



Association for
**Iranian
Studies**

15 May 2026

Robert J. Jones
President, University of Washington
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Tricia Serio
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Professor Daniel Hoffman
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Dear President Jones, Provost Serio and Professor Hoffman:

We write as members of the Association for Iranian Studies Committee on Academic Freedom (AIS-CAF) regarding recent developments involving University of Washington Associate Professor Dr. Aria Fani, who holds the Elahé Omidyar Mir-Djalali Professorship in Persian and Iranian Studies, and the decision to remove him from his position as director of the Middle East Center at the University's Jackson School of International Studies.

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. As an independent, non-partisan, non-political, multidisciplinary international community, the association publishes *Iranian Studies*, the principal journal in the field. AIS membership includes over 500 scholars, students, academic and other professional researchers. We are committed to encouraging the free exchange of ideas and academic freedom of speech, both within and beyond the geographical boundaries of Iran. The association's Committee on Academic Freedom has been following the particularities of this case.



The removal of Dr. Fani from his directorship of the Middle East Center has prompted concerns within the academic community and wider public regarding whether established procedures, principles of faculty governance, and norms of due process were followed in the decision-making process. In circumstances where administrative actions affect faculty appointments or leadership roles, particularly where such actions may be understood as connected to a faculty member's public or professional expression, it is important that institutions adhere to established procedures and clearly communicate the basis for their decisions.

Administrative actions affecting faculty leadership roles in contexts involving public expression must be undertaken through clear, transparent, and consistently applied procedures. In the absence of such clarity, these actions risk undermining confidence in institutional commitments to academic freedom and faculty governance.

Widely recognized standards of academic governance emphasize that such actions should be guided by applicable institutional policies, include appropriate consultation with relevant faculty bodies where required, and be carried out in a manner consistent with principles of fairness, transparency, and due process. Clarity in these matters is essential not only for the individuals involved, but also for maintaining confidence in institutional processes more broadly.

In light of these considerations, AIS-CAF respectfully invites the University of Washington to clarify:

- The institutional procedural framework under which the decision regarding the termination of Dr. Fani's directorship was made;
- Whether relevant faculty governance structures were consulted in accordance with institutional policy;
- How principles of due process were applied in this case.

We further encourage the University of Washington to ensure that its actions are undertaken in accordance with established principles of faculty governance and institutional procedure, and in full compliance with applicable federal and state anti-discrimination laws.

We offer these observations with the aim of affirming the importance of academic freedom and maintaining clear, consistent, and transparent institutional procedures in matters affecting faculty roles. Such practices are central to sustaining the conditions under which academic work can proceed with integrity.



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AIS-CAF will continue to follow this matter as appropriate and remains committed to supporting the procedural foundations of academic freedom for scholars in Iranian studies and related fields.

Sincerely,

The Committee for Academic Freedom,
Association for Iranian Studies

cc:

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Farida Shaheed
United Nations Special Rapporteur on the Right to Education