

How Fiat and Jennifer Lopez are indirectly enabling the Iranian regime

By Mark Wallace

[*The Daily Caller*](#)

January 26, 2011

Earlier this month, United Against Nuclear Iran (UANI) sent a letter to Jennifer Lopez, the well-known actress, singer and judge for "American Idol," asking her to renounce her ties to the Italian automaker Fiat. Most Americans have seen Ms. Lopez's Fiat commercials, which she filmed as part of a multimillion-dollar deal that also includes product placement during her performances.

The reasoning behind our campaign is simple: Ms. Lopez is the most prominent spokesperson for Fiat, and Fiat - through its business in Iran - is undermining U.S. national security and human rights. Fiat maintains an active business presence in Iran, and through its subsidiary Iveco has sold vehicles to the Iranian regime which have been used to transport ballistic missiles and stage gruesome public executions.

It is important to place Fiat's activities in Iran in a broader geopolitical context. For one, U.S. automakers are prohibited from selling automobiles in Iran, due to laws passed in an overwhelmingly bipartisan fashion and signed by presidents both Democratic and Republican. The goal of those laws, and the Obama administration's policy towards Iran, is to exert economic pressure on Iran's government until it stops pursuing policies that threaten global peace and security as well as the rights of its citizens. When it comes to Iran, no company can ever be sure how its products might be used, or what the taxes it is paying the Iranian Treasury might help fund. UANI has tried to make Ms. Lopez aware of this fact.

Unfortunately, multinational corporations like Fiat that continue to do business in Iran are throwing the regime a much-needed lifeline that is helping it remain in power and fund its activities. As such, the U.S and its allies have been encouraging corporations to end their business activities in Iran, particularly when the activities directly support the Iranian regime, as is the case of Fiat.

Consider that several international automakers, including Toyota and Kia, have heeded this call and pulled out of Iran. A number of other international companies have also followed suit, including Komatsu, Liebherr and ABB. Even Chinese companies such as Huawei are now scaling back their business in Iran to prevent the regime from abusing their civilian goods for nefarious purposes.

But not Fiat. To date, Fiat has not responded to overtures and letters from UANI leadership and our supporters across the country, even as it tries to re-enter the American automobile market with the help of Ms. Lopez. As for her, she has yet to issue any sort of response to questions about Fiat's business in Iran, despite being contacted not just by UANI, but by numerous reporters and fans who have followed our campaign.

No one believes that Ms. Lopez supports Iran's nuclear weapons program, its public hangings of homosexuals and political dissidents, its support of terrorist groups such as al Qaida or its plans to assassinate foreign dignitaries and carry out terrorist attacks on U.S. soil. In fact we at UANI figured Ms. Lopez would be taken by surprise once she learned of our legitimate

concerns regarding Fiat's business activities in Iran, and we hoped she would be eager to take a stand for international security and human rights.

Yet as the days go by, we are increasingly disappointed not just in the lack of a response from Fiat, but also with Ms. Lopez's silence. It is sad to learn that Ms. Lopez could tolerate serving as the public face of an irresponsible international corporation that is directly undermining U.S. national security - a company which by the way has benefitted greatly from U.S. tax dollars given its newly acquired majority stake in the recently bailed-out Chrysler Group.

The irony is that when it comes to endorsement deals, it is typically corporations that must distance themselves from celebrities who have gotten in trouble with the law or caused embarrassment to their images. In the case of Fiat it is the reverse: Fiat, through its callous disregard and reckless policies, is potentially damaging Ms. Lopez's reputation.

Ms. Lopez and other entertainers can and should follow a path where their endorsements do not increase the sales of corporations whose actions are diametrically opposed to the security and foreign policy goals of the United States - actions antithetical to the values Ms. Lopez presumably shares with her American fan base.

We look forward to her response.

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