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6 October 2022

Ayatollah Ali Khamenei
Supreme Leader of the Islamic Republic of Iran
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Permanent Representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran to the United Nations
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Chief Justice Gholamhossein Mohseni Ejeji, Head of the Judiciary
c/o H.E. Mr. Takht-Ravanchi
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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 recent attacks on academic institutions, schools, teachers, and students who have joined the peaceful protests that have unfolded in Iran throughout the past weeks following the killing of Mahsa Amini on 16 September 2022. We are alarmed by the more recent news that Iran's security forces have placed a number of universities under siege, among them, Sharif University of Technology, while many other academic institutions and schools throughout the country have been converted into military bases to suppress protestors. With this latest development, there are reports that the security forces are beating, shooting at, and arresting students and academics who had been on strike while gathering in their universities in solidarity with the protestors. Worryingly, there are also reports that school-aged youth have been subjected to the recent securitization attempts of the state police, as security forces have recruited children to the *Basij* paramilitary forces to help suppress the protests. Such treatments are a clear violation of the students' fundamental rights to education, freedom of speech and assembly. In solidarity with the Iranian Teachers' Union, academics and students, we condemn the brutal manner in which Iranian government forces have responded to these peaceful protests, and ask that you hear the protestors' cries and respect their demands.

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.

The disturbing news of Ms. Mahsa (Jhina) Amini's tragic killing in mid-September over an alleged violation of Iran's restrictive hijab laws has triggered a nationwide and international outcry. Iranians across the country



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have taken to the streets to express their anger and frustration over the apparent lack of respect for human life, particularly when it is deemed to challenge strict state ideology on gender and women's rights. With the slogan, "Woman, Life, Freedom," the protestors capture the popular demand for basic human rights that have been systematically denied and violated over the past four decades. In a show of exceptional solidarity, the people of Iran have joined in these peaceful protests across gender, race, ethnicity, class, and region, voicing their basic demands from the state. However, Iranian state security forces have responded by opening fire on unarmed protestors, killing at least 83 as of this writing, and arresting thousands more across the country.

We are dismayed to learn that Iranian security forces have not spared university campuses, high schools, and other academic institutions -- sites of learning, thinking and exchange -- from the recent crackdowns. With the violent attacks on Sharif University, in early October, we see that state security forces are, in fact, intensifying their attacks and arresting individuals from these locations. These reports are particularly disturbing because they demonstrate the forceful measures that security forces are employing to quell free speech and intellectual exchange.

We support the recent calls by the Coordinating Council of Iranian Educators' Trade Union for faculty and students across the nation to boycott classes for several days. These calls, signed by many institutions across Iran, are again, for peaceful attempts to highlight solidarity with individuals and groups who are boldly taking to the streets to voice their legitimate grievances. Such efforts also decry the clear violations of academic freedom and the right to education by the state security forces, as they transform educational institutions into battlegrounds to violently suppress peaceful protests.

The Committee on Academic Freedom of the Middle East Studies Association stands in solidarity with Iran's scholars, researchers and students, and calls for the Iranian government to heed Iranians' demands for basic rights to education, speech and peaceful assembly, the same rights protected by Iran's national laws. We further call on government officials to show restraint in the face of legitimate demands for accountability for police violence against civilians.

We agree with Iranian protestors that "Woman, Life, Liberty" must all be respected, and we support Iranians in their attempts to tackle systemic inequality and discrimination based on gender, as well as race or ethnicity, class, and creed. We appeal to the Iranian government to cease attacks on the protestors and seek peaceful avenues to engage the protestors' legitimate demands, which include accountability for the unlawful killing of Ms. Amini.

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



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Sincerely,

Eve Troutt Powell
MESA President
Professor, University of Pennsylvania

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

cc:

His Excellency Ebrahim Raisi, President

The Honorable Mahmoud Alavi, Minister of Intelligence

The Honorable Hossein Amir-Abdollahian, Minister of Foreign Affairs

The Honorable Takht-Ravanchi, Permanent Representative of Iran to the
United Nations

The Honorable Volker Türk, UN High Commissioner for Human Rights

The Honorable Javid 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 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, UN Human Rights Council

The Honorable Josep Borrell Fontelles, High Representative of the Union for
Foreign Affairs and Security Policy