



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

Headquarters & Secretariat

Georgetown University
Center for Contemporary Arab
Studies

3700 O St. NW, ICC STE 241
Washington DC 20057

Phone 520-333-2577
Fax 520-207-3166
secretariat@mesana.org
mesana.org



29 June 2026

Ayatollah Mojtaba Khamenei
Supreme Leader of the Islamic Republic of Iran
c/o H.E. Mr. Ali Bahreini
Permanent Representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran to the United
Nations
622 Third Avenue, 34th Floor
New York, NY 10017, USA
Email: iran@un.int
Fax: +1 (212) 867-7086

Dr. Masoud Pezeshkian
President of the Islamic Republic of Iran
c/o H.E. Mr. Ali Bahreini
Permanent Representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran to the United
Nations
622 Third Avenue, 34th Floor
New York, NY 10017, USA
Email: iran@un.int
Fax: +1 (212) 867-7086

Chief Justice Gholamhossein Mohseni Ejei, Head of the Judiciary
c/o H.E. Mr. Ali Bahreini
Permanent Representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran to the United
Nations
622 Third Avenue, 34th Floor
New York, NY 10017, USA
Email: iran@un.int
Fax: +1 (212) 867-7086

Your Excellencies,

We write on behalf of the Committee on Academic Freedom of the Middle East Studies Association (MESA) of North America to express our profound alarm at the Iranian government's intensifying crackdown on university students, and to condemn in the strongest possible terms the execution of Erfan Shakourzadeh, a 29-year-old aerospace engineering graduate student at Iran University of Science and Technology, by the Iranian government on 11 May 2026.

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

The Committee on Academic Freedom has repeatedly raised objections to the Iranian authorities' violations of academic freedom. Among the letters we have sent you, our 12 [March 2022](#) letter warned of violations of academic freedom in the dismissals of Professor Arash Abazari from Sharif University of Technology, Professor Mohammad Fazeli from Shahid Beheshti University, and Professor Reza Omid from the University of Tehran. In our letter of 12 [January 2023](#), we objected to the imprisonment of Saeed Madani, a sociologist sentenced to nine years in prison for his scholarly work, and released on 20 April 2026. In our letter of 15 [February 2024](#), we expressed our grave concern over politically motivated suspensions, dismissals, and forced retirements of dozens of faculty members, fifty of whom we identified in what was still a partial list. Our letter of 8 [April 2024](#) expressed concern over the severe crackdown on universities following the 2021 election of Ebrahim Raisi as president, during which some 121 faculty members and [thousands of students were](#) suspended, arrested, or purged for ideological dissent and their support of the *Woman, Life, Freedom* protests. On [11 April 2024](#), we wrote about the unlawful detention of the prominent theologian Sedigheh Vasmaghi, who has drawn on her academic expertise in Islamic jurisprudence to speak in support of women's rights. More recently on 12 [May 2025](#), we wrote about the cruel detention of over six years now of Ali Younesi and Amirhossein Moradi, the gold and silver medalists in astronomy, who were subjected to torture to secure forced confessions. And our letter of 6 [November 2025](#) condemned the politically motivated arrests of independent scholars Parviz Sedaghat, Mahsa Asadollahnejad, and Shirin Karimi, and the interrogations of Mohammad Maljoo and Heyman Rahimi. In recent months, [human rights organizations](#) have continued to document mounting arbitrary arrests and persecutions.

The execution of Erfan Shakourzadeh is the latest violation in this egregious pattern. Shakourzadeh was arrested in March 2025 by the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) Intelligence Organization on charges of espionage and cooperation with hostile countries. He was held in Evin Prison, where, by his own account, he was subjected to eight and a half months of torture and solitary confinement, and forced to make a coerced confession. In a note addressed to the public before his execution, he wrote: "I am Erfan Shakourzadeh, one of the few so-called elites who chose not to emigrate... Do not allow another innocent life to be lost in silence and obscurity." He was 29 years old at the time of his death. The use of the death penalty against a graduate student on the basis of a confession obtained under torture is a grave violation of international human rights law, including Article 5 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which prohibits torture and cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment or punishment, and Article 11, which guarantees the right to a fair trial and the presumption of innocence.

Moreover, we are deeply concerned about the broader wave of disciplinary actions, suspensions, expulsions, and arrests targeting students across Iran's universities. Reports from students at Sharif University of Technology, the University of Tehran, Shahid Beheshti University, Iran University of Science and Technology, and the University of Birjand indicate that hundreds of students have been subjected to disciplinary investigations and punitive measures in recent months, predominantly for activities linked to peaceful protest, student activism, or the expression of political views.

Among the named students whose cases have been brought to our attention are the following, though this is surely only a partial list:

At the University of Tehran: Amir Mehdi Karimi, a Polymer Engineering student, was suspended for two semesters in Fall 2025 and subsequently arrested in May 2026; Vahid Rostami, a Statistics student, was arrested in April 2026; Mahyar Eftekhari, also a Polymer Engineering student, was suspended for two semesters in April 2026 in a ruling issued in absentia, reportedly in violation of Note 84 of the 2024 Disciplinary Regulations; Motahhar Gounaei, a former Dentistry student and secretary of the university's student association, who had already spent one year in prison following expulsion, was again summoned to court in May 2026 after having been released in March 2025; and Amir Hossein Rezaie, a Political Science student who remains detained without further information.

At Sharif University of Technology: Parnian Khodabakhshi, a second-year engineering student, was held for 56 days before being released on bail on 5 May 2026, following student threats of a strike; Fariborz Kohanzad, previously arrested during the *Woman, Life, Freedom* movement, was arrested again in March 2026; Ali Alirezaei was arrested on 9 May 2026; Mostafa Mohammad Hassan, a master's student in Philosophy of Science, remains detained with no information available as to his condition; and Arman Haj-Mohammadi, a master's student in Civil Engineering, and 21-year old Electrical Engineering student Erfan Khadem have been detained.

At Iran University of Science and Technology: Majid Jamshidzadeh was arrested in January 2026, tried in March 2026, and sentenced to five years in prison on charges of "assembly and collusion with the intent to disrupt national security."

At the University of Birjand, disciplinary rulings have been issued against 50 students—including deprivation of housing and welfare services for 30 students and two-semester suspensions for 20 others—in proceedings that students and legal observers have described as unlawful, as rulings were issued in absentia while non-resident students were not present in the city.

At multiple other universities, students have been arrested and remain detained:

In the city of Tabriz, these include Ahmadreza Afsharinezhad, Sahand Abbasnia, and Mohammad Mohammadzadeh, all three Architecture students, and Sahand Zaheri, Graphic Arts student, all at the Islamic Arts University of Tabriz; Pedram Alamdari, Somayeh Heydari, and Ali Ebrahimi, all three Physics students at Tabriz University; as well as Mehdi Kuhsari, Medical student at Tabriz University of Medical Sciences.

At Rasht University, these students include Nima Hemmati, a Master's student in Ethnomusicology, and Sima Chambari, a Chemistry student.

At Tehran's Sureh University, Dasta Farrokhi, student of Dramaturgy Literature, and at Azad University of Karaj, Amir Hossein Sheikhmohammady, student of Veterinary Medicine, were detained.

In addition, on the evening of 11 April 2026, a group of 18 students from the Universities of Tehran, Shahid Beheshti, Sharif, and Ferdowsi—alumni of the same National Organization for Development of Exceptional Talents (SAMPAD) high school who had gathered with a former high school sociology teacher to reconnect—were suddenly confronted by armed security agents. Several students were severely beaten and their mobile phones confiscated before all 18 were transferred to an undisclosed detention facility. Following initial interrogations, 14 were released. Four students were held in solitary confinement overnight: Mohammad Parsa Golchin, a 2024 entrant in Literature at the University of Tehran; Mohammad Hassan Khoshchreh, a 2024 entrant in Law at the University of Tehran; Iliya Sabouri-Nasab, a 2024 entrant in Social Sciences at the University of Tehran; and Hossein Mahdi-Panah, a 2024 entrant in Electrical Engineering at Sharif University of Technology. On 12 April, at the Revolutionary Prosecutor's Office in Mashhad, they were formally charged with assembly and collusion against national security and propaganda activities against the state. Three were subsequently released on surety bail; Mohammad Parsa Golchin, a Literature student and gold medal winner in the National Literature Olympiad, remains in detention.

In the most recent concerning development, Yashar Darolshafa, a doctoral student at the University of Social Welfare and Rehabilitation Sciences, who is a member of Iran's Sociology Society's governing board, was assaulted and detained and his whereabouts remain uncertain.

The crackdown has not been confined to enrolled students. On 22 April 2026, Mohammad Mehdi Hatef, a writer, translator, and independent researcher in philosophy, was arrested by security forces at his workplace in Tehran and transferred to an undisclosed location. Following his arrest, agents raided his

home, conducted a thorough search of the premises, and confiscated electronic devices along with academic and research materials. No information was made available regarding the reasons for his arrest, the charges against him, or his place of detention. He has since been reported released. His case is consistent with the broader pattern, documented in our letter of 6 November 2025, of security forces targeting independent scholars and researchers who pursue intellectual and civic work outside the formal university system.

The manner in which these disciplinary proceedings have been conducted raises grave concerns about compliance with Iran's own regulations, including the [revised disciplinary guidelines adopted in 2024](#). Students report receiving telephone notifications of disciplinary files opened against them without being provided written charges, evidence, or adequate time to prepare a defense. Disciplinary authorities have reportedly relied on students' social media activity, private online communications, and Telegram messages as grounds for punishment. At Shahid Beheshti University, access to educational systems—including course registration platforms—was suspended for dozens of students before any disciplinary ruling had been issued, effectively denying them access to education prior to any finding of wrongdoing. Accounts from disciplinary hearings describe proceedings that functioned as ideological interrogations rather than impartial reviews, in which students were questioned about their personal beliefs and political views and subjected to intimidation.

These actions form part of a sustained and escalating effort to suppress student activism and independent thought in Iran's universities. Universities have historically served as vital spaces for debate, critical inquiry, and civic participation in Iranian society. The growing use of expulsions, suspensions, arrests, and disciplinary intimidation creates a climate of fear that discourages students from exercising their fundamental rights—rights enshrined in Articles 19, 20, and 26 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, to which Iran is legally obligated as a signatory. Article 26 affirms the right to education and stipulates that higher education shall be equally accessible to all on the basis of merit. Articles 19 and 20 protect freedom of expression and peaceful assembly. The systematic targeting of students for the peaceful exercise of these rights constitutes a clear and ongoing violation of Iran's international obligations.

We condemn all politically motivated executions, disciplinary actions and arrests targeting students and scholars across Iran. We decry these measures as clear violations of the fundamental rights of academic freedom, freedom of expression, freedom of assembly, and the right to education. We urge your administration to immediately halt all disciplinary actions that violate due process; to restore affected students' access to education; to reverse unjust

suspensions and expulsions; to release all students and scholars currently detained for the peaceful exercise of their rights; and to uphold Iran's obligations under national and international law, including those enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948.

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

Sincerely,



Ussama Makdisi
MESA President
Professor, University of California, Berkeley



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

Cc:

The Honorable Esmacil Khatib, Minister of Intelligence

The Honorable Abbas Araghchi, Minister of Foreign Affairs

The Honorable Ali Bahreini, Permanent Representative of Iran to the United Nations

The Honorable Volker Türk, UN High Commissioner for Human Rights

The Honorable Mai Sato, 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

Mounir Satouri, Chair of the European Parliament Subcommittee on Human Rights

Re: Repression of Iranian students

29 June 2026

Page 7

David McAllister, Chair of the Committee on Foreign Affairs (AFET)

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

Adam Romanowski, Member of Cabinet of Kaja Kallas, High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy

Marta Temido, Vice-Chair of the European Parliament Subcommittee on Human Rights

Łukasz Kohut, Vice-Chair of the European Parliament Subcommittee on Human Rights

Michael O’Flaherty, Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights

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