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MEDIA RELEASE

AMERICAN HOSTAGE IN IRAN, BAQUER NAMAZI, AGAIN REQUIRES URGENT SURGERY TO CLEAR LIFE-THREATENING BLOCKAGES IN MAIN ARTERIES TO HIS BRAIN

Washington, D.C. – Today, the family of American hostages in Iran Siamak and Baquer Namazi announced a new, dire development in Baquer’s ongoing health struggle. According to multiple neurologists, Baquer (85) must undergo surgery within weeks to clear life-threatening blockages in his left internal carotid artery (ICA). He previously underwent surgery to resolve similar blockages in the right ICA in October 2021. The Namazi family is calling on Iranian authorities to grant Siamak furlough so that he can be with Baquer during his surgery and assist in the recovery process.

Baquer has been a hostage of Iran since February 2016, when he was detained in the airport after Iranian authorities lured him back into the country under the false pretenses of seeing his imprisoned son, Siamak. He was thrown in Iran’s notorious Evin Prison and sentenced alongside Siamak to ten years in prison for “collaboration with a hostile government” – the United States.

At the time of his arrest, Baquer was 79 years old and already suffering from numerous health conditions, including an arrhythmia. Despite being aware of his health concerns, Iranian authorities subjected Baquer to prolonged periods of solitary confinement and denied or severely delayed his access to appropriate medical care. Consequently, his health deteriorated rapidly in prison, leading to roughly a dozen hospitalizations, two in-custody surgeries, and, eventually, a highly restrictive medical furlough beginning in 2018. In early 2020, the Iranian judiciary released the bail that had been posted as a requirement for Baquer’s medical furlough and informed him that his case had been closed and his sentence commuted to time served. However, despite having no legal basis to do so, Iran has refused to allow Baquer to leave the country to reunite with his family and seek the international medical treatment he desperately needs.

The horrific prison conditions, denial of proper care, and overall trauma of the past six and a half years have been devastating for Baquer’s physical and mental health. He developed stress-induced, adult-onset epilepsy, as well as severe depression. He is often confused, becomes easily fatigued, and has difficulty moving around and maintaining his balance, which has resulted in several falls.

His health troubles culminated in near total blockages in his right ICA last October, putting him at high risk of having a potentially fatal stroke. Iranian authorities ignored international pleas to lift Baquer’s travel ban and forced him to undergo the necessary carotid endarterectomy in Iran, despite the heightened risk to his life posed by the stressful environment, poor aftercare, and rampant Covid-19 infections in the country. Although he fortunately survived and recovered from the first surgery, new scans have revealed that severe blockages in his left ICA require Baquer to urgently undergo surgery again and Iranian authorities appear poised to subject him to the same unnecessary dangers as before.

Siamak Namazi (50) remains arbitrarily detained in Evin Prison and has been consistently denied furlough, even as Iran furloughed around 100,000 other prisoners during the Covid-19 pandemic. Iran's repeated refusal to grant him furlough violates its own laws and Siamak is now at the cusp of seven years of illegal detention without a single day of reprieve. Babak Namazi, Siamak's brother and Baquer's son, plead with Iran to grant his brother furlough to help his father through surgery and recovery:

“Because of Iran’s unconscionable decision to arbitrarily hold a doting grandfather and lifelong humanitarian and the United States’ continued failure to act decisively on his behalf, we are now reliving the torturous nightmare we endured last fall. Like any son, I want nothing more than to be by my dad’s side during this difficult time, but instead I spend each moment wondering if I will ever see him alive again. The pain is unbearable. I am begging Iran to show the smallest amount of humanity by allowing Siamak to be with my dad and help take care of him during his recovery. I also call on the U.S. to drastically increase its efforts to obtain my family’s freedom before it’s too late. Time is not on our side.”

In October 2021, the Namazis’ international legal team submitted an urgent action appeal to the United Nations Special Rapporteur on Health in response to Iran’s refusal to allow Baquer to seek treatment abroad. The appeal detailed Iran’s repeated violation of the Namazis’ right to health, including by barring Baquer from leaving the country for surgery. The Namazis’ legal team today reiterated those findings and demanded that Iran immediately allow Baquer to travel. Jared Genser, who has served as pro bono counsel to the Namazis for nearly six years, offered the following:

“Iranian authorities have known about Baquer’s extremely precarious health since the moment they arrested him and have only worked to exacerbate it over the past almost seven years, despite having no legal basis to hold him. Their blatant disregard over whether an innocent, frail, and elderly man lives or dies is a calculated affront to their obligations under international law. Iran must immediately reverse its travel restrictions on Baquer so that he can access the lifesaving care he needs. The U.S. should also aggressively push for his freedom, as well as that of Siamak and the other American hostages.”

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