



COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY
IN THE CITY OF NEW YORK

January 11, 2010

The Honorable Hillary R. Clinton
Secretary of State
U.S. State Department
Washington, D.C.

Dear Secretary Clinton,

As members of the faculty at Columbia University, we wish to express our deep concerns for the well-being of Kian Tajbakhsh, who has been imprisoned in Iran's notorious Evin Prison after being found guilty of "political crimes" by an Iranian court on October 20, 2009. Mr. Tajbakhsh was subsequently sentenced to 15 years in prison for supporting the Iranian uprising against the government in the aftermath of the disputed election last summer. He appealed this sentence, only to face additional charges of spying which were announced on November 23, 2009 in Iran's Revolutionary Court.

We gratefully acknowledge your earlier statements made on Mr. Tajbakhsh's behalf. But given the chaotic and dangerous political and civil climate in Iran today, we respectfully request that you do everything possible to obtain Mr. Tajbakhsh's immediate release.

We note that your statement on behalf of Canadian journalist Maziar Bahari made a significant, improved difference in the treatment of Mr. Bahari by prison guards according to a "60 Minutes" interview of him broadcast in November 2009.

Mr. Tajbakhsh, who earned a doctorate from Columbia in urban studies, was providing nonpolitical urban technical advice as a consultant with explicit permission from the Iranian government. He was scheduled to assume duties as an associate professor of urban studies last fall at Columbia's Morningside Heights campus at the Graduate School of Architecture, Planning and Preservation.

The Iranian government has established a pattern of harassment of scholars--most recently imprisoning the former chancellor of Tehran University, according to Scholars at Risk, who have also highlighted Mr. Tajbakhsh's case. His latest arrest was the second time he has been detained in Iran during the past two years. In 2007, Kian, along with Haleh Esfandiari, a Middle East expert with the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, was arrested and jailed in the Evin Prison. Attacking and imprisoning scholars is a destructive and pernicious act that does not address the problems confronting the Islamic Republic of Iran, now or in the future.

In closing, we ask you to do everything within your powers to alleviate Mr. Tajbakhsh's plight and gain his immediate release.

Sincerely,

Peter Awn

Elazar Barkan

Robert Barnett

Caroline Bettinger-Lopez

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