

May 22, 2007

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
Fax: +98 251 7774 2228
Email: info@leader.ir, istiftaa@wilayah.org

Your Excellency,

I write on behalf of the Committee on Academic Freedom (CAF) of the Middle East Studies Association of North America (MESA) to protest the continuing campaign of harassment, expulsion, and arrest of students at Amir Kabir University of Technology in Tehran. Most recently six student journalists were arrested in early May in connection with articles published in student publications in late April. The six students—Ahmad Qasabian, Moqdad Khalilpour, Pooya Mahmoudian, Majid Tavakkoli, Babak Zamanian, and Majid Sheikhpour—are believed held in Evin Prison. As of this date none of the students has been formally charged with any crime. I urge you to investigate the circumstances of their arrest and to release them if they are not charged with a recognizable criminal offense.

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.

Reports from Iran indicate that the student editors were summoned to a Revolutionary Court on May 3rd, 7th, and 8th following the publication in student magazines of articles deemed by university officials to "insult Islamic sanctities." The offending articles include one in which the doctrine of religious infallibility is questioned and another in which the recent crackdown on modern female clothing is challenged. The issues raised in these articles clearly fall within the parameters of debate common to universities and are therefore clearly protected by universal standards of academic freedom. Press accounts have also reported that following the publication of the offending articles members of the Basij militia entered the campus and physically attacked students associated with the campus publications. In several documented cases students associated with the campus publications were hospitalized with critical injuries.

As you are no doubt aware, Your Excellency, the Basij militia is organized under the authority of the Revolutionary Guard, which in turn is under your direct command. Your government's encouragement of the Basij militia to enter the campus and confront the student journalists is tantamount to an incitement of violence against those holding views you deem unacceptable. This contravenes one of the most basic principles of academic freedom, the maintenance of university campuses as sites

promoting the open exchange of ideas free from harassment and violence.

The Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran 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 and 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.

His Excellency Ayatollah Ali Khamenei
Page 2

Your Excellency, the violence perpetrated against students associated with the campus publications at Amir Kabir University and the subsequent arrest of student editors 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, this 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 February 13, 2007, and 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>).

We trust that you will appreciate the seriousness of this matter and will take the appropriate measures to release the six student journalists. 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.

Yours Respectfully,

Zachary Lockman
MESA President

cc: Head of the Judiciary
Ayatollah Mahmoud Hashemi Shahroudi
Ministry of Justice, Ministry of Justice Building, Panzdah-Khordad Square
Tehran, Islamic Republic of Iran
Fax: +98 21 3390 4986
Email: info@dadgostary-tehran.ir

President
His Excellency Mahmoud Ahmadinejad

The Presidency, Palestine Avenue, Azerbaijan Intersection
Tehran, Islamic Republic of Iran
Email: dr-ahmadinejad@president.ir

Speaker of Parliament
His Excellency Gholamali Haddad Adel
Majles-e Shoura-ye Eslami, Baharestan Square
Tehran, Islamic Republic of Iran
Fax: + 98 21 3355 6408
Email: hadadadel@majlis.ir