

October 4, 2004

His Excellency Ayatollah Sayed 'Ali Khamenei
Supreme Leader of the Islamic Republic of Iran
The Presidency, Palestine Avenue
Azerbaijan Intersection
Tehran, Islamic Republic of Iran

Your Excellency:

Salamun 'alaykum.

We, the undersigned American Muslim students and professors of Islamic studies, write to you to express our concern over the incident that befell Dr. Abdolkarim Soroush in Qom last month where he was physically attacked by pressure groups, without receiving adequate protection from security forces.

We are dismayed that a scholar of his standing should receive such treatment in response to a lecture, and equally concerned that the government does not do more to protect the freedom of speech, not only for Dr. Soroush, but also for other academics and journalists. Clearly, repression and physical violence are an inappropriate expression of opposition to ideas. Rather, disputants should argue with Qur'anic and other proofs that may support their position. To do otherwise would constitute intolerance and inhumanity. The government can ensure that everyone understands this by safe-guarding the freedom of speech of thinkers and journalists.

It has long been our hope that Iran would emerge as a model of the tolerant and humane face of Islam. Yet, incidents such as this give Islam a very bad reputation, not only in Iran, but around the world. We fear the negative consequences of condoning a culture of physical opposition to free speech in the name of religion. We are Muslim students and professors of Islamic studies who much respect the Qur'an and the Prophet. It is for this reason that we write to you to request that you take action to uphold Qur'anic and prophetic principles that would prevent this sort of incident from occurring in the future.

We still retain hope that Iran will some day become a brilliant example of Islam's humane principles. We also hope that you will personally aid its progress to such a destination.

Wassalam 'alaykum wa rahmat Allah wa barakatuh,

Sincerely,

Aasil Ahmad, Georgetown University 2000

Umbreen Bhatti, University of Michigan (JD Candidate)

Tannaz Haddadi, George Mason University (MA Candidate)

Najam Haider, Princeton University (PhD Candidate)

Shadi Hamid, Georgetown University (MA Candidate)

Dalal Hasan, John Hopkins School of Advanced and International Studies 2004

Dr. Jamillah Karim, Spelman College (Professor)

Dr. Khaled Keshk, Depaul University (Assistant Professor)

Shabana Mir, Georgetown University (PhD Candidate)

Hadia Mubarak, Georgetown University (MA Candidate)

Intisar Rabb, Princeton University/Yale Law School (PhD/JD Candidate)

Dr. Omid Safi, Colgate University (Assistant Professor)

Asma Sayeed, Princeton University (PhD Candidate)

Dr. Shahab Ahmed, Harvard University (Assistant Professor)/Princeton University (Visiting Fellow)

Mairaj Syed, Princeton University (PhD Candidate)