

**Middle
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of North America, Inc.

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May 26, 2010

Ayatollah Ali Khamenei
Supreme Leader of the Islamic Republic of Iran
c/o H.E. Mohammad Khazaei
Ambassador of the Islamic Republic 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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Dear Ayatollah Khamenei,

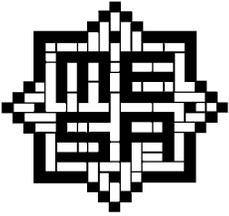
I write you once again on behalf of the Committee on Academic Freedom (CAF) of the Middle East Studies Association of North America (MESA) to express our profound outrage at the recent death sentences and executions, as well as continued harassment, imprisonment, and expulsions targeting university faculty and administrators, teachers, and non-violent student activists in the Islamic Republic of Iran.

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 nearly 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.

We are gravely alarmed and disturbed by the Iranian government's escalating and increasingly brutal violations of academic rights and the most basic rights of freedom of opinion and expression since our last letter to you on February 9, 2010 (http://www.mesa.arizona.edu/caf/letters_iran.html).

We are distraught over the recent executions of 5 prisoners on May 9, among them the Kurdish teacher and social justice activist Farzad Kamangar, a member of the Iranian Teachers' Trade Association. Kamangar had been arrested in 2006 and condemned to death in 2008 on the alleged charge of belonging to an armed separatist Kurdish organization and involvement in a series of bombings -- at a trial that lasted only a few minutes and during which no substantiating evidence was presented by the prosecution in support of these allegations. Moreover, all of these executions by hanging were carried out without prior notification to the accused, their families, or their legal representatives. During their detention, all of these individuals (Farzad Kamangar, Ali Heydarian, Shirin Alam Hooli, Farhad Vakili, and Mehdi Eslamian) were subjected to torture in an attempt to extract self-incriminating confessions from them.

Even while these executions continue to be harshly condemned by the international community, the revolutionary courts (with the full sanction of the head of the Iranian judiciary, Sadeqh Larijani) have been handing down excessive, unwarranted sentences to many of the hundreds of teachers, university faculty, and students rounded up since the contested election of June 12, 2009. These cruel and harsh measures, fully endorsed by other



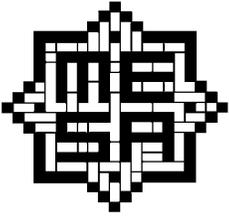
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officials such as Tehran's prosecutor-general Abbas Jafari-Doulatabadi, are widely seen not only as a continuation of the official policy of silencing peaceful critics of the state, but also as additional means of creating an atmosphere of fear with the approach of the anniversary of last summer's large-scale demonstrations in Iran in the aftermath of the presidential election.

In addition to harsh interrogation tactics, routine torture, forced self-incriminating confessions, and long prison sentences, the judiciary of the Islamic Republic has been zealous in accusing detained individuals of being "mohareb" (i.e., one who wages war against God) and sentencing them to death. We find extremely reprehensible the increasingly recurrent application by the Iranian judiciary of the noxious designation of mohareb, which carries the death penalty, particularly when sentencing individuals arrested for peaceful expression of independent thought (guaranteed by the constitution of the Islamic Republic as well as the UN Declaration of Human Rights) or for other acts that do not otherwise merit drastic sentences under the Iranian law. Among those currently awaiting execution for allegedly being a mohareb is the teacher Abdul-Reza Ghanbari. He was arrested during the Ashura street protests of December 27, 2009 for chanting anti-government slogans and was subsequently tortured, accused of belonging to an armed anti-regime organization, tried without access to an independent legal representative, and sentenced to death by hanging. We ask that this sentence be overturned immediately. While we welcome the recent commutation (to 3 ½ years imprisonment) of the original death sentence handed down to 20-year-old student activist Mohammad-Amin Valian of the central council of the Islamic Student Association of Damghan Science University, who had confessed to throwing stones at the security forces attacking the demonstrators during the Ashura street protests, we urge the Iranian judiciary to consider even greater lenience for Mr. Valian.

Since our last letter, there has been a chronically worsening climate of state-sponsored intimidation and persecution in the Islamic Republic of student activists, university and school instructors and administrators, intellectuals and scholars at large, as well as artists, trade unionists, and human rights and gender rights activists on patently ideological grounds. Teachers' rights activists and members of teachers' unions and councils have also been targets of systematic persecution. Many have been summoned to court and fined or sentenced for their peaceful advocacy of improved work conditions, better pay and benefits, greater job security, and/or criticism of the government's mistreatment of colleagues or student activists. The many teachers currently in detention on spurious charges include Hashem Khastar, a retired teacher and head of the Mashhad Teachers' Trade Union Center, who was arrested in June 2009, released a few weeks later, and then rearrested again on September 16. He is reported to be in poor health and lacking access to adequate medical care while in prison. Other jailed teachers' rights campaigners include Mohammad Davari, Rassoul Bedaghi, Ali-Akbar Baghani, Ali-Reza Hashemi, Mahmoud Beheshti Langaroudi, Hossein Bastaninejad and Ghorban Ahmadi. The arrests and intimidation of teachers' rights activists were stepped up with the approach of Labor Day and Teachers' Day celebrations in Iran (on May 1 and May 2 respectively).



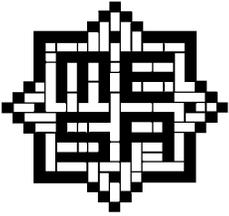
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Student groups and education rights groups singled out for intimidation and persecution by the state include the Council for Defending the Right to Education, the Islamic Student Association, and the Office for Fostering [Student] Solidarity (daftar-e tahkim-e vahdat), many of whose members are routinely arrested and/or fined, beaten, expelled from universities, and threatened by the authorities. We are particularly concerned about the case of Kouhyar Goudarzi, an expelled Sharif University (Tehran) student and a member of the alumni association of the Office for Fostering [Student] Solidarity as well as a member of the Committee of Human Rights Reporters and a former member of the Islamic Student Association, who was arrested on December 20, 2009 on his way to the funeral of Grand Ayatollah Hossein-Ali Montazeri. He was recently transferred to solitary confinement and his lawyer has been informed that his court file is missing. We are also anxious about the deteriorating health of the detained vice-secretary of the Tehran branch of the Office for Fostering [Student] Solidarity, Shabnam Madadzadeh. Two senior members of the same organization, Bahareh Hedayat and Milad Asadi (arrested in December 2009 for criticizing the government), were sentenced on May 20 to 9 ½ years and 7 years imprisonment respectively. The recent harsh and unjustified jail sentences meted out to student activists and to former students banned from continuing their education inside Iran also include 3 years for Arash Sadeghi, 1 year for Mohammad Youssef Rashidi, 15 years for Ali Kantoori, 4 years for Mehdi Khoda'i, 1 year and 74 lashes for Ali-Reza Azabad, 15 years for Ziaoddin Nabavi, 28 months for Mahdiyeh Golrou, 1 year and 74 lashes for Peyman Aref, 4 years for Hessam Salamat, 6 years for Majid Dorri (Nabavi, Golrou, Aref, Salamat, and Dorri are members of the Council for Defending the Right to Education), 9 years for Arsalan Abdi, 3 years for Saman Nouranian, and 6 years for Pouya Ghorbani, whose brother and wife were also arrested (his wife being sentenced to 2 ½ years imprisonment).

All of these detainees have reportedly been subjected to physical and/or psychological torture, including threats made against their families, as in the case of Ghorbani and Abdi. In the case of the latter, the authorities threatened to detain and harm his sisters as a means of extracting false confession from him. Hundreds more detained students currently await sentencing under similar conditions for non-violent activities and participation in street demonstrations, and many of them are being denied access to urgent medical care. These include the (Tehran) Allameh Tabataba'i University student Hamed Omidi, who was arrested for condemning the execution in November 2009 of a Kurdish activist Ehsan Fattahian. Omidi, who was previously tortured, was severely beaten following his condemnation of the recent executions of Kamangar, Heydarian, Alam Hooli, Vakili, and Eslamian on May 9.

The process of expelling student activists from university campuses and of "starring" and banning students from continuing their education inside Iran continues unabated. Among the most recent examples is the expulsion of five students from Shiraz University on May 18 (Esmail Jalilvand, Kazem Reza'i, Abdoljalil Reza'i, Hamdollah Namjou, and Younes Mirhosseini). There has also been a recent upsurge in the dismissal or forced resignation and retirement of university faculty and administrators as well as school teachers. These actions are indicative of an ongoing campaign to remove from campuses and schools those educators and students considered ideologically insubordinate to the state and at odds with the policies



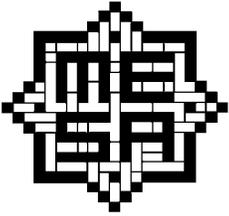
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of the current Iranian administration. Some of the university faculty purged more recently via dismissals or pressured resignations and retirements include Dr. Morteza Mardiha of the Allameh Tabataba'i University and Dr. Touraj Mohammadi, Dr. Mohammad Shahri, and Dr. Sayyid Ali-Asghar Beheshti-Shirazi of the Elm-va-San'at University. Among other dismissed faculty at various universities are such distinguished professors as Mohammad Reza Shafiee-Kadkani, Saba Vasefi, Mahmoud Erfani, Amir-Nasser Katouzian, Reza Davari, Karim Mojtahedi, Ali Sheikholeslami, Hassan Bashiriyeh, Abolghassem Gorji, Mohammad Ashuri, and Jamshid Momtaz. We deplore public statements by government officials that openly call for "cleansing" university campuses of those deemed ideologically disloyal to the state on grounds of upholding secular worldviews, not adhering to the particular interpretation of Shi'i Islam advocated by the Iranian state, or diverging from the state's political ideology, as in the repeated statements made by the controversial minister of Science, Research, and Technology, Kamran Daneshjou (<http://www.payvand.com/news/10/mar/1051.html> & http://blogs.nature.com/news/thegreatbeyond/2009/09/exclusive_paper_authored_by_ir.html).

These cases comprise only some of the random examples of the extensive and heightened persecution by Iranian authorities of independent-minded academics, scholars, students, and intellectuals, as well as the more broad-ranging callous violations of the basic rights of academic freedom, freedom of expression, and human rights by the authorities. Among others, we are particularly apprehensive about the fate of Shiva Nazar Ahari. Nazar Ahari, a prominent human rights and women's rights activist and journalist belonging to the Committee of Human Rights Reporters, is also one of the Islamic Republic's thousands of "starred and banned university students" and a member of the Council for Defending the Right to Education. She was arrested on December 20, 2009 along with Goudarzi and others en route to the funeral service for Grand Ayatollah Montazeri. She has served prior jail sentences and is now being falsely accused by the authorities of belonging to a terrorist organization aiming to overthrow the Iranian regime, a pernicious allegation frequently made by the authorities against non-violent activists whom they seek to silence (with the charge carrying one of the harshest possible sentences under Iranian law).

In addition to these developments, which paint an increasingly bleak picture of the conditions in Iran, we stress once again that we remain concerned about the fate of those student activists, teachers, university faculty and administrators, and scholars and intellectuals arrested earlier on an array of unsubstantiated charges and who are still in detention. Among these are the student activist Majid Tavakoli, the former chancellor of the University of Tehran Dr. Mohammad Maleki, and the social scientist and researcher Dr. Kian Tajbakhsh. Tavakoli, a member of the Amir Kabir University of Technology's Islamic Student Association, was arrested following a speech he gave on December 7, 2009 (during the commemoration of the National Student Day in Iran), and was subsequently sentenced to 8 ½ years imprisonment. Tavakoli, whose health has been fast deteriorating in recent weeks, began a hunger strike on May 23 after being transferred to solitary confinement. The 77-year-old Maleki, arrested on August 22, 2009 and currently released on bail, is facing the charge of "mohareb," which carries the death sentence. Tajbakhsh, our internationally



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renowned and esteemed colleague, was arrested on July 9, 2009 and sentenced in October 2009 to 12 years imprisonment on the fabricated charge of espionage and endangering national security. We ask for the immediate revocation of all charges against these individuals.

We remind you as well that the constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran (Article 23) and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (Articles 18, 19, 21) guarantee the basic rights of freedom of thought and expression. The Islamic Republic of Iran is currently by far one of the worst perpetrators of violent state-sponsored infringement of academic rights. We hope you will take the initiative to remedy these conditions and will respond to our letter. We also ask you to reflect on the ethical, moral, and social dimensions and ramifications of the injustice committed by Iranian authorities and the suffering inflicted on innocent people.

Sincerely,

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

cc: Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR)