



Middle East Studies Association of North America, Inc.

The University of Arizona · 1232 North Cherry Avenue · Tucson, Arizona 85721

22 December 1994

Hojjatoleslam Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani
The Presidency
Palestine Ave.
Azerbaijan Intersection
Tehran, Islamic Republic of Iran

Your Excellency:

The Committee on Academic Freedom of the Middle East Studies Association is gravely concerned about the reports (by IRNA, November 27, 1994) that Mr. Ali Akbar Saidi-Sirjani has died in hospital after being put under house arrest in a house owned by the government where he remained incommunicado.

The Middle East Studies Association comprises 2400 academics worldwide who teach and conduct research on the Middle East and North Africa. The association publishes the respected *International Journal of Middle East Studies* and is committed to ensuring respect for the principles of academic freedom and human rights throughout the region.

We wrote to you on 2 May 1994 to express our concern that Mr. Saidi-Sirjani be given all the guarantees of fair criminal procedure afforded by the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. His death in detention, where he was held for eight months without being tried or allowed to contest the charges against him, raises serious questions about Iran's commitment to international human rights conventions to which it is a party.

We note that PEN was assured by Mr. Said Raja'i Khorasani on 7 June 1994 that Mr. Saidi-Sirjani would be receiving a fair and public trial and that concern for his well-being was groundless. The news that he died of "a heart ailment," which his family says he did not have, suggests that the concern was well-grounded.

We continue to find it likely that the actual reason for the detention and death under suspicious circumstances of Mr. Saidi-Sirjani was his record as an independent academic and intellectual who was critical of government policies, including Iran's failure to adhere to its own constitutional norms. We note that the array of charges levelled at Mr. Saidi-Sirjani are implausible and that his "confession" to these resembled many "confessions" that are obtained by coercive mechanisms. The unwillingness of prosecutors to present these implausible charges in a fair and public trial is suggestive of official awareness that they could not be proved in court.

The Middle East Studies Association respectfully requests an immediate, thorough and independent investigation into the circumstances surrounding Mr. Saidi-Sirjani's death. We also urge that the conclusions and methods of the investigation be made public.

Respectfully,



Anne H. Betteridge
Executive Director

cc: Ayatollah Seyed Ali Khamanei
Said Raja'i Khorasani, Iranian Interparliamentary Group
Ayatollah Yazdi, Head of Judiciary
Ambassador Kamal Kharzi, Iranian Ambassador to the United Nations