



Association for  
**Iranian  
Studies**

May 11, 2026

Volker Türk  
UN High Commissioner for Human Rights

Audrey Azoulay  
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 (CAF) of the Association for Iranian Studies (AIS), we write to raise an urgent concern about Iran's educational and academic institutions becoming a frontline in the widening 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).

AIS is a private, non-profit academic society founded in 1967 to support and promote scholarship and research on Iran and the Persianate world at the international level. An independent, non-partisan, non-political, and multidisciplinary international community, the association publishes *Iranian Studies*, the principal journal in the field. AIS membership includes scholars, students, and academic and professional researchers. AIS is dedicated to the promotion of scholarship and teaching on Iran and the protection of academic freedom. Central to this mission is the defense of educational institutions as spaces of learning, research, and intellectual exchange, which must be safeguarded from violence and political coercion.

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 February 28 and March 30, 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.

Among those affected are:

- Iran University of Science and Technology (est. 1929), a leading center for engineering and industrial research
- [Amir Kabir University of Technology](#) (est. 1958), one of Iran's most prominent technical institutions
- Malek-Ashtar University of Technology (est. 1984), where research facilities and laboratories were damaged
- Iran University of Art (est. 1918), where multiple buildings sustained damage
- Imam Hossein University (est. 1986), where several academic buildings were affected
- National Research Institute of Genetic Engineering and Biotechnology (est. 1989), whose main building was struck

These attacks continued into the second month of war; the most recent reported attacks on universities in Tehran targeted [Shahid Beheshti University](#) (est. 1960) on April 3, where one faculty building and a research center were largely destroyed. On April 5–6, 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.

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 two months after the Minab bombing, no accountability measures have been taken regarding the strike, with the U.S. military [stating that it was still "investigating"](#) the incident. At the same time, [UN experts have strongly condemned the attack](#), while investigative reporting by [The New York Times](#) concluded that the strike was carried out by U.S. forces.

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. Indeed, this is not the first time students and faculty have suffered from severe disruptions to higher education. US-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. In the February and March 2026 attacks at least 60 students and 10 professors were killed; [broader estimates](#) suggest that as many as 303 students and teachers across educational levels have lost their lives. 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 only escalated, with U.S. and Israeli operations having intensified, Israeli forces having advanced deeper into southern Lebanon, and the United States continuing to threaten to widen and deepen its attacks on civilian infrastructure in Iran.

We therefore call upon international and regional organizations, governments, and relevant actors to respond urgently to these grave violations by the U.S.–Israel coalition by:

- Publicly condemning the deliberate targeting and destruction of educational institutions, and affirming that, as signatories to applicable international conventions, the United States and Israel must be held fully accountable to their obligations under international humanitarian law, including the protection of students, scholars, educators, and the educational spaces in which they study, teach, research, and work.
- Exerting immediate diplomatic, legal, and political pressure to secure the cessation of the U.S.–Israel war on Iran, and taking concrete steps to bring this military campaign to an end without delay.
- Mobilizing reparative support for affected educational institutions, including reconstruction of damaged schools and universities, and restoration of academic infrastructure.

Sincerely,

The Committee for Academic Freedom,  
Association for Iranian Studies

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 Almquist, 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

Pete Hegseth, U.S. Secretary of Defense

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

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

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