



**Middle
East
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5 March 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
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Major General Hossein Salami, Commander-in-chief of the Islamic
Revolutionary Guard Corps
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

Your Excellencies, Sir,

We write on behalf of the Committee on Academic Freedom of the Middle East Studies Association (MESA) to express our grave concern over the continued detention of Iranian-French researcher Dr. Fariba Adelkhah and her French colleague Dr. Roland Marchal since 5 June 2019. We particularly fear for the health and well-being of these academics in light of the rapid spread of the coronavirus across Iran and in light of Dr. Adelkhah's poor health following 49 days of a hunger strike. Both academics continue to be denied consular visits and visits with one another. To date, they have not been presented with evidence supporting the charges against them, and their trial, begun on 3 March 2020, was - minutes after its opening - postponed until further notice and without explanation. As such, Drs. Adelkhah and Marchal continue to be unlawfully incarcerated, and at a time when Iran scrambles to contain an ever-widening epidemic that has already reached the country's prisons. We vehemently protest the cruel treatment of the detainees 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 have previously written to you on 22 July 2019, 28 October 2019 and 3 February 2020, to protest the arrest and detention of Drs. Adelkhah and Marchal. Since the arrest of the two scholars in June 2019, in violation of Article



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32 of the Constitution, judicial authorities have failed to provide any reasons for the charges against them of collusion against national security and propaganda against the Islamic Republic.

In December 2019, an Iranian court ordered the scholars' release on bail, but judicial authorities have refused to act upon the ruling. As a result, Dr. Adelkhah went on a 49-day hunger strike to protest the illegal incarceration of Dr. Marchal and herself, and particularly the isolation of Dr. Marchal, who is said to be in poor condition, both mentally and physically.

The hunger strike left Dr. Adelkhah with severe kidney pain, and she was admitted to the prison dispensary in late February 2020. Despite advice from prison doctors to transfer her to a hospital outside the prison, she was returned to her ward on 1 March 2020, without having been properly treated in the dispensary. What is more, she was forced to return to a section of the prison where other inmates are believed to have contracted the coronavirus.

The political trial of Drs. Adelkhah and Marchal began in the morning of 3 March 2020. For unknown reasons, possibly due to ill health, Dr. Marchal was not present. Meanwhile, Dr. Adelkhah does not appear to have had access to her lawyer in preparation for the trial. French consular staff were not permitted to attend. Without her lawyer present, Dr. Adelkhah refused to answer the judge's questions. Soon after its opening, the trial was postponed to an unspecified date, without explanation. As a result, Drs. Adelkhah and Marchal continue to be incarcerated on a basis and in a manner that violates Iran's own laws, as well as its commitments under international law. MESA's Committee on Academic Freedom strongly objects to the continued incarceration of the two scholars and calls for their immediate release.

This call is ever more urgent in light of the fact that Iran, with 92 deaths and 2,900 officially declared cases, has seen the highest outbreak of the coronavirus outside of China. Prison authorities have responded by granting temporary release to thousands of non-political prisoners. Schools and universities have been closed and concerts and sports events cancelled. We call upon you to extend the offer of release to political prisoners as well and ensure that those of foreign citizenship have full access to their country's consular and medical services.

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

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Dina Rizk Khoury', with a long, sweeping underline.

Dina Rizk Khoury
MESA President
Professor, George Washington University



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A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Laurie Brand'.

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, Paris,
France