

May 8, 2006

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 on behalf of the Committee on Academic Freedom of the Middle East Studies Association of North America (MESA) and the Committee on Academic and Intellectual Freedom of the International Society for Iranian Studies (ISIS) to protest in the strongest possible terms the recent arrest of Dr. Ramin Jahanbegloo, a prominent Iranian intellectual and political theorist. We urge you to use your good offices to determine the circumstances of his detention and to secure his immediate release.

The Middle East Studies Association of North America and the International Society for Iranian Studies are the preeminent international organizations in their respective fields. MESA, founded in 1966, and ISIS, founded in 1967, were established to promote scholarship and teaching on Iran, the Middle East, and North Africa. MESA publishes the *International Journal of Middle East Studies* and has more than 2600 members worldwide; ISIS publishes the international journal of *Iranian Studies* and has more than 500 members worldwide. Both organizations are committed to ensuring academic freedom, the free exchange of ideas, and freedom of expression in all its forms, both within Iran and the Middle East and in connection with the study of Iran and the Middle East in North America and elsewhere.

According to information we have received Dr. Jahanbegloo was arrested at Tehran's Mehrabad airport in late April. Officials from your government have stated that Dr. Jahanbegloo is currently undergoing "interrogations" and that he is suspected of crimes related to "security and spying". Despite these statements, as of this date no official charges have been filed against Dr. Jahanbegloo. Officials have stated that charges against Dr. Jahanbegloo will only be filed after his interrogation. Given these facts we are concerned that officials of your government are in the process of coercing confessions from Dr. Jahanbegloo. We also have reason to believe that he has been allowed only limited access to his family, and as far as we know he has not had any access to legal counsel.

Dr. Jahanbegloo is a highly respected scholar and academic who is currently the head of the department of Contemporary Studies at Tehran's Cultural Research Bureau, an important institution in your country that has gained international recognition for its important scholarly work in the area of Iranian history, culture, and politics. Dr. Jahanbegloo's work as part of the Cultural Research Bureau has contributed to the high regard in which it is held by scholars both inside and outside of Iran. He has also studied and taught at major universities in Europe and North America, including the Sorbonne, Harvard University, and the University of Toronto. In his role as a public intellectual Dr. Jahanbegloo has also consistently advocated for the US and Europe to adopt a less confrontational approach in dealing with Iran. His published work includes over twenty books in Persian, French, and English on topics relating to European and Iranian intellectual history and political philosophy. Dr. Jahanbegloo's writing reflects a thoughtful

consideration of Iran's encounter with modernity and the difficult and complex process by which modern Iranian intellectuals have sought to define universal values such as democracy and human rights in terms that are organic to Iranian tradition. Given the arbitrary and unusual nature of Dr. Jahanbegloo's detention, we are compelled to conclude that his arrest is connected to his scholarly and intellectual pursuits.

We also feel compelled to remind you, Your Excellency, that the rights of individuals to freedom of thought, opinion, and speech are explicitly protected under the Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran (Article 23), as well as the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (Articles 18, 19, 21), to which the Islamic Republic of Iran is also a state party. The arbitrary arrest of Dr. Jahanbegloo does further harm to the reputation of Iran as a country where scholarly research and inquiry are highly valued. Dr. Jahanbegloo's arrest and detention can only be conceived as a direct attack on the principles of academic freedom and critical intellectual inquiry.

Your Excellency, we trust that you will appreciate the seriousness of this matter and will take the appropriate measures. We urge you to secure his immediate release.

Yours Respectfully,

Juan R.I. Cole
President
MESA

Janet Afary
President
ISIS