

Plant the tree of friendship for it brings boundless joy Uproot the sapling of enmity for it summons countless sorrows

دخت دوستی بشان که کا اول مبار آرد نهال دشمنی برکن که ریخ نی شمار آرد

Dear President Obama,

In the aftermath of the terrorist attacks of September 11th, Americans discovered friends in unlikely places, none more unlikely than Tehran, Iran. On September 12th 2001, thousands of Iranians spontaneously lit candles in solidarity with the families of 9/11 victims and the American people.

In your inaugural address on January 20th, you reaffirmed the bonds of faith and friendship that link the American people to each other and the world.

Despite the Islamic Republic's belligerent rhetoric, the Iranian people are a proud and peaceful people whose faith binds them to principles of justice, tolerance, mercy and compassion. Having experienced the scourge of war, tyranny and oppression, the Iranian people are resolute in promoting peace and determined in their quest for freedom.

After thirty years of judicial and religious persecution-stoning, execution of minors, abduction, abuse and torture -the Iranian people's reverence for life is undiminished. Their faith has never shattered. Instead of fearing death, Dr. Shireen Ebadi, winner of the Nobel Peace Prize, and a new generation of Iranians-women, youth, journalists, workers, students and even some clerics-continue to fight for rights and freedoms enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations.

The idea that military strikes will moderate the Islamic Republic's conduct or promote the cause of peace in the region is a fallacy. The fear of war enables fanatics to fuel anti-Americanism in the name of protecting Iran and Islam against the "Great Satan." Ranking American statesmen, soldiers and diplomats recognize that an attack on Iran's nuclear facilities will enable a bankrupt and broken theocracy to justify failure and conceal deceit behind the veil of ideology and patriotism.

Given the proximity of Iran's nuclear facilities to urban centers, the humanitarian, environmental and health hazards of such an attack would be catastrophic. According to a 2006 study by Physicians for Social Responsibility, the estimated immediate and long term human fatalities from exposure to fallout could rise to more than 2.6 million innocent civilians in Iran and Pakistan.

Mr. President, your administration can create political leverage by tapping into America's soft power. As our nation's top diplomat, you can support and publicize the cause of Iran's civil rights movement. The more international media coverage Iran's civil rights leaders receive, the more emboldened the Iranian people will be in their demands for democracy.

Iran's Muslims, Zoroastrians, Jews, Christians, and Bahais appreciate peace, an appreciation distilled in a verse from Hafiz of Shiraz, one of Iran's most beloved poets, a verse etched more deeply in the heart of the Iranian people than any legal code:

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Please Mr. President, take the poet of Shiraz as your guide: the love that binds us all as one is greater than the hatred that divides us as many.

We ask you to:

1) Extend the hand of peace and promise of friendship to the Iranian people. Promote peace and freedom without making concessions that legitimize the Islamic Republic's violations of the civil and human rights of Iranians.

2) Champion the virtues of peace, understanding, and fellowship between peoples. Triumph over darkness and enmity by refusing military action that fuels cults of death and martyrdom.

3) Demonstrate your commitment to rekindling friendship with the Iranian people. Urge all Americans to join you in lighting a candle on September 12, 2009.

We are confident that by adopting these points, countless Americans and Iranians will join your struggle to offer future generations a peaceful and prosperous tomorrow.

Signatories:

Rev. Dr. Vincent Harding, Veterans of Hope Project

Rev. Dr. Rita Nakashima Brock, Faith Voices

Dave Stiles, Jeff Patterson, Betsy Rose, Nilou Noofar, Stella Goodpasture, Amir Soltani, Pat DeLong, Odette Lockwood Stewart, David Stark, Axis of Friendship

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September 11th Families for Peaceful Tomorrows*

Congressman Jim Hansen (Retired)

Mark C. Johnson, Fellowship of Reconciliation

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(Organizations for identification purposes only, unless otherwise noted)

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