

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

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**MESA '08**  
November 22-25  
Washington, DC

4 November 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  
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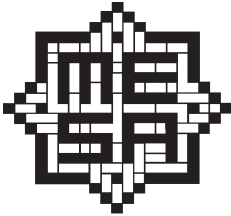
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Your Excellency,

I am writing on behalf of the Committee on Academic Freedom of the Middle East Studies Association of North America (MESA) to express our concern over the 26, October confiscation of the passport of Ms. Sussan Tahmasebi by security officials at Imam Khomeini airport. Ms. Tahmasebi, a scholar and women's rights activist, was thereby prevented from travelling to the United States where she is scheduled to participate as a panelist in the MESA annual meeting, scheduled for November 22-25. Your government has issued no details regarding the reasons for preventing Ms. Tahmasebi from travelling. I urge you immediately to investigate the reasons behind the confiscation of her passport, and, if she is not to be charged with a criminal offense, to see that it is returned to her promptly so that she may be permitted to travel.

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 3000 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.

On 26 October, Ms. Tahmasebi had already passed the passport checkpoint when security officials from the office of the President paged her. They proceeded to confiscate her passport and prevent her from travelling. She then returned home to find five security agents at her door who presented her with a court order to search her home. While also filming the home, the security officials seized a number of CDs, books, writings, texts addressing peace-building, cassette tapes and a laptop. They also presented her with a summons, which had in fact been issued a month earlier, to present herself to the Security Branch of the Revolutionary Courts within three days. Ms. Tahmasebi appeared at the security branch of the investigative court of the Revolutionary Courts on Wednesday October 29, 2008. While her lawyer Zohreh Arzani was allowed to accompany her to court, Arzani was not permitted



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to be present during the interrogation, which lasted for more than five hours. According to the Security officials who interrogated her, the interrogations are part of ongoing investigations and will continue.

This is the fourth time that security officials have prevented Ms. Tahmasebi from travelling. Despite her repeated inquiries, she has never been provided with information on the reasons for these actions. Given the circumstances of the passport confiscation and the subsequent search and confiscation of materials directly related to her research, our committee is very concerned that the travel ban and subsequent interrogations are related to her academic and scholarly work. Coming only a few days after the arrest by your government of Ms. Esha Momeni, a graduate student in the department of journalism and media studies at California State University, Northridge, we are particularly concerned that the travel ban on Ms. Tahmasebi is yet another instance of the violation of basic principles of academic freedom.

The confiscation of Ms. Tahmasebi's passport 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 Ms. Tahmasebi's detention seriously.

We urge you to clarify the reasons for the confiscation of her passport and to work toward a speedy resolution of this matter so that she may travel. We look forward to your response.

Sincerely,

Mervat Hatem  
MESA President  
Professor of Political Science, Howard University