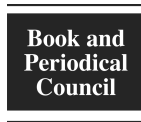




PEN CANADA
for FREEDOM of EXPRESSION

caj The Canadian Association of Journalists
L'Association Canadienne des Journalistes



November 8, 2010

Prime Minister Stephen Harper
Office of the Prime Minister
80 Wellington Street
Ottawa, Ontario
K1A 0A2

Fax: 613-941-6900

Dear Prime Minister Harper:

We are writing to share with you our deep concerns about the recent trial and sentencing in Iran of the Canadian-Iranian blogger Hossein Derakhshan.

When Mr. Derakhshan was sentenced on September 28, to 19 and a half years in prison, PEN Canada, Canadian Journalists for Free Expression (CJFE), Article 19, Index on Censorship and the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) called on the international community “to hold Iran to its obligations and to support Iranian bloggers, journalists and writers to do their work without fear of imprisonment or reprisal.” A joint statement by these groups was subsequently endorsed by 28 other freedom of expression organizations that belong to the International Freedom of Expression Exchange (IFEX) network.

Now, PEN Canada and CJFE, joined by the Book and Periodical Council, The Canadian Association of Journalists, the Canadian Newspaper Association, the Canadian Publishers' Council, the Professional Writers Association of Canada, The Writers' Union of Canada and the Canadian Committee for World Press Freedom are calling on the Canadian government to take a strong leadership role in holding Iran to those obligations.

It is widely known that Iran's domestic laws recognize the right to freedom of expression; indeed the country was one of the first to ratify the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights in 1975. Article 19 of the Covenant protects “the right to hold opinions without interference” and the “freedom to seek, receive and impart information and ideas of all kinds, regardless of frontiers, either orally, in writing or in print, in the form of art, or through any other media.” However, despite these explicit commitments to freedom of expression, the government of Iran has responded to Mr. Derakhshan's exercise of this right by detaining him at Evin prison (where we have received credible reports that he may have been tortured), by seeking a death penalty at his trial, and by imposing a sentence which includes a five-year ban from membership in political parties and media-related activities.

Since the government crackdown following the disputed 2009 elections, CPJ reports that at least 37 journalists are currently imprisoned there and several have been placed under “immense physical and psychological pressure to confess to crimes that they have not committed, including crimes that could carry the death sentence.” CPJ also records that the Iranian authorities have deprived jailed journalists of “the right to family visits and legal counsel, while holding several without charge for periods far exceeding legal limits.”

We have been concerned for several years about the treatment of journalists in Iran. In 2003, the Canadian-Iranian photojournalist Zahra Kazemi was arrested for photographing a protest and died after being detained at Evin prison. Last year, the Canadian-Iranian journalist Maziar Bahari, while reporting for *Newsweek* magazine in Iran, was also detained in Evin for four months during which he reported to having been forcefully interrogated, repeatedly beaten and pressured to confess to espionage.

We note that the governments of France and Canada recently published a Joint Declaration “asking Iran to recognize Mr. Derakhshan’s dual citizenship, in particular by guaranteeing consular access, in accordance with the Vienna conventions.” We are also encouraged by Minister Cannon’s earlier statement that “Iran must release [Mr. Derakhshan] and other dual-nationals who have been unjustly detained.” We therefore urge the government of Canada to redouble its efforts to obtain consular access to Mr. Derakhshan with a view to securing the dismissal of the charges against him, and his unconditional release.

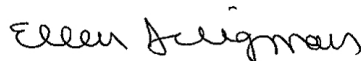
We seek your assurances that the government of Canada will use all available means to ensure that Mr. Derakhshan is allowed to appeal against his sentence, that he will be accorded all of the rights due to prisoners under international law while he remains in prison, and that the government of Iran will investigate reports that Mr. Derakhshan was severely mistreated during his pre-trial detention.

We look forward to hearing of any further developments in this matter.

Sincerely,



Annie Game
Executive Director, CJFE



Ellen Seligman
President, PEN Canada



Mary Agnes Welch
President, The Canadian
Association of Journalists



David Swail
President, Canadian
Publishers' Council



Anne McClelland
Executive Director, Book and
Periodical Council



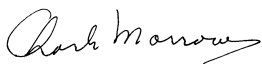
Alan Cumyn
Chair, The Writers' Union
of Canada



Sandy Crawley
Executive Director, Professional
Writers Association of Canada



John Hinds
President, Canadian
Newspaper Association



Charles Morrow
Secretary, Canadian Committee
for World Press Freedom