

# SCHOLARS AT RISK

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N E T W O R K

Ayatollah Ali Khamenei  
Supreme Leader of the Islamic Republic of Iran  
c/o H.E. Mohammad Khazaee Ambassador of Iran to the United Nations  
Permanent Mission of the Islamic Republic of Iran to the United Nations  
622 Third Ave.  
New York, NY 10017

November 3, 2009

**Re: Dr. Kian Tajbakhsh**

Your Excellency:

I am writing on behalf of the Scholars at Risk Network to express grave concern over the arrest, conviction and sentencing of Dr. Kian Tajbakhsh, a respected international scholar and researcher. For the second time this year, I write to urge you to reconsider the charges against Dr. Tajbakhsh and to ensure that an appeal be heard.

Scholars at Risk (SAR) is an international network of 220 universities and colleges in 28 countries dedicated to promoting academic freedom and its constituent freedoms of thought, opinion, expression, association and travel. In especially serious cases, the network intervenes on behalf of detained scholars like Dr. Tajbakhsh.

In a previous letter dated July 24, 2009, we wrote to express our concern over reports that Dr. Tajbakhsh had been wrongfully detained and held incommunicado in an undisclosed location, having been arrested at his home in Tehran on the evening of July 9, 2009. We were made to understand that the agents who took him into custody provided no legal justification for his arrest and removed him to an undisclosed location, in apparent breach of guarantees outlined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the United Nations International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, to which Iran is signatory. Dr. Tajbakhsh was later charged with creating post-election turmoil, charges his family strongly denies.

Recent reports indicate that on October 20, 2009 he was convicted and sentenced to at least twelve years in prison. We are particularly concerned by reports that Dr. Tajbakhsh may have been forced to stand trial before the revolutionary court without the benefit of legal counsel of his choosing, a right which is guaranteed under Article 35 of the Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran. We understand that, according to Iranian law, an appeal of his conviction can be filed by his attorney within twenty days. Recent reports from human rights groups indicate, however, that judicial officials have rejected several attempts by Dr. Tajbakhsh's attorney to file an appeal. Furthermore, we have learned that he remains in solitary confinement.

Dr. Tajbakhsh's arrest, conviction and holding in solitary confinement raise grave concerns for his well-being. The suddenness of Dr. Tajbakhsh's arrest and the lack of any clear basis for his detention and conviction raise grave concerns about the ability of internationally recognized scholars and intellectuals to safely visit Iran. Taking into account his wrongful arrest under similar circumstances in 2007 and the recent arrests of academics throughout Iran following the June 12<sup>th</sup> election, this event suggests a wider attempt to intimidate intellectuals and to limit academic freedom in Iran—a suggestion we find particularly distressing and unfortunate, given Iran's rich intellectual history and traditional support for the values of scholarship and free inquiry. We find this even more distressing given the current tensions in the region and the world, which appear to warrant more rather than fewer exchanges and discussions among scholars inside and outside of Iran.

We urge you to ensure that the guarantees embodied in the constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran and Iran's obligations under international law are upheld, that an appeal on behalf of Dr. Tajbakhsh is permitted to be filed and fairly heard, leading, we believe, to the conviction being repealed and his release from prison. We further urge you to ensure that he has immediate access to legal counsel of his choosing, to family and to any necessary medical treatment in the interim.

We appreciate your immediate attention to this important matter and look forward to your reply.

Sincerely,



Robert Quinn  
Executive Director

Cc:

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