

# United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

July 27, 2021

President Joseph R. Biden  
The White House  
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W.  
Washington, D.C. 20500

Dear President Biden,

We are writing to express our concern about the prospect of incoming Iranian President, Ebrahim Raisi, visiting the United States to attend the United Nations General Assembly.

Raisi's record as a violator of human rights is long-standing and clear. In 1988, during his tenure as the deputy prosecutor of Tehran, Raisi served on a four-member Death Commission which oversaw the killing of over 5,000 prisoners, including women and children.<sup>1</sup> The Death Commission conducted interviews that lasted only minutes to determine a prisoner's loyalty to the Islamic Republic of Iran, then sentenced them to death without a lawyer, right to appeal, or fair trial.<sup>2</sup> The executions, conducted by hanging or firing squad, often occurred on the same day as the Death Commission's interrogations.<sup>3</sup> After burying the dead in unmarked mass graves, Iranian officials refused to notify families for months and never shared with them the locations of their graves.<sup>4</sup> Raisi's Death Commission executed children as young as 15.<sup>5</sup>

Ebrahim Raisi is proud of his record. In 2018, Raisi defended his role on the 1988 Death Commission, calling it "divine punishment" and "one of the proud achievements of the system."<sup>6</sup> In the thirty years since the commission, Raisi continued to subject the Iranian people to extrajudicial prosecution, torture, and execution.<sup>7</sup> During the 2009 Green Revolution, when Iranians protested the rigged presidential election, Raisi served as Iran's deputy chief justice. In this role, Raisi was directly involved in the regime's prosecution and death sentences of peaceful protesters. Years after, when Raisi served as prosecutor general, he advocated for maintaining Iran's house arrests on Green Revolution leaders.<sup>8</sup>

Raisi also consistently supports inhumane punishment against the Iranian people. In 2010, Raisi celebrated the Iranian judiciary's amputation of a prisoner's hand for stealing as "a source of pride

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<sup>1</sup> Farnaz Fassihi, "A Roadblock for Iran's President-Elect: He's on the U.S. Sanctions List," *The New York Times*, June 19, 2021, <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/06/19/world/middleeast/ebrahim-raisi-iran-president.html>.

<sup>2</sup> Tzvi Kahn, "Iran's Leading Presidential Candidate Has Committed Crimes Against Humanity," *Foundation for Defense of Democracies*, June 17, 2021, <https://www.fdd.org/analysis/2021/06/17/irans-candidate-crimes>.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.* n. 2.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.* n. 2.

<sup>5</sup> Amnesty International, "Blood-Soaked Secrets," 2017, <https://www.amnesty.org/download/Documents/MDE139>.

<sup>6</sup> Reuel Marc Gerecht and Ray Takeyh, "In Ebrahim Raisi, Iran's clerics have groomed and promoted their ruthless enforcer," *The Washington Post*, June 25, 2021, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/2021/06/25/ebrahim>.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.* n. 5.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.* n. 2.

for us.”<sup>9</sup> More recently, Ebrahim Raisi led Iran’s judiciary from 2019 to 2021. During his tenure, the judiciary regularly tortured its prisoners.

Recently, the United States designated Raisi for his role as head of Iran’s judiciary in facilitating the Supreme Leader of Iran’s tyrannical agenda, where he oversaw the state’s crackdown and murder of non-violent protesters.<sup>10</sup> In 2019, the U.S. Department of the Treasury’s Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC) designated Raisi, pursuant to Executive Order 13876, for his oversight over the executions of juveniles, torture, and other cruel, inhuman, and degrading treatment of Iranian prisoners, including amputations.

Ebrahim Raisi should remain sanctioned under U.S. law. If the United Nations General Assembly maintains its current plans to allow some in-person attendance, the White House should deny Raisi and other Iranian leaders visas to attend. Allowing Raisi to travel to the United States—to the same city where the Iranian regime just tried to kidnap a U.S. citizen—would legitimize his repression, undermine America’s moral leadership, and potentially endanger our national security, given the likely presence of intelligence agents in the Iranian traveling party.

There is strong precedent for denying an entry visa to a foreign leader. In 1988, the United States barred PLO Chairman Yasser Arafat from entering the United States to attend a meeting of the United Nations. In 2014, President Obama denied an entry visa to Iranian Ambassador Hamid Aboutalebi, who was involved in taking American diplomats hostage in 1979. In 2020, the United States declined to issue a visa for Iranian Foreign Minister Javad Zarif. Ebrahim Raisi’s role in the Death Commissions, brutal crackdowns on Iranian protesters, and his association with the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps should disqualify him from receiving a visa to the United States.<sup>11</sup>

Thank you for considering this important matter. We look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,



Tom Cotton  
United States Senator



Chuck Grassley  
United States Senator

<sup>9</sup> Center for Human Rights in Iran, “‘Proud of Hand Amputations,’ Says Top Judiciary Official,” October 27, 2010, <https://www.iranhumanrights.org/2010/10/amputations-judiciary-official/>.

<sup>10</sup> United States Department of Treasury, “Treasury Designates Supreme Leader of Iran’s Inner Circle Responsible for Advancing Regime’s Domestic and Foreign Oppression,” November 4, 2019, <https://home.treasury.gov/news>.

<sup>11</sup> “Ebrahim Raisi: President of Iran.” Report, *United Against Nuclear Iran*, 2021. [https://www.unitedagainstnucleariran.com/ebrahim-raisi-president-of-iran?gclid=CjwKCAjwoZWbHbBgEiwAiMN66eG4wJmJfR\\_PkDs3jWnv2LCB4zF8Gn7se5h2OLUnp7Ksq475h-VT4BoCHgEQAvD\\_BwE](https://www.unitedagainstnucleariran.com/ebrahim-raisi-president-of-iran?gclid=CjwKCAjwoZWbHbBgEiwAiMN66eG4wJmJfR_PkDs3jWnv2LCB4zF8Gn7se5h2OLUnp7Ksq475h-VT4BoCHgEQAvD_BwE)

*Marsha Blackburn*

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Marsha Blackburn  
United States Senator

*Rick Scott*

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Rick Scott  
United States Senator

*Marco Rubio*

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Marco Rubio  
United States Senator

*Ted Cruz*

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Ted Cruz  
United States Senator