

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

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November 10, 2010

Ayatollah Ali Khamenei  
Supreme Leader of the Islamic Republic of Iran  
c/o H.E. Mohammad Khazaei  
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Permanent Mission of the Islamic Republic of Iran to the United Nations  
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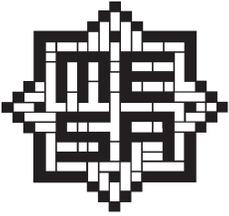
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I write to you on behalf of the Committee on Academic Freedom of the Middle East Studies Association of North America (MESA) to express our deepening concern over the exceedingly harsh treatment of student activists and the blatant disregard for freedom of expression on university campuses across 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 of expression, both within the region and in connection with the study of the region in North America and elsewhere.

Since the disputed election of 2009, the authorities of the Islamic Republic of Iran have intensified their repression and persecution of non-violent student activists and scholars on and off university campuses. Hundreds of students on campuses throughout Iran have been banned from study, arrested, given arbitrary and harsh sentences, imprisoned, and tortured by authorities. We call for the immediate and unconditional release of all students and scholars of conscience imprisoned in Iran for their political views and non-violent activism.

We are gravely concerned about the targeted detention and maltreatment of students and activists belonging to a number of student organizations, including those belonging to the peaceful national student organization Office for Fostering Solidarity (daftar-e tahkim-e vahdat). The numerous student activists of this group currently imprisoned include Bahareh Hedayat, Shabnam Madadzadeh, and Milad Asadi. Hedayat, a former student of economics at Tehran University and a member of the central council of the Office for Fostering Solidarity, was imprisoned on 31 December 2009, during the mass arrests that took place following the Ashura demonstrations. She was charged with various national security offences on grounds of her defense of student rights and criticisms of Iranian officials during a visit to the Netherlands earlier in the month. Hedayat is currently serving a nine and a half year sentence at Evin Prison. She was recently also charged with "disturbing public order," and could now face an additional year of imprisonment and 74 lashes. Madadzadeh, a former student at Tarbiat Moallem University and a vice-secretary of the Office for Fostering Solidarity, is reportedly in critical condition as she serves a five-year prison sentence in the notorious Rajai Prison in Karaj. Illegally arrested in February 2009 and later charged with "actions against national security," she has been detained in prison ever since. Asadi, an engineering student at Khajeh Naser Toosi University of Technology in Tehran and also a member of the central council of the Office for Fostering Solidarity, was arrested shortly



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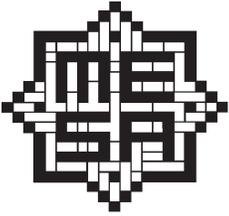
before the National Student Day demonstrations that occurred on 7 December 2009 and has been sentenced to seven years imprisonment. He too was recently brought to trial again on additional charges.

Other members of the Office for Fostering Solidarity to face a significant degree of government persecution include Mehdi Arabshahi and Morteza Samyari. Arabshahi, a student at Allameh Tabataba'i University in Tehran arrested on 27 December 2009 during the Ashura demonstrations, was released on bail last March after having suffered a heart attack while detained and has yet to stand trial. Arrested on 4 January 2010, Samyari, a suspended student from the University of Sistan and Baluchistan, was sentenced to a five-year prison sentence and kept in solitary confinement at Evin before being released on bail. Members of this student activist organization remain targets of persecution by authorities. Last week, Ali Gholizadeh, a banned student at Shahrud University of Technology and a member of the Office for Fostering Solidarity was arrested without a warrant in Mashhad.

We also again call for the release of Majid Tavakoli, a student of marine engineering and a member of the Islamic Studies Association at Amir Kabir University in Tehran. Arrested after making a speech on National Student Day on 7 December 2009, he is currently serving an eight and a half year prison sentence and has suffered physical and psychological abuse in prison.

We are deeply troubled by continued reports of the ill treatment and poor health of student activists. Some of them are held captive in inhumane conditions in "exile" prisons, distant from their families in the provinces of Iran. We are concerned for the health and well being of Zia Nabavi, a banned honors student at Babol Nushirvan Technological University in Mazandaran Province and a member of the Council for Defending the Right to Education, who was reportedly recently placed in solitary confinement and severely beaten in the Ahvaz Prison. It is reported that Hamed Rouhinejad, a philosophy student at Shahid Beheshti University in Tehran who suffers from multiple sclerosis and was imprisoned before the summer elections of 2009 for allegedly participating in political demonstrations, has been moved against doctors' orders from Evin Prison to a campground prison in Zanjan with no medical facilities and is on the verge of dying. According to reports, Majid Dori, a banned student at Allameh Tabataba'i University and a founding member of the Council for Defending the Right to Education, who was arrested and imprisoned in June 2009, is suffering from poor health at Evin and is currently in solitary confinement awaiting transfer to the even harsher confines of the Ahvaz Prison. Hundreds of other students at large have been detained, expelled, and summoned to court for their conscientious demands for freedom of expression on university campuses in Iran.

These disturbing cases of maltreatment of innocent students and the mounting reports of other detentions and abuses present clear evidence of the climate of intense intimidation and the thorough disregard for the freedom of expression that are pervasive on and off university campuses in the Islamic Republic of Iran today.



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The preservation of academic freedom is integral to the fabric of civil society. The open pursuit and free expression of knowledge and ideas, without fear of reprisal and discrimination are internationally recognized as fundamental liberties to be guarded at academic institutions of higher learning and on university campuses. Moreover, 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 MESA Committee on Academic Freedom denounces these egregious violations of academic freedom in Iran and calls for the unconditional release all students unjustly held in prisons throughout the country.

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