



## **Statement regarding the US embargo on the import of Iranian handmade carpets**

**The President of the United States of America, Barack Obama, has signed a bill that prohibits the import of Iranian handmade carpets. Carpet weavers and workers are among the most deprived segments of the Iranian population. Label STEP and ORIA appeal to the US Government to exclude handmade carpets from the trade embargo.**

President Obama has signed the 'Comprehensive Iran Sanctions, Accountability, and Divestment Act' (H.R. 2194) on July 1, 2010. The trade embargo includes handmade carpets produced in Iran and will become effective on September 29, 2010.

The number of carpet weavers, workers, and their related family members in Iran is estimated at about 8 million people. They are among the most deprived segments of the population. Most of them live and work in remote rural areas where there are only very few alternatives to earn a living.

A considerable number of carpet weavers belong to tribal peoples and still live their traditional way of life or are in a critical phase of transition into urban localities. Carpet weaving is a key element of their cultural heritage and identity and remains an important means of existence to them.

Handmade carpets were among the first globally traded goods. Their importance in commercial and cultural exchange between the East and the West has a long history. Handmade carpets are a cultural bridge and stand for peaceful exchange between the Orient and the West.

President Obama said that "these sanctions are not directed at the Iranian people" (June 9, 2010) and that "the United States stands with the Iranian people" (July 1, 2010). But the trade embargo contributes to the unemployment, impoverishment and insecurity among millions of people already struggling to make a living in Iran.

Furthermore, the trade embargo also threatens numerous US carpet importers and retailers, most of them small businesses and family-owned enterprises. In 2009, the United States of America imported handmade carpets from Iran with a total value of 41 million USD.

For all these reasons Label STEP – the Swiss based non-governmental organization promoting fair trade with handmade carpets, committed to improving working and living conditions of carpet weavers and fighting abusive child labor – and ORIA – the American based, Not-for profit National Trade Association fostering ethical business practices and promoting the best interests of the Oriental Rug Trade – appeal to the Government of the United States to exclude handmade carpets from the trade embargo. Label STEP also appeals to all other Governments of carpet importing countries to not introduce trade embargos on handmade carpets from any producing countries.

### **About ORIA:**

The Oriental Rug Importers Association (ORIA) is a national trade association formed in 1958 to foster ethical business practices and promote the best interests of the Oriental Rug Trade in the United States and in countries that produce Oriental rugs.

ORIA's membership consists of over 70 leading U.S. based importers of handmade carpets, whose products sell at retail in all of the 50 states.

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### **About Label STEP:**

Label STEP is a Swiss based, internationally active non-governmental organization committed to improving the working and living conditions of carpet weavers, fighting abusive child labor and promoting environmentally friendly production methods.

Label STEP's membership currently consists of 15 importers and 45 retailers from five countries with more than 150 points of sale in 11 countries throughout Europe.

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