



August 3rd, 2023

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

Dear Secretary Blinken,

On behalf of the National Iranian American Council, the nation's largest grassroots organization dedicated to advancing the priorities of the Iranian-American community, we write to underscore the importance of making additional progress in processing visas and refugee resettlement for Iranian nationals. We applaud the work that the Biden administration and State Department has done and continues to do in redressing the lingering impacts of the Muslim ban and restoring visa processing to Iranian nationals. As we have [documented](#), there has been significant progress across the board in recent years. However, particularly in the wake of the Iranian government's brutal crackdown on nationwide protests last year, we reiterate the importance for the State Department to consider what additional steps can be taken to support Iranian nationals seeking visas or refugee status in the United States.

As you know, the summer months represent a priority for the State Department to process visas for Iranian students, in particular, given the pending start of the fall semester. The Biden administration has made important strides in recent years in restoring student visa numbers to levels that approach the period prior to the Muslim ban and COVID-19 pandemic, and we hope this progress will continue in these critical weeks when prospective Iranian students need to secure their visa to start classes on time.

However, it appears as if there may be a significant and continuing processing backlog for many Iranian students. The National Iranian American Council recently [received messages from representatives of a group of over 800 Iranian students](#) who have reportedly conducted their necessary student visa interviews with U.S. embassies in Turkey, the United Arab Emirates, Armenia, and Pakistan but have been experiencing significant delays in the approval of their visas. Some of these students have reportedly been waiting for over a year and a half, since 2022, for their visas to be processed so they may begin attending the universities to which they were accepted. As a result of these conditions, many have had to defer their funded university spots at least two times already.

Separately, we have been concerned by reports that well-qualified Iranian students are being [rejected outright](#) for unclear reasons, including failure to demonstrate that they did not have intent



to immigrate. While we understand the difficulties inherent in assessing eligibility for a visa and the capacity challenges that flowed from the prior administration and the impact of the pandemic, we believe it is important to demonstrate in both word and deed that America is a land of freedom and opportunity. Iranian students, in particular, have borne the brunt of the Islamic Republic authorities' brutal crackdown on nationwide protests and many are hoping for a visa to get to a country where they can pursue their academic endeavors in full safety.

Particularly in light of the expressions of the administration's support for the people of Iran, it is important that the administration not hold country conditions against the people of Iran in assessing their eligibility for a visa. As a result, we believe it is important for State Department leadership to accurately convey to consular offices servicing Iranians that it is a priority to process well-qualified Iranian nationals, including students.

We look forward to speaking with State Department officials on this request, and following up on additional priorities of importance to the Iranian-American community and U.S. government as a whole.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "James Abadi", is written below the word "Sincerely,".

President, National Iranian American Council