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September 5, 2018

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
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Your Excellency,

We write on behalf of the Committee on Academic Freedom of the Middle East Studies Association (MESA) to express our grave concern regarding the treatment of Ph.D. student Xiyue Wang of Princeton University's Department of History. Mr. Wang has been imprisoned since August 2016 and is serving a ten-year jail sentence. Although he had secured the necessary research permit and valid visa to conduct archival research in Iran, he has seen his academic freedom violated for the past two years as he has been groundlessly convicted of "cooperating with foreign states against the Islamic Republic of Iran," and collecting "highly confidential articles" for his doctoral dissertation. We urgently call on the Iranian authorities to overturn this ruling, and to release Mr. Wang.

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.

Xiyue Wang, a citizen of the United States, visited Iran between 25 January and 10 March 2016 in order to take Persian-language classes at the reputable Dehkhoda Institute and International Center for Persian Studies in Tehran. He returned to Iran on 1 May 2016 to continue his language studies and conduct dissertation research on the diplomatic history of the Qajar Dynasty (1789-1924) and its relations with Iran's northern neighbors. Before traveling to Iran, Mr. Wang had received the necessary visa as well as a research permit to conduct archival research at the National Archives in Tehran from the Iranian Interest Section at the Pakistani embassy in Washington, D.C.

On 21 July 2016, Mr. Wang was summoned for questioning by Iranian authorities, in the course of which his passport was confiscated. On 7 August 2016, he was detained and taken to Evin Prison, where he has remained ever since. He was first kept in solitary confinement and later transferred to different wards in prison. Since being imprisoned, Mr. Wang's health has significantly deteriorated. He has developed arthritis in his knees, suffered rashes all over his body, and fallen victim to depression. He is in declining health and under immense mental distress, which is a major source of concern for his family.

In February 2017, Mr. Wang was informed by Judge Salavati of the Revolutionary Court, Tehran branch, that he was being accused under Article 508 of Iran's penal code for having "cooperated with foreign states against the Islamic Republic of Iran." In April 2017, he was convicted of two counts of espionage based merely on his relationship with academic institutions in the United States, and in August 2017 the Iranian judiciary rejected his appeal. However, any charge of espionage against Mr. Wang is baseless as he

has no relations with the United States government or any other governments, and there is no evidence that Mr. Wang was present in Iran for any reason other than to pursue his dissertation research.

Mr. Wang's unlawful arrest, his prolonged detention in spite of having a valid visa and research permit, and his sentencing to a ten-year jail term all represent a miscarriage of justice and an assault on academic freedom. These actions go against the right of individuals to freedom of thought, opinion, and speech, which is explicitly protected under the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (Articles 18, 19, 21), to which the Islamic Republic of Iran is a signatory. Given that Mr. Wang's research topic is purely historical and has no relationship to the current Iranian regime, nor any bearing on how the Islamic Republic will be internationally perceived, and given the fact that before going to Iran he had acquired all the necessary permits to undertake his research, the accusations against him lack any merit or legal foundation.

Mr. Wang has a five-year old son and a wife who have not seen him for more than two years. We echo the recent Opinion of the Working Group on Arbitrary Detention of the United Nations Human Rights Council issued on 23 August 2018, urging you to release Xiyue Wang immediately from detention, and to ensure that he is urgently transferred to a hospital. Mr. Wang's rapidly deteriorating physical and mental health, compounded by the long separation from his wife and young son, provides ample basis for humanitarian consideration for the time that he has served in Evin Prison. He should be reunited with his young family and allowed to continue his important academic work.

We look forward to your response.

Sincerely,



Judith E. Tucker
MESA President
Professor, Georgetown University



Amy W. Newhall
MESA Executive Director

cc:

The Honorable Dr. Hassan Rouhani, President
Mohammad Javad Zarif, Minister of Foreign Affairs
Mahmoud Alavi, Minister of Intelligence
Mohammad Bathaei, Minister of Education
Mansoor Gholami', Minister of Science, Research and Technology
Ayatollah Sadeqh Larijani, Head of the Judiciary
The Honorable Gholamali Khoshroo, The Ambassador of Iran to the United Nations