



National Iranian American Council

Advancing the Interests of the Iranian-American Community

The Stand With the Iranian People Act: Frequently Asked Questions

Why should the US impose travel restrictions on Iranian government leaders?

Iranian human rights defenders, including Nobel Peace Prize laureate Shirin Ebadi, have called for travel restrictions to be imposed on Iranian government officials.

SWIPA requires the Secretary of State to deny entrance visas to Iranian government officials guilty of human rights abuses, and calls on the President to work with our allies to adopt similar policies internationally. By denying visas to Iranian government officials who are guilty of human rights abuses, we will send a powerful message to the people of Iran that the United States is deeply concerned about the human rights abuses occurring in Iran.

Why should the US prohibit federal procurement contracts for companies that provide censorship software and other tools of repression to the Iranian government?

Shortly after massive demonstrations and unrest broke out in Iran following the June 12 election, news accounts highlighted the role that Nokia Siemens Network (NSN) played in selling internet censorship and monitoring technology to the Government of Iran. This technology played a pivotal role in the crackdown on opposition protests in the weeks following the election, and caused a major uproar among US lawmakers.

SWIPA would require companies to cease providing these tools of repression to the government of Iran or else lose government procurement contracts. As of this summer, NSN held nearly \$5 million in federal procurement contracts, according to the Wall Street Journal.

SWIPA makes clear that the US Congress stands with the Iranian people and that companies that make such unethical business choices will not be rewarded with government contracts.

Why should Congress authorize US charities to operate in Iran?

Right now, US charities can apply for an exception to the ban on working in Iran from the Office of Foreign Assets Control, but such licenses are hardly ever issued and organizations have become so discouraged with the process that they hardly ever bother applying anymore. Applying for a license requires a lengthy review period that currently takes an average of more than four months, though in many cases can take a year or more. Unfortunately, many services that US charities offer are time-sensitive or urgent--such as

life-saving medical care and disaster relief. For these important causes, access to Iran is practically impossible, given the time it takes to obtain a license.

What's more, organizations face an unpredictable system in which a license is good for one year only, with no guarantee that a decision will be made on its renewal in time to continue operations after the expiration date. Thus, companies face the likely prospect of being forced to abandon their operations entirely while their application for renewal is under review. Many organizations find this system simply too unpredictable to justify making a commitment to relieving human suffering in Iran--all because of an excessively onerous bureaucratic process.

How can authorizing US charities to operate in Iran improve US national security?

The humanitarian and person-to-person assistance authorized in SWIPA will improve attitudes towards the United States by connecting the American and Iranian people through acts of goodwill. SWIPA could start to create a foundation for a sustainable relationship between the people of Iran and the United States. As the 1979 Iranian Revolution taught us, sustainable relationships must extend beyond narrow ruling elites to the general public. SWIPA will help form lasting bonds between the American and Iranian peoples, building up American soft power in the region which ultimately will improve US national security.

If we allow charities to set up operations in Iran, will they be able to provide aid to the Iranian government?

No. Under SWIPA, organizations may not provide services or conduct transactions with any organization that appears on the Treasury Department's "Specially Designated Nationals" list, a regularly updated blacklist of Iranian organizations that provide support for Iran's financial, security and energy sectors. The penalty for violating this prohibition is a fine of up to \$250,000 for civil cases and up to \$1,000,000 and 20 years in prison for criminal cases.

As an additional fail-safe, the Treasury Department would have the authority to prevent any organization from operating in Iran if the Secretary of the Treasury determines that the charity's activities would undermine US national security.

Is there a precedent for authorizing American humanitarian organizations to work in Iran?

Yes. After the 2003 earthquake in Bam, Iran, President Bush authorized humanitarian aid organizations to operate in Iran for nine months. The action was widely praised, and a bipartisan [resolution](#) supporting the decision was passed by the House of Representatives 381-0.

Even if we authorize NGOs to provide assistance to Iran, won't the Iranian government just refuse their visa requests? There's no way the Iranian government would authorize humanitarian and people-to-people assistance programs from US charities, right?

Maybe. But we should put the ball in Iran's court. Strengthening ties between the American and Iranian people serves US interests. If the Iranian government wants to obstruct those ties, then it will only demonstrate to the rest of the world that Tehran, not Washington, is the source of the problem.

Won't SWIPA be seen in Iran as foreign meddling the same way the "Iran Democracy Fund" was?

No. SWIPA provides no US Government funding for activities in Iran. It simply removes bureaucratic roadblocks that have prevented American charity organizations from carrying out their missions for the benefit of the Iranian people.