

**Middle
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February 9, 2010

Ayatollah Ali Khamenei
Supreme Leader of the Islamic Republic of Iran
c/o H.E. Mohammad Khazaee
Ambassador of the Islamic Republic of Iran to the United Nations
Permanent Mission of the Islamic Republic of Iran to the United Nations
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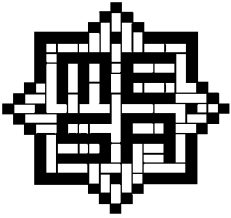
Your Excellency,

I write to you on behalf of the Committee on Academic Freedom (CAF) of the Middle East Studies Association of North America (MESA). We write in order to express our grave concern over the violent treatment, arrest, and harsh sentencing of students and activists across Iran since the Ashura demonstrations of late December 2009.

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.

Following the violent response of government security forces during the Ashura protests, in which at least eight people were killed and hundreds more arrested, there have been continued attacks on university campuses and arrests of students, academics, and intellectuals throughout Iran. Students have been summoned before disciplinary committees, expelled, and detained for their political views, spreading a climate of fear on restive campuses throughout the country. In addition, a number of students and faculty have been arrested and sentenced to unjust prison terms. MESA is committed to the respect and protection of basic rights of freedom of speech, opinion, and scholarship, as well as the right to non-violent assembly, on university campuses. We again urge Iranian authorities to implement and guarantee the full rights of academic and intellectual freedom and the right to peaceful assembly on Iranian campuses.

At MESA we are alarmed by the following recent developments within Iran: In January 2010, Majid Tavakoli, a student and member of the Islamic Student Association at Amir Kabir University in Tehran, was sentenced to eight years in prison for giving a speech on National Students Day. Over the last month, hundreds of university students have been arrested on campuses in such cities as Tehran, Mashhad, Isfahan, Shiraz, Qazvin, and Tabriz, among others. It is reported that on February 3, 2010, the philosopher, translator, and journalist, Omid Mehrgan, was arrested in his home in Tehran and taken to an undisclosed location, while the journalist and human rights activist, Kaveh Ghassemi Kermanshahi, was arrested at his home in Kermanshah. In general, we are concerned for the fate of the countless university students, writers, scholars, and activists arrested and detained throughout Iran since demonstrations during the month of Muharram.



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In recent months, security forces have violently sought to put down student movements that have been building since the June 2009 elections and saw their latest manifestation on Ashura. Amidst the escalating violations of human rights by government security forces, we find the statements by Iran's national chief of police, Ismail Ahmadi Moghaddam, to the effect that the era of "mercy" and "tolerance" is over, to be shocking and disturbing. Even more reprehensible was the January 29 Friday sermon in Tehran by Ayatollah Ahmad Jannati calling, in unprecedented fashion, for the speedy execution of post-election protesters. It is inconceivable to us that such a high ranking cleric and the chair of the Guardian Council would use Friday prayers to make such inhumane, inflammatory, and shortsighted statements that cast doubt on the legitimacy of the judiciary system.

Moreover, we continue to be deeply concerned regarding cases about which we have written to you in the past, including: the arrest and conviction of scholar Kian Tajbakhsh; the continuing arrests of students belonging to the Office for Fostering [Student] Solidarity (daftar-e tahkim-e vahdat), as well as other student activists at the University of Tehran and Sharif University in Tehran. Four students belonging to the Office for Fostering Solidarity have been detained and face the charge of muharib (as waging war against God), which carries the death penalty, without being allowed access to lawyers. We are compelled to remind you again, that the rights of individuals to freedom of thought, opinion, and speech are explicitly protected under the Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran (Article 23), as well as the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (Articles 18, 19, 21), to which the Islamic Republic of Iran is a signatory. The politically motivated persecution and maltreatment of students on university campuses constitutes a direct violation of the principles of academic freedom and critical intellectual inquiry.

Your Excellency, this latest letter of ours coincides with the thirty-first anniversary of the Islamic Revolution of 1979. We hope you recognize the students and activists seeking reforms today are not only kindred to the political activists of three decades ago, but also the heirs of the now century old movement for freedom and representative politics in Iran. We call on you again to protect the freedom of expression and the right to peaceful assembly on university campuses and throughout Iran. We look forward to your response.

Sincerely,

Roger M.A.Allen
MESA President
Professor of Arabic & Comparative Literature, University of Pennsylvania