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REMARKS BY SARAH SHOURD – SEPTEMBER 19, 2010

American hiker Sarah Shourd made the following remarks at a news conference in New York today following her return to the United States. Sarah, 32, was released from detention in Iran after 410 days in solitary confinement on September 14. Her fiancé Shane Bauer and their close friend Josh Fattal, both 28, remain held in Evin Prison, Tehran. To learn more about Sarah, Shane and Josh, please visit www.freethelikers.org

Welcome everyone and thank you for being here today. I want to begin by again expressing my sincere thanks to the government and religious leaders of Iran. My gratitude goes in particular to Ayatollah Khamenei and President Ahmadinejad for my compassionate release from detention.

It is my deepest hope that the world will not let this humanitarian gesture by the Iranian government and judicial branch go unrecognized. I believe this decision is a step in the right direction for all of us and, above all, for my fiancé Shane and my dear friend Josh.

I will forever be grateful to His Majesty Sultan Qaboos bin Said of Oman for his untiring commitment to our case and the warmth of his people's welcome. When I stepped out of the plane into that beautiful country the caress of the sweet, fragrant breeze was a promise – a promise Shane and Josh's suffering too will end.

I also want to thank the American people and our government, and people and governments all around the world who have advocated for our release and supported our families for more than 13 months. Lastly, I want to extend my gratitude to our lawyer Masoud Shafii for his tireless work on our behalf and to my friend Ambassador Leu of Switzerland for her support and continued engagement.

Getting on the plane in Tehran was one of the most memorable and important moments of my life. But this is not the time to celebrate. My disappointment at not sharing that moment with Shane and Josh was crushing. And I stand before you today only one third free. That was the last thing that Josh said to me before I walked through the prison doors. Josh and Shane felt one third free at that moment and so did I.



The only thing that enabled me to cross the gulf from prison to freedom alone was the knowledge that Shane and Josh wanted with all their hearts for my suffering to end. They showed nothing but joy at my release and that more than anything is testimony to the selflessness and beauty of their spirits.

I had many concerns about my health while I was in prison. Thankfully, doctors in Oman have reassured me that I am physically well. As we say in Arabic, al-Hamdilullah, Praise be to God.

Shane and Josh do not deserve to be in prison one day longer than I was. We committed no crime and we are not spies. We in no way intended any harm to the Iranian government or its people and believe a huge misunderstanding led to our arrest and prolonged detention.

Shane, Josh and I had no knowledge of our proximity to the Iran-Iraq border when we went hiking behind the Ahmed Awa waterfall, a popular tourist site frequented by local families in Iraqi Kurdistan. If we were indeed near the Iraq-Iran border, that border was entirely unmarked and indistinguishable.

Though my friends and I never intended or chose to go to Iran, the tragedy of our imprisonment has forever marked our destinies. I never in my worst nightmare imagined that I would be a prisoner. I never saw it coming, and I never knew that my family would have to suffer like this.

I want to be clear that I do not in any way blame the Iranian people for the pain our families and friends are suffering. I found Iranians to be a diverse, generous people defined by their fervent worship of God and noble Islamic values. Like all of us, they love their families and they want to live in peace.

At the time of our arrest, Shane and I were working in the Middle East and living in Damascus, Syria. Shane is a courageous and talented international journalist and I taught English to Iraqi and Palestinian refugees, as well as Syrian nationals. Josh is an environmental teacher who arrived in Syria as our guest less than a week before our arrest after leading a study abroad program about global health challenges.

My hope is that by learning who we are and how we came to be in this diverse and fascinating region of the world directly from my lips, it will help clear up any doubts and end Shane and Josh's detention. I intend to talk about these issues more in the days



and weeks ahead because it is time to clear up the misunderstanding that led to our imprisonment.

I also firmly believe that now is the time to make the world a little safer for everyone through peace and dialogue. I believe that our tragedy is an opportunity for Americans and Iranians to realize that an improved relationship would be in the best interest of all people. My hope is that, in our own, small way, Shane, Josh and I as individuals can help begin to build a bridge between our two disparate countries and cultures.

I walked out of prison with my spirit bruised but unbroken and I am more determined than ever that Shane and Josh – God Willing, Inshallah – will soon walk out the same way. My life begins again the day I go to pick them up, the day when all three of us can be reunited with our families with the walls of prison far behind us.

My work is cut out for me and I need all the help I can get. I ask everyone who cares about Shane and Josh's freedom to please stand behind us and our families so that we can make this final push for their freedom together. I also ask the governments and people of the world to please help in the process of cooperation and bridge-building at this crucial time. Please help us free Shane and Josh. Please help us create an atmosphere of goodwill in the world. Thank you.