



March 31, 2022

The Honorable Antony Blinken
Secretary of State
2201 C Street NW
Washington, DC 20521

The Honorable Alejandro Mayorkas
Secretary of Homeland Security
Washington, DC 20528

Dear Secretary Blinken and Secretary Mayorkas:

We write to express our deep concern with the treatment of Alireza Ghorbani, a celebrated Iranian singer and dual Iranian-Canadian national, ahead of his performance at a sold-out concert in Costa Mesa, California, to celebrate the Iranian New Year Norooz. Mr. Ghorbani is one of the preeminent Iranian singers outside of the country, and performs at music festivals all over the world. The Farhang Foundation - which put on the concert that was to feature Mr. Ghorbani - went out of its way to ensure that he secured a visa and would encounter no trouble in getting to the United States to perform for the Iranian-American community.

Shockingly, Mr. Ghorbani was blocked from attending. According to the *Los Angeles Times*, he was removed from his flight and interrogated for nearly four hours, had his visa canceled and was told he could no longer travel to the United States.¹ The cause of this insulting and humiliating detention was reportedly his compulsory military service decades earlier for the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC), which in 2019 was designated as a foreign terrorist organization (FTO).

We recognize that certain sanctions and precautions are necessary when it comes to an entity like the IRGC, which engages in a variety of actions counter to U.S. interests and peace and security throughout the Middle East. However, it is an outrage that Mr. Ghorbani would be treated like a terrorist for seeking to share his musical gift with the Iranian-American community, all due to an inflexible designation that can't distinguish between the IRGC's leadership and a musician living abroad who ended his compulsory military service decades ago.

¹ Iranian vocalist, headliner at Segerstrom Nowruz celebration interrogated, denied U.S. entry, Los Angeles Times, March 30, 2022, <https://www.latimes.com/socal/daily-pilot/news/story/2022-03-30/iranian-vocalist-headliner-at-segerstrom-nowruz-celebration-interrogated-denied-u-s-entry>.



The IRGC is the only entity on the FTO list that is part of a foreign state and the only one that engages in state-backed conscription. Yet the State Department and Department of Homeland Security apply blanket and apparently retroactive restrictions onto anyone who has ever served in the IRGC, including Mr. Ghorbani and a growing list of individuals with spouses and other loved ones in the United States.

We urge you to revisit Mr. Ghorbani's ability to visit the United States so that he can share his musical gift with the Iranian-American community. Moreover, we urge you to revisit these policies to ensure that U.S. restrictions can distinguish between those actively serving in the IRGC and individuals who have long since departed the military service. Maintaining this inflexible policy will regrettably lead to more painful and insulting incidents like the one that occurred this month, and needlessly and painfully keep families separated over actions they had no control over.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Javad Akbari". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "J" and a distinct "Akbari" at the end.

President, National Iranian American Council