



**Middle
East
Studies
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September 20, 2005

Ayatollah Ali Khamenei
Supreme Leader of the Islamic Republic of Iran
c/o H.E.Javad Zarif
Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
Permanent Mission of the Islamic Republic of Iran to the United Nations
Fax: 212-867-7086

Your Excellency:

We write to you today, on behalf of the Committee on Academic Freedom of the Middle East Studies Association of North America (MESA), regarding the continued imprisonment of Hossein Ghazian, a sociologist and co-director of the Ayandeh Research Institute in Tehran. Dr. Ghazian has been imprisoned since late October 2002, when he was arrested following publication of opinion polls the institute conducted on subjects that included popular attitudes in Iran towards the United States. Dr. Ghazian's arrest and continued imprisonment stand in clear violation of his internationally guaranteed rights to freedom of expression and freedom to impart and receive information, which are constituent rights of academic freedom. We strongly urge you to take the necessary steps to secure his immediate release and to dismiss of the unjust charges lodged against him.

The Middle East Studies Association of North America (MESA) is comprised of 2600 academics worldwide who teach and conduct research on the Middle East and North Africa, and is the preeminent professional association in the field. The association publishes the *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, and is committed to ensuring respect for the principles of academic freedom and freedom of expression in the region and in connection with the study of the Middle East and North Africa in North America and elsewhere.

Following his arrest, Dr. Ghazian was convicted on charges of waging propaganda against the Islamic Republic of Iran and cooperation with a belligerent state and was sentenced to nine and a half years in prison. Some of the charges were dismissed on appeal but he remained convicted on the charge of cooperation with a belligerent state (article 508 of Iran's Penal Code); his sentence was thus reduced to four and a half years. Two colleagues who were arrested with him, Mohsen Goudarzi and Abbas Abdi, were released in 2004 and 2005, and cleared of all charges, but Dr. Ghazian's efforts to appeal his remaining conviction to the Supreme Court have been blocked by Saeed Mortazavi, the presiding judge in Dr. Ghazian's case and now Tehran's chief prosecutor.

The Ayandeh Research Institute conducted the opinion polls in question for the U.S.-based Gallup Organization and the Zogby Polling Institute. One poll was part of an international survey of values in Muslim societies; the other, conducted a week before the June 2001 presidential election in Tehran, surveyed popular perceptions of Iranian-U.S. relations.

According to a submission Dr. Ghazian made to the Supreme Court, during his period of incarceration the authorities kept him in solitary confinement and subjected him to physical and psychological abuse. He also was denied the right to communicate regularly with his lawyers and family, in violation of Iran's constitution. The legal office in Iran's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, in

response to requests by Dr. Ghazian's lawyers, stated in 2004 that the Islamic Republic does not consider the United States to be a belligerent state. However, Judge Mortazavi has to this point refused to allow this and other documents in the case to be reviewed by the Supreme Court.

Your Excellency, the Judiciary of the Islamic Republic of Iran falls directly under your authority. Dr. Ghazian, who in several weeks will have spent three years in unjust detention, has been convicted and sentenced solely for acts that are protected under Article 19 of the International Covenant for Civil and Political Rights, to which Iran is a state party. We urge you to take steps to secure his immediate and unconditional release and dismissal of the unjust charges on which he was convicted.

We look forward to your positive response to this request, and thank you in advance for your attention to this important matter.

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Amy W. Newhall". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Amy W. Newhall
Executive Director
MESA

cc: Ambassador Zarif, IRI Mission to the UN