



AIS – CAF Statement on Expulsion and Suspension of Iranian University Faculty in Advance of the One-Year Anniversary of Woman, Life, Freedom Uprisings

September 8, 2023

We write on behalf of the Association for Iranian Studies (AIS) and its Committee for Academic Freedom (CAF) to express grave concern over recent reports of the suspension, expulsion, and forced retirement of university faculty in Iran. The government has removed in recent weeks established university faculty and replaced them instead with individuals that support the state's political positions but who lack appropriate [scholarly credentials](#).

This purging has occurred throughout this past year but has increased substantially in advance of the one-year anniversary of the uprisings that began with the murder of Jîna Mahsa Amini on 16 September 2022. Ms. Amini was apprehended by the Morality Police ostensibly for having improper hijab. She was violently beaten while in custody of the police and died three days after her arrest. The episode sparked protracted uprisings throughout Iran.

The charges brought against dismissed professors include support of these protests, inciting students to protest, and the use of [anti-régime slogans](#). Dr. Ali Sharifi-Zarchi, assistant professor of bioinformatics and artificial intelligence at Sharif University of Technology, reported recently that he had received a notice of [dismissal](#). Dr. Sharifi-Zarchi had been an outspoken critic of the regime's clampdown on students and universities from the beginning of the protests in September 2022. Similarly, scholars at other institutions of higher education have become subjected to similar firing slips. At Allameh Tabataba'i University, faculty members [Dr. Ameneh 'Aali](#) and Dr. [Hamideh Khademi](#) were targeted for their support of student uprisings last year. These represent only a few of a much larger group of professors who have been summarily dismissed, some by telephone without formal notice. Days after these expulsions, new [reports](#) emerged about the additional discharge of seven professors from the Faculty of Literature at the University of Tehran. Further dismissals have taken place at Tehran's Fine Arts University, and at Tehran University's College of Fine Arts, Dr. Azin Movahed was dismissed. At Beheshti University [Dr. Mohammad Ragheb](#) was suspended from the department of Persian literature last year. In recent weeks Dr. Vahid Eidgah, Dr. Javad Bashari, Dr. Milad Azimi, Dr. Leily Varahram, Dr. Ghasem Azizi, and Dr. Dariush Rahmanian have been either targeted or dismissed from their positions. On some university campuses, [many students](#) have again been

subjected to violence and similarly expelled. The activist HRANA news agency maintains that at least 700 students have been arrested over the course of the protests. These purges have increased during the presidency of [Ebrahim Raisi](#).

Over the past year, university campuses have become sites of contestation and political protest, leading to the arrest and detention of countless students and teachers. We are alarmed that these expulsions have taken place summarily and without due process. By engaging in retaliatory acts that amount to ideological purging of the university, the Islamic Republic has flagrantly defied the principles of academic freedom and expression that remain central to the foundations of higher education and knowledge production. These suspensions and expulsions have precedent, most prominently after the establishment of the régime in what was called a “cultural revolution” and again after the 2009 Green Movement uprising. Restrictions on academic freedom, as well as the suspension and expulsion of university professors, have compelled many academics to flee and to [immigrate abroad](#).

Academic freedom remains one of the fundamental rights of university scholars. In 1997, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization’s (UNESCO) [Recommendation Concerning the Status of Higher-Education Teaching Personnel](#) declared that “all higher-education teaching personnel should enjoy freedom of thought, conscience, religion, expression, assembly and association as well as the right to liberty and security of the person and liberty of movement. They should not be hindered or impeded in exercising their civil rights as citizens, including the right to contribute to social change through freely expressing their opinion of state policies and of policies affecting higher education.” The [European Union Charter of Fundamental Human Rights](#) also affirms the principles of academic freedom.

Finally, the [American Association of University Professors](#) (AAUP) stresses that academic freedom “protects the right of a faculty member to speak freely when participating in institutional governance, as well as to speak freely as a citizen.” The “[t]argeted harassment” of faculty and the “[l]ack of procedural protections” represent a serious threat to the academic freedom of professors and young university scholars.

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 monitoring the suspension and expulsion of university scholars in Iran and forcefully condemns these actions. It calls on the authorities of the Islamic Republic of

Iran to halt its improper purging of faculty and to protect the rights and freedoms of university academics by providing an environment free from harassment and retaliation that allows professors and students to pursue their research and to express freely their rights as citizens. We further urge state authorities to reinstate immediately and with full privileges all professors dismissed from their posts, as well as all students suspended or expelled from their degree courses, because of their participation in anti-régime protests.