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Committee on
Academic Freedom

December 13, 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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Ayatollah Sadegh Larijani, Head of the Judiciary
c/o H.E. Mr. Gholamali Khoshroo
Permanent Representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran to the United Nations
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Your Excellencies,

We write on behalf of the Committee on Academic Freedom of the Middle East Studies Association (MESA) to protest the continued detention of visiting academics on the basis of what appear to be fabricated charges of violations of national security.

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.

As of December 2018, several academics visiting Iran have been accused of crimes against national security and remain under arrest. These accusations appear to be based on innuendo, fabricated evidence or even forced confessions. We write in particular regarding the cases of Meimanat Hosseini-Chavoshi, Abbas Edalat, Ahmadreza Djalali, and Wang Xiyue.

Among those held in detention without charge is Dr. Meimanat Hosseini-Chavoshi, an Iranian-Australian demographer who teaches at the University of Melbourne, and has published extensively on Iran's fertility policy. Her 2009 book, in which she analyzes Iran's extraordinarily successful family planning program, which began in the early 1990s, received the Book of the Year Award from the Islamic Republic in 2010. Dr. Hosseini-Chavoshi has conducted extensive research visits to Iran in the past and has collaborated with several of Iran's leading academic institutions and think tanks, including Iran's Parliament Research Center (IPRC) and the Iranian president's Center for Strategic Studies (CSS).

Dr. Hosseini-Chavoshi is currently waiting to be charged. She has yet to choose a lawyer from the twenty lawyers the judiciary has presented to her. We take this opportunity to protest the recently issued judicial regulations which require those accused of crimes against national security to choose a lawyer from a list of twenty selected by Your

Excellency, Ayatollah Larijani. These regulations violate international standards of due process.

We also write to protest the continued detention of Dr. Abbas Edalat, a professor of computer science and mathematics at the Imperial College London, who was arrested on 15 April 2018 while participating in an academic conference in Tehran. Dr. Edalat has been accused of espionage but not officially charged. We urge you, Your Excellency, Ayatollah Larijani, to ensure Dr. Edalat will no longer be held in detention without charge and that no charge will be issued without compelling evidence. Pending such evidence, we call upon you to see to his immediate and unconditional release.

We further write to protest the sentencing of Dr. Ahmadreza Djalali on the basis of alleged violations of national security. Dr. Djalali was arrested in April 2016 and sentenced to death in October 2017 for espionage. The sentence, which was upheld by the Supreme Court in February 2018, is based on a forced confession which Dr. Djalali later retracted. We note that forced confessions are not admissible as evidence in Iranian courts and his sentence is therefore invalid and should be dismissed.

Since his arrest, Dr. Djalali has been held intermittently in solitary confinement, denied access to a lawyer of his choosing, and subjected to psychological torture. Compounding these due process and mistreatment concerns are reports that Dr. Djalali is suffering from increasing health complications, including weight loss and a possible tumor. In November 2017, after authorities repeatedly denied him access to proper medical care, he was transferred to a hospital for abdominal surgery.

A permanent resident of Sweden, Dr. Djalali has during his time in detention been naturalized as a Swedish citizen, and his wife and two small children continue to reside in Sweden. We call upon Your Excellency, Ayatollah Larijani, to follow due process and dismiss Dr. Djalali's death sentence, release him, ensure his immediate access to the medical care he requires, and facilitate his safe return to Sweden.

Finally, we write to protest the continued imprisonment of Wang Xiyue, a Ph.D. student in Princeton University's Department of History, who is serving a ten-year jail sentence. He was convicted of two counts of espionage based on his relationship with academic institutions in the United States. Any charge of espionage against Mr. Wang is baseless, however, 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.

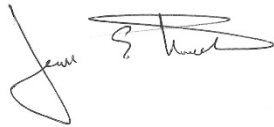
We wish to remind you that the arrest of individuals without charge is a violation of Iran's national laws as well as its obligations under international law. According to Article 32 of the Iranian Constitution, "No one can be arrested except in accordance with the rule and the procedures that are set by the law. In the case of arrest, the charge and the reason for the arrest must be immediately conveyed and communicated to the defendant in writing." Further, the fact that Dr. Hosseini-Chavoshi, Dr. Djalili, Dr. Edalat and Mr. Wang were not formally charged within days of their arrest is a violation of Iran's obligation under Article 9.2 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), which stipulates that "anyone who is arrested shall be informed, at the time of arrest, of the reason for his arrest and shall be promptly informed of any charges against him." The Committee on Academic Freedom strongly objects to the worrying trend whereby academic visitors to Iran, from both Iranian and non-Iranian backgrounds, are targeted for harassment and arrest, and groundlessly accused of espionage or crimes against national security. Such continued abuses of academic freedom and freedom of expression

by the Iranian authorities are direct violations of internationally and nationally recognized rights. We urge you to ensure that the judiciary, especially the Revolutionary Courts, functions in a manner consistent with Iran's national and international legal obligations.

The unlawful arrest of Meimanat Hosseini-Chavoshi, Abbas Edalat, Ahmadreza Djalali, and Wang Xiyue, and their prolonged detention without trial, as well as the sentencing of Dr. Djalali and Mr. Wang, all represent a miscarriage of justice and an assault on academic freedom. Iran's obligations as a state party to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) include guaranteeing fair trials and protecting the rights to freedom of belief and association. As an international community of scholars, we believe it is imperative that the fundamental rights of our colleagues be respected. We urge you to release Meimanat Hosseini-Chavoshi, Abbas Edalat, Ahmadreza Djalali, and Wang Xiyue immediately from imprisonment, and to ensure their safe return to their countries of residence and to their families.

We thank you for your attention to this most serious matter, and we look forward to receiving 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
The Honorable Gholamali Khoshroo, The Ambassador of Iran to the United Nations
The Honorable Michelle Bachelet, The United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights