

August 23, 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,

I am writing on behalf of the Committee on Academic Freedom (CAF) of the Middle East Studies Association of North America (MESA) to express our concern over the recent death of Akbar Mohammadi while in detention at Evin Prison on July 30, 2006, and to inquire regarding the medical condition of his brother Manuchehr Mohammadi who is still being held in detention. Akbar and Manuchehr Mohammadi were both arrested along with other student activists in July of 1999 during demonstrations protesting the closure of a daily newspaper. We consider their participation in these peaceful demonstrations to be a protected form of expression as guaranteed by universal standards of academic freedom of speech and assembly. Since their detention we have closely followed developments in their case and have become increasingly concerned for their well-being and that of others being detained by your government.

The Middle East Studies Association of North America (MESA) was founded in 1966 to promote scholarship and teaching on the Middle East and North Africa. The preeminent organization in the field, the Association publishes the *International Journal of Middle East Studies* and has more than 2600 members worldwide. MESA is committed to ensuring academic freedom and freedom of expression, both within the region and in connection with the study of the region in North America and elsewhere.

Information we have received indicates that since his initial arrest in 1999 Akbar Mohammadi had been subject to torture and ill treatment while in police custody. Mr. Mohammadi had reportedly gone on a hunger strike in June of 2006 to protest his detention. During this period credible reports suggest that he was denied access to legal counsel and medical treatment. We are gravely concerned that the conditions under which he was being held as well as the decision by your government to deny him medical treatment in July of 2006 were the cause of his death.

The fate of Akbar Mohammadi's brother, Manuchehr Mohammadi, is also of concern to us. We have reports that he, too, had been on a hunger strike to protest the circumstances of his detention and had in fact slipped into a coma in July of 2005 before receiving medical treatment. Documented reports regarding his detention indicate that he has previously been tortured and mistreated while in the custody of your government. His current medical condition is unknown to us; however, we have reason to believe that he is currently being denied access to legal counsel and to his family members.

Given the circumstances surrounding the death of his brother we feel it is urgent that you take steps immediately to determine the physical condition of Manuchehr Mohammadi and to grant him access to legal counsel and to his family. We also urge you to immediately begin an independent investigation into the circumstances of Akbar Mohammadi's death while in detention, and that you make the results of this investigation public.

We 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 detention and ill treatment of student activists for protesting the closure of newspapers is in direct violation of these protected rights and the universal value of free and open exchange of ideas. The death of photojournalist Zahra Kazemi in 2003 while in police custody, the arrest and continued detention of Ramin Jahanbegloo since April of this year, and the previous arrest of Akbar Ganji, in addition to the case of Akbar and Manuchehr Mohammadi, can only be conceived as direct attacks on these universal principles.

Your Excellency, we trust that you will appreciate the seriousness of this matter and take the immediate appropriate measures.

Sincerely,

Juan R.I. Cole  
MESA President