



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

3542 N Geronimo Ave
Tucson AZ 85705 USA

tel 520-333-2577
fax 520-207-3166
caf@mesana.org
www.mesana.org



January 27, 2017

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
New York, NY 10017, USA
Email: iran@un.int
Fax: +1 (212) 867-7086

Your Excellency,

We write on behalf of the Committee on Academic Freedom of the Middle East Studies Association (MESA) to express our grave concern regarding reports that Mr. Hamid Babaei, a doctoral student of finance at the University of Liège in Belgium serving a six-year prison sentence in Iran, is seriously ill, has not been afforded access to proper medical care and now has even been barred from receiving visitors. We wrote to you previously regarding Mr. Babaei's case in May 2014 and in March 2015. We again urge the Iranian judiciary both to ensure that he receives necessary medical care while in custody and to overturn the conviction related to his academic activities, thus leading to his release.

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.

As we stated in our previous letters, the Committee on Academic Freedom strongly protests the fact that Mr. Babaei was arrested in August 2013 after attempting to return to Belgium following a summer visit in Iran. Reports indicate that after four months in detention, including three weeks of solitary confinement, Mr. Babaei was sentenced on December 21, 2013 to six years in prison for allegedly acting against national security by communicating with a hostile government. It appears that the only evidence for this charge is the scholarship funding which Mr. Babaei has received from the University of Liège, where he is completing a doctoral degree in finance, and it has been suggested that the conviction was in fact in retaliation for his refusal to spy on fellow Iranian students in Belgium. According to our sources, Mr. Babaei, who also holds a master's degree in industrial engineering from the University of Science and Technology in Tehran, has been pressured to make a false confession under duress, but has repeatedly denied the charges against him.

Since November 2014, Mr. Babaei has experienced medical problems, and is now in urgent need of medical attention for severe gum disease and other dental issues. While the judiciary has previously permitted Mr. Babaei a visit to an external dentist, prison authorities are currently not allowing him to have such care. Worse, we have learned that Mr. Babaei was recently banned from

receiving visitors after he reportedly wrote to the warden to complain that prison authorities had intercepted letters he had written to the prosecutor.

Mr. Babaei's arrest, detention, and conviction are violations of Iran's obligations under both its constitution and international law. Freedom of thought, opinion, and speech are explicitly protected under the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (Articles 18 and 19), to which the Islamic Republic of Iran is a signatory. In addition, given Mr. Babaei's deteriorating health, we remind you that the Constitution of the Islamic Republic (Article 29) deems access to "health services, and medical care and treatment" to be a "universal right" which "the government must provide for every individual citizen."

As noted in our prior letters to you, Mr. Babaei's prolonged detention and conviction represent another instance of infringement of academic freedom, the pursuit of knowledge and free expression of views without fear of reprisal in the Islamic Republic. The Committee on Academic Freedom strongly objects to these violations of internationally recognized rights to academic freedom in Iran and calls upon the relevant authorities in the Islamic Republic to reconsider the sentence against Mr. Babaei and, in the meantime, to ensure Mr. Babaei's access to regular medical treatment and right to family visits.

Sincerely,



Beth Baron
MESA President
Professor, City University of New York



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

cc:

Ayatollah Sadeqh Larijani, Head of the Judiciary
The Honorable Zeid Ra'ad Al Hussein, United Nations High Commissioner for
Human Rights