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Our Family Members Are Being Held Hostage in Iran. Help Us.

Tehran has ramped up hostage-taking as a key element of its foreign policy and is wrongly imprisoning our kin who are American and British citizens.

By Babak Namazi and Richard Ratcliffe

President Hassan Rouhani of Iran is in New York to attend the United Nations General Assembly. Before his departure from Iran, he complained about the “[unjust and oppressive actions](#)” that have been carried out against Iran and described his visit to the General Assembly as “an opportunity to [state and explain the views of nations](#), especially the great nation of Iran.”

Global attention has been fixated on salvaging the nuclear deal and reducing conflict between the United States and Iran, but the world has ignored the harsh truth that Iran is brazenly using hostage-taking as a key element of its foreign policy.

In the last few years alone, Tehran has wrongly imprisoned citizens of the United States, Britain, Canada, Australia, Austria, France, Sweden, the Netherlands and Lebanon. António Guterres, the secretary-general of the United Nations, and the assembled world leaders at the General Assembly must convey a clear message to President Rouhani: Civilized nations do not systematically take and torture hostages for leverage in their diplomatic relations, and such behavior will not be tolerated.

We are not politicians. For us, it is a desperate matter of life or death. Our loved ones have been languishing in Iranian prisons for nearly four years. Each day is a devastating reminder of their absence in our lives.

Siamak and Baquer Namazi are American-Iranians who have been detained in Iran since October 2015 and February 2016. They were convicted on manufactured charges of “collaboration with a hostile foreign government,” a reference to the United States, and sentenced to 10 years in prison. Siamak is currently held in the notorious Evin Prison in Tehran, while Baquer, a retired UNICEF official, had been detained there for two years but is now out on a temporary and highly restrictive medical furlough.

Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe is British-Iranian and was arrested in April 2016 while visiting family. In September, she was convicted on undisclosed security charges and sentenced to five years in

prison. A second fabricated case was also opened against her, effectively blocking her eligibility for parole. Amnesty International has [designated](#) her as a prisoner of conscience. Nazanin is also being held at Evin Prison.

Iran is not content to just illegally imprison our family members, but rather seems determined to break their spirits and put their lives at risk. Nazanin was forcibly [brought](#) to a psychiatric ward, kept in solitary confinement and chained to a bed. The prison has also [restricted](#) her contact with and access to family, including her 5-year-old daughter. Her prison psychiatrist found Nazanin is not fit to be in prison.

Siamak has been beaten, tasered and tortured. Baquer, who is 83 years old, was held for extended periods in solitary confinement and suffers from numerous life-threatening health problems, including heart conditions, epilepsy and severe blockages in the major arteries to his brain. While he has now been allowed a medical furlough, Iran still refuses to let him travel abroad for necessary medical treatment, and his condition is rapidly deteriorating.

Such circumstances are hardly unique to our families. The United Nations Working Group on Arbitrary Detention has [recognized](#) that “there is an emerging pattern involving the arbitrary deprivation of liberty of dual nationals in Iran” and declared the detentions of [Siamak](#), [Baquer](#) and [Nazanin](#) to be illegal, demanding their release. The U.N. special rapporteur on Iran has similarly pointed toward the plight of detained dual and foreign nationals in the country and named Siamak, Baquer and Nazanin. Human Rights Watch [declared](#) in 2018 that Iran has “escalated its targeting of Iranian dual citizens and foreign nationals.” Yet Iran has relentlessly continued to hold and take hostages.

Iran [has found hostage taking to be an effective tactic](#). The Iranian government has repeatedly leveraged hostages to negotiate prisoner swaps, obtain weapons and secure large payments or other financial concessions.

Nazanin has been informed that she is being held to [pressure](#) Britain to resolve a longoutstanding debt dispute worth hundreds of millions of dollars. In Siamak and Baquer’s case, Iranian media with state ties disclosed that Iran was seeking “many billions of dollars” for their release. Such tactics flout international law and run contrary to even the most basic standards of human decency.

Among the key purposes of the United Nations, according to its charter, is to unite the countries of the world to maintain international peace and security and to promote and protect human rights. We are joining affected families around the world to call for the release of Nazanin, Siamak, Baquer and all of Iran’s hostages in one voice. We implore world leaders to do the same.

Babak Namazi is the brother of Siamak Namazi and the son of Baquer Namazi. Richard Ratcliffe is the husband of Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe.