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PEN American Center is an association of writers and editors working to advance literature,  
 to defend free expression, and to foster international literary fellowship.

May 15, 2007

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Your Excellencies,

On behalf of the 3,400 members of PEN American Center, an international organization of writers dedicated to protecting freedom of expression wherever it is threatened, we are writing to express our concern regarding the harassment and subsequent imprisonment of Haleh Esfandiari, head of the Middle East program at the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars in Washington, D.C..

According to our information, on December 30, 2006, Esfandiari, a dual U.S.-Iranian citizen who had been visiting her mother in Tehran, was traveling to the airport for her return to the United States when her taxi was held up by three masked men with knives. Esfandiari's life was threatened and her U.S and Iranian passports were stolen. When Esfandiari attempted to replace her passports, she was sent to Iran's Ministry of Intelligence for interrogation. The interrogation focused mainly on her work at the Wilson Center. From that point, Esfandiari was unable to leave the country and was summoned almost daily for six weeks and interrogated by intelligence officials up to eight hours a day about U.S. programs in Iran, in particular programs at the Wilson Center. On May 8, 2007, Esfandiari was summoned by the Ministry of Intelligence for questioning and was arrested without warrant or explanation and transferred to Tehran's Evin Prison, notorious for its documented cases of torture and detainee abuse.

PEN American Center believes Haleh Esfandiari has been detained in violation of her right to free expression as guaranteed by Article 19 of the United Nations International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, to which Iran is a signatory. We therefore respectfully ask for the immediate and unconditional release of

Haleh Esfandiari. Furthermore, we seek immediate assurances that while detained Esfandiari is treated humanely.

Thank you for your attention.

Sincerely,



Hannah Pakula  
Chair, Freedom to Write Committee



Larry Siems  
Director, Freedom to Write and  
International Programs

Cc: His Excellency Dr. Mohammad Javad Zarif  
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