



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

3542 N Geronimo Ave
Tucson AZ 85705 USA

tel 520-333-2577
fax 520-207-3166
caf@mesana.org
www.mesana.org



February 28, 2018

Ayatollah Ali Khamenei
Supreme Leader of the Islamic Republic of Iran
The Office of the Supreme Leader
Jomhuri Street
Tehran
Islamic Republic of Iran
Fax: +98 21 644 11

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,

We write on behalf of the Middle East Studies Association of North America (MESA) and its Committee on Academic Freedom to express our consternation at the very disturbing news of the death in detention of renowned Iranian scholar and environmentalist Professor Kavous Seyed Emami. While the Judiciary of the Islamic Republic has announced that Seyed Emami committed suicide in his cell, his family, friends, and colleagues find that claim to be highly dubious. We call upon the Iranian authorities to undertake a complete and thorough investigation of the circumstances of his untimely death; the investigation should be carried out by an independent body under the direct supervision of Professor Seyed Emami's family or of their chosen representatives.

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 nearly 2500 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.

An Iranian-Canadian dual national, Seyed Emami was a highly respected conservationist and professor of sociology at Imam Sadegh University, as well as one of the founders of the Persian Wildlife Heritage Foundation. According to our information, he and six of his associates – also environmentalists – were arrested by the intelligence services on 24 January 2018 on the suspicion that they had been spying for foreign entities. After two weeks in custody, Professor Seyed Emami was found dead in his cell on 9 February. We understand that his family – although disbelieving the Judiciary's claim of death by suicide – was pressured to bury him quickly and forgo an independent autopsy. His six colleagues remain in prison.

Furthermore, we are deeply disturbed by what appears to be an intensification of arrests of Iranian academics engaged in the peaceful pursuit of their scholarship and related activities, and the seemingly baseless accusation that their work amounts to espionage or illicit activity that could negatively impact the security of the state. We are also very troubled about the mistreatment of detainees, and we remind the

Iranian authorities that both the judiciary and the prison system are, in fact, responsible for the protection of all detainees – irrespective of their alleged “crimes” -- while in custody.

We strongly object to the continued violations by the Iranian authorities of internationally recognized rights and due process as described in relevant provisions of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, to which Iran is a signatory. With regard to the shocking death in detention of Kavous Seyed Emami, we echo the statement made by prominent Iranian academics in their open letter of protest, dated 11 February 2018, to President Hassan Rouhani: “Our minimum expectation is that you take immediate and effective action to seriously investigate the case ... and make the institutions involved in this painful loss accountable.”

We look forward to your positive response.

Sincerely,



Judith E. Tucker
MESA President
Professor, Georgetown University



Amy W. Newhall
MESA Executive Director

cc

Ayatollah Sadeqh Larijani, Head of the Judiciary
President Hassan Rouhani
Mohammad Javad Zarif, Minister of Foreign Affairs
Justin Trudeau, Prime Minister of Canada
Chrystia Freeland, Minister of Foreign Affairs, Government of Canada
Zeid Ra'ad Al Hussein, United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights
Koumbou Boly Barry, United Nations Special Rapporteur on the Right to Education
David Kaye, United Nations Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of the right to freedom of opinion and expression