



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

1219 N Santa Rita Ave  
The University of Arizona  
Tucson AZ 85721 USA

520 621-5850  
520 626-9095 fax  
caf@mesana.org  
www.mesana.org



March 30, 2015

Ayatollah Ali Khamenei  
Supreme Leader of the Islamic Republic of Iran  
c/o H.E. Mr. Gholamali Khoshroo  
Permanent Representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran to the United Nations  
622 Third Avenue, 34th Floor  
New York, NY 10017, USA  
Email: iran@un.int  
Fax: +1 (212) 867-7086

Your Excellency,

I write on behalf of the Committee on Academic Freedom of the Middle East Studies Association (MESA) to express our grave concern regarding reports that Mr. Hamid Babaei, a doctoral student of finance at the University of Liège in Belgium serving a six-year prison sentence, is suffering ill health without access to proper medical attention and health care. We first wrote to you regarding Mr. Babaei's case in May 2014, and we again urge the authorities in Iran to grant him a fair and impartial appeal hearing, to overturn convictions related to his academic activities, resulting in his release, and to ensure that he receives necessary medical care and attention.

MESA was founded in 1966 to promote scholarship and teaching on the Middle East and North Africa. The preeminent organization in the field, MESA publishes the International Journal of Middle East Studies and has nearly 3,000 members worldwide. MESA is committed to ensuring academic freedom of expression, both within the region and in connection with the study of the region in North America and elsewhere.

As related in our letter dated 12th May 2014, the Committee on Academic Freedom protests the fact that Mr. Babaei was arrested in August 2013 after attempting to return to Belgium following a summer visit in Iran. Reports indicate that after four months in detention, including three weeks of solitary confinement, Mr. Babaei was sentenced on December 21, 2013 to six years in prison for allegedly acting against national security by communicating with a hostile government. It is reported that the sole evidence for this charge is the scholarship funding which Mr. Babaei has received from the University of Liège, where he is completing a doctoral degree in finance. According to our sources, Mr. Babaei, who also holds a master's degree in industrial engineering from Iran University of Science and Technology in Tehran, has been pressured to make a false confession under duress, but has repeatedly denied the charges against him. Most recently, disconcerting reports have surfaced suggesting that Mr. Babaei has been in poor health as a result of his unjust imprisonment, ill treatment, and restriction of access to professional medical care.

March 30, 2015

Page 2

We consider Mr. Babaei to be a scholar at risk and remind you again that his arrest, detention, and conviction are violations of Iran's obligations under constitutional and international laws. The rights of individuals to "freedom of belief" is guaranteed by the Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran (Article 23), while freedom of thought, opinion, and speech are explicitly protected under the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (Articles 18 and 19), to which the Islamic Republic of Iran is a signatory. We call on Iran to ensure that the principles of academic freedom, in accordance with national and international laws, are upheld with regard to Mr. Babaei and all scholars. What is more, with regard to Mr. Babaei's deteriorating health and well-being, the Constitution of the Islamic Republic (Article 29) deems access to "health services, and medical care and treatment" to be a "universal right" which "the government must provide for every individual citizen."

As noted in our prior letter to you in this case, Mr. Babaei's prolonged detention and conviction on the basis of his studies at the University of Liège represents another instance of infringement upon academic freedom and the pursuit of knowledge and free expression of views without fear of reprisal in the Islamic Republic. We strongly urge for a just resolution of Mr. Babaei's case and hope for the fostering of a more open and free atmosphere for scholars in Iran, allowing for unfettered opportunities to express and exchange their views internationally on the world stage. The MESA Committee on Academic Freedom denounces these continuing violations of internationally accepted rights to academic freedom in Iran and calls on the Islamic Republic to reconsider its conviction of Hamid Babaei on the grounds of his academic activities and to ensure that he be allowed to receive proper medical care and health services until his release.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Nathan J. Brown', is written over a white background.

Nathan J. Brown

President, Middle East Studies Association and Professor of Political Science and International Affairs, George Washington University

cc:

Ayatollah Sadeq Larijani, Head of the Judiciary

The Honorable Zeid Ra'ad Al Hussein, United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights