

PRESS RELEASE FOR GANJI AWARD

Middle East Scholars Cite Iranian Dissident Writer for Academic Freedom Award

(Washington, November 21, 2005) -- The Middle East Studies Association of North America (MESA) awarded its 2005 academic freedom prize to Akbar Ganji, the Iranian writer imprisoned since April 2000 for writings critical of the government's systematic violations of freedom of expression and other basic rights.

MESA made the award on Sunday evening, November 20, at an awards ceremony during its 40th annual meeting, held in Washington, D.C. The group cited Ganji's unrelenting commitment to speaking boldly about the systematic abuses of those in power in Iran today.

“Akbar Ganji has proven himself again and again to be a public intellectual and writer of uncommon courage,” said MESA president Ali Banuazizi, co-director of the Middle East and Islamic Studies program at Boston College. “Even today, from prison, his letters and manifestos inspire people in Iran and around the world who struggle for a future free of arbitrary power.”

Akbar Ganji is the author of *Dungeon of Ghosts* and "A Republican Manifesto," as well as numerous other works. The Iranian authorities have held him in solitary confinement almost continuously since September 3 in a special ward of Tehran's Evin prison. He was sentenced in July 2001 to six years in prison for "acting against national security" and "spreading propaganda," among other charges stemming from his writings critical of the government.

MESA also gave an academic freedom award this year to the Workshop of Armenian-Turkish Scholarship, for its pioneering and successful efforts to address controversial issues raised by the destruction of the Armenian population of the Ottoman Empire during World War One.

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