



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

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22 April 2026

Volker Turk
UN High Commissioner for Human Rights

Khaled El-Enany
Director-General, United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural
Organization (UNESCO)

Farida Shaheed
UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to Education

Jürg Lauber
President, UN Human Rights Council

Kaja Kallas
High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and
Security Policy

Marco Rubio
United States Secretary of State and National Security Advisor

Your Excellencies, High Representative, Special Rapporteur, and Mr.
Secretary:

On behalf of the Committee on Academic Freedom of the Middle East Studies Association of North America (MESA), we write to raise an urgent concern about Iran's educational and academic institutions becoming a frontline in the U.S.-Israel war against the country. The war has followed a dangerous pattern of targeting civilian institutions, cultural and historical heritage sites, and public service centers. Schools, universities, and research centers have been systematically targeted in violation of international humanitarian law, including the Geneva Conventions (1949) and its Additional Protocol I (1977).

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 freedom of expression both within the region and in connection with the study of the region in North America and elsewhere.

The systematic pattern of targeting universities is evident in the damage reported in the first month of the war. According to Iran's Ministry of Science, Research and Technology (MSRT), between 28 February and

30 March, 21 universities in Iran were attacked by U.S.-Israeli strikes, resulting in damages to 154 buildings and sites on campuses in Iran's western and central provinces, including almost all major universities in Tehran. Universities attacked in the capital include: the University of Science and Technology (IUST, est. 1929), one of the oldest technical universities in the region, which plays a central role in training engineers and advancing industrial and technological development in Iran; [Amir Kabir University of Technology](#) (est. 1958) also known as Tehran Polytechnic, one of Iran's most prestigious engineering institutions with a long history of research and academic excellence; Malek-Ashtar University of Technology (est. 1984), where attacks focused on research facilities, leading to damage to laboratories and associated structures; the Iran University of Art (est. 1918), the largest art university in the country, where two buildings were damaged; Imam Hossein University (est. 1986), which offers programs in engineering, sciences, and strategic studies, and where several buildings were damaged; and the National Research Institute of Genetic Engineering and Biotechnology (est. 1989), whose main building was attacked.

These attacks have continued into the second month of war; the most recent reported attacks on universities in Tehran targeted [Shahid Beheshti University](#) (est. 1960) on 3 April, where one faculty building and a research center were largely destroyed. On 5-6 April, U.S.-Israeli airstrikes [directly hit Sharif University of Technology](#)—often described as Iran's MIT in Tehran—damaging key infrastructure, including a data center that supports artificial intelligence systems and the university's digital services. Maryam Mirzakhani, the first woman to receive the Fields Medal in mathematics (referred to as the Nobel Prize of mathematics), graduated from Sharif University of Technology.

Beyond Tehran, half of the universities damaged in March are major academic centers that service Iran's provinces. In Isfahan province, the Isfahan University of Technology (IUT, est. 1977), which is widely regarded as one of Iran's leading centers for science and engineering, was reportedly targeted on multiple occasions between mid- and late March 2026. At least one confirmed strike resulted in injuries to university personnel and damage to 9 buildings, including various faculty buildings and laboratory facilities. Facilities at the Isfahan Science and Technology Town (ISTT), also sustained damage. Similarly, strikes on Isfahan University of Art (est. 1999), which owns numerous historic houses and sites in the city, caused serious damages to five buildings, including the central library and the sports complex.

In West Azerbaijan province, 13 buildings were damaged when the University of Urmia, founded in 1879 on the site of the New Westminster Medical College and now the largest university in the region, was targeted

in an attack. In Ilam province, the student dormitory complex and the provincial technology center at the University of Ilam (est. 1976), were damaged. In Khuzestan province, 16 buildings at the Jundi-Shapur University of Technology (est. 1972) suffered damages due to blast waves, and the perimeter wall of the Khorramshahr University of Marine Science and Technology (est. 1936) was completely destroyed. In Sistan and Baluchestan province, six buildings at the Chabahar Maritime University (est. 1976) sustained damages. In Hamadan province, several buildings at Malayer University (est. 1991) experienced minor damages. The male student dormitory at Persian Gulf University (est. 1991) in Bushehr province was also damaged. The National University of Skills (NUS, formerly the Technical and Vocational University, est. 2011), which has branches in multiple cities, has sustained damages across 14 sites. The mere physical reconstruction of damaged university campuses is expected to impose a substantial financial burden on the country's higher education system.

Research facilities in the medical sciences have also become repeated targets in the war; according to the [World Health Organization](#), over 20 verified attacks have targeted healthcare in Iran. On the morning of 31 March 2026, U.S.-Israeli missiles struck the Tofigh Daru Research & Engineering Company (est. 2000), a key research and development center producing active pharmaceutical ingredients for anticancer, cardiovascular, and immunomodulatory medicines. This grave assault on critical health research infrastructure was followed by a strike on 2 April on the Pasteur Institute of Iran (est. 1920), a century-old institution delivering essential health services, including vaccines. The institute is home to 13 national reference laboratories, three biobanks, and two WHO collaborating centers, and has sustained severe damage that has rendered it unable to continue its work as part of the global Pasteur Institute Network, including its key role in national and regional disease surveillance.

Attacks on educational infrastructure have also damaged primary and secondary schools: more than 760 schools have been directly hit or damaged as of 3 April, according to Iran's [Ministry of Education](#). The first day of the war saw direct strikes on the [Shajareh Tayyebah girls' school](#) in Minab, where at least 168 people, mostly children between seven and twelve years of age, were killed. Over a month after the Minab bombing, the warring aggressors have not been held accountable for the strike, with the US military [saying it was still "investigating."](#) This is while credible institutions like [The New York Times](#) have carried out their own investigations and found the U.S. guilty.

Taken together, reported aerial and missile attacks on major educational and research institutions indicate a deliberate expansion of the target

doctrine to include human capital infrastructure and the systematic erosion of Iran’s intellectual infrastructure. This is part of a broader pattern of Israel targeting educational sites across the region. MESA and its Committee on Academic Freedom have [documented](#) and condemned the systematic destruction of Gaza’s educational sector, including the killing of thousands of students and hundreds of faculty and staff, as well as the destruction of all twelve universities. Scholars have described this as scholasticide: the deliberate destruction of educational institutions and the intellectual life they sustain.

Indeed, this is not the first time students and faculty have suffered from severe disruptions to higher education. Israeli attacks on Iran during the June 2025 “Twelve-Day War” killed 16 faculty members and 13 students and prompted universities to shift to remote operations. On 8-9 January 2026, a security crackdown resulted in thousands arrested and killed and another shift to remote operations to prevent campus protests. The 2026 war and the resulting disruption of education, following upon such attacks and repressive measures, have inflicted both physical and psychological trauma on students at all levels—effects that many young Iranians are likely to carry throughout their lives.

Contrary to Israeli-U.S. claims that some of these institutions have a “dual use,” due to their alleged contribution to the military sector and are thus legitimate military targets, [scholars](#) of international law note that such claims stretch the concept in ways that disregard proportionality and fail to account for the direct, indirect, and cumulative harm to civilians. The international law community has further characterized the U.S.–Israeli decision to initiate the war against Iran as a clear violation of the United Nations Charter—an assessment articulated in an [open letter](#) signed by more than one hundred international law experts. And yet, the conflict has only escalated, with U.S. and Israeli operations intensifying, Israeli forces advancing deeper into southern Lebanon, and the United States reportedly threatening to widen and deepen its attacks on civilian infrastructure in Iran.

We therefore call upon international and regional organizations and actors to intervene in response to these serious violations by the US-Israel coalition by publicly condemning such deliberate attacks on educational institutions. As signatories to relevant conventions, the United States and Israel must be held to their obligations under international humanitarian law to protect scholars, students, and the institutions in which they study, research, and work. We further urge international and regional actors to press for the immediate cessation of the U.S.-Israel war on Iran and to take prompt action toward bringing this war to an end.



Re: U.S.-Israel attacks on educational infrastructure

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Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Ussama Makdisi', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Ussama Makdisi
MESA President
Professor, University of California, Berkeley

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Judith E. Tucker', written in a cursive style.

Judith E. Tucker
Chair, Committee on Academic Freedom
Professor Emerita, Georgetown University

Cc:

Thomas Fletcher, Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and
Emergency Relief Coordinator of UN Office for the Coordination of
Humanitarian Affairs

Roberta Metsola, President of the European Parliament

David McAllister, Chair of the European Parliament Committee on Foreign
Affairs

Mounir Satouri, Chair of European Parliament Subcommittee on Human
Rights

Viktor Almqvist, Press Officer for the Committee on Foreign Affairs and
Subcommittee on Human Rights of the European Parliament

Ursula von der Leyen, President of European Commission

Hélène Le Gal, Managing Director for the Middle East and North Africa,
European Union, External Action Service (EEAS)

Michael O'Flaherty, Commission for Human Rights of Council of Europe

Massoud Pezeshkian, President of the Islamic Republic of Iran

Donald J. Trump, President of the United States



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Pete Hegseth, U.S. Secretary of Defense

Dorothy Shea, Acting Representative of the United States to the UN

Amir-Saeid Irvani, Permanent Representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran to the UN