

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

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October 12, 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  
622 Third Ave.  
New York, NY 10017

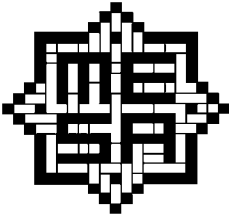
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Dear Ayatollah Khamenei,

I am writing to you on behalf of the Committee on Academic Freedom (CAF) of the Middle East Studies Association of North America (MESA). This time, I write to you in regards to the most recent spate of harsh and unwarranted sentencing by Iranian authorities of a number of prominent Iranian scholars, intellectuals, and academic rights activists. I also would like to remind you again of our ongoing concern with the fate of hundreds of detained academics, members of teachers unions, non-violent students' rights activists and other defenders of academic rights, journalists, scholars, and intellectuals at large in the Islamic Republic of Iran, as well as our grave concern with the continued intimidation and expulsion of many educators, students, and administrators at Iranian universities and schools on ideological grounds. We are also deeply troubled by the harassment and detentions of the legal representatives of these individuals and human rights and women's rights activists by the authorities (as in the case of the arrest of the prominent Iranian human rights lawyer Ms. Nasrin Sotoudeh in September). For past CAF-MESA letters on Iran, see: [http://www.mesa.arizona.edu/caf/letters\\_iran.html](http://www.mesa.arizona.edu/caf/letters_iran.html)

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.

In this letter, I would like to particularly draw your attention to the continued persecution of Mr. Emadeddin Baghi and the announcement by Iranian authorities on September 21, 2010, that he has been sentenced to an additional six years imprisonment. Mr. Baghi is an internationally-renowned independent scholar and a prolific author, a prominent journalist, and a leading human rights and prisoners' rights defender, who also has campaigned against capital punishment and torture in Iran. He is a recipient of prestigious international human rights awards, including the Martin Ennals Award for Human Rights Defenders in 2009. He has previously served jail sentences totaling 4 and ½ years since May 2000 for his peaceful advocacy of human rights in general and his endorsement of freedom of expression, his founding of the Association for the Defense of Prisoners' Rights (ADPR) in 2003 – which has been banned by the authorities–, and his *Quran-* and *Shari'a-*based scholarship in opposition to the death penalty. Moreover, he has been repeatedly harassed by the authorities, has had many of his publications banned, and over the past decade he has been summoned to court more than 80 times on grounds of his various peaceful activities, none of which



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have been in violation of the rights guaranteed in the constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran. Mr. Baghi was again detained on December 28, 2009, reportedly on grounds of his having conducted an interview in 2008 with the late Grand Ayatollah Montazeri, who was a leading clerical advocate of greater political, social, gender, and religious rights in Iran. Mr. Baghi spent much of his recent detention in solitary confinement. In July 2010 he was sentenced to one year in prison along with a 5 year subsequent ban on his participation in civic and political activities due to his defense of prisoners' rights. Following that sentencing, Mr. Baghi, who is currently on leave from prison on bail because of serious heart and kidney ailment (aggravated by his treatment in prison), was summoned to the revolutionary court again in September 2010 and informed that he had been handed yet another sentence in August, this time for an added term of six years in prison. The most recent sentence was allegedly in reaction to his having endangered state security by conducting the interview with Grand Ayatollah Montazeri, which was aired on BBC Persian in January 2010 (following Montazeri's death in December 2009), as well as for such activities as contacting UNICEF in connection with children's rights and the execution of juveniles in Iran. His arrest in December coincided with widespread arrests of journalists, scholars, human rights activists, feminists, student's rights activists, and various non-violent political rights activists in Iran, such as the journalist, feminist, and human rights activist Shiva Nazar Ahari, who is also a member of the Council for Defending the Right to Education. Although Ms. Nazar Ahari has been released on bail, she too was sentenced in September 2010 to six years imprisonment and 74 lashes for her peaceful advocacy of women's rights. In the case of Mr. Baghi, as his interrogation and trial proceedings indicate, he was clearly targeted for his scholarship on, and sponsorship of, the abolition of death penalty and torture, as well as for his defense of prisoners' rights.

We consider Mr. Baghi a scholar at risk and a victim of state persecution. MESA joins the many other independent, non-partisan international organizations in demanding that Iranian authorities rescind the current sentences meted out to Mr. Baghi and end the willful and ideologically-motivated harassment of Mr. Baghi.

Sincerely,

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

cc: Head of the Judiciary of the Islamic Republic of Iran, Ayatollah Sadeq Larijani  
Fax: (011) 9821 8879 6671  
Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR)