



برای ترجمه فلیسی این نامه سرگشته اینجا را کلیک کنید

An Open Letter to President Barack Obama

President Barack H. Obama
The White House
Washington, D.C.

Dear Mr. President,

I write to bring to your attention a human tragedy that plane crashes have brought to the Iranian people and visitors who travel to Iran. In tune with your “hope” and “change” slogans, I also write to urge that you help mitigate this calamity by lifting sanctions on the sale of American-made civilian planes and spare parts to Iran.

As you consider this request, Mr. President, please remember that an increasing number of Iranian-Americans and Americans also travel to Iran and that they and their Iranian loved ones must also fly these extremely unsafe Iranian planes. Protecting the lives of these citizens is, Mr. President, among your most basic Constitutional duties.

Mr. President, your humanitarian gesture will be greatly appreciated by the Iranian people on both sides of the post-election struggle, particularly by those fighting for their citizenship rights on the streets of Iran. Please keep in mind that the fallen icons of that struggle, as well as those serving prison terms, could have been in one of those crashed planes!

Since 1990, with more than 200 plane crashes, Iran has had the worst aviation safety record among all nations. Among these incidents, 70 or so alone have led to over 2,000 deaths, and six have been recorded among the world’s “100 worst civil aviation disasters” since the 1980s. They have involved planes made by the United States, Russia and Western Europe.

The latest tragedy occurred on July 24 when a Russian-made Ilyushin crashed in a local airport, killing over 20 people. Only 10 days earlier, on July 15, an Iranian passenger jet (a Russian-made Tupolev) had crashed, killing all 168 people on board. The plane, flying from Tehran to Yerevan, was carrying Iran’s National Junior Judo Team for competition in Armenia.

Mr. President, please also consider these alarming statistics: Iranian civilian plane crashes have increased by five times since the 1980s, and since 2001, fifteen major civilian planes have crashed. Seven of these planes were American Boeing jets and C-130 planes, arguably the safest aircrafts available. Yet, they have frequently crashed due to “mechanical failures.”

Here are partial statistics for Iran's American-made planes that have been involved in incidents or have crashed since 1980, killing close to 1,000 Iranians:

Boeing 737 crashed in 2008, killing 70 people;
C-130 crashed in 2005, killing 116 people;
Boeing 707 crashed in 2005, killing "several" people;
C-130 crashed in 2003, killing 110 people;
C-130 crashed in 1999, killing 130 people;
Boeing 727 crashed in 1996, killing 4 people;
C-130 crashed in 1996, killing 86 people;
C-130 crashed in 1994, killing 12 people;
C-130 crashed in 1986, killing 98 people;
C-130 crashed in 1981, killing 80 people; and
Boeing 727 crashed in 1980, killing 128 people.

In addition, an American missile brought down an Iranian civilian Airbus 300-1 over the Persian Gulf waters in 1988, killing all 290 passengers on board. I must add that C-130 is a military transport plane but the Islamic Republic has also used it for civilian services. For example, the C-130 that crashed in 2005 killing 116 people was carrying 68 journalists.

Mr. President, these tragedies happen in large part because sanctions prevent Iran from buying new planes or spare parts for its aged planes made in America (Boeing jets and Lockheed-Martin C-130) and in Europe with American participation (Airbus). Barred from the Western civilian plane markets, Iran has been buying or leasing old and unsafe Russian planes.

In 2008-2009, Iran Air flew international routes with 11 Boeing Jets, 12 Airbuses, and 16 Russian-made planes. Many of these planes are too old and poorly maintained due to lack of spare parts and deficient service by unqualified technicians. Among them, the U.S.-made planes are the oldest, and because of U.S. sanctions, they are badly maintained and are most unsafe.

Barred from the American and European markets, Iran has also turned to black markets where counterfeit parts are supplied. Besides, the Iranian government has often been forced to use parts from a plane considered "unusable" to patch up another "repairable" plane. The repaired plane is then allowed to fly while the crew members "pray to God for a safe landing."

Because of Iran's rugged geography, size, and underdeveloped land transport system (there is no internal water transport), Iranians have become increasingly air-transport dependent. No wonder that even if they are aware of the real risk, they still fly these unsafe planes. Having no other option, Iranians are paying for the U.S.-Iran feud with their blood.

Mr. President, who should we blame for the dismal state of Iranian air safety? The Iranian government and its supporters point fingers at the U.S., and the American government and the

opposition to the regime blame the Iranian government. The first in the line of responsibility is of course the Iranian government, which is directly obliged to safeguard its citizens.

Iranians also know that it is hypocritical of Tehran to blame Washington for the unsafe Iranian planes while continuing with its anti-American behavior. Besides, the scandalous official slogan of "Down with America" leaves little room for the U.S. to lift sanctions on Iran or make serious humanitarian gestures toward it. No wonder Iranians support the normalization of ties.

Yet, Mr. President, the U.S. must also accept some responsibility for the unsafe American-made Iranian civilian planes that are killing Iranians. True, your administration is not accountable for the safety of the Iranian citizens, but international aviation norms, regulations, and standards make passenger safety, regardless of citizenship, a top priority of all governments.

The American sanctions on the sale of civilian planes and parts to Iran are particularly unjustifiable from a constitutional and moral standpoint: increasingly more U.S. citizens are travelling to Iran and flying in these planes. Nor is this sanction policy a reasonable business practice while the U.S. economy is in deep recession and needs increased international trade.

Sanctions on sales of civilian planes and spare parts to Iran also undercut American public diplomacy toward the Iranian people. The U.S. government rightly blames the Iranian government for abusing the human rights of its people, including their safety. But, by jeopardizing Iranian lives, U.S. sanctions are also abusing Iranian human rights.

Responsibility for the Iranian air tragedies also lies with those who oppose normal U.S.-Iran relations. Some justify their objection by arguing that Iran would use the parts and the planes for military use. Others claim that any U.S. opening to Iran will jeopardize the chance for imposing democracy and human rights on the Islamic regime.

Mr. President, if we can impose uranium enrichment safeguards on nations, then it should be easy to verify where planes or parts sold to Iran are used. The objections made on grounds of democracy and human rights, too, are not justified. What they really are saying is that any American opening to Iran will legitimize the regime and strengthen its dictatorship.

This is an essentially anti-American argument. Historical experiences show that ties with the U.S. razes dictators while in the absence of the ties they thrive. Indeed, no country has ever become a democracy in the absence of diplomatic ties with the U.S. -- suggesting that such ties are a precondition though not a sufficient condition for democratic change.

Fingering blame at this or that player is no substitute for an urgent solution. Mr. President, deal with the Islamic regime in whichever way you deem fit, but do not make the Iranian people pay for your Iran policy with their lives. Blocking sales of civilian planes and parts is neither good foreign nor economic policy, nor it is good human rights or public diplomacy.

It is equally unacceptable to make plane parts a component of any incentive package in the nuclear negotiations with Iran. That approach, once adopted by the EU, sends a terrible message to the Iranian people: we will provide for your safety only if your government gives up its enrichment programs. Otherwise, you will pay with your lives for Tehran's intransigence.

Mr. President, the Iranian people deserve a better U.S. policy and here is why. They are among a minority in the Greater Middle East (GME) who are pro-American. They are among a minority in GME who are moving away from radical Islam toward political reforms. They are among a minority in GME who condemn terrorism and are its victims.

Iranians are among a minority in GME who oppose nuclear technology for military use and want a nuclear-free region. They are among a minority in GME who have been a victim of war and want to live in peace. And they are among a minority in GME who are fighting for democracy and against the abuses of human rights.

Mr. President, in short, Iranians are among a minority in GME who are your allies on the most serious concerns you have raised regarding the region. So, please do not listen to those who equate Iranian lives with American planes and parts, or to those who tell you that selling them to Iran means appeasing Tehran and that it will promote terrorism and nuclear proliferation.

You should not also listen to those who tell you selling parts to Iran will increase state repression and human rights abuses, or will block the reform movement and promote Islamic radicalism. And please do not listen to those who tell you selling parts to Iran will prolong the life of the Islamic regime, or will lead to more regional instability. None of this will happen.

Mr. President, instead, in my humble opinion, you should listen to the voices of Iranians, whose safety is being compromised. They want the planes and parts, and if you do not provide them, they will doubt your sincerity when you say you are on their side as they struggle for their human rights. Please note also that it is the people's lives that are on line, not their officials'.

It is time, Mr. President, that you make a humanitarian gesture to Iran as President George W. Bush made during the tragic earthquake that destroyed the historic city of Bam. By letting Iran buy American planes and parts, you will make Iranians and the Iranian-Americans indebted to your goodwill. It is also an act in tune with your "hope" and "change" slogans.

Sincerely,

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