

March 11, 2024

Ambassador Rena Bitter
U.S. Assistant Secretary of State
Bureau of Consular Affairs
2201 C Street, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20520
By email: CAPRESSREQUESTS@state.gov

Re: Visa for Iran's Vice President for Women and Family Affairs

Dear Ambassador Bitter:

United Against Nuclear Iran (“UANI”) understands that the Islamic Republic of Iran’s Vice President for Women and Family Affairs Ensieh Khazali and an accompanying delegation are enjoying the luxurious accommodations provided by the Millennium Hilton Hotel at One UN Plaza this week in Manhattan, NY.¹ Khazali is in New York to attend meetings connected with the U.N. Commission on the Status of Women (“CSW”), despite Tehran being rightly ousted from membership on that very body. We are writing to request that the U.S. State Department immediately rescind her visa and to refrain from permitting her to enter the United States in the future.

Khazali is a key enabler of women’s rights abuses in Iran. She is a supporter of child marriage.² She has also opposed UNESCO’s 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, calling on member-states to “eliminate gender disparities in education and ensure equal access to all levels of education and vocational training.” After VICE News interviewed Khazali in Tehran in 2023, where Isobel Yeung challenged her about Iran’s oppression of women, Yeung recalled “we found our van suddenly surrounded by a team of Iran’s security forces. A gun was held to our head, and everything was taken from us. Later that night while in detention, they told us we were working under false pretenses. The next day we were instructed to leave the country.”³ Khazali’s conduct has been so egregious that Canada has sanctioned her.⁴

As ever, Khazali’s visit coincides with yet more instances of brutal domestic repression. Just last week a U.N. Fact Finding Mission connected to the U.N. Human Rights Council found that Iran’s regime committed crimes against humanity against the Iranian people in the suppression of protests after the murder of Mahsa Amini in September 2022. According to their report, “the Mission found cases of women and girls subjected to rape and other forms of sexual and gender-based violence, including gang rape, rape with an object, electrocution of genitalia,

¹ IRNA, [Iran VP in NYC to Attend U.N. Commission on Status of Women](#), March 10, 2024.

² Iran Wire, [“Iran’s New VP for Family and Women Affairs Supports Child Marriage,”](#) March 11, 2024.

³ VICE News, [“Inside Iran: What Happened to Iran’s Women-led Uprising,”](#) December 23, 2023.

⁴ Global Affairs Canada, [“On first anniversary of Mahsa Amini’s death, Canada announces additional sanctions against the Iranian regime,”](#) September 15, 2023.

forced nudity, and groping. Security forces characterized women’s demands for equality and non-discrimination as a “willingness to get naked” and “spreading immorality.”⁵

The decision to grant a visa to Khazali follows a long pattern of U.S. officials granting visas to Iranian regime officials to propagandize and threaten the United States and its allies while on American soil. While the Islamic Republic’s Foreign Minister Hossein Amir-Abdollahian, a member of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps which is a designated foreign terrorist organization, was in New York during his last trip in January 2024, the regime executed Mohammad Ghobadlou, a 23-year-old Iranian protester⁶—perhaps just as Amir-Abdollahian was ordering room service from his penthouse suite at the Millennium Hilton. Granting visas to Iranian regime officials while they engage in these crimes continues to reward the very behavior that American officials routinely protest.

To its credit, the Biden administration led the way in having Iran’s regime being kicked off the U.N. Commission for the Status of Women in 2022. It also has supported the work of the U.N. Fact Finding Mission at the U.N. Human Rights Council, including as recently as March 8, with the Office of the U.S. Special Envoy for Iran saying, “it is imperative that the Fact Finding Mission continue its important work.”⁷ However, the repeated decisions to grant a visa to Iranian regime officials undermine these very efforts and telegraph impunity. Actions speak louder than words.

The United States has the sovereign right, irrespective of the U.N. Headquarters Agreement, to deny visas for “security, terrorism, and foreign policy” reasons.⁸ There is precedent for the U.S. government to do so—for example, it denied a visa to Iran’s then Foreign Minister Javad Zarif in January 2020.⁹

We remain highly concerned at the State Department’s overly generous policy of granting visas to Iranians officials complicit in the regime’s systemic gender apartheid. Given Khazali’s direct role in women’s rights abuses in Iran, we call on the State Department to revoke her visa.

Khazali is reportedly scheduled to be in the U.S. for six days, and we would therefore appreciate hearing from you at your earliest convenience but no later than March 13. Thank you for your kind attention.

Yours sincerely,



Ambassador Mark D. Wallace

⁵ Office of the U.N. High Commissioner for Human Rights, “[Iran: Institutional discrimination against women and girls enabled human rights violations and crimes against humanity in the context of recent protests](#),” March 8, 2024

⁶ Iran International TV, https://twitter.com/IranIntl_En/status/1749635330762772646

⁷ Office of the U.S. Special Envoy for Iran, [Tweet](#) from March 8, 2024.

⁸ See Joe Lieberman and Mark Wallace, “[No Visa for Iran’s President Ebrahim Raisi](#),” Wall Street Journal, August 10, 2022.

⁹ Reuters, “[U.S. denies Iran’s Zarif a visa to attend U.N.: U.S. official](#),” January 7, 2020.