



Vice President Joseph R. Biden
1500 Market St.
Philadelphia, PA 19102

April 1, 2020

Dear Vice President Biden and team,

We hope that you and the whole Biden team are staying safe and healthy. We are sending this open letter to express concern with your [recent comments on Meet the Press](#) this past Sunday, as you hedged on whether the U.S. should ease sanctions on Iran amid the Coronavirus outbreak. We recognize that gathering the facts, as you said was your intention, is important. As a result, we hope the following information and resources will be of help to you and the entire Biden team and help lead to an unqualified statement in support of easing sanctions on Iran amid the pandemic, which would be a powerful humanitarian gesture that also helps combat the shared threat of COVID-19.

The punishing sanctions that are currently constricting humanitarian trade would not be in place today if the U.S. had kept its word on the nuclear deal that the Obama-Biden administration secured and which you have stated that you intend to return to compliance with if elected President. Indeed, the Coronavirus crisis is being exacerbated in Iran - and more people are dying as a result - simply so that President Trump can continue his anti-Obama vanity campaign against the nuclear deal.

Easing many of those U.S. sanctions that were previously suspended would immediately help 83 million Iranians as they suffer the effects of a major COVID-19 outbreak. Sanctions have directly harmed Iran's public health sector by limiting their ability to import medical devices and medicine manufactured in the West, as indicated by both Iranian public health officials on the ground and numerous impartial observers around the world.

These issues also predate the current crisis. According to an [October 2019 Human Rights Watch report](#) on the United States 'maximum pressure' campaign, sanctions have "drastically constrained the ability of Iranian entities to finance humanitarian imports,

(202) 386-6325



niacouncil.org



1629 K St NW, Suite 503
Washington, DC 20006





including vital medicines and medical equipment.” These issues have been exacerbated by the extent of the disaster in Iran, with Iran’s medical industry now limited in its ability to purchase equipment rapidly and adapt to changing circumstances on the ground in fighting the pandemic.

On the ground [reports](#) indicate a dire shortage of masks, ventilators, other forms of Personal Protective Equipment, and medicine used to treat the virus, all [worsened by sanctions](#) which delay or block the sale of goods that are needed to treat the outbreak. [According to an employee of a major pharmaceutical company in Iran](#), “the sanctions have definitely made the import and production processes longer and more expensive. Some suppliers are afraid and not willing to work with us anymore. The sanctions have reduced Iran’s capacity to control the outbreak.”

Aside from humanitarian trade, the maximum pressure campaign pursued by the Trump administration seeks to collapse the entire Iranian economy - increasing unemployment and depreciating the Iranian currency - making it harder for Iranian families to self-isolate as many need to work multiple jobs just to afford basic food and medicine to survive.

Moreover, the temporary suspension of sanctions on Iran is a growing consensus position within the Democratic party. Senators Bernie Sanders and Elizabeth Warren have both been [vocal and clear](#) in their [calls](#) for immediate sanctions relief to combat the crisis. [Two separate letters](#), including Democratic Senators and House Members, have called on the Trump administration to loosen sanctions temporarily to aid Iran’s fight against the virus. Both note the Iranian government’s negligent response to the spread of the virus, but argue that we cannot be complicit in the suffering of the Iranian people by continuing to impose sanctions during this time of crisis.

There is a growing movement for the U.S. to lift sanctions amid the crisis, with the UN, UK, Pakistan and other nations urging the U.S. to lift sanctions to help the Iranian people. In addition, a [letter signed](#) by NIAC Action and over 40 other organizations – including the International Crisis Group, J Street, MoveOn, Win Without War and Ploughshares Fund – similarly urged for sanctions relief during this humanitarian crisis.

We would very much appreciate any clarification you could provide us on the issue, and would be happy to discuss our reasoning in greater detail.

Your team can follow our [weekly tracker](#) on how the issue is developing in Iran and how U.S. policy is affecting the crisis. In addition, here are a few resources describing the effects of U.S. sanctions on Iran as they contend with the crisis:



- [Trump's Bungling of Coronavirus Started with Iran](#), Jamal Abdi, Newsweek (3/10/20)
- [President Trump Should Ease Sanctions on Iran Amid COVID-19 Outbreak](#), Policy Memo, NIAC (3/16/20)
- [Donald Trump Risks a Dual Crisis of an Iran War during Coronavirus Pandemic](#), Ryan Costello and Shervin Ghaffari, The National Interest (3/23/20)
- [This Coronavirus Crisis is the Time to Ease Sanctions on Iran](#), Editorial Board, New York Times (3/25/20)
- [America Should Help Contain Iran's Spiking Coronavirus Epidemic](#), Editorial Board, Washington Post (3/25/20)
- [How Trump Sanctions on Iran Will Worsen the Pandemic](#) Narges Bajoghli and Mahsa Rouhi, The New York Times (3/24/2020)
- [While coronavirus ravages Iran, U.S. sanctions squeeze it](#) Adam Taylor, Washington Post (3/19/2020)
- [Bush and Obama eased sanctions on Iran during humanitarian crises, why isn't Trump?](#) Negar Mortazavi, Responsible Statecraft (3/13/2020)

Respectfully,

Jamal Abdi

Executive Director, NIAC Action