



**Middle
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Ayatollah Ali Khamenei
Supreme Leader of the Islamic Republic of Iran
c/o H.E. Dr. Mohammad Javad Zarif
Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
Permanent Mission of the Islamic Republic of Iran to the United Nations

By post and facsimile: 212 867-7086

Your Excellency:

We are contacting you to express our great concern about and strong condemnation of the violent attacks on university students, and the wide scale arrest, imprisonment, intimidation, and maltreatment of hundreds of students throughout Iran in recent weeks.

The Middle East Studies Association of North America (MESA) comprises 2700 academics worldwide who teach and conduct research on the Middle East and North Africa, and is the preeminent professional association in the field. The association publishes the *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, and is committed to ensuring respect for the principles of academic freedom and freedom of expression in the region and in connection with the study of the Middle East and North Africa in North America and elsewhere.

According to the information we have received, following some minor student protests on June 12 in Elm-o Sanaat and Shahid Beheshti Universities, the dormitories of these universities were viciously attacked by bands of vigilantes in the early hours of the morning on June 12 and 14, when their residents were asleep and defenseless. The attackers broke down the doors with pick axes and sledge hammers, destroyed the personal property of the residents, and physically abused and attacked the students with knives, clubs, and chains. Subsequent to these attacks 80 students were arrested, some in the hospital where they were taken for treatment, but very few of the perpetrators of these crimes have been identified and arrested.

The attacks on the Tarasht, Shahid Beheshti, and the Tarbiat Modaress (June 17) dormitories are clearly a recurrence of the criminal attacks by vigilantes and police forces on the dormitories of the Tehran University that took place on July 9, 1999. On that occasion at least one student, Ezzat Ebrahimnejad, was killed, and several other students were maimed and seriously injured. The subsequent criminal court, in a travesty of justice, vindicated the attackers, including General Farhad Kazemi, the police commander who had led the attacks. But a number of students who were arrested in demonstrations following these events were condemned to unjustly heavy sentences. Ahmad Batebi, a student whose only crime was to have had his picture

published on the cover of the 'Economist' magazine, received a ten-year jail sentence. Students such as Mehrdad Lohrasbi, Akbar Mohammadi, Abbas Fakhrahar, among others are still languishing in prison.

Although the police have shown greater restraint during recent events, the vigilantes and the judiciary seem to have acted with even greater impunity and disregard for laws and the civil and legal rights of the students. In reaction to these treatments, student protests, sit-ins, and food strikes spread to other cities and campuses in the cities of Karaj, Ahvaz, Isfahan, Shiraz, Mashhad, Zahedan, Hamedan, Kermanshah, Rasht, Sabzevar, Tabriz, Urumieh, Kerman, Sanadaj, and Yazd. In response to these protests 4000 people were arrested, 2000 of whom are still in prison. In Tehran at least 400 people are still under arrest, among which there are at least 66 students. These numbers do not include those students arrested under 'political charges', whose exact numbers and whereabouts are not known.

We are deeply disturbed that your Excellency seems to have contributed to this state of affairs. In July of 1999, you made a public announcement demanding your followers to treat students 'with respect and kindness', even if they insulted you in person. This commendable call to restraint was not heeded by your followers who went on a rampage without any of them being punished. During the recent confrontations you did not exercise even this minimal rhetorical tolerance and ordered your followers to treat the students and protesters "with decisiveness and without pity". Regrettably, your disturbing statement has been widely echoed throughout the country by other officials appointed by and only accountable to yourself. These include local Friday prayer leaders, military commanders, the judiciary, the National Iranian Radio and Television, and some major newspapers, like the *Kayhan Daily*, all of whom have publicly called for the 'ruthless and harsh' treatment of student protesters.

We have received information that several prominent student activists have been violently arrested by unknown security forces operating outside the government's jurisdiction. It is highly suspected that these rogue forces operate under the jurisdiction of the Counter-Intelligence Department of the Revolutionary Guards Corp as well as the Prosecutor General's Office of the Judiciary Branch. Both these institutions are under your direct supervision. The government institutions legally in charge of security, which include the Intelligence and Interior Ministries, as well as the Police and the Prison Administration have declared that they have no knowledge of these arrests, or the whereabouts of the detainees. These arrests have been without the defendants being legally notified of the formal charges against them. Ali Akrami of Amir Kabir University disappeared on June 14. Mojtaba Najafi and Morteza Safae, student activists at Allameh Tabatabaee University, were attacked with mace spray and driven away in unmarked cars in front of their colleagues on June 16. Abdollah Momeni and Mehdi Pour-Rahim of Elm-o Sanaat University have disappeared on June 29. Mehdi Aminzadeh was seen being forcefully pushed into an unmarked car on June 29. Qolamreza Zarifian, Deputy Minister of Science and Higher Education, announced on June 26 that at least 36 students in Tehran and 50 in the provinces had either disappeared or had been arrested by unknown agents. On 27 June 24 students disappeared in Tabriz.

Several other elected leaders of the main Islamic Student Association (Daftar-e Tahkim-e Vahdat) have been arrested at gunpoint by unidentified security agents. Saeed Razavi-Faqih of Tarbiat Modares University was arrested when leaving a meeting of the Association of Journalists on July 10. His whereabouts are unknown to this day. His lawyer has not been able to determine why he was arrested and under what conditions he is being kept. Other student leaders have been violently arrested under similar circumstances. These include Saeed Habibi, Reza Amerinasab, and Arash Hashemi (on July 10); and Ali Sadeghi, Saeed Babaei, and Amir Motamedi (on July 17) in Tehran; as well as Saeed Ardeshiri and 9 other leading activists in Kerman (July 17).

According to several reports by members of the Iranian Majlis, the detained students are being subjected to lengthy interrogations and serious physical and psychological abuse and torture. Many are being kept in solitary confinement for extended periods of time, and are deprived of sleep, decent food, and proper medical care. The families of many detainees are being subjected to pressure and threats. These illegal abuses are aimed at forcing the arrested students to make false confessions about themselves and against fellow students and other political activists. The 'Revolution Court' seems to have emphasized this attitude when it announced on July 18 that it was releasing 14 students on parole after having posted heavy bails, because they had "honestly admitted their culpability and shown remorse by confessing they had committed these crimes under the poisonous influence of certain individuals. The students are being released after they have implicated the real culprits and the main sources of the recent conspiracies".

Your Excellency, we would like to remind you that according to [Article 22](#) of the Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran, the life, property, and rights of individuals are inviolable. [Article 23](#) forbids the persecution of individuals for their beliefs. [Article 27](#) permits the free holding of public gatherings and marches provided arms are not carried. [Article 38](#) bans all forms of torture for the purpose of extracting confessions or acquiring information. It prohibits the compulsion of individuals to testify, confess, or take an oath, states that any testimony or confession obtained under duress is devoid of value, and states that the violation of this article is a crime punishable by law. [Article 39](#) prohibits any and all abuse of the dignity and repute of persons detained and imprisoned, and makes the violation of this article a crime punishable by law.

Furthermore, these articles correspond to legal protections enshrined in the United Nation's Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. As a signatory to this International Covenant, Iran is obligated to respect and protect the exercise of these rights. [Article 7](#) of the Covenant prohibits torture and inhuman treatment of the individual. [Article 9](#) prohibits arbitrary arrest and deprivation of liberty, except under legally established procedures. [Article 10](#) cites that anyone arrested should be treated with respect and dignity. [Article 14](#) cites that anyone charged must be informed of the nature of the charges against him/her. [Articles 18, 19, and 21](#), state that everyone should enjoy the freedom of thought, expression, opinion, and assembly.

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Re: attacks on university students

We therefore urge you in the strongest terms to speak out publicly and to take all the necessary steps to ensure that these clear infringements of the legal rights of the imprisoned students are stopped, that the imprisoned students and political activists are freed immediately, and that all those guilty of violent attacks on student dormitories and gatherings, or of illegal arrest, maltreatment, and intimidation of students and the university community be identified and punished according to law.

Your Excellency, we can only persist in reminding you that these steps are critical to help prevent further deterioration of Iran's international standing. Iran's reputation as a country with a great tradition of learning and scholarly inquiry has suffered as a result of these most recent violations of the sanctity of the university community. We urge you to treat this situation with the urgency and the gravity that it requires.

We thank you in advance for your attention to this matter and look forward to your reply.

Yours respectfully,



Amy W. Newhall
Executive Director

cc. HE Kamal Kharrazi, Minister of Foreign Affairs, IRI
HE Mahmoud Hashemi Shahroudi, Head of the Judiciary, IRI
HE Mohammad Khatami, President of the IRI
HE Mehdi Karoubi, Speaker of the Majlis, IRI
HE Kofi Anan, United Nations