

March 22, 2010

To: Members of the House of Representatives  
Members of the United States Senate

We write to express our opposition to Iran sanctions legislation approved in the House and the Senate that is being negotiated in conference. As currently written, these bills would seriously damage US interests for human rights in Iran and the democratic aspirations of the Iranian people, as well as significantly limit the President's ability to conduct Iran policy at a particularly critical moment.

We urge that significant changes be made to any final legislation, including: removing provisions that encroach upon the President's flexibility in carrying out foreign policy, altering existing sanctions to reflect and respond to the ongoing political dynamic on the ground in Iran, and minimizing the harm imposed on the Iranian people.

The Obama Administration has made it clear that it does not intend to contribute to the pain and suffering of innocent Iranians, yet the legislation being considered is comprised of indiscriminate sanctions designed to do just that. History provides ample evidence that broad sanctions do not produce a positive change in a government's behavior, and only serve to stifle civil society and harm innocent civilians. The Iranian people have suffered enough under their own government; instead of pursuing ways to compound their suffering, Congress should pursue opportunities to support human rights and remove unintentional barriers that stand in the way of Iranians' aspirations for democracy.

Therefore, we would like to call attention to the many areas of existing Iran sanctions that are counterproductive, and urge that they be corrected. Just last week, the Treasury Department waived sanctions on Internet communications software, which it determined had produced an "unintended chilling effect" on the free speech of ordinary Iranians. We commend this decision, and urge that Congress adopt similar measures as part of the pending legislation. Examples include: removing sanctions that prohibit American humanitarian, relief, and human rights NGOs from operating in Iran without a special license, as well as restrictions that prevent civilian aircraft parts and services from being provided to Iran's aging passenger planes. These and other constructive measures will have a much greater impact in supporting the Iranian people and furthering US interests than a draconian "sanctions-only" approach.

In order to resolve the dispute over Iran's nuclear program, the international community must work together. Congress should support the President's efforts to build international unity on Iran, not derail them by removing the President's necessary authority to exercise discretion in imposing sanctions. However, the language of the bills in their current form threatens to unravel international unity by forcing the President to punish U.S. allies. Such overly restrictive language should be corrected in the final version of the legislation.

As Iranians continue their brave struggle for rights, it is more important than ever that the United States demonstrates that it does not stand against the people of Iran. We thank you for your consideration of this important issue.

Signed,

**National Iranian American Council**

**Just Foreign Policy**

**Friends Committee on National Legislation**

**Council for a Livable World**

**Physicians for Social Responsibility**

**Win Without War**

**Peace Action/Peace Action West**

**Women's Action for New Directions**

**American Friends Service Committee**

**Leadership Conference of Women Religious**

**Fellowship of Reconciliation**

**DownsizeDC.org, Inc.**

**United Church of Christ, Justice and Witness Ministries**

**Pax Christi USA**

**Global Ministries of the United Church of Christ and Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)**