

Message of peace and friendship to the people of United States of America

Request for the Congress and President of USA

Jan 2008 (Draft-2)

We are a group of independent Iranian civil society representatives engaged in scientific and humanitarian work in our country. Some of us are also engaged in social service activities beyond our borders. While working for common causes, we often hold hands with civil society partners from other parts of the world, including members of the US scientific and civil society community. Because of the many compatriots we have in your country, we feel a special human bond linking us together. We are non-partisan and have no political agenda

As the New Year unfolds, we extend our warm greetings to the people of America and wish and pray for peace, friendship and prosperity for all. We pray for logic, reason, justice to prevail and remove the dark clouds casting a shadow and constraining communications and collaboration between us. In fact, the coincidence of this year's Christmas and New Year holidays with Islamic festivities should be seen in a positive light and should energize all of us to work for common spiritual values.

We want to look beyond troubling issues such as the US intervention, that toppled the democratically elected popular government of Mossadeq and the drama of hostage taking of US diplomats by Iran. We want to look at the positive responses and deep empathy shown by people of the two countries when Iran faced the aftermath of the Bam earthquake tragedy and US faced the consequences of the man made disaster of September 11.

We are confident that our message will be heeded. Our request to the US Congress and to the US President is to scrap the fund for promoting democracy in Iran. This will pave the way for us to strengthen our bonds for people to people cooperation between America and Iran, WITHOUT INTERFERENCE OF GOVERNMENTS OF BOTH SIDES. Yes, we are confident that we can achieve what both governments have declared as intentions, but have failed to achieve in practice.

How Iranians look at the fund:

(a) Iran has had a sad history of external interference. Iranians have deep suspicion of any foreign inspired initiative. No credible civil society member would want to be associated with such a fund. Even opposition figures and prominent democracy and human rights activists in Iran have called for the termination of the democracy promotion program.

(b) The fund has undermined Iran's home grown civil society initiatives. It has fueled paranoia of US and Israel conspiracies to undermine political stability, bring about regime change and install a pro-American government. Thus, the

fund has provided a pretext for distrust and suspicion, leading to narrowing of space for independent civil society.

(c) Contrary to US laws and international norms of transparency, the recipients of the US funding are secret, Thus,those in contact with western partners are placed at risk of being treated as potential conspirators and become the target for crack down by the Iranian government.

(d) If governments of both sides are sincere about supporting people to people collaboration, the best way is for both of them to step aside and let the scholars and civil society members work without restrictions that are based on unsubstantiated suspicion, and remove legal obstacles of the sanctions, issuing of visas, etc. Terminating the democracy promotion fund is the first step for the US and releasing all people who have been imprisoned on suspicion of connection with the US Government is the first step for the Iranian Government. These steps will provide incentives for action by independent scholars and civil society activities. Obviously, the cooperation of the two sides must adhere to the principles of transparency, accountability and being free from any political agenda.

Here is the gist of our message:

1. To the great people of America, which has drawn on the best of talents from all over the world, including Iranians: We extend our hands in love, friendship and cooperation, transcending differences of governments. There is much to gain from our collaboration, including infusing rationality, compassion, peace and tolerance into policies and practices of our Governments. Through our on-going dialogue, we hope together to identify people-based programs and mechanisms for collaboration. Through the wonderful centers of science and technology, and through your universities and centers of higher learning and your civil societies, we hope to give concrete shape to our mutual aspirations, which will serve not only the people of our two countries, but citizens of the whole world.
2. To the members of Congress: As representatives of the people of America, including the large number of Iranian Americans, we look to you to support us through the power of the people you represent. We request you to encourage the Government to abolish the fund, which has caused so much pain and stress to a significant part of Iranian civil society. Already a small number of scientists and civil society leaders from Iran and America are cooperating. Without interference or funding from the two governments, we can together develop and expand our cooperation. Governments must be facilitators and not caretakers. We also need to see easing of the severe restrictions the sanctions have placed on our mutual cooperation.
3. To the American President: We extend our greetings to you and your family and pray for the Almighty to give us all the blessings of wisdom,

fill our hearts with love for all humanity, without any discrimination, and enable us to serve human kind and the cause of peace with justice. You have declared your deep respect and affection for the Iranian people. We want to take you at your word. So, here is a group of independent Iranians asking you:

- (a) to dismantle the fund for democracy, which has had an outcome completely opposite to your declared goals
- (b) to set up a non-partisan panel of scholars to study ways and means of easing sanctions so that independent and genuine Iranian civil society and scholars can cooperate with their US counter parts, observing universally accepted code of ethics, including transparency, accountability and partnerships based on equality and equity. We will respect international law, and the laws of both countries. What we do not like about the laws, we will try and change through non-confrontational dialogue and committed advocacy.

4. And we have used various channels to communicate with own government: Some of us have already engaged various state authorities a dialogue designed to foster trust and confidence. We will hold the Government to the promises made, and accountable to the laws of Iran, including rights of citizens as enshrined in the constitution of the Islamic Republic.

We hope and pray our peaceful, non-confrontational discourse, free from any political motivation, will be taken seriously and we can, through strengthening of genuine and independent people to people cooperation serve the real interests of both countries.

(DRAFT-2) By Baquer Namazi, drawing on statements of many cso activists and modified by inputs of several friends)