

# **Support a Free Iran Remarks**

**Secretary Deborah Lee James**

September 20, 2021

Thank you for that kind introduction, Amir.

To the participants of this important rally today in Washington DC, to President-elect of the National Council of Resistance, Mrs. Maryam Rajavi, and to the many thousands more who are listening in Iran and around the world, including the mostly female led resistance units, I want to begin today by telling you how sorry I am that I cannot be with you in person.

But I am very much with you in spirit, in action and in voice—I so admire your dedication, your devotion and your commitment to the cause of a secular, democratic and non-nuclear republic of Iran. This is an inspiration to me and to countless others in the US and other nations.

And if I may speak from the heart and as a woman, your tireless pursuit of truth, transparency, and justice is something that every fighter, every leader, every mother, daughter and sister should and must support.

I was privileged to speak to many of you in July during the Free World Summit, on the heels of the sham election in Iran and your powerful boycott and protest of the vote. Your message was heard around the world—the corrupt regime in Iran certainly heard you—and they continue to view you as a big threat and will do everything possible to silence your voice.

I say--Don't let them do it!!

For your voice is loud, clear, compassionate and just—

Let them hear you—

We are fed up with economic incompetence and broken promises,

We reject your systemic corruption,

We demand accountability.

And we will not tolerate your disrespect for human rights and the misogynistic treatment of women.

Let them hear you and let the rest of the world hear you as well!

If I may, let me reflect for a moment on that last point.

I know what it means to be a woman up against difficult odds and strong men. After all, I served as the second woman in US history to lead a branch of the heavily male dominated US military. Earlier in my life, I was a young woman facing some of the same dynamics the young women of the resistance face today.

I want to say to all of you specifically —

Take heart, for your voices and your actions have already accomplished a great deal. Your goals are achievable, and although there will be a price to pay and change will take more time, you have the power to do this.

How sweet the day will be when your voices and this resistance movement—led by a woman and comprised of 50 percent women—ultimately bring down the very regime that treats women as second-class citizens.

My friends, Ebrahim Raisi has the blood of many on his hands—and the whole world knows it. As head of Iran's judiciary, and earlier in his career as a member of the 1988 Death Commission, he is and was directly responsible for overseeing unspeakable actions, including the forced disappearance and execution of as many as thirty thousand political prisoners-- mostly members of MEK-- and the targeting of Iranian dissidents abroad.

Regrettably, he escaped accountability for his brutal actions—indeed, his ruthless nature is a primary reason why the ayatollahs have promoted him through the years. Now, he is President

of the Iranian regime and will soon address the UN General Assembly. It's a sad day when your chief qualification to lead a nation is your willingness to crack down hard and oppress the people of your country.

Most recently, Amnesty International issued a powerful statement:

"That Ebrahim Raisi has risen to the presidency instead of being investigated for the crimes against humanity of murder, forced disappearance and torture is a grim reminder that impunity reigns supreme in Iran. The circumstances surrounding the fate of the victims and whereabouts of their bodies are, to this day, systematically concealed by the Iranian authorities."

I wholeheartedly agree with Amnesty International's assessment—the world community needs to take action--

Here again, your voice—and your demand for accountability—must be heard. I join with you in calling upon the UN General Assembly to refer the matter of the 1988 massacre and other Raisi crimes--to the Security Council and to conduct an official investigation into this heinous genocide and crimes against humanity.

I hope that the United States will play a leading role in this charge and I hope that interviews with survivors in Ashraf 3, Albania will be part of the official record. For who better to bear witness to all that happened 33 years ago—including the murder of pregnant women and teenage girls—than the people who were there, who suffered and who somehow persevered and survived?

My friends, although the current state of affairs may sound bleak, there is opportunity in bleakness. The challenge certainly remains difficult but your unity, sacrifice and persistence will surely deliver results. And I am certain that the United States wants to help.

Specifically, there remains overwhelming bipartisan support in the US House of Representatives for H.Res. 118—a Resolution expressing support for the Iranian people's desire for a democratic, secular and non-nuclear Republic of Iran. H.Res. 118 also condemns Tehran's support for state sponsored terrorism and violations of human rights. Mrs. Rajavi deserves enormous credit here, for her 10 point plan was the model used to craft this resolution. I want to

thank her for educating many in the United States and around the world about who Ebrahim Raisi really is and what's really happening in today's Iran. Its extremely important that you keep bringing to the attention of the American people and to the world the conditions the people of Iran face and the need to hold Raisi accountable.

I continue to call on our Congress, including the US Senate, to finalize H.Res 118 as soon as possible. In addition, I hope the Congress and other nations will support the Biden Administration's efforts to seek a "longer and stronger" agreement as a follow on to the reentry into the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action and that any lifting of sanctions would occur only after Tehran agrees and demonstrates that it has altered its behavior on terrorism, human rights, and regional destabilizations.

As a former Secretary of the US Air Force, I can tell you that Iran's support for terror in Yemen, Lebanon, Gaza and against US forces in Iraq, Syria and elsewhere has caused bloodshed, destruction and massive refugee issues. These actions simply must come to an end once and for all!

My friends, my time is running short. I want to return to a point I made earlier: the importance of your voice.

Your voice is loud, clear, compassionate and just.

Don't let them silence you—not ever.

Let them continue to hear you.

Don't let the world think that they are strong, for they grow more desperate and vulnerable with each passing day.

Don't let them tell the world—we are the only alternative for governance within Iran. This is a lie.

YOU are the alternative.

YOU represent the future of Iran.

YOU are committed to equality for all nationalities and genders.

YOU believe in peaceful coexistence and respect for the United Nations charter.

YOU are fighters, challengers, resistors

YOU are the mothers, daughters, fathers and brothers that will one day deliver the right of self-determination and freedom to the people of Iran.

Thank you again for your participation in this important conference and for your commitment to a free Iran.