

House Foreign Affairs Committee
Subcommittee on Middle East and North Africa

“Held for Ransom: The Families of Iran’s Hostages Speak Out”

Testimony of Babak Namazi

July 25, 2016

Madam Chair and distinguished members of the Subcommittee, six hundred and fifty-one days ago, on October 13, 2015, my brother, Siamak Namazi, was arrested and detained in Iran by the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps (the IRGC) at the notorious Evin Prison.

In January 2016, five American hostages were released from prison in Iran. To my family’s shock and horror, my brother was not released. We were given different explanations of the inexplicable, but felt reassured to learn that Secretary of State John Kerry had been promised by Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif that Siamak would be released within weeks of the other hostages. When he was not, my family was devastated.

But things only got worse from there. Instead of releasing my brother, on February 22, 2016, my father, Baquer Namazi, was lured back to Iran from a brief trip abroad by the promise of seeing Siamak, but was instead was also detained.

On October 17, 2016, without any evidence or respect for their rights of due process, my father and brother were each summarily tried, convicted, and sentenced to ten years in prison for “collusion with an enemy state.” They remain in Evin Prison today. It is important to emphasize this latter point because Foreign Minister Zarif claimed last week in an interview with CBS News that my father Baquer was “not behind bars,” implying he had been transferred to house arrest. This is just not true.

My father and brother have been and continue to be subjected to unimaginable suffering including spending part of his confinement in solitary cell. My father is 81-years-old, and has a severe heart condition that requires medication and may shortly require a pacemaker. He has lost more than 30 pounds and suffers dizziness, shortness of breath, and headaches. In the last few months, he has twice been hospitalized for a week at a time, which only makes us more concerned about his well-being, especially as the IRGC never told father or our family what is wrong with him after such hospitalization and no records were given to the family. It obvious that his condition, both physical and mental, is rapidly deteriorating. My father’s prison sentence is a death sentence.

My brother is a strong man, but I fear he has given up hope. His detention conditions are truly horrific. He has been kept in isolation for long periods of time. For the majority of

his detention, he was forced to sleep on a concrete floor because they gave him no bed and held in solitary confinement. Though Siamak will not talk about it, he has been regularly tortured by the IRGC with beatings and tazing, and psychological torment such as the prison guards having told him my father is in dire health and only telling him the truth days later.

The IRGC has ripped my family in half, and for those of us left behind, we worry all the time about whether my father and Siamak will survive. We don't yet see a way through this suffering to their liberation. I don't understand why Foreign Minister Zarif would claim my father is now under house arrest, when he clearly isn't. For the Iranian government to present this false claim to the international community makes a mockery of my family's pain by having given us a moment of hope that at least a little of our suffering might be ameliorated, only to see it dashed when the truth became clear that it hadn't happened. I cannot digest the inhumanity and cruelty that my family is exposed to on a daily basis.

My family is very grateful that the United Nations, where my father worked for many years, is highly engaged. It has been very heartening to see Secretary-General Guterres engage at the highest levels with the Iranian government, following up on Secretary-General Ban's engagement. And Tony Lake, the head of UNICEF, has been incredibly focused on pressing Iran to release my father as well.

We are also very grateful for ongoing assistance provided by President Trump and his administration on our behalf. It is clear by both the public statements and private actions that the President is very focused on securing the release of my family and other American citizen hostages in Iran. We desperately need that help and support to secure my father and brother's release. While I am not qualified to say what specifically would be most effective to secure the release of my family, I urge the President and Congress to spare no effort and to do whatever is necessary to save my father and brother and to save them quickly.

I also would be remiss if I did not thank Chairwoman Ros-Lehtinen for having originally sponsored House Resolution 317 with Reps. Lowey, Poe, and Deutch, and all the other co-sponsors. It is heartening to see such strong bipartisan support and my family is so grateful that this Subcommittee unanimously adopted the resolution. I hope the full House of Representatives will take up the resolution as soon as possible.

Finally, I turn my attention to speaking publicly to the Government of Iran. In short, my father and brother have done nothing wrong and are innocent. Foreign Minister Zarif said last week at the Council on Foreign Relations that he is willing "to address this humanitarian problem from a humanitarian perspective." I pray that he finds a way and not these are not just empty words. They must be released urgently and on humanitarian grounds before it is too late.

I have been reassured so many times by well-meaning individuals to be patient and that my family just needs to hold on. But patience isn't a virtue that I can have when I see my

father and brother's physical and mental health deteriorate so much and at an increasing rate of speed.

Please help me bring my father and brother home. I am losing my entire family. We are simply running out of time.