



**Middle
East
Studies
Association**
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11 March 2022

Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, Supreme Leader of the Islamic Republic of Iran
c/o H.E. Mr. Takht-Ravanchi
Permanent Representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran to the United Nations

Chief Justice Gholam-Hossein Mohseni-Eje'i, Head of the Judiciary
c/o H.E. Mr. Takht-Ravanchi
Permanent Representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran to the United Nations

Your Excellencies,

We write on behalf of the Committee on Academic Freedom of the Middle East Studies Association (MESA) to express our concerns about the Iranian government's violations of academic freedom in light of the recent dismissals of distinguished university professors, including Professor Arash Abazari, Department of Philosophy of Science, Sharif University of Technology, Professor Mohammad Fazeli, Department of Sociology, Shahid Beheshti University, and Professor Reza Omidi, Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Tehran. These firings appear to be politically motivated and diminish Iran's long tradition of scholarly research and inquiry.

MESA was founded in 1966 to promote scholarship and teaching on the Middle East and North Africa. The preeminent organization in the field, MESA publishes the International Journal of Middle East Studies and has over 2,800 members worldwide. MESA is committed to ensuring academic freedom of expression, both within the region and in connection with the study of the region in North America and elsewhere.

Professor Abazari, who was trained at Johns Hopkins University and hired at Sharif University in 2018, is a philosopher of science and an expert on nineteenth century German philosophy. In 2020, he published a well-received monograph with Cambridge University Press, *Hegel's Ontology of Power: The Structure of Social Domination in Capitalism*. He has also authored a number of peer-reviewed articles. Despite these achievements, the university declined to renew Professor Abazari's contract. Professor Ebrahim Azadegan, the chair of the university's Department of Philosophy of Science, noted that Iranian authorities had mistakenly understood Professor Abazari to have signed an open letter in 2010 protesting the results of the 2009 Iranian presidential election.

Professor Fazeli is a renowned sociologist of the politics and science of the energy sector who joined the faculty at Shahid Beheshti University in 2015. Between 2013 and 2017, during the administration of former President Hassan Rouhani, Professor Fazeli also worked at a research center, the Center for Strategic Studies. However, it was not until after the August 2021 inauguration of President Ebrahim Raisi that Professor Fazeli was dismissed. While some at Shahid Beheshti University have insisted that the decision not to renew Professor Fazeli's contract owed to his absence while he worked for the former President's administration, his discharge, which took place some



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years later, appears to be in line with a broad practice of dismissals of scholars from university after the inauguration of the Raisi administration.

Professor Omidi, who was hired at the University of Tehran in 2018, has an outstanding record of scholarship, teaching, and service. His research on social welfare explores persistent and widening inequality and analyzes policies that contribute to it. The University has stated that it was not able to extend Professor Omidi's contract due to the Iranian government's vetting policies.

The cases of Professors Abazari, Fazeli, and Omidi are reminiscent of the post-revolutionary "cultural revolution" in which universities were closed for years and, more recently, of the academic purges by the government of former President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad (2005-2013). The dismissals of these scholars are not only harmful to them and their students, but also do untold damage to Iranian social sciences and humanities disciplines at Iranian institutions of higher learning.

We therefore strongly urge the Iranian government and university administrators to reinstate these professors at their respective universities. We further call upon the government to uphold the values and rights enshrined in the Iranian constitution and national laws by defending academic freedom in Iran.

We thank you for your attention to this very serious matter and look forward to your response.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Eve M. Troutt Powell". The signature is fluid and cursive, with "Eve" and "M." being smaller initials.

Eve Troutt Powell
MESA President
Professor, University of Pennsylvania

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Laurie Brand". The signature is cursive and appears to be a single word.

Laurie Brand
Chair, Committee on Academic Freedom
Professor Emerita, University of Southern California

cc:

His Excellency Ebrahim Raisi, President
The Honorable Yousef Nouri, Minister of Education



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The Honorable Takht-Ravanchi, Permanent Representative of Iran to the United Nations

The Honorable Michelle Bachelet Jeria, The United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights