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Committee on
Academic Freedom

August 2, 2018

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Your Excellencies,

We write on behalf of the Committee on Academic Freedom of the Middle East Studies Association (MESA) of North America to condemn the crackdown and harsh prison sentences against students who participated in peaceful country-wide protests on and off campus in December 2017 that left at least 25 people dead and more than 5,000 arrested.

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 2,500 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.

Over the past months, various Iranian courts have handed down harsh prison sentences against students for taking part in the December 2017 protests against poverty, unemployment, and corruption of government officials. As of mid-July 2018, authorities have arrested at least 150 students, and courts have sentenced 17 to prison terms of up to eight years. In addition, some students have been banned from membership in political parties or participating in media, including social media, for two years.

Among those sentenced are:

- Leila Hassandzadeh and Sina Rabiee, student activists from the University of Tehran; they have been sentenced to six years and one year in prison respectively on charges of “conspiracy and collusion to act against national security” and “propaganda against the state.” In addition, a two-year travel ban has been imposed on them for the time after their release from prison.
- Mohsen Haghshenas, a student of set design at the University of Tehran; he has been sentenced to two years in prison on charges of “conspiracy and collusion to act against national security” and “disruption of public order by participating in illegal assemblies.”
- Sina Darvish Omran, a student of German language, and Ali Mozaffari, an anthropology student, both at the University of Tehran; they have been sentenced to eight years in prison and two-year travel bans. The court also banned them from membership in political parties and participation in media events, including use of social media, for two years for the time after their release from prison.
- Roya Saghiri, a student at the University of Tabriz; she has received a 23-month prison sentence “for propaganda against the state and insulting its pillars.”
- Ali Kamrani and Ali Ghadiri, students from the University of Tabriz; they were each sentenced to six months in prison.
- In an earlier case, Fereshteh Tousi, a student at Allameh Tabataba’i University was sentenced to 18 months in prison on 3 July 2018 on charges of “propaganda against the state” for organizing a ceremony commemorating the national student day at her university in December 2016. Her sentence also includes a two-year ban for the time after her release from prison on leaving the country, use of social media, and membership in political parties and associations.

Dozens of student associations and hundreds of university research and teaching staff have protested these sentences and called upon President Hassan Rouhani to intervene to protect student rights. We do so as well.

We further note that the majority of arrests have been undertaken by the Ministry of Intelligence, which is under the direct control of the Supreme Leader, and the majority of indictments have been handed down by the revolutionary courts, which are under the direct control of the Head of Judiciary.

Both institutions, the Ministry of Intelligence and the revolutionary courts, are overstepping their competencies, as arrests ought to be made by the police only, and criminal prosecutions ought to be undertaken by the general courts, not the revolutionary courts.

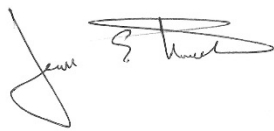
We therefore call upon Supreme Leader Khamenei and the Head of Judiciary Sadegh Larijani to ensure all criminal procedures abide by Iranian law.

In that light, we wish to remind you that according to Article 32 of the Iranian Constitution, “No one can be arrested except in accordance with the rule and the procedures that are set by the law.” Further, we note that charges of “anti-state activity” and “propaganda against the state” have been brought against academics based on what appear to be unjustified and fabricated accusations. They violate both Iran’s and international standards of due process.

The Committee on Academic Freedom strongly objects to the worrying trend in Iran in which those cleared by the police and the regular courts are subsequently re-arrested by the Ministry of Intelligence and tried in the revolutionary courts. Such practices are direct violations of the Iranian constitution, of Iran’s laws of criminal procedure, and of nationally recognized rights. We urge you to uphold the relevant provisions of the Iranian constitution and abide by Iran’s commitments to international covenants to protect Iranians’ academic freedom as well as due process. We request that the government seek the reversal of the sentences through whatever judicial processes are available.

We look forward to your response.

Sincerely,



Judith E. Tucker
MESA President
Professor, Georgetown University



Amy W. Newhall
MESA Executive Director

cc

Mansoor Gholami’, Minister of Science, Research and Technology
Mohammad Bathaei, Minister of Education
The Honorable Zeid Ra’ad Al Hussein, United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights
The Honorable Javid Rehman, U.N. Special Rapporteur on the Situation of Human Rights in Iran