



**Middle  
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**MESA**  
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Montréal

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Ayatollah Ali Khamenei  
Supreme Leader of the Islamic Republic of Iran  
C/O H.E. Javad Zarif  
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Your Excellency,

We write to you on behalf of the Committee on Academic Freedom (CAF) of the Middle East Studies Association (MESA) and The Committee for Academic and Intellectual Freedom of the International Society for Iranian Studies (ISIS).

Both of our organizations are deeply concerned by the recent arrests in Iran of the respected Iranian-American academics, Dr. Haleh Esfandiari and Dr. Kian Tajbakhsh.

Based on numerous reports, Dr. Esfandiari and Dr. Tajbakhsh were detained by Iranian security forces on May 8 and May 11, respectively. As of this date, your government has released very few details regarding the circumstances of their detention. We are particularly concerned that Dr. Esfandiari and Dr. Tajbakhsh are being mistreated while in custody and are being pressured by prison and intelligence ministry officials to make false confessions. We urge you to take immediate steps to guarantee their physical well-being, grant them their right to confer with legal counsel, and allow them to leave Iran whenever they choose.

The Middle East Studies Association of North America and the International Society for Iranian Studies are the preeminent international organizations in their respective fields. MESA, founded in 1966, and ISIS, founded in 1967, were established to promote scholarship and teaching on Iran, the Middle East, and North Africa. MESA publishes the *International Journal of Middle East Studies* and has more than 2700 members worldwide; ISIS publishes the international journal, *Iranian Studies* and has more than 500 members worldwide. Both organizations are committed to ensuring academic freedom, the free exchange of ideas, and freedom of expression in all its forms, both within Iran and the Middle East and in connection with the study of Iran and the Middle East in North America and elsewhere.

Official statements made by your government regarding the case of Dr. Esfandiari and Dr. Tajbakhsh use vaguely worded allegations of "espionage." MESA and ISIS vehemently reject these unfounded allegations. Our colleagues' activities have consistently remained firmly within the strict boundaries of transparent and legitimate academic and policy research. These arrests are all the more troubling as they indicate a calculated policy by Iranian authorities of targeting academics of dual Iranian-US citizenship. MESA and ISIS are independent, nonpolitical international academic organizations that steer clear of the government-level diplomatic disputes between Washington and Tehran. We condemn the targeting of our colleagues on grounds of their having US citizenship. The various unsubstantiated allegations made by certain quarters in Iran against Dr. Esfandiari's work at the Wilson Center in Washington, DC, and Dr. Tajbakhsh's connection with various

international and American think-tanks since his return to Iran in 2000—the latter with the full knowledge and cooperation of Iranian authorities and directed toward humanitarian relief aid and urban planning—are considered by our academic organizations as unjustified assaults against the basic principles of academic and intellectual freedom.

We also feel compelled to remind you, Your Excellency, that the rights of individuals to freedom of thought, opinion, and speech are explicitly protected under the Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran (Article 23), as well as the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (Articles 18, 19, and 21), to which the Islamic Republic of Iran is also a state party. The arbitrary arrests of Dr. Esfandiari and Dr. Tajbakhsh further harm the reputation of Iran as a country where scholarly research and inquiry are highly valued. These arrests can only be conceived as a direct attack on the principles of academic freedom, critical intellectual inquiry, and research.

Your Excellency, we trust that you will appreciate the seriousness of this matter and will take the appropriate measures. We urge you to secure our colleagues' immediate release.

Yours Respectfully,



Zachary Lockman  
MESA President



Nasrin Rahimieh  
ISIS President

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