

**Middle
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Studies
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5 November 2008

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
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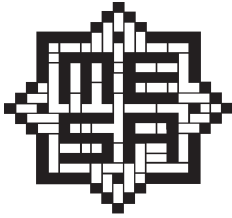
Your Excellency,

We are writing on behalf of the Committee on Academic Freedom of the Middle East Studies Association of North America (MESA) and the American Anthropological Association Committee for Human Rights to express our concern over the recent arrest of Ms. Esha Momeni, a graduate student in the department of journalism and media studies at California State University, Northridge. Since Ms. Momeni's arrest on October 15 your government has issued very few details regarding the reasons for her arrest or the circumstances of her current physical condition. News reports from Iran and international sources indicate that she is being held in Evin prison. As of this date, your government has neither formally charged Ms. Momeni with any crime nor allowed her to meet with legal representatives. We urge that you immediately investigate the circumstances of her detention, guarantee her physical well being while in custody, and release her if she is not to be charged with a criminal offense.

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

The American Anthropological Association Committee for Human Rights is elected by the membership of the AAA – a professional organization of over 11,000 anthropologists that is committed to the promotion and protection of the rights of people everywhere to the full realization of their humanity.

Ms. Momeni was arrested in Tehran while conducting research for her Master's Degree in journalism and media arts. She traveled to Iran in July of this year to visit family members as well as to conduct further research required for the completion of her Master's thesis. As part of this research, Ms. Momeni conducted videotaped interviews with Iranians working in the areas of public policy and journalism. On October 15th, Ms. Momeni was arrested in Tehran after being stopped by authorities for a minor traffic violation. At the time of her arrest, the authorities neither charged her with a crime nor explained the reason for her arrest. Subsequent to her arrest, police arrived at Ms. Momeni's family home and began an extensive search of the property. As a result of the search, authorities confiscated computers, videotapes, books, and writings belonging to Ms. Momeni. Given the circumstances of her arrest and the subsequent search and confiscation of materials directly related to her research, our



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committee is very concerned that her arrest is related to her academic and scholarly work. These circumstances lead us to believe that Ms. Momeni's arrest is a violation of the basic principles of academic freedom.

The detention of Ms. Momeni does further damage to the reputation of the Islamic Republic of Iran as a country where students, academics, and intellectuals can engage in critical debate free from government intrusion. This is particularly distressing and unfortunate given Iran's rich history of scholarship and tradition of free intellectual inquiry. Academic freedom is in fact essential to achieving your government's stated goals of international cooperation and intellectual excellence in higher education. We urge you to reaffirm your commitment to these goals by taking the matter of Ms. Momeni's detention seriously.

We urge you to provide further information about Ms. Momeni's condition, as well as to immediately provide her with access to legal counsel, family members, and any necessary medical treatment. We also urge you to clarify the circumstances of her arrest and to work towards her timely release.

Sincerely,

Mervat F. Hatem, PhD
MESA President
Professor of Political Science, Howard University

Victoria Sanford, PhD
Chair, AAA Committee for Human Rights
Associate Professor of Anthropology, Lehman College & the Graduate Center,
City University of NY

