

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

September 18, 2023

Statement by Siamak Namazi
American Hostage in Iran (2015-2023)

Upon Landing in Doha, Qatar, on the Flight From Tehran, Iran

I would not be free today, if it wasn't for all of you who didn't allow the world to forget me. From the bottom of my heart, thank you. Thank you for being my voice when I could not speak for myself and for making sure I was heard when I mustered the strength to scream from behind the impenetrable walls of Evin Prison.

For almost eight years I have been dreaming of this day. Now that it is finally here, I find my ineffable joy of my forthcoming reunification with my family is laced with sorrow – a painful and deep feeling of guilt for taking my breaths in freedom while so many courageous individuals that I love and admire continue languishing behind those walls. They are detained for demanding the dignity and freedom that every human being is inherently entitled to; for reporting the truth; for worshipping their God; for being a woman. For nothing. All the political prisoners of Iran, a country where the indomitable courage of women leaves us in awe, deserve their liberty.

As a hostage, 2,898 days of what should have been the best days of my life were stolen from me and supplanted with torment. What I want more than anything is assurance that no one else will know the interminable anguish that my family and I experienced. But sadly, many are suffering those miseries right now. People like Ahmedreza Djalali, an Iranian-Swedish physician who has been on death row on trumped-up charges for over seven-and-a-half years now. The only thing keeping him standing is the dream of someday holding his son Ayro, his daughter Amatis, and his wife Vida in his arms again.

While my captors epitomized the baseness of humanity, many of my fellow prisoners personified its nobleness. People like Niloufar Bayani, Sepideh Kashani, Houman Jokar, Taher Ghadirian, Amirhossein Khaleghi, and Sam Rajabi – the renowned environmentalists whose eminent goodness shines so vividly that it can illuminate Evin Prison’s bleakest cells. People like Sepehr Ziaei who, despite having been repeatedly jailed for being a member of the Bahá’í faith, always brightens up the other inmates’ days by cracking radiant smiles and corny jokes. The only message that Iran’s leaders send the world by incarcerating such extraordinary people is that it revels in the endless depth of its gratuitous cruelty.

I am not special. All I did was not give up and survive. But my heroes are my mother, Effie, and my brother, Babak, who suffered with me every single day that I was a captive. They stood stalwart by us when my father Baquer and I came under siege by a dark and dastardly regime and when we got left behind by those who should have helped. And as they suffered in unimaginable ways, they worked, they persevered, and they prayed. They never lost hope this day would finally come. They made the impossible possible.

Speaking of superstars, it would be remiss of me not to mention the relentless and unflinching Jared Genser. He and his remarkable colleague Skylar Gleason were far more than my pro bono counsel over seven long years – they stuck by me, they advised me, they fought for my freedom, and they kept their sacred promise to stand by us until the end, no matter how long it took to succeed. They never gave up. They are part of the family and I am forever in their debt.

While in Evin Prison, I experienced the worst of humanity every day. But outside of those walls, there were countless people who reminded me of the best of humanity. They learned of our family’s suffering and, in innumerable small and big ways, contributed to our freedom. From my local lawyer to my classmates from White Plains High School, there

are literally scores of people that I need to reach out to thank.

I am greatly beholden to the Emir of Qatar and the governments of Switzerland, Oman, the United Kingdom, and the many others who helped secure our release. Likewise, I must express my deep, if belated, appreciation to the United Arab Emirates and Cleveland Clinic Abu Dhabi for the profound kindness they noiselessly showed my father. Thank you all! Shukran jaziran!

Most importantly, my heartfelt gratitude goes to President Biden and his Administration, which had to make some incredibly difficult decisions to rescue us. Thank you President Biden for ultimately putting the lives of American citizens above politics. Thank you for ending this nightmare. Thank you for bringing us home. Thank you! Thank you! Thank you!

But I am afraid there is much left to do. Your continued dedication to this cause is crucial for protecting the lives and security of Americans in the future.

Over the past 44 years, the Iranian regime has mastered the nasty game of caging innocent Americans and other foreign nationals, and commercializing their freedom. By now Evin Prison is virtually a dystopian United Nations of Hostages. We must urgently channel the grievous pain of the victims of this wickedness into the kind of measures that would upend the cost-benefit calculations of Tehran's foul business. For if we keep this vile path to profit free of risk and toll, this venal regime will keep treading on it. Again. And again. And again.

Mr. President, the tale of my eight-year captivity is ultimately a stark reminder that once our citizens are seized by a rogue state, we are left with no good options. Therefore, as I take my first breaths of freedom while you engage with world leaders at the United Nations, I urge you to initiate a game-changing global endeavor aimed at preventing hostage-taking in the first place. It is only if the free world finally agrees to collectively impose draconian consequences on those who use human

lives as mere bargaining chips, that the Iranian regime and its ilk will be compelled to make different choices. Sadly, until then, we can anticipate more Americans and others falling victim to state hostage-taking – a horror that, thanks to you, my family and I will strive to put behind us starting today.

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With this statement, I hope everyone will forgive me for needing a while to get reacquainted with liberty. Before anything, I must deal with some health issues, spend time with family and loved ones, and simply enjoy some of the many things I have long been denied.

I must get to know the tall and remarkable law school students that my little niece and nephew have transmogrified into. I also desperately need to be in nature and in places with open vistas. I want to see foliage instead of walls and wardens. I want to lay back on the grass, with the warm sun on my face, and gaze up at the open blue skies.

My other pressing “needs” include visiting the Apple Store to replace all the devices my captors took as bounty. I am dying to find out what gadgets now exist – when I was taken hostage, the iPhone 6S had just come out. You cannot imagine what an eight-year itch feels like.

Let me end by reminding everyone that the greatest fear of any political prisoner is to be forgotten. While today the focus is on celebrating the recovery of five innocent Americans from Iran, we must renew our commitment to the fight to secure the release of all those wrongly imprisoned or taken hostage in Iran and around the world, including foreign or dual nationals. Thank you again to everyone who made this day possible.

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