



**Middle
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May 11, 2007

President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad
Pasteur Ave
Tehran 13168-43311
Iran

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 dismay over the harassment and subsequent detention of Dr. Haleh Esfandiari, director of the Middle East program at the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars. Dr. Esfandiari was in Iran to visit her aging mother in December but was prevented from leaving the country and subsequently threatened, pressured, and repeatedly questioned by security authorities. Most recently, on May 8, 2007, she was arrested without charges and taken to Evin Prison.

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 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.

The confiscation of Dr. Esfandiari's travel documents and her subsequent harassment contravenes Iranian laws and Iran's international commitments which guarantee the right of entry and exit to Iranians and other nationals. Further, her detention violates the constitution of Iran, which explicitly protects the rights of individuals to freedom of thought, opinion, and speech (Article 23). The constitution also explicitly prohibits the exercise of punitive measures against individuals for the exercise of these guaranteed rights (Articles 2, 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.

Harassment and detention of scholars is always cause for grave concern, but in this case it should be noted that the scholar in question is widely respected both for her knowledge and ability to provide clear and dispassionate analysis. Her treatment sends a chilling message to scholars throughout the world.

We feel it is urgent that you take steps immediately to explain the reasons for her sudden detention, grant her access to legal counsel and family members, and allow her to return to her family in the United States as quickly as possible.

Respectfully,

Zachary Lockman
President

cc: H.E. Dr. Mohammad Javad Zarif, Ambassador of Iran to the United Nations
Embassy of Pakistan, Interests Section of the Islamic Republic of Iran
Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars