



September 14, 2023

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

Dear Secretary Blinken,

On behalf of the National Iranian American Council, we write with deep concern regarding a proposal put forward by former Trump administration Envoy for Iran Elliott Abrams. Writing in the *Wall Street Journal*, Mr. Abrams called for the U.S. to ban travel to Iran on a U.S. passport.¹ Subsequently, at least one Member of Congress has suggested that legislation should be enacted to institute such a ban.

As an organization with twenty years of experience advocating on behalf of the civil rights of the Iranian-American community, we write to convey our strong opposition to this proposal, which would have a profound impact on hundreds of thousands of Iranian Americans and tear apart many families from their loved ones.

Nobody knows the risks of traveling to Iran better than Iranian Americans. The Iranian government's detentions of Iranian Americans as political pawns has been abhorrent and terrifying, as is its broader repression of the people of Iran. Many in our community, including myself, do not travel to Iran because of the risks of being wrongfully detained by Iranian authorities for political purposes. But many Iranian Americans do choose to travel to Iran. Most Iranian Americans have family in Iran and there are significant restraints on Iranians that prevent them from securing U.S. visas and affording to travel to the United States. The ability to travel to Iran is the only way for many in our community to see their families.

The Iranian government's detainment of foreign nationals and dual nationals is a serious challenge. A travel ban blocking travel to Iran would impact countless Americans but will not solve this problem, which must be dealt with strategically and through diplomatic measures. Consequences must be targeted at bad actors, not broadly imposed on Americans.

We recognize that there has been a years-long ban on travel to North Korea under a U.S. passport, which is the model for this proposal. Under existing regulations, Americans could face

¹ Elliott Abrams, *Wall Street Journal*, September 6, 2023, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/iran-on-6-billion-a-day-ransom-biden-tehran-hostage-35e43a1e>



jail time for decades for choosing to travel to North Korea on a U.S. passport. While reserving judgment on the merits of this regulation, we would note that North Korea is far different from Iran and the Iranian diaspora maintains much closer ties to people on the ground than is possible with North Korea. It is these ties, already jeopardized by the abhorrent repression of the Iranian government, that would risk being severed by an indiscriminate ban on travel imposed by the U.S. government. No government, whether Iranian or American, should threaten the Iranian-American community with jail time to prevent us from being able to see our loved ones.

We vigorously support this Administration's termination of the Muslim Travel Ban imposed by the Trump Administration and encourage efforts to continue working to dismantle the lingering impact of that heinous policy that separated Iranian-American families. A new Travel Ban, preventing Americans from being able to travel to Iran, risks undermining those efforts by once again imposing restrictions that disconnect Iranian Americans from loved ones in Iran.

We hope and trust that this policy is not receiving serious consideration from the U.S. State Department or the federal government writ large. But if there are changes being contemplated regarding regulations involving traveling to Iran, we implore you to meet directly with diverse voices in the Iranian-American community and to hear directly regarding the possibly life-changing ramifications of such a ban. It is our strong belief that the negative ramifications of a new travel ban to Iran would far outweigh any possible benefits to U.S. policy.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Jamal Abdi". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial "J" and "A".

Jamal Abdi, President