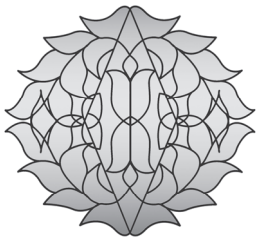


**Middle
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MESA '09

July 16, 2009

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

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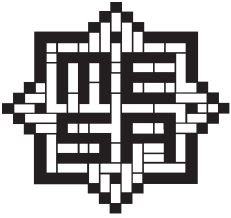
Your Excellency,

I am writing to you on behalf of the Committee on Academic Freedom (CAF) of the Middle East Studies Association of North America (MESA) to express my concern about the recent arrests and continued detention of a large number of academics, scholars, and student activists in Iran without any formal charges and without access to legal representation. Based on the available reports, many of the detainees are held at undisclosed locations across the country and are subject to harsh interrogation tactics and various forms of torture in violation of basic international human rights and the laws of the Islamic Republic of Iran. In particular, we are concerned with the arrest on 9 July 2009 of our colleague Dr. Kian Tajbakhsh, a prominent Iranian-American social scientist. Dr. Tajbakhsh is a scholar with an international reputation who has not been involved in political activities and was not a participant in the recent street protests following the June 12 disputed presidential elections in Iran. He was taken from his home by the state security forces and to date his family has no information of his whereabouts or the reasons for his detention.

MESA was founded in 1966 to promote scholarship and teaching on the Middle East and North Africa. The preeminent organization in the field, MESA 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

This is the third time events in Iran have compelled me to write to you this year. On 29 April 2009, I wrote to you to express our grave concern regarding the large-scale wave of intimidation, arrests, and campus expulsions carried out by Iranian security forces against peaceful student activists and protesters on various university campuses throughout Iran. On 30 June 2009, I wrote again to voice CAF's serious concern over the murders, mass arrests, brutal beatings, and widespread harassment of Iranian university students in the aftermath of the 12 June 2009 disputed Iranian presidential elections and the ransacking of university dormitories by security forces in a number of cities.

Our special concern with Dr. Tajbakhsh's arrest and safety also stems from the fact that he was previously detained in 2007, held for four months in solitary confinement on the basis of charges that lacked credibility, and forced to participate in a sham "confession" which was broadcast on Iranian state television, before being released. Despite that harrowing experi-



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ence, Dr. Tajbakhsh subsequently opted to remain in Iran and to continue working as an expert in urban planning and social policy in that country, given his unflagging commitment to the welfare of his native country and its people. We fear Dr. Tajbakhsh may again be a victim of concocted allegations.

Your Excellency, we call for the immediate and unconditional release of Dr. Tajbakhsh, who was not involved in the recent protests, as well as those academics, scholars, and students arrested for no more than exercising their basic right to freedom of expression and peaceful protest (as guaranteed in the constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran). We also urge that these individuals be treated with absolute dignity and given access to legal representatives of their choosing while they remain in detention.

MESA again calls on Iranian authorities to respect and guarantee the full rights of academic and intellectual freedom for scholars and the right to peaceful assembly on all university campuses

Sincerely,

Virginia H. Aksan, PhD
MESA President
Department of History, McMaster University