



**Middle
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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 write on behalf of the Middle East Studies Association of North America (MESA) and the Committee on Academic Freedom to protest the recent expulsion of Mr. Matin Meshkin from Tehran's Amir Kabir University of Technology. Mr. Meshkin is a doctoral candidate in electrical engineering as well as a prominent student activist and member of the Islamic Student Association. His expulsion appears to be another egregious example among a wave of recent such cases in which your government has taken disciplinary action against students who express political opinions that are critical of your government's policies. I urge you to investigate the circumstances leading to Mr. Meshkin's expulsion and allow him to continue his education.

The Middle East Studies Association of North American (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 2700 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.

Mr. Meshkin is an advanced doctoral candidate who is close to completing the final requirements for his doctorate in electrical engineering. He has completed all of the coursework to receive his degree, has carried out the necessary research, and written his doctoral dissertation. He has also successfully completed the required comprehensive doctoral examinations. He now waits to schedule his thesis defense in order to complete the final requirement of the doctorate. It was at this stage in Mr. Meshkin's education that he was summarily— and without explanation—expelled from Amir Kabir University in December of last year. Prior to his formal expulsion Mr. Meshkin had been notified that the grant he had been awarded to fund his education from the Shahid Chamran University in Ahvaz had been withdrawn. Mr. Meshkin protested the termination of his university grant and offered to pay his own tuition to complete his doctorate degree. It was at this point that he received official word of his expulsion. As of this date neither Mr. Meshkin nor his lawyers have received any formal explanation accounting for his expulsion. His case is now pending at the Administrative Justice Court.

Your Excellency, you are no doubt aware of the student protests at Amir Kabir University that also took place in December of last year, where students confronted President Ahmadinejad during a campus visit. You are also no doubt aware of public comments made by President Ahmadinejad during this campus visit. As video taped reports of the campus visit document, President Ahmadinejad publicly threatened student protestors

with disciplinary action, including expulsion from the university, if they become identified as “starred students”—named because stars or asterisks have been placed next to their names on official intelligence ministry lists in connection to their political activism. Given that Mr. Meshkin was a prominent member of the student movement at Amir Kabir University we have no alternative but to conclude that his expulsion from the university is connected to his political activism.

The Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran explicitly protects the rights of individuals to freedom of thought, opinion, and speech (Articles 23). The constitution also explicitly prohibits the exercise of punitive measures against individuals for the exercise of these guaranteed rights (Article 2 and Article 3). Further, your government’s actions are in violation of 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 expulsion of Mr. Meshkin does further damage to the reputation of the Islamic Republic of Iran as a country where students, academics, and intellectuals can engage in critical debate free from government intrusion. In fact, Mr. Meshkin’s case is just one example of a disturbing trend in your country’s university system. As we have detailed in previous letters to your office (see letter of September 13, 2006), during the past year students and professors from numerous Iranian universities have been disciplined, fired, forcibly retired, expelled, and otherwise harassed on grounds that are clearly related to their political opinions and associations. This trend has also been documented by numerous international non-governmental organizations, including Human Rights Watch in its report of October 2006 titled Denying the Right to Education <http://www.hrw.org/backgrounder/mena/iran1006>).

Your Excellency, we trust that you will appreciate the seriousness of this matter and will take the appropriate measures to reverse Mr. Meshkin’s dismissal. We also ask that you initiate measures that will preserve the principles of academic freedom at Iranian universities. We look forward to your positive response.

Sincerely yours,



Zachary Lockman
MESA President

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