



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

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December 21, 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,

We write on behalf of the Middle East Studies Association of North America (MESA) and its Committee on Academic Freedom to express our grave concern regarding the Islamic Republic's arrest of Mohammad Hossein Rafiee, Professor Emeritus of Chemistry at the University of Tehran. Professor Rafiee was arrested without a warrant on June 16, 2015, and taken to Evin Prison, where he has been held ever since on unknown charges. According to his daughter, Professor Rafiee suffers from heart disease, high blood pressure, a thyroid condition and chronic allergies. We are deeply troubled by his arrest, which appears to have been politically motivated, and the conditions under which he is being held; we are also very concerned about his physical and mental well-being.

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.

Professor Rafiee was arrested several weeks after his house was raided – again without a warrant – and the papers and laptops of his family members confiscated. He was accused of “spreading propaganda against the regime,” although no details for this charge were provided, and his trial was held in secret. He was sentenced to six years in prison and banned from political and journalistic activities for two years after his release. To this day Professor Rafiee has not been informed of the specific details of his alleged crime. His family suspects that the arrest is connected to his membership in the opposition party *Melli Mazhabi*, as well as to the 120-page letter which he sent to President Rouhani in 2014, in which he expressed his support for Iran's nuclear agreement with the United States. In this letter, he also called for the release of political prisoners, free and fair elections, and an improvement of the human rights situation in Iran.

Professor Rafiee is being held in Evin Prison's Section 8. This section is for ordinary criminals, and the conditions are particularly abysmal. He shares a cell measuring twenty square meters and containing only three bunk beds with



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twenty-seven other inmates. Most prisoners, including Professor Rafiee, are compelled to take turns sleeping on the floor. Professor Rafiee went on a hunger strike to protest these difficult conditions this past summer. Not only is he in fragile health, but the medications that Professor Rafiee needs are not available in prison, and his family fears for his life.

MESA's Committee on Academic Freedom calls upon Iran's government to uphold internationally accepted rights to academic freedom and freedom of speech, and to enforce the provisions of the Islamic Republic's penal code and related regulations, according to which Professor Rafiee should not have been arrested without a warrant and, even if found guilty of political crimes, should be held with other political prisoners, not with common criminals. Moreover, given his fragile health and what appears to be a politically motivated arrest and conviction, we call upon you to secure his immediate release.

We look forward to your response.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Beth Baron'.

Beth Baron  
MESA President  
Professor, City University of New York

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Amy W. Newhall'.

Amy W. Newhall  
MESA Executive Director  
Associate Professor, University of Arizona

cc:

The Honorable Hassan Rouhani, President of the Islamic Republic of Iran  
Ayatollah Sadeqh Larijani, Head of the Judiciary  
The Honorable Zeid Ra'ad Al Hussein, United Nations High Commissioner for  
Human Rights