

**Middle  
East  
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Association**  
of North America, Inc.

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**MESA '08**  
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Washington, DC

January 7, 2008

Ayatollah Ali Khamenei  
Supreme Leader of the Islamic Republic of Iran  
c/o H.E. Mr. Mohammad Khazaei  
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Your Excellency,

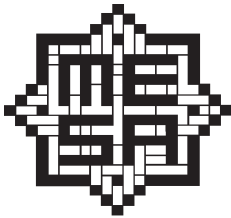
I write on behalf of the Middle East Studies Association of North America (MESA) and its Committee on Academic Freedom (CAF) to protest in the strongest possible terms the recent wave of arrests of students at universities across Iran following demonstrations held on December 7, 2007 demanding greater academic freedom at Iranian universities. The names of some of the known detained students are listed below. All are members of the student group Office for Strengthening Unity (*Daftar-e Tahkim-e Vahdat*) and Students for Freedom and Equality (*Daneshjuyan-e Azadi-Khah va Beraber Talab*). As of this date none of the students have 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 offence.

- Rosa Essaie (f), member of Iran's Armenian community, student at Amir Kabir University
- Mehdi Geraylou (m), student at Tehran University
- Anousheh Azadfar (f), student at Tehran University
- Ilnaz Jamshidi (f), student at Free University of Central Tehran
- Rouzbeh Safshekan (m), student at Tehran University
- Nasim Soltan-Beigi (m), Allameh Tabatabai University
- Yaser Pir Hayati (m), student at Shaheed University
- Younes Mir Hosseini (m), student at Shiraz University
- Milad Moini (m), student at Mazandaran University

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 recent arrests came in the context of a campaign during the past six weeks by Iranian authorities to place further limits on the freedom of expression on university campuses in Iran. These limits include a new wave of suspensions and expulsions of politically active students, the replacement or forced retirement of reformist professors, and the further banning of a number of student publications deemed politically critical of your government's policies. Following these measures to further curtail academic freedom, students from universities throughout Iran held simultaneous mass demonstrations and sit-ins on Iran's University Student's Day (December 7<sup>th</sup>, 2007). Those non-violent demonstrations in turn led to more arrests of students. The total number of arrested students is unknown, but reports by authorities in Iran, as well as news reports by the international press, put the number of recently arrested students at several dozen.

Your Excellency, in the last two years our Committee has observed with great concern the increasing



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restrictions placed on freedom of expression and academic freedom at Iranian universities. During the past two years our Committee has in fact written to you on seven separate occasions to protest violations of universally accepted standards of academic freedoms by your government. This latest case of harassment, arrest, and detention of university students for the peaceful expression of their guaranteed rights seems to be yet another troubling episode that does further damage to Iran's long cherished reputation as a society that values intellectual inquiry and freedom of expression.

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 (Article 2 and 3). Further, your government's actions are in violation of the International Covenant of Civil and Political Rights (Article 18, 19, 21), to which the Islamic Republic of Iran is also a state party.

We urge you, Your Excellency, to release all of the students detained in recent weeks. If charges are to be filed against any detained students, we urge that they be internationally recognizable criminal charges and that any trial be conducted openly and according to internationally recognized standards. We also urge you, Your Excellency, to immediately grant the students listed above unfettered access to their relatives and to legal representation, and to guarantee the well-being of all the recently detained students.

Your Excellency, we trust that you will appreciate the seriousness of this matter and will take the appropriate measures to release the detained students. We also ask that you initiate measures that will reverse the restrictions placed on academic freedom at Iranian universities. We look forward to your positive, written response.

Yours Respectfully,

Mervat F. Hatem  
MESA President

cc:

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