



**Middle  
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October 7, 2015

Ayatollah Ali Khamenei  
Supreme Leader of the Islamic Republic of Iran  
c/o H.E. Mr. Gholamali Khoshroo  
Permanent Representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran to the United Nations  
622 Third Avenue, 34th Floor  
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Your Excellency,

I write on behalf of the Committee on Academic Freedom of the Middle East Studies Association (MESA) to express our grave concern regarding the Islamic Republic's failure to release Mrs. Bahareh Hedayat. Mrs. Hedayat should have been released this past June, yet days after receiving release orders from an Appeals Court in Tehran, she was served with an additional, previously suspended, two-year sentence for an alleged crime committed in 2006. According to her husband, Mrs. Hedayat has kidney complications and reproductive health issues that have worsened due to harsh prison conditions. This makes her immediate release even more pressing. We urge you to see to the enforcement of due process, according to which Mrs. Hedayat should have been released from Evin prison by now.

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 3,000 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.

Mrs. Hedayat is a student activist, women's rights activist, and a board member and spokesperson of the student organization Office for Consolidating Unity. Before her imprisonment she was a student of Economics at the University of Tehran. She has been arrested multiple times (June 12<sup>th</sup> 2006, July 9<sup>th</sup> 2007, July 13<sup>th</sup> 2008 and March 21<sup>st</sup> 2009), most recently in December 2009 after sending a video message to the European Students' Union in which she spoke of injustice and the need for legal and political reform in Iran. In May 2010, Mrs. Hedayat was sentenced to six months imprisonment for allegedly insulting the president, two years for allegedly insulting Your Excellency, and five years for allegedly "gathering and colluding to commit crimes against national security". An additional six-months sentence was later added as punishment for having written a letter, together with fellow imprisoned student activist Majid Tavakkoli, in December 2010, encouraging students to continue their peaceful struggle for freedom. This brings her overall sentence to ten years, the longest issued verdict a student activist has ever received in the post-Khomeini period.

According to Article 134 of Iran's amended penal code, which provides that in the case of multiple charges an individual will only serve the maximum punishment for the charge carrying the heaviest sentence, Mrs. Hedayat should have been released this August for fully serving her five year-prison term. Yet, instead of her release, a two-year suspended prison term previously imposed for her participation in a June



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2006 demonstration calling for an end to discrimination against women in law was implemented.

Mrs. Hedayat's arrest and imprisonment are violations of Iran's obligations under constitutional and international laws. The rights of individuals to freedom of thought, opinion, and speech are explicitly protected under the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (Articles 18, 19, 21), to which the Islamic Republic of Iran is a party. In addition, the rights of women, for which Mrs. Hedayat fought in the demonstration for which her current sentence has been re-activated, are enshrined in Articles 20 and 21 of Iran's constitution.

MESA's Committee on Academic Freedom calls upon your government both to uphold internationally accepted rights to academic freedom and freedom of speech, and to enforce the provisions of the Islamic Republic's penal code, according to which Mrs. Hedayat should have been released this past summer.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Nathan J. Brown', is written over a white background.

Nathan J. Brown

President, Middle East Studies Association and Professor of Political Science and International Affairs, George Washington University

cc:

Ayatollah Sadeqh Larijani, Head of the Judiciary

The Honorable Zeid Ra'ad Al Hussein, United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights