



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

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7 November 2025

Ayatollah Ali Khamenei
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c/o H.E. Mr. Amir-Saeid Iravani
Permanent Representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran to the
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Dr. Masoud Pezeshkian
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Chief Justice Gholamhossein Mohseni Ejei, Head of the Judiciary
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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 deep concern over the Iranian government's ongoing violations of academic freedom, particularly in light of the recent politically motivated arrests or summons of independent scholars, most notably, Parviz Sedaghat, Mahsa Asadollahnejad, Shirin Karimi, Mohammad Maljoo and Heyman Rahimi. We object in the strongest possible terms to the persecution of these individuals and the denial of their rights.

MESA was founded in 1966 to promote scholarship and teaching on the Middle East and North Africa. The preeminent organization

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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.

In recent years, our committee has repeatedly raised objections to the suspension, dismissal, and imprisonment of academics in Iran. 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. Our letter of 12 [March 2022](#) 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. We wrote several letters (for example, letter dated [11 April 2024](#)) objecting to the unjust persecution of Prof. Sedigheh Vasmaghi for her peaceful protests against police brutality, and the banning of her books in Iran. And 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.

President Masoud Pezeshkian's government—elected on promises to reform the state's rigid ideological and political disciplining practices—has sought to restore calm to universities in the new academic year by reinstating some of the dismissed professors and students. Yet, the security forces have turned their attention to independent researchers and educators who engage in civic teaching, research, and public dialogue on pressing social issues. [On 3 November 2025](#), Parviz Sedaghat, a researcher and senior editor of economic journals in Iran, Mahsa Asadollahnejad, a sociologist and political researcher, and Shirin Karimi, a writer and translator, were arrested at their homes and taken to prison. Mohammad Maljoo, an economist and former university lecturer, and Heyman Rahimi, a scholar of political economy, have not been imprisoned, but they are required to submit to daily interrogation at a designated security facility. All five have been charged with “threats to national security” for their intellectual work.



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The recent attacks on independent and critical scholars outside the university system expose the limits of the government's professed efforts to safeguard academic freedom. The protection of academic freedom must extend beyond universities to encompass independent researchers and their civic research and educational institutions, as well. These scholars have already been deprived of their careers and livelihoods, having been wrongfully expelled from or excluded by universities for political or ideological reasons. They must not also be denied their right to pursue intellectual and scholarly work—individually or through independent civic institutions—and their public lectures and research activities must be protected from security raids and harassment. These rights are enshrined in Articles 19 and 26 of the United Nations' Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948, to which Iran is a signatory.

We join other academic associations in expressing our outrage regarding the politically motivated treatment of social science scholars, and we condemn these clear violations of the fundamental right of academic freedom. We urge your administration to uphold Iran's obligations under national and international laws, including those enshrined in the articles of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

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

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Asli U. Bali'.

Aslı Ü. Bâli
MESA President
Professor, Yale Law School

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Laurie A. Brand'.

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

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The Honorable Esmail Khatib, Minister of Intelligence

The Honorable Abbas Araghchi, Minister of Foreign Affairs

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

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)