

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

February 24, 2011

WASHINGTON, D.C. – The U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) welcomes the addition yesterday of two Iranian government officials to the executive order President Barack Obama signed on September 29, 2010 imposing sanctions for serious human rights abuses in Iran.

The original order named eight Iranian officials. Yesterday's designation brings the total to ten, seven of whom USCIRF identified as severe religious freedom abusers in its recommendation urging such sanctions in May 2010.

"USCIRF welcomes these sanctions for human rights abuses imposed on two additional Iranian officials, one of whom, Mohammed Reza Naqdi, head of the Basij militia, USCIRF identified in May as being responsible for egregious violations of freedom of religion or belief in Iran," said Leonard Leo, USCIRF chair.

As commander of the Basij forces, which has committed the most abusive and controlled acts against peaceful protestors, Naqdi played a role in the violent response to the Ashura demonstrations in December 2009, which resulted in as many as 15 deaths and hundreds of arrests.

In May, USCIRF identified nine Iranian officials, six of whom the Obama administration named in September, as being responsible for 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 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.

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.

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