



Centre for **A**pplied **R**esearch & **E**valuation  
**I**nternational **F**oundation

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### **Compassion, humility and mental health for young Americans in Iran.**

#### **The Centre For Applied Research and Evaluation-International Foundation. (Careif) Position Statement**

Careif is an international mental health charity that works towards protecting and promoting mental health and resilience with a special focus on young people, to eliminate inequalities and strengthen social justice. Our principles include working creatively with humility and dignity and balanced partnerships in order to ensure all cultures and societies play their part in our mission of protecting and promoting mental health and well-being. We do this by respecting the traditions of all world societies, whilst believing traditions can evolve for even greater benefit to individuals and society.

The arrest and detention of the three young Americans, Sarah Shourd, Josh Fattal and Shane Bauer whilst hiking on the Iranian border has attracted significant international attention, condemnation and outrage. Sarah Shourd was released on grounds of Islamic compassion. Careif cannot comment on the mental status of the detainees, but clearly our social and cultural obligations are to ensure that cultural misunderstanding, contrasting judicial systems, and posturing over sovereignty and entitlements do not obscure the mental distress and well-being of the detainees; we wish to assert their human rights alongside the rights of those others in the world who find themselves in such bewildering situations having only wanted to get by and make a useful and valuable contribution to the world. Young people in particular are often full of the passions of life, of ideologies that help them defeat their fears and overcome adversity. Young people have the most to offer our societies and the most to lose; they are prepared to make sacrifices with total commitment that resonate with their passion and belief in an honest and just world. Thus the young detainees must stand a good chance of sustaining and recovering their mental health and well-being when released from custody.

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There is no doubt that cultural differences and exchanges require humility and sensitivity to avoid unintended insult or humiliation; the human desire to befriend and reach out can sometimes result in disagreements about entitlements and mutual obligations and rights. International law is complex and often upheld in good faith by all parties. Of course we appeal to the Iranian authorities to show themselves to be above the misperceptions and polarised opinions that can cloud a sense of justice, and to consider the release of the detainees on grounds of human compassion and their own long tradition of embracing truth.

There is an evidence base that social isolation, linguistic isolation, detention in many contexts, loss of friendships and family and freedoms can have devastating consequences, producing states of depression, anxiety, post-traumatic stress disorder, and even hallucinations and suicide. Perceived discrimination, stigma and a sense of being treated unfairly are themselves risk factors for illness, mental and physical. This is especially important to avoid in youth as it can lead to life long problems. Permanent changes in personality can emerge, and a sense of moral trauma and injustice, if permitted to emerge, can result in long standing loss of valuable human capital and an inability to return to work. It is hard to recover from such states, as the world is permanently changed in the eyes of the sufferer. We all wish to maintain our common humanity, irrespective of where we live and what faith we follow. Josh and Shaun, when released, will need their friends and family to be true to their traditions to comfort and return them to the young compassionate people they are known to be; at times of adversity individuals find great solace in friendship, family, prayer, music, and through acts of giving and forgiveness. At the same time the Iranian authorities must surely wish to be true to their traditions and consider their rightful place in continuing to make a progressive impact on human history and international relations.

*Kamaldeep Bhui*

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*Albert Persaud*

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On behalf of the trustees of Careif

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