forth in this Declaration, without distinction of any kind, such as race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national origin, property, birth or other status.

Article 18 also provides that “Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; this right includes the freedom to change religion or belief, and the freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or in private, to manifest his religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship and observance.”

Indeed, this is what sets us apart from all the nonhuman creatures in the world. For many, we believe that we are born in the image of God with the capacity to reason, to know right from wrong, to worship, and to be reflective human beings, unlike animals which are instinctive.

The importance of religious freedom to the flourishing of the individual and of society was clearly embodied in the International Religious Freedom Act of 1998. The Act specifically declares the policy of the United States to condemn violations of religious freedom, and to promote and assist other governments in the promotion of the fundamental rights of religion, and to seek to channel U.S. security and development assistance to governments that are not found to engage in gross violations of the right of freedom of religion.

As a result, the Act establishes an Ambassador-at-Large for Religious Freedom to assist the Secretary of State in preparing portions of the Human Rights Reports that relate to freedom of religion and freedom from various forms of religious discrimination. The Act requires the Secretary of State, in order to facilitate access by nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) and the public around the world to international documents on the protection of religious freedom, etc.

The Act further expresses the sense of Congress that in order to encourage involvement in religious freedom concerns at every possible opportunity and by all U.S. Government representatives, officials of the executive branch should promote increased advocacy on such issues during meetings with foreign leaders.

Since the 1979 Revolution, religious and ethnic minorities have lived in fear with so many losing their lives or sentenced to imprisonment. The priests and followers of minority groups have lost lives simply for being Sunnis, Gonabadi Sufis, Christian, Baha'i, and Jewish. These people are witnessing another kind of Holocaust, many have been forced to leave Iran.

We believe that the Conventions on the Protection and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide are set out in Article II as a commitment with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnic, racial, or religious group, such as: killing members of the group or to deliberately inflict on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about destruction in whole or in part; imposing measures intended to prevent births with the group; and forcibly transferring children of one group to another group.

What has occurred in Iran violates all treaties, laws, and norms of international law, and cannot be tolerated. Experience has shown that any policy of appeasement simply permits the violation of human rights to continue and the violation of international norms to exist.

We must make sure that religious freedom is a key point of discussion in the JCPOA talks or it will simply result in further suppression and execution of religious minorities and political prisoners in Iran. Taking the Iranian Revolutionary Guards (IRG) off the Foreign Terrorist Organizations list simply legitimizes the terror caused by them within the country and Middle East. IRG is a tool of suppression of religious and ethnic minorities within the country.

Releasing vast sums of money to Iran simply makes the continued criminal and suppressive activities of religion more powerful and dangerous. We, therefore, petition your administration to deny the visa to President Ebrahim Raisi to attend the 77th General Assembly of the United Nations as a Head of State.

Sincerely,



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cc:

Hon. Antony J. Blinken, U.S. Secretary of State,
Hon. Uzra Zeya, Under Secretary of State
Hon. Anne A. Witkowsky, Assistant Secretary of State, Bureau of Conflicts and
Stabilization Operations
Hon. Rashad Hussain, U. S. Ambassador-at-Large for International Religious
Freedom

Organizations

Freedom House
World without Genocide at Mitchell
Hamlin School of Law
Church of Scientology National Affairs Office
Alliance for the Rights of All Minorities in Iran
Baha'is of the United States
ChinaAid Association
Center for Pluralism
Citizens for Global Solutions
Coordination des Associations et des Particuliers pour la Liberte de Conscience
(CAP Freedom of Conscience)
International Organization to Preserve Human Rights
Iraq Christian Relief Council
Jubilee Campaign
Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns
Coptic Solidarity

Organizations (Individual Representatives)

Nadine Maenza, President, IFR Secretariat and Former Chair, United
States Commission on International Religious Freedom
Dr. Paul Murray, International Vice President, Religious Freedom Initiatives at
Global Peace Foundation

Hamid M. Gharagozloo, U. S. Representative, International Organization to
Preserve Human Rights
Dr. Jan Figel, Former EU Commissioner and FORB Special Envoy
Gary Bauer, Republican Presidential Candidate (2000), President American

Values

Professor Paul Marshall, Baylor University

Ingrid Vander veldt, Empowering a Billion Women Chairman, CEO

Dr. Jessica D. Russo, Psy.D, Clinical Psychologist, Doctors against Forced Organ Harvesting, (DAFOH), Consultant

Dr. Brian Grim, Religious Freedom & Business Foundation, Founder and President

Jeff Weber, Executive Director, The William Wilberforce Center,

Dr. John Boyd, Institute for Global Engagement, President, CEO

Suzanne Scholte, Seoul Peace Prize Laureate, President, Defense Forum Foundation, Chair, North Korea Freedom Coalition

Jesse Jaspal, World Sikh Parliament

Anila Ali, American Muslim & Multifaith Women's Empowerment Council, Vulnerable People Project (VPP), President

Dr. Omer Kanat, World Uyghur Congress, President

Dipan Mitra, World Hindu Federation, Bangladesh Chapter, Secretary General and Founder Bureau of Minority Rights Bangladesh

Arch. Justin Baramsanankiye, PhD, DMin, DD, The Episcopal Free Church of Burundi

Rev. Dr, Allen Church, President, National Clergy Council, Manassas, VA

Dr. John Carlo, Senior Pastor, Christian Pentecostal Church, Staten Island, NY

Father, John Anderson, President, Saint Nicholas Freedom Group

Rev. George Parker, Executive Director, Revealing Light Ministries

Mrs, Peggy Nienaber, Chairman, Religious Freedom Coalition, President, Faith and Liberty

Thierry Valle, Coordination des Associations et des Particuliers pour la Liberté de Conscience

Tommy Waller, Founder and President, HaYovel, Inc.

Carol Davis, School Teacher, Staten Island, NY

Tom Piltch, Retired Mentor, McLean Presbyterian Church

Dr Gloria Puldu, President, Leah Foundation

Dr. Richard Benkin, Independent Human Rights Activist; President, Forcefield NFP

Felipe Alexandre, President, Alexandre Law Firm and AG Immigration

Frank McQuade, President, Law Office of Francis X. McQuade, Long Island, NY

Bruce Goldwasser, Rabbi Emeritus, Temple Beth Shalom, Flushing, NY

Wonki Hong, Pastor Emeritus, The Church for all Nations

Rabbi Daniel Zucker, President, Americans for Democracy in the Middle-East

Martin Cooper, Rabbi Emeritus, The Garden Jewish Center, NY

Kamal Fahmi, Founder, Set My People

Rev. Canon Dr. Howard K. Williams, Former Archdeacon of Brooklyn, NY

Rev. Father Donovan I. Leys, Priest and Rector, Saint Gabriel's Episcopal Church, Brooklyn, NY

Rev. Marion Edmonds-Allen, Executive Director, PARITY

**Rev N. J. L'Heureux, Jr., Executive Director Emeritus, Queens Federation of
Churches**

Dr. Hormoz Shariat, President, Iran Alive Ministries,