

PEN CANADA

25 YEARS for FREEDOM of EXPRESSION

The Right Honourable Stephen Harper
Prime Minister of Canada
80 Wellington Street
Ottawa, K1A 0A2
Fax: 613-941-6900

July 8, 2009

Dear Mr. Harper,

I am writing on behalf of PEN Canada, the Canadian centre of International PEN, a literary and human rights organization that opposes censorship wherever it occurs. We want to express to you our full support for the Canadian government's quick response to the recent developments in Iran which have led to the suppression of independent reporting.

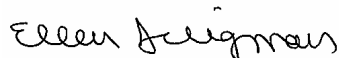
We have been disturbed to learn that more than twenty journalists have been arrested during the violent aftermath of the recent Iranian elections. We, like the government of Canada, are very concerned about the case of Canadian-Iranian journalist Maziar Bahari, who, as you are aware, was arrested on June 21. Since that time, he has been held without charge, and there are growing fears for his safety.

We are deeply appreciative of the Canadian government's efforts to raise Mr. Bahari's case with the Iranian authorities. We are also heartened by Minister Cannon's statements of concern about the integrity of the investigations of reformist leaders and party officials who have been detained to date, in part because of its relevance to others who have been detained or incarcerated. We recognize that the government of Iran has previously declined to provide access to dual-nationality detainees. However, given the urgency of Mr. Bahari's situation, we respectfully urge the Canadian government to continue – with all possible strength – its efforts to secure his immediate release and the release of all other journalists who have been incarcerated in recent months.

PEN protests the government of Iran's violation of the basic human right to free speech, and implores the Canadian government to encourage the appropriate authorities to desist from further suppression of foreign and domestic news coverage, and from the disabling of online social networks, in accordance with the right of all people to freedom of opinion and expression as set out in Article 19 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), to which Iran is a signatory.

We thank you for your continued attention to these serious and urgent matters and ask that the Canadian government not let up on its efforts to achieve the release of those journalists who have been incarcerated during this time of unrest.

Sincerely yours,



Ellen Seligman
President, PEN Canada

Please see our website (www.pencanada.ca) for more information on journalists who have been arrested, including Maziar Bahari and Hossein Derakhshan, an Honorary Member of PEN Canada, who was arrested in November 2008.

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