



Association for
**Iranian
Studies**

Statement regarding the continuing crackdown on university students, faculty, and campuses in Iran

January 3, 2023

We write on behalf of the Association for Iranian Studies (AIS) and its Committee for Academic Freedom (CAF) to express our outrage and deep concern regarding the continuation of unlawful and violent government assault on academic freedom in the Islamic Republic of Iran. Following the state murder of the 22-year-old Kurdish-Iranian woman Mahsa Jina Amini on 16 September 2022, hundreds of students, teachers, and scholars who joined the peaceful protests have been injured, detained, dismissed, and prosecuted. University campuses have been attacked and placed under siege, among them Sharif University of Technology, University of Tehran, Tabriz University of Medical Sciences, Kurdistan University of Medical Sciences, and Babol Noshirvani University of Technology, where students and teachers have been brutally injured by live bullets and birdshots, beaten, dragged from their dormitories, and transferred to unknown locations. The swift executions without trial of young activists, Mohsen Shekari and Majidreza Rahnavard, have compounded the atmosphere of terror and fear to which Iranian university students of a similar age are subjected.

We are alarmed further by the recent disturbing news that female students and schoolgirls have been subjected to sexual assault in detention centers and interrogation rooms across the country. The horrific accounts of torture, sexual assault, and executions are illegal actions intended to terrorize and silence the Iranian people and to crush their peaceful protests.

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. We are committed to encouraging the free exchange of ideas and freedom of speech, both within and beyond the geographical boundaries of Iran. AIS's CAF has been closely following the ongoing protests in Iran for the fourth consecutive month with grave concern over state impunity and the unprecedented police violence against peaceful protesters, many of whom are university students, teachers, and researchers.

In our previous statement issued on October 3, 2022, we strongly condemned the unlawful and violent crackdown on Sharif University of Technology, which took place on October 2, 2022, and was an example of a continuing systematic assault on the institutions of higher education in Iran. In the weeks and months following that horrific incident, the Islamic Republic's security forces have continued to

launch a series of attacks on university campuses across the country with hundreds of students being injured, kidnapped, and transferred to unknown locations, according to the [Students' Union of Iran](#). Hundreds of students and scholars remain under unlawful detention.

On October 30, 2022, [Human Rights Watch](#) estimated that at least 308 university students have been arrested since the protests began. Within two months, this number doubled and currently exceeds 605 identified student detainees, according to a report released by the [Human Rights Activists News Agency \(Harana\)](#) on December 29, 2022. Hundreds of thousands of detainees are facing show trials and severe sentences, among them, many students and scholars, who are deprived of meaningful legal representation. According to [Iran Human Rights group](#) (IHRNGO) dozens of protesters, including university students, could potentially receive the death sentence on baseless security-related charges such as “enmity against God” (*moharebeh*) and “corruption on earth” (*efsad-fil-arz*).

Academics who are not behind bars face threats of interrogation, imprisonment, and expulsion. Dozens of students have been banned from setting foot on university campuses and pursuing their education, solely for having dared to exercise their rights to freedom of expression, association, and assembly by stating their opinions and participating in peaceful protests. Several university professors have been dismissed from their positions or have been summoned for interrogations. For example, Professor Ali Sharifi-Zarchi of the Department of Bioinformatics and Computer Engineering at Sharif University of Technology, was called into interrogation on December 24, 2022, for protesting the unlawful mass arrests of students. Another disturbing case concerns that of Professor Mohamad Ragheb, assistant professor of Persian literature at Shahid Beheshti University, who has been suspended from his position after boycotting classes and joining the protests along with his students and colleagues. These incidents are particularly troubling since they demonstrate the vicious measures undertaken by the state’s security apparatuses, including the raiding of university campuses, the use of lethal force against academics, expulsions, and sham trials to crush peaceful nationwide protests.

As we noted in our previous statement, we remain resolute in voicing our solidarity with our colleagues and students in Iran who are risking their lives for a better life. The ongoing attacks on peaceful protests violate the Islamic Republic’s own Constitution, Article 27, which guarantees the right to peaceful assembly. We call upon government officials to heed Iranians’ demands for basic rights to education, speech, and peaceful assembly. We further demand the immediate release of all arrested and imprisoned academics. We also call upon international human rights organizations to hold the Islamic Republic accountable for the unlawful killing of Ms. Amini and [512](#) innocent protesters, including 69 children who have lost their lives since September 17, 2022.

At AIS-CAF we will continually monitor the situation on the ground and document the judiciary’s violation of the laws of the Islamic Republic and its international legal commitments. The instigation and use of coercive force against peaceful academics must be stopped; the unlawful and arbitrary charges against students and scholars must be reversed; and respect for academic autonomy and freedom across the country must be honored.