

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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WASHINGTON, D.C. – The U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) welcomes the executive order signed today by President Barack Obama that imposed sanctions on eight Iranian government officials responsible for serious human rights abuses in Iran.

“These targeted sanctions are the first of their kind and send a very clear message to Tehran,” said Leonard Leo, USCIRF chair. “In May, USCIRF called on the U.S. government to take the action it did today. Also in May, USCIRF identified nine Iranian officials, six of whom the Obama administration named today, as being responsible for egregious religious freedom violations in Iran.”

The President’s executive order complies with the mandate in PL. 111-195, the Comprehensive Iran Sanctions, Accountability, and Divestment Act that was signed into law on July 1, 2010. This law, which had broad and bipartisan support in Congress, highlights Iran’s serious, systematic, and ongoing violations of human rights, including suppression of religious freedom. The law mandates that the President impose sanctions on individuals responsible for or complicit in human rights and religious freedom abuses.

“USCIRF applauds today’s executive order and urges President Obama to impose sanctions on the other three Iranian officials USCIRF has identified: Sadegh Ardeshir Larijani, Head of the Judiciary, Mohammad Reza Naghdi, Head of the Basij militia, and Esmail Ahmadi-Moqaddam, Head of the National Police,” said Mr. Leo.

“USCIRF also urges the President to encourage our European Union counterparts to impose similar measures. We must send the clear message to the Iranian government that the international community will not tolerate with impunity continued human rights and religious freedom violations,” said Mr. Leo.

The government of Iran has been engaging in human rights abuses for more than 30 years. During the past year, the Iranian government’s poor religious freedom record deteriorated, especially for religious minorities such as Baha’is, Christians, and Sufi Muslims, and physical attacks, harassment, detention, arrests, and imprisonment intensified. Even the recognized non-Muslim religious minorities—Jews, Armenian and Assyrian Christians, and Zoroastrians—protected under Iran’s constitution faced increasing discrimination and repression.

Since 1999, USCIRF has recommended, and the State Department has designated, Iran as a “Country of Particular Concern,” or CPC, due to its systematic, ongoing, and egregious

violations of religious freedom.

USCIRF is an independent, bipartisan U.S. federal government commission. USCIRF Commissioners are appointed by the President and the leadership of both political parties in the Senate and the House of Representatives. USCIRF's principal responsibilities are to review the facts and circumstances of violations of religious freedom internationally and to make policy recommendations to the President, the Secretary of State and Congress.

To interview a USCIRF Commissioner, contact Tom Carter, Communications Director at tcarter@uscirf.gov, or (202) 523-3257.