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14 December 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
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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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Your Excellencies,

We write on behalf of the Committee on Academic Freedom of the Middle East Studies Association (MESA) to express our grave concern regarding reports that Dr. Ahmadreza Djalali, a scholar of emergency and disaster medicine, imprisoned in Iran since April 2016 and sentenced to death in October 2017 on charges of espionage, was expected to be transferred on 1 December 2020 to Rajai Shahr prison from Evin prison. His family and his lawyers fear that the impending transfer is a step taken by Iranian authorities toward carrying out his death sentence. We implore Your Excellencies to intervene to revoke the sentence and see to Dr. Djalali's 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 over 2,800 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. Ahmadreza Djalali, an Iranian-Swedish scholar and professor of emergency and disaster medicine, was arrested by security forces of Iran's Ministry of Intelligence in April 2016. He had traveled to Iran from his home in Sweden, having been invited by several universities in Iran to participate in a series of academic activities. We have written a number of letters to you regarding Dr. Djalali (see letters dated [6 February 2017](#), [25 October 2017](#), [21 December 2017](#), [8 February 2018](#), [13 December 2018](#), [4 April 2019](#), and [5 August 2019](#)), expressing our concerns about his unlawful arrest, the denial of medical attention for severe conditions described below, his death sentence based on forced confessions, and the Supreme Court's upholding of that sentence without allowing any submissions from his defense team.

On 24 November 2020, Iranian officials announced that Dr. Djalali had been transferred to solitary confinement in Evin prison. According to the human rights group Amnesty International, Dr. Djalali was scheduled to be moved on 1 December 2020 to the Rajai Shahr Prison in Karaj, where his execution was to be carried out. Then, on 3 December, Dr. Djalali's wife, Ms. Vida Mehrannia, publicly expressed her fears and announced that Iranian authorities had

postponed the transfer “[for some days.](#)” We are extremely concerned that the purpose of Dr. Djalali’s looming transfer is to implement the unjust death sentence against him. Further, we understand that as a result of the very harsh treatment to which he has been subjected, Dr. Djalali’s psychological condition is poor. Announcing his imminent transfer for the purpose of carrying out his death sentence is not only cruel, but also causes him and his family severe mental duress.

Such treatment is in conflict with Iran’s own laws of due process. Forced confessions are not admissible as evidence in Iranian courts; therefore, Dr. Djalali’s sentence is invalid and should be dismissed. Furthermore, to date, Iranian authorities have not disclosed any evidentiary basis for the allegations against him, which Dr. Djalali disputes. Since his detention, Dr. Djalali has undertaken several hunger strikes in protest of the unsubstantiated charges against him. Additionally, he has suffered from the lack of adequate treatment for a serious blood disease, likely leukemia, which Iranian authorities detaining Dr. Djalali are required by law to treat.

The Committee on Academic Freedom forcefully objects to these violations of internationally recognized rights and due process in Iran. While it appears that the authorities have, for the time being, delayed Dr. Djalali’s execution, we, along with many academics and scholarly organizations around the world, call for the reversal of his capital sentence. This is especially appropriate in light of the objectionable procedures that led to the issuance of the ruling in the first place. Moreover, we condemn the repeated denial of adequate medical care to Dr. Djalali, even following emergency abdominal surgery in November 2018 and despite the sharp deterioration in his health.

Indeed, the woefully unjust treatment of this prominent academic greatly tarnishes Iran’s image and reputation in the world. We call on you to intervene, to immediately revoke the capital sentence, release Dr. Ahmadreza Djalali from prison, and facilitate his safe return to his wife and children in Sweden.

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

Sincerely,



Dina Rizk Khoury
MESA President
Professor, George Washington University



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 Javaid Rehman, UN Special Rapporteur on the Situation of
Human Rights in the Islamic Republic of Iran
The Honorable Tlaleng Mofokeng, UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to
Physical and Mental Health
The Honorable Nils Meltzer, UN Special Rapporteur on Torture and Other
Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment
The Honorable Agnes Callamard, UN Special Rapporteur on Extrajudicial,
Summary or Arbitrary Executions
The Honorable Irene Khan, UN Special Rapporteur on the promotion and
protection of the right to freedom of opinion and expression
The Honorable Leigh Toomey, Chair-Rapporteur for the Working Group on
Arbitrary Detention
Ms. Marija Pejčinović Burić, Secretary General of the Council of Europe
His Excellency Stefan Löfven, Prime Minister of Sweden
The Honorable Federica Mogherini, High Representative of the Union for
Foreign Affairs and Security Policy
Mr. Christophe Poirel, Director of Human Rights Directorate, Human Rights and
Rule of Law, Council of Europe
The Honorable Ann Linde, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Sweden