

Alliance of Baptists • American Friends Service Committee

The Fellowship of Reconciliation • Friends Committee on National Legislation

Friends United Meeting • Mennonite Central Committee U.S.

NETWORK, A National Catholic Social Justice Lobby • Pax Christi USA

United Church of Christ, Justice and Witness Ministries

United Church of Christ and Disciples of Christ, Global Ministries

United Methodist Church, General Board of Church and Society

October 1, 2009

Dear Member of Congress,

We are Christian leaders who have been working and praying to ease and finally end the mutual suspicion and hostility that have characterized the relationship between the United States and Iran for the last three decades. The goal of improving U.S.-Iran relations has grown urgent, we believe, to prevent more regional conflict and avoid drawing the U.S. into another costly war in the Middle East.

A number of us have had the opportunity to travel to Iran and meet Iranians from all walks of life, including religious and political leaders, among them President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad and former president and current reform leader Mohammad Khatami.

We see in the Obama administration's policy of diplomatic engagement and in the political ferment continuing to grip Iran an unprecedented opportunity to transform U.S.-Iranian relations, resolve international concerns over Iran's nuclear program, and enlist Iranian help in a much-needed effort to stabilize the wider Middle East.

We write now to urge Congress not to close that window of opportunity by moving ahead with new U.S. economic sanctions on Iran, including the Iran Refined Petroleum Sanctions Act or similar legislation. Moving ahead with new unilateral sanctions now will harm the persistent movement for reform in Iran and reduce the chances of reaching an agreement with Iran to ensure that Iran never acquires nuclear weapons.

Congressional action on new U.S. sanctions on Iran will provide hard line factions in Iran with a new tool to rally support and suppress dissent. Those same factions will use additional sanctions action in Congress to argue that Iran should not succumb to coercion and compromise in its talks with the permanent members of the Security Council, including the U.S., and Germany.

Iran's disclosure of a second nuclear enrichment facility near Qom underlines the need for agreement via the talks scheduled to begin in Geneva October 1. The prospects for success will not be enhanced by more U.S. sanctions.

We ask you to refrain from congressional action for sanctions on Iran in light of several other important circumstances: 1) no imminent threat exists from an Iranian nuclear weapon; U.S. and Israeli intelligence agencies agree, in estimates made with the knowledge of Iran's Qom facility, that Iran cannot obtain a nuclear weapon before 2014 if it should make an all out effort to do so; 2) further economic sanctions are extremely unlikely to improve Iranian behavior, as even Iran's strongest critics in the U.S. who view sanctions as well-intentioned argue; and 3) the impact of existing sanctions on Iran is severe; Iran already has as much incentive as sanctions can provide to compromise with the international community. In light of these circumstances, moving new U.S. sanctions legislation in Congress now makes no sense and is more likely to harm than advance U.S. interests.

We believe that a new relationship with Iran based on mutual respect and guarantees of peace is possible. The opening presented by the administration's intent to engage Iran diplomatically and by ordinary Iranians' desire for a more open society and normal relations with the rest of the world is a unique opportunity. We strongly urge you not to close the door on that opportunity by action in Congress that may well create unintended negative consequences.

Sincerely,

Rev. Paula Clayton Dempsey, Minister for Partnership Relations, Alliance of Baptists

Mary Ellen McNish, General Secretary, American Friends Service Committee

Mark C. Johnson, Ph.D., Executive Director, The Fellowship of Reconciliation

Joe Volk, Executive Secretary, Friends Committee on National Legislation

Sylvia Graves, General Secretary, Friends United Meeting

Rolando L. Santiago, Executive Director, Mennonite Central Committee U.S.

Simone Campbell, SSS, Executive Director, NETWORK, a National Catholic Social Justice Lobby

David A. Robinson, Executive Director, Pax Christi USA: National Catholic Peace Movement

Michael Neuroth, Policy Advocate on International Issues, United Church of Christ,
Justice and Witness Ministries

Peter Makari, Executive, Middle East and Europe, Global Ministries, United Church of
Christ and Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)

James E. Winkler, General Secretary, General Board of Church and Society, United
Methodist Church