

**Middle
East
Studies
Association**
of North America, Inc.

1219 N Santa Rita Ave
The University of Arizona
Tucson AZ 85721 USA

520 621-5850
520 626-9095 fax
mesana@u.arizona.edu
www.mesana.org



MESA '08
November 22-25
Washington, DC

September 12, 2008

Ayatollah Ali Khamenei
Supreme Leader of the Islamic Republic of Iran
c/o H.E. Mohammad Khazaee
Ambassador of Iran to the United Nations
Permanent Mission of the Islamic Republic of Iran to the United Nations
622 Third Ave, 34th Floor
New York, NY 10017, USA

Fax: 212-867-7086

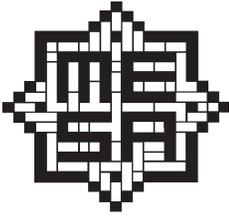
Your Excellency,

I am writing on behalf of the Committee on Academic Freedom of the Middle East Studies Association of North America to express our grave concern over the recent arrest and detention of Dr. Mehdi Zakerian, a professor of international relations and human rights law at Islamic Azad University in Tehran. Since Dr. Zakerian's arrest in mid-August, very few details have been forthcoming regarding the reasons for his arrest, the location of his detention, or his current physical condition. As of this date, your government has filed no formal charges against him. I urge you to investigate the circumstances of his arrest immediately, guarantee his physical well being while in custody, and release him if he is not charged with a violation of the law.

The Middle East Studies Association of North America (MESA) was founded in 1966 to promote scholarship and teaching on the Middle East and North Africa. The preeminent organization in the field, the Association publishes the *International Journal of Middle East Studies* and has more than 2900 members worldwide. MESA is committed to ensuring academic freedom and freedom of expression, both within the region and in connection with the study of the region in North America and elsewhere.

Dr. Zakerian is a respected scholar in the fields of international relations and human rights law in the Islamic world. He holds a Ph.D. in International Relations from Azad University, has an extensive record of scholarly publication, and has lectured at numerous Iranian universities. For a number of years, Dr. Zakerian has also been a member of the editorial boards of the Tehran-based bilingual academic journals *International Studies* and *Regional Studies Quarterly*. He has also worked as a senior researcher at Tehran's Center for Strategic Studies of the Middle East.

Dr. Zakerian, who had previously been a professor at the University of Tehran, was summarily dismissed in September 2007, without explanation, as part of the much-publicized campaign of dismissals of liberal and reformist professors from Iran's universities. Our committee wrote to you, in a letter dated September 13, 2006, criticizing this policy of dismissing university professors for reasons relating to their academic and scholarly points of view. Such a policy is a clear violation of internationally recognized principles of academic freedom. At the time of his arrest in August 2008, Dr. Zakerian was a professor at Azad University and had been invited to spend an academic year as a Visiting Scholar at the University of Pennsylvania Law School. We are concerned that, like his earlier dismissal from



**Middle
East
Studies
Association**
of North America, Inc.

page 2/Re: Detention of Prof. Mehdi Zakerian

his position at the University of Tehran, his recent detention is also connected to his scholarly and intellectual work, and thus a further violation of the basic principles of academic freedom.

The detention of Dr. Zakerian does further damage to the reputation of the Islamic Republic of Iran as a country where students, academics, and intellectuals can engage in critical debate free from government intrusion. This is particularly distressing and unfortunate given Iran's rich history of scholarship and tradition of free intellectual inquiry. Academic freedom is in fact essential to achieving your government's stated goals of international cooperation and intellectual excellence in higher education. We urge you to reaffirm your commitment to these goals by taking the matter of Dr. Zakerian's detention seriously.

Your Excellency, we trust that you will take the appropriate measures in this matter. We urge you to provide further information about Dr. Zakarian's location and condition, as well as immediately to accord him access to legal counsel, family members, and any necessary medical treatment. We also urge you to clarify the circumstances of his arrest and to work towards his timely release.

We look forward to your reply,

Sincerely,

Mervat F. Hatem
MESA President
and
Howard University, Professor of Political Science

cc: William Burke-White, University of Pennsylvania Law School