

## **Two French researchers detained in Iran**

*Le Figaro* has taken upon itself to publicize Roland Marchal's detention in Iran. We had kept this news confidential on the recommendation of the French ministry of foreign affairs, even as information about Fariba Adelkhah's arrest had appeared on Iranian social media in mid-July. Discretion in this regard seemed best to the French authorities. As soon as we alerted them to our colleagues' disappearance on June 25<sup>th</sup>, diplomats at the highest levels of government undertook to seek their release; in so doing, however, they sought to avoid inciting any form of nationalist mobilization in or by Tehran. Based on previous experience, this struck us as a sound approach. Other colleagues who had found themselves in similar situations were clear on the fact that "Western" media attention is often counter-productive, proving either useless or making things worse for imprisoned researchers, as regards both jail conditions and possibilities of release.

Adelkhah and Marchal, it appears, were arrested on June 5<sup>th</sup>. Throughout the summer, French government officials sought to secure their freedom. They were allowed only to visit Marchal; Adelkhah, whose French citizenship is not recognized by the Iranian government, has been off limits to them. Both of our colleagues are represented by local counsel. As we speak, they are under interrogation in the wing of Evin prison overseen by the Revolutionary Guard Corps.

We will not comment on *Le Figaro's* statements regarding possible negotiations between Paris and Tehran regarding Adelkhah and Marchal, as we have no reliable information on the matter.

We draw attention to the fact that, of late, there has been a spike in arrests of foreign researchers. The case we are concerned with here is far from isolated. Many Iranian academics, moreover, are in prison for political reasons, on charges that bear no relation to reality.

Simultaneously with our solidarity for our two colleagues, we wish to express our thanks and our appreciation to the French diplomats and politicians who, behind closed doors, have been determinedly acting on their behalf.

There is no justification for the incarceration of Adelkhah and Marchal. Their work is strictly scholarly. They entertain no relations with any intelligence service and, in Iran, engage in no political activity whatsoever. The notion that they may be involved in espionage or efforts at destabilization is grotesque. Were this not a matter of life and liberty, the allegation would be altogether laughable for those of us familiar with their intellectual and personal pursuits. The sad truth is that they have been taken hostage by the Revolutionary Guard to unknown bargaining ends. Their arrest has nothing to do with them specifically. At stake, rather, is a power play linked to a regional context that is a direct result of the Trump administration's confrontation with Iran.

Given the Iranian government's contempt for academic freedom and the danger encountered by scholars travelling to Iran, REASOPO reiterates its call to European

scholarly institutions and universities: while expressing common cause with Iranian academics and researchers facing the arbitrary violence of the Iranian security apparatus, immediately suspend any and all cooperation with Iran, save for welcoming Iranian students.