

## Open letter to President of PEN America, Ayad Akhtar

### On the honoring of imprisoned Iranian writers with the *Freedom to Write Award*

Mr Ayad Akhtar  
PEN America  
588 Broadway, Suite 303  
New York, NY 10012  
USA

18 September 2021

Dear Mr Ayad Akhtar

I sincerely thank PEN America for honoring three writers imprisoned in Iran: Baktash Abtin, Keyvan Bajan and Reza Khandan Mahabadi, with the 2021 PEN/Barbey Freedom to Write Award.

These three board members of the Iranian Writers' Association are the symbol and embodiment of the protest against the systematic censorship and repression of freedom to write and freedom of expression and thought by the Islamic Republic.

In the last four decades, many writers and artists have been arrested, imprisoned and even assassinated by the Islamic Republic for the "crime" of expressing their views and defending freedom. For example, Mohammad Jafar Pouyandeh and Mohammad Mokhtari, members of Iranian Writers' Association, were among the writers killed by the government in a series of assassinations known as Serial Killings in 1998. You are probably aware that one of the "crimes" of the three imprisoned writers honored by you was attending a memorial service for those victims of the Serial Killings!

The Islamic Republic has a long and dark record in suppressing freedoms and freedom advocates, and your decision to honor these three prisoners is a positive step in challenging the regime of repression and execution in Iran. We, along with the vast majority of the people of Iran, call for the cultural, sports and diplomatic boycott and rejection of the Islamic Republic because of more than four decades of systematic repression of freedom to write and freedom of expression and thought, and because of the arrest, execution and assassination of thousands of freedom advocates and protesters. I hope PEN America will join us, the people of Iran, in this just cause.

Yours sincerely



Hamid Taqvaee  
Secretary of the Central Committee of the Worker-communist Party of Iran