

His Excellency Nicholas Hopton
198 Ferdowsi Avenue
Tehran
11316-91144
Iran

(by email)

2 October 2017

Your Excellency,

Re. 4th Europe-Iran Forum, 3-4 October 2017, Zurich

We are writing to you ahead of the 4th Europe-Iran Forum business conference series at which you are due to speak at. We are extremely concerned about the continued arbitrary detention of Ms Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe and Mr Kamal Foroughi, and their continued lack of consular access to UK officials. We strongly urge you to use this opportunity to call for their immediate release and, pending release, secure consular access to them.

Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe is a 38-year-old British-Iranian mother who was detained in early April last year while returning to London from a family holiday with her young daughter Gabriella. Following an unfair trial conducted in secret and lacking basic elements of due process, Ms Ratcliffe was sentenced to five years imprisonment for “membership of an illegal group” in connection with her work at the charity, Thomas Reuters Foundation, and previously at BBC Media Action. She is therefore considered a prisoner of conscience imprisoned solely for peacefully exercising her rights to freedom of expression and association through her professional work and she must be immediately and unconditionally released. She has spent seven months in solitary confinement which has resulted in a serious deterioration of her mental and physical health.

Kamal Foroughi is an elderly British-Iranian grandfather who was detained in May 2011. After being held in solitary confinement for 18 months he was convicted of alleged “espionage” in an unfair trial in which no evidence has been provided in justification. He has not received a visitor in more than 2,000 days with very limited access to a lawyer. Mr Foroughi is currently at risk of blindness due to untreated cataracts and may be suffering from untreated prostate cancer. Last month, he turned 78 in Evin prison in Tehran. He has not received the results of a number of medical tests for over 10 weeks as they remain in the prison reception.

The United Nations Working Group on Arbitrary Detention has found that both were detained on account of their UK-Iranian nationality, and that both are arbitrarily detained, in violation of international law. The Working Group has called for their immediate release. Six United Nations Special Rapporteurs have also called for their release, referring to their unfair secret trials as “a mockery of justice”.

In March 2017, 261 MPs and Peers signed a letter seeking the release of Nazanin and Kamal. In October 2016, the European Parliament adopted a resolution on Iran calling for the release of Nazanin and Kamal as well as other EU-Iranian dual nationals.

We are aware that the Government has made certain representations in these cases and that both families have met with Minister Alistair Burt MP and have been assured that representations have been made “at the highest levels in Iran.” We also very much welcome that you that you have met Nazanin’s daughter, Gabriella, on two occasions, which we very much welcome. However, it has now been over one year since diplomatic relations with Iran have been fully restored, and six and a half years since Mr Foroughi was first detained, yet Iran continues to deny UK officials access to UK nationals detained in Iran.

Of the numerous serious concerns arising from Iran’s failure to abide by the rule of law in these cases, is the fact that it does not allow any access by UK consular officials as it does not recognise dual nationality.

While increased business ties between the UK and Iran provides greater opportunities, any improved relations between the UK and Iran must take into account that UK-Iranian nationals such as Ms Ratcliffe and Mr Foroughi were arrested on account of their dual nationality, remain in arbitrary detention and that Iran continues to deny UK officials consular access. Any such agreements should ensure that UK-Iranian nationals who are currently arbitrarily detained are released immediately and that pending release Iran grants immediate consular access to all UK nationals detained in Iran, including Ms Ratcliffe and Mr Foroughi.

Given these strengthened relations, we are writing to request that you use the opportunity of the 4th Europe-Iran dialogue to raise their cases with the Iranian authorities, calling, in line with the recommendation of the United Nations Working Group on Arbitrary Detention, for the immediate release of Ms Ratcliffe and Mr Foroughi.

We look forward to hearing from you at your earliest convenience.

Sincerely,

Carla Ferstman
Director, REDRESS

Kate Allen
Director, Amnesty International UK

cc: The Rt Hon Boris Johnson MP, Foreign Secretary, Foreign and Commonwealth Office