



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

1219 N Santa Rita Ave  
The University of Arizona  
Tucson AZ 85721 USA

520 621-5850  
520 626-9095 fax  
sbs-mesa@email.arizona.edu  
www.mesana.org



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WASHINGTON DC

September 2, 2011

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  
662 Third Avenue  
New York, NY 10017

Dear Ayatollah Khamenei,

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 grave concern about the arrest and detention of Ramin Zibaei, a scholar at the Baha'i Institute of Higher Education in Tehran.

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.

MESA has learned that Ramin Zibaei was among several scholars and faculty members at the Baha'i Institute of Higher Learning detained in a raid in late May 2011. According to reports, at least thirty Baha'is were arrested in coordinated raids in Tehran, Isfahan, and Shiraz. MESA is alarmed and disturbed by these widespread efforts to exclude the Baha'i community from pursuing and gaining access to higher education in Iran.

The Baha'i Institute of Higher Learning is an online university established in 1987 to provide education to Baha'i students, who are prohibited from attending universities and government sponsored institutions of higher learning in Iran on the grounds of their religion. Mr. Zibaei has taught at the institute for the past eight years as a member of the psychology department and was the dean of the social science faculty at the time of his detention. Since his arrest last May, Mr. Zibaei has not been permitted access to legal counsel, in violation of international law and standards of due process.

We consider Mr. Zibaei a scholar at risk. MESA joins with many other independent and international academic associations in demanding that Iran uphold its legal obligations, both domestic and international, in the case of Mr. Zibaei and his colleagues at the Baha'i Institute of Higher Education. The rights of individuals

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Re: Ramin Zibaei

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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 Iran is a signatory. Under article 18, “everyone shall have the right to freedom of thought, conscience, and religion . . . No one shall be subject to coercion which would impair their freedom to have or to adopt a religion of their choice.”

We regret and are deeply troubled by the widespread limits placed on academic freedom and the ongoing intimidation of intellectuals and student activists at universities and institutions of higher learning across Iran since the disputed elections of 2009. 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. MESA urges authorities in Iran to grant Mr. Zibaei, pending his release, access to family, legal counsel, and medical treatment. More broadly we call on the government of Iran to cease targeting scholars and academics on ideological, political, and religious grounds.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Suad Joseph".

Suad Joseph

MESA President

Professor of Anthropology and Women's Studies

University of California Davis

cc:

Head of the Judiciary of the Islamic Republic of Iran, Ayatollah Sadeq Larijani  
Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights