

October 4, 2019

The Honorable Mike Pompeo  
Secretary of State  
U.S. Department of State  
2201 C Street NW  
Washington, DC 20520

The Honorable Kevin McAleenan  
Acting Secretary of Homeland Security  
U.S. Department of Homeland Security  
3801 Nebraska Ave, NW  
Washington, DC 20530

Dear Secretary Pompeo and Acting Secretary McAleenan,

On behalf of the undersigned coalition of Iranian American civil society, advocacy, and legal organizations, we are writing out of concern over recent reports of en masse visa cancellations and entry denials of students of Iranian nationality. We request clarity on the administration's grounds for these decisions. Specifically, we seek information and guidance on whether there has been any change in the visa approval process for F, J or M visa applicants, including any blanket policies of denial, any additional reviews and background checks pertaining to the Security Advisory Opinions (SAO), and/or any change in standards for admission at ports of entry.

As you are aware, under Section 2(b)(ii) of Presidential Proclamation No. 9645, Iranian nationals seeking valid student (F and M) and exchange visitor (J) visas are exempt from the travel restrictions imposed on all other nonimmigrant and immigrant visas. Both economically and politically, the U.S. benefits from having these students permitted. A study by the [Washington Institute](#) found that 75% of Iranian students study STEM subjects, 82% study at the graduate level, and the majority are enrolled in doctoral programs. Beyond the economic and scientific benefits, the study found that Iranian students provide an opportunity to enhance U.S. public diplomacy within Iran and pave the way for short-and long-term change in Iran.

Our organizations have received multiple reports in the past month that Iranian nationals approved for valid student (F and M) visas have had their visas revoked without explanation. Many of these visa revocations occurred on or around August 29, 2019. These students either were notified that their visas had been abruptly cancelled by the airlines or Customs and Border Protection (CBP) officers before departure, or were denied entry by CBP officers upon arrival in the U.S. All the reports involved students who had their F and M visas issued months prior to their planned departure to the U.S. only to find out that their visas were cancelled shortly before attending their respective universities. Mirroring the aforementioned Washington Institute's statistics, the majority of these students were to study STEM subjects such as Computer Science, Software Engineering, and Civil Engineering at top universities like Northwestern, Stanford, UC Davis, and more. Due to the volume of recent systematic visa cancellations and entry denials for Iranian students, the Iranian American community is seriously concerned, warranting a prompt response from your departments on the issue.

We believe it is important for the U.S. to distinguish the Iranian people from the regime and recognize recent efforts made towards this objective by the Administration. The vast majority of Iran's 80 million people are young (under 35), educated, digitally connected, and hold a very favorable disposition toward America. The greatest promise of change in Iran is based on more interaction with the U.S. society and people, not less. Unnecessary travel restrictions against the Iranian people, including Presidential Proclamation No. 9645, have already caused undue hardship on tens of thousands of American citizens,

and are counterproductive to U.S. national interests of engaging the Iranian people and supporting their democratic aspirations.

We thank you for your attention to this important issue and look forward to your response. We would welcome a meeting with appropriate representatives to discuss the State Department and the Department of Homeland Security's decision to cancel the visas of and deny entry to these students. We hope to engage in a constructive conversation regarding the implementation and processing of exemptions for Iranian nationals under Section 2(b)(ii) of Presidential Proclamation No. 9645.

Please forward any communications regarding this matter to Morad Ghorban, Director of Government Relations and Policy, Public Affairs Alliance of Iranian Americans at [Morad@PAAIA.org](mailto:Morad@PAAIA.org) or 202-828-8370.

Sincerely,

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