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AMERICAN HIKERS DETAINED IN IRAN ARE IN ILL HEALTH, SPEAK OF A HUNGER STRIKE

Families Urgently Call On Iran to Release Shane Bauer, Sarah Shourd and Josh Fattal; Honor Its Commitment to Grant Their Mothers Visas

Two of the three American hikers detained in Iran are in poor health and the three of them have spoken of going on hunger strike to protest their unjust detention, their families said today, after Swiss diplomats were allowed to visit them on Thursday for the first time in almost five months. Shane Bauer, 27, Sarah Shourd, 31 and Josh Fattal, 27, were detained on July 31, 2009 when news reports say they accidentally strayed across an unmarked border with Iran while on a brief hiking trip in Iraqi Kurdistan. They are being held in Evin Prison.

"We thank the Iranian authorities for allowing Shane, Sarah and Josh to receive another consular visit at long last but we are alarmed to learn of their physical and emotional state of health and fear their well-being will suffer even more unless their case is resolved without delay. Shane has a stomach ailment and Sarah is suffering from a serious health issue that requires specialist care as well as grappling with depression. We understand that they have spoken about starting a hunger strike because they are in such despair at the total lack of movement in their case," the families said. "We are painfully aware of the tensions between the governments of the United States and Iran, but it is wrong to make innocent citizens pay the price. Shane, Sarah and Josh are being held for no legitimate reason and without access to their lawyer, Masoud Shafii. This treatment is completely unjustified and we urgently call on the Iranian authorities to do the humane thing and let them come home. We are convinced that if Iran had any evidence against Shane, Sarah and Josh, it would already have tried them in a public court of law and let them answer any allegations. We know that Shane, Sarah and Josh have nothing to hide."

Swiss diplomats told the detainees that their mothers hoped to visit them, which helped lift their spirits. The mothers – Cindy Hickey, Nora Shourd and Laura Fattal – applied for visas on January 6. They have twice been told through diplomatic channels that their applications had been approved, but the visas still have not been issued.

"We urge Iran to live up to its promises instead of denying our families the fundamental right to visit our loved ones in jail. The emotional pain we're suffering because of this makes us feel like we too are being punished for no good reason – just as Shane, Sarah and Josh are being deprived of their freedom for no good reason," the families said.

The three Americans have been denied virtually any contact with the outside world other than one brief telephone call to their families on March 9, three consular visits and access to some of the letters and messages that have been sent to them by family, friends and supporters. The two men are held together while Ms. Shourd continues to be held alone in a cell. They are allowed to meet twice a day for brief periods but are isolated from other prisoners.

"Letters are a lifeline of strength and love for Shane, Sarah and Josh and they specifically asked friends and supporters to continue writing to them. They are aware of the hard work everyone is doing to win their release and know about the Free the Hikers website, and they are incredibly



appreciative,” the families said. “All of us are also extremely grateful to the Swiss Ambassador and her colleagues in Iran for their persistence in trying to ensure that our loved ones’ consular rights are respected.”

Contact: familiesofhikers@gmail.com