



**Middle  
East  
Studies  
Association**  
of North America, Inc

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15 February 2024

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  
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Chief Justice Gholamhossein Mohseni Ejeji, Head of the Judiciary  
c/o H.E. Mr. Takht-Ravanchi  
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Your Excellencies,

We write on behalf of the Committee on Academic Freedom of the Middle East Studies Association of North America (MESA) to express our grave concern regarding the Iranian government's violations of academic freedom in light of the recent politically motivated dismissals of distinguished university professors. Since the inauguration of President Ebrahim Raisi in August 2021 and the aftermath of the "woman, life, freedom" movement protests that erupted in September 2022, we have witnessed intense attacks on academic institutions and universities across the country. In our 6 [October 2022](#) letter to you, we protested the fact that Iran's security forces had placed a number of universities under siege, employing force to suppress peaceful protests and free expression. Within the past year, multiple universities across the country have witnessed the dismissal of many professors and lecturers. These dismissals, as evidenced below, are largely the results of faculty support for the peaceful protests of their students whose academic freedom state authorities have violated. We object to these politically motivated dismissals and call for the immediate reinstatement of university faculty who have been dismissed in the aftermath of the nationwide protests.

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 close to 2800 members worldwide. MESA is committed to ensuring academic freedom and the freedom of expression, both within the region

and in connection with the study of the region in North America and elsewhere.

The politically motivated faculty dismissals of the past year in Iran constitute a major violation of academic freedom, which is protected by Iranian law. Faculty have been subject to terminations, suspensions, teaching bans, non-renewal of work contracts, and forced and early retirements. Although the exact numbers are difficult to confirm, unofficial reports have included the names of more than 110 professors dismissed since October 2022. Iran's Ministry of Science, Research and Technology and other state institutions tasked with overseeing academic appointments have yet to provide any reasons for the suspensions, dismissals, or forced resignations of these professors. Faculty have often been dismissed through verbal rather than official written notification, through salary suspension or termination of other rights. The evidence indicates that most of these academics have not been charged with anything other than supporting their students, who have been arrested, imprisoned, or suspended and expelled as a result of protests on campus. Typically, the faculty members have expressed their opposition to the violation of student rights by signing mass letters of protest to university presidents or sharing their insights in media interviews. For instance, on 2 October 2022, nearly 1100 faculty members across different universities in Iran signed a mass letter protesting the arrest or dismissal of their students. Not only were their pleas ignored by the government-appointed administrators, but the Ministry of Security and Intelligence summoned and interrogated many of the professors who had signed these letters. In what appears to have been a retaliatory move, many of these professors received sentences ranging from written reprimands to dismissal (please see below a partial list of the faculty affected by these dismissals).

Another worrying trend during the past years has been the ever-increasing reach of the Ministry of Security and Intelligence (MOIS) through its subsidiary Herasat branches in universities and academic institutions. The Herasat offices at universities, tasked with identifying potential security threats, have been empowered to surveil employees (for example, by monitoring their communications) and assemble files on them, act as informants, and even influence hiring and firing practices. Indeed, within the past year, security institutions have become the final decisionmakers in all administrative matters related to professors, from hiring and promotion to their suspension and dismissal. University presidents and directors, rather than supporting their faculty and students, have become the executors of security decisions, often without consulting either the faculty members in question or any reappointment, promotion and tenure boards, or other relevant committees.

Your Excellencies, we have written to you several times regarding politically motivated dismissals of faculty members in recent years (see, for example, our letters dated 11 [March 2022](#) and 12 [January 2023](#)), in which we also warn of the negative implications of such dismissals for the larger Iranian society and the pursuit of knowledge and scholarship. We are extremely concerned about this increase in faculty dismissals, as Iranian officials continue to securitize university campuses and curtail free expression and exchange. We therefore call upon you to immediately reinstate all faculty who have lost their academic jobs and rights in this current crackdown so that they can continue to contribute to knowledge production and education. We further call upon you to curb the power and interference of security apparatuses such as MOIS, in academic institutions across Iran, and safeguard the freedom of speech and job security of academics in accordance with Iran's constitution and laws. The Iranian people and government have always valued education and the fostering of knowledge as a cornerstone of national progress. Protecting academic freedom and the faculty who are trained to engage in knowledge production is essential to protecting this critical role of education and educators.

Finally, we draw your attention to only a partial list of those professors who have experienced politically motivated suspensions, dismissals, and/or forced retirements within the past year:

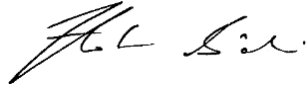
1. Azin Movhad, Associate Professor, Faculty of Fine Arts, University of Tehran.
2. Abtin Golkar, Assistant Professor, Russian Language Department, Tarbiat Modares University.
3. Iraj Mehraki, Assistant Professor, Islamic Azad University- Karaj.
4. Behrouz Chamanara, Assistant Professor, Faculty of Language and Literature, University of Kurdistan.
5. Hojjat Parsa, Associate Professor and Dean, Faculty of Economics and Business, Persian Gulf University.
6. Ali Sharifi Zarchi, Assistant Professor, Sharif University of Technology.
7. Mehdi Khoei, Professor, Faculty of Social Science, Allameh Tabatabai University.
8. Fatemeh Rajaei-Rad, Assistant Professor, Faculty of Medical Science, Babol University.
9. Sadegh Zibakalam, Professor, Faculty of Law and Political Science, University of Tehran.
10. Mohsen Borhani, Assistant Professor, Faculty of Law and Political Science, University of Tehran.

11. Seyyed Akbar Jafari, Professor, Faculty of Physics, Sharif University of Technology.
12. Mohammad Ragheb, Assistant Professor, Faculty of Persian Language and Literature, Shahid Beheshti University.
13. Negar Zeilabi, Assistant Professor, Faculty of Theology and Religions, Shahid Beheshti University.
14. Eslam Nazemi, Associate Professor, Faculty of Engineering and Computer Science, Shahid Beheshti University.
15. Niloofar Razavi, Assistant Professor, Faculty of Architecture and Urban Planning, Shahid Beheshti University.
16. Hossein Mesbahian, Assistant Professor, Faculty of Letters and Humanities, University of Tehran.
17. Amir Nikpey, Assistant Professor, Faculty of Law, Shahid Beheshti University.
18. Hassan Bagheri Nia, Assistant Professor, Department of Psychology and Educational Sciences, Hakim Sabzevari University.
19. Zahra Khoshk Jan, Assistant Professor, Faculty of Literature, Shahid Bahonar University of Kerman.
20. Susan Safaverdi, Assistant Professor, Faculty of Political Science, Islamic Azad University-Central Branch.
21. Mustafa Azarakhshi, Assistant Professor, Faculty of Theology and Religions, Shahid Beheshti University.
22. Seyed Javad Emami, Assistant Professor, Faculty of Architecture and Environmental Design, University of Science and Technology.
23. Ali Akbar Amini, Assistant Professor, Political Science, Islamic Azad University- Central Branch.
24. Vahid Edgah, Assistant Professor, Faculty of Letters & Humanities, University of Tehran.
25. Alireza Azad, Assistant Professor, Faculty of Theology and Islamic Thought, Ferdowsi University of Mashhad.
26. Abolfazl Shayan, Dean & Assistant Professor, Faculty of Humanities, Jahrom University.
27. Amir Maziar, Assistant Professor, Faculty of Theoretical Sciences & Advanced Art, Tehran University of Art.
28. Arman Zakeri, Assistant Professor, Faculty of Humanities, Tarbiat Modares University.
29. Armin Amir, Assistant Professor, Faculty of Social Sciences, Allameh Tabataba'i University.
30. Eisa Amini, Assistant Professor, Faculty of Law, Islamic Azad University- Central Branch of Tehran.
31. Jalil Maleki, Assistant Professor, Faculty of Law, Islamic Azad University- Central Branch of Tehran.
32. Masood Olia, Assistant Professor, Faculty of Theoretical Sciences & Advanced Art Studies, Tehran University of Art.

33. Mohsen Khalili, Associate Professor, Faculty of Law & Political Science, Ferdowsi University of Mashhad.
34. Morteza Nemati, Assistant Professor, Faculty of Letters & Humanities, Shahid Chamran University of Ahvaz.
35. Musa Akrami, Professor, Faculty of Law, Theology, & Political Science, Islamic Azad University- Science & Research at Tehran Branch.
36. Shamsi Abbasalizadeh, Associate Professor, Faculty of Medical Sciences, Tabriz University of Medical Sciences.
37. Somayeh Sima, Assistant Professor, Faculty of Civil & Environmental Engineering, Tarbiat Modares University.
38. Amir Sajedi, Assistant Professor, Political Science, Islamic Azad University- Central Branch of Tehran.
39. Arash Reisinezhad, Assistant Professor, Law & Political Science, University of Tehran.
40. Behshid Hosseini, Professor, Architecture & Urban Planning, Tehran University of Art.
41. Farshi Nowrouzi Roshanvand, Assistant Professor, Faculty of Language & Literature, University of Mazandaran.
42. Farzan Sojoodi, Associate Professor, Faculty of Cinema & Theatre, Tehran University of Art.
43. Ghasem Azizi, Professor, Faculty of Geography, University of Tehran.
44. Javad Bashiri, Assistant Professor, Faculty of Letters & Humanities, University of Tehran.
45. Kusha Gorji Sefat, Assistant Professor, Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Tehran.
46. Leila Varahram, Assistant Professor, Faculty of Letters & Humanities, University of Tehran.
47. Maghsood Ranjbar, Assistant Professor, Faculty of Humanities, Islamic Azad University- Qom Branch.
48. Mahdi Motia, Associate Professor, Faculty of Theology & Prophet's Descendants Studies, University of Isfahan.
49. Majid Zargham, Associate Professor, Faculty of Humanities, Islamic Azad University- Qom Branch.
50. Mohammad Ali Khosravi, Assistant Professor, Faculty of Political Science, Islamic Azad University- Central Branch of Tehran.

Thank you for your attention to this urgent matter. We look forward to your response.

Sincerely,



Aslı Ü. Bâli  
MESA President  
Professor, Yale Law School



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

Cc:

His Excellency Ebrahim Raisi, President  
The Honorable Mahmoud Alavi, Minister of Intelligence  
The Honorable Hossein Amir-Abdollahian, Minister of Foreign Affairs  
The Honorable Takht-Ravanchi, Permanent Representative of Iran to the  
United Nations  
The Honorable Volker Türk, UN High Commissioner for Human Rights  
The Honorable Javād Reḥmān, UN Special Rapporteur on the Situation  
of Human Rights in the Islamic Republic of Iran  
The Honorable Mary Lawlor, UN Special Rapporteur on the Situation of  
Human Rights Defenders  
The Honorable Tlaleng Mofokeng, UN Special Rapporteur on the Right  
to Physical and Mental Health  
The Honorable Irene Khan, UN Special Rapporteur on the promotion and  
protection of the right to freedom of opinion and expression  
Udo Bullmann, Chair of the European Parliament Subcommittee on  
Human Rights  
Viktor Almqvist, Press Officer for the Committee on Foreign Affairs  
(AFET) and Subcommittee on Human Rights (DROI) of the European  
Parliament  
Josep Borrell Fontelles, High Representative of the European Union for  
Foreign Affairs and Security Policy  
Fiona Knab-Lunny, Member of Cabinet of Josep Borrell, High  
Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security  
Policy  
Hannah Neumann, Vice-Chair of the European Parliament Subcommittee  
on Human Rights



Re: Dismissals of University Professors

15 February 2024

Page 7

Raphael Glucksmann, Vice-Chair of the European Parliament

Subcommittee on Human Rights

Bernard Guetta, Vice-Chair of the European Parliament Subcommittee on Human Rights

Christian Sagartz, Vice-Chair of the European Parliament Subcommittee on Human Rights

Dunja Mijatović, Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights

Kati Piri, Member of the Dutch Parliament (House of Representatives)

David McAllister, Committee on Foreign Affairs, European Parliament