

**Middle  
East  
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28 October 2019

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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Ebrahim Raisi, Head of the Judiciary  
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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 detention of world-renowned French sociologist, Roland Marchal in June 2019 upon a personal visit to Iran. More than four months since his arrest, the Iranian authorities have yet to charge Professor Marchal with any wrong-doing, further confirming the suggestion of his colleagues that he is merely an “academic prisoner” arrested to be used as a bargaining chip between Tehran and Paris during this period of heightened political tensions. We echo the objections of our colleagues at French academic institutions who recently publicized Dr. Marchal’s arrest that such treatment of academics is unacceptable.

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 more than 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.

Dr. Marchal is a sociologist with the French National Center for Scientific Research (CNRS); since 1997 he has been working as a researcher at Sciences-Po Paris’ Center for International Studies (CERI). A scholar of Africa, Dr. Marchal focuses on the economies of conflicts, post-conflict reconstruction, and development in sub-Saharan Africa, particularly Somalia, Chad, Central African Republic, and Mali. Through his post-colonial lens, Dr. Marchal’s research has effectively called into question existing orthodoxies on development and post-conflict reconstruction in Sub-Saharan Africa, by instead emphasizing the importance of investing in legitimate forms of local authority. His extensive publications in the sociology of Africa are characterized by his critical eye towards, among other things, Western interventionism in Africa, from Somalia and Mali to Chad and Sudan, with a nuanced understanding of local structures and norms. His research has never extended to Iran.

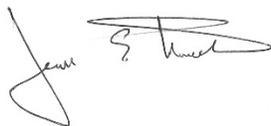
Dr. Marchal had traveled to Iran in June 2019 to visit his friend and colleague, Dr. Fariba Adelkhah, an Iranian-French anthropologist of Iran and Afghanistan who, like him, is also a researcher at CERI-Sciences Po in Paris. We wrote to you on 22 July 2019 to protest her arrest, in June as well, and in connection with which no formal charges have yet been filed. These scholars are renowned researchers in their fields in part because of their rejection of essentialist and stereotypical understandings of the Middle East and Africa. Keeping these scholars unjustly behind bars and away from their research projects and academic community is a gross violation of their basic right to academic freedom. It also represents a major obstacle to the pursuit of objective and data-driven knowledge of regions that are not generally well understood in Western academia.

Iran's disrespect for the fundamental right of academic freedom—in direct violation of its own national and international legal obligations—has increased alarmingly in recent years, further discouraging valuable research on Iran and possibilities for academic exchange with other countries. The arrests in recent years of academics—both dual nationals like Dr. Adelkhah and others who do not hold Iranian citizenship, such as Dr. Marchal or Xiyue Wang, a graduate student of history at Princeton University—mostly by Iran's Revolutionary Guards seem to be politically motivated, geared towards using these innocent scholars as pawns in pressuring Western powers, such as France or the United States, to change their policies toward Iran. MESA's Committee on Academic Freedom strongly objects to this disturbing trend, and urges you to require Iran's security forces and the judiciary to abide by Iran's obligations under national and international law.

With respect to Drs. Adelkhah and Marchal, we feel compelled to remind you that the arrest and detention 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." Indeed, their arrest and detention represent a miscarriage of justice; we urge you to release both scholars immediately and ensure their safe return to France.

Thank you for your attention to this very serious matter. We look forward to your response.

Sincerely,



Judith E. Tucker  
MESA President  
Professor, Georgetown University



Laurie Brand  
Chair, Committee on Academic Freedom  
Professor, University of Southern California

cc:



Re: Detention of French sociologist Roland Marchal

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His Excellency Dr. Hassan Rouhani, President

The Honorable Mahmoud Alavi, Minister of Intelligence

The Honorable Mohammad Javad Zarif, Minister of Foreign Affairs

The Honorable Gholamali Khoshroo, The Ambassador of Iran to the United Nations

The Honorable Michelle Bachelet, The United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights

The Honorable Philippe Thiebaud, Ambassador of the Republic of France to the Islamic Republic of Iran

Fonds d'Analyse des Sociétés Politiques, Association de Recherche