



**Middle
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3 February 2020

Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, Supreme Leader of the Islamic Republic of Iran
c/o H.E. Mr. Takht-Ravanchi
Permanent Representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran to the United Nations
Email: iran@un.int
Fax: +1 (212) 867-7086

Chief Justice Ebrahim Raisi, Head of the Judiciary
c/o H.E. Mr. Takht-Ravanchi
Permanent Representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran to the United Nations
Email: iran@un.int
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Major General Hossein Salami, Commander-in-chief of the Islamic Revolutionary
c/o H.E. Mr. Takht-Ravanchi
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 express our grave concern over the detention of Iranian-French researcher Dr. Fariba Adelhah and her French colleague Dr. Roland Marchal since 5 June 2019 in Iran's notorious Evin prison. We particularly fear for the health and well-being of these academics. Since 24 December 2019, Dr. Adelhah has been on a hunger-strike to protest their unjust detention. Given her serious concerns over Dr. Marchal's health, Dr. Adelhah has stated that she would be prepared to suspend her hunger strike if her colleague were to be released. It is now more than one month since this renowned scholar has been on a hunger strike, while both academics continue to be denied consular visits and visits with one another. We vehemently protest such cruel treatment of the detainees by the Iranian authorities and ask for their immediate release.

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 2,700 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.

We wrote to you on 22 July 2019 and again on 28 October 2019 to protest the arrest and detention of Drs. Adelhah and Marchal, respectively. Both of these scholars are researchers at CERI-Sciences Po in Paris. While Dr. Adelhah is a leading anthropologist studying Iran and Afghanistan, Dr. Marchal is a sociologist who has devoted his decades-long career to researching post-conflict reconstruction in Sub-Saharan Africa. These scholars are renowned researchers in their fields in part because of their important contributions to moving scholarship beyond an

essentialist and stereotypical understanding of the Middle East and Africa. Marchal, whose research has never extended to Iran, was arrested in June 2019 while visiting Adelkhah.

Since the arrest of these two scholars in June 2019, in violation of Article 32 of the Constitution, the Iranian judicial authorities have failed to provide any reasons for the charges against them of collusion against national security and propaganda against the Islamic Republic, while they have dropped charges of espionage. Furthermore, since December 2019, Dr. Marchal, who holds French citizenship exclusively, has been deprived of consular visits that would have allowed his detention conditions and his health to be monitored. To protest such harsh and unjust treatment, on 23 December 2019 Fariba Adelkhah co-signed a letter with another detained academic, the Australian Dr. Kylie Moore-Gilbert, announcing that they would both go on a hunger strike beginning 24 December to obtain recognition of their innocence and respect for academic freedom in the Islamic Republic. While she was on hunger strike, in mid-January 2020, Dr. Adelkhah declared a *bast* – a term for an ethical protest in a place of asylum – in the prison’s communal area and refused to return to her cell. Dr. Adelkhah has demanded to meet with Dr. Marchal, who is detained in the Revolutionary Guard section of the prison, to comfort him and check on his health given his isolation under the current conditions of his detention.

Your excellencies, we urge you to recognize Dr. Adelkhah’s protests against the unjust and unlawful treatment to which she and other imprisoned academics in Iran have been subject. Indeed, the arrest and detention of individuals without charge is a violation of Iran’s national laws as well as its obligations under international law. With the growing tensions between Iran and some Western powers, it seems that many of the recent arrests of academics by Iran’s Revolutionary Guards may be politically motivated, geared towards using these innocent scholars as pawns in pressuring Western powers, such as France, to change their policies toward Iran. MESA’s Committee on Academic Freedom strongly objects to this disturbing trend, and urges you to insist that Iran’s security forces and its judiciary abide by their obligations under national and international law. In addition, the fragile health condition of most of these detainees, including Drs. Adelkhah and Marchal, strongly argues for their release on humanitarian grounds.

In sum, the arrest and detention of these academics represents a miscarriage of justice; we urge you to release them immediately and ensure their safe return home.

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

Sincerely,



Dina Rizk Khoury
MESA President
Professor, George Washington University



Re: Health of detainees Dr. Fariba Abdelkhah and Dr. Roland Marchal
3 February 2020
Page 3

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Laurie Brand', is written in a cursive style.

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

cc:

His Excellency Dr. Hassan Rouhani, President
The Honorable Mahmoud Alavi, Minister of Intelligence
The Honorable Mohammad Javad Zarif, Minister of Foreign Affairs
The Honorable Takht-Ravanchi, Permanent Representative 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