



Association for
**Iranian
Studies**

January 3, 2023

AIS Letter Protesting the Recent Sentence and Imprisonment of Professor Saeed Madani

We write on behalf the Association for Iranian Studies (AIS) and its Committee for Academic Freedom (CAF) to express our outrage over the nine-year sentence issued against Professor Saeed Madani, a prominent sociologist of Iran. The conviction and lengthy prison sentence handed down to Dr. Madani constitute clear violations of his academic freedom, freedom of speech, and freedom of conscience, as protected by Iran's own laws and its legal obligations under international law.

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 over 500 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.

Dr. Madani has a long history of political activism in Iran, going back to before the 1979 revolution. He has used his scholarly platform to raise awareness and speak out against social harms and societal inequities, particularly on behalf of those with the least social and political power in the country.

Dr. Madani is a member of the banned political coalition, The Council of Nationalist-Religious Activists of Iran, a non-violent, democratic opposition that calls for structural reform and seeks to hold Iranian leaders to the rule of law as laid out by that country's Constitution. He is also a member of the Social Problems and Harms Group of the Iranian Sociological Association and a member of the Social Welfare Research Group of the University of Social Welfare and Rehabilitation Sciences. In addition, he edits the journal, *Social Welfare*. Dr. Madani has led numerous research projects in various areas of social harm in Iran, including poverty, inequality, addiction, and prostitution. He has published his research on capital punishment, civil society, social movements, violence against women, and children's rights in Iran.

Critical of Dr. Madani's research activities, Iran's government officials have prevented him from obtaining a permanent faculty position, although he has taught at many of Iran's top universities. In recent years, authorities have prohibited him from publishing his research results inside of Iran and traveling outside of the country.

In 2016, Dr. Madani was exiled to the southern port city of Bandar Abbas after having served four years of an eight-year prison sentence at Evin prison in Tehran. Then, this past January (2022), Dr. Madani was prohibited from leaving Iran to take up a one-year post at Yale University. He was subjected to prolonged interrogation in the middle of the night after he had already checked-in his luggage and was scheduled to board his flight to the U.S.

In May 2022, Dr. Madani was arrested in his home by the Islamic Republic Guard Corps and charged with “forming and administering dissident groups,” “propaganda against the Islamic Republic of Iran,” and “assembly and collusion to commit crimes against the security of the country.” The evidence supporting these charges included Dr. Madani’s membership in the Civil Rights Association, an organization licensed by the Interior Ministry, his publication of a book against capital punishment, *Against the Death Penalty*, and a meeting with Iran’s former president, Mohammad Khatami (1997-2005).

On December 24, 2022, Branch 29 of Iran’s Islamic Revolutionary Court issued its ruling finding Dr. Madani guilty of “forming and administering dissident groups” (according to [socio-political activists inside Iran](#), these are online groups in social media!) and “propaganda against the Islamic Republic of Iran.” (He was acquitted of the charge of “assembly and collusion to commit crimes against the security of the country.”) Dr. Madani was sentenced to eight years in prison for the first charge and one year for the second, for a total of nine years, eight of which are mandatory.

Despite the charges against him, Iranian authorities recognize his expertise when it comes to civil society, social movements, and repression and inequality. According to his lawyer, Mahmoud Behzadirad, Dr. Madani was consulted inside of Evin prison on three separate occasions by Intelligence Ministry officials, who asked his opinion about how to stop the ongoing protests. He replied that the authorities should stop their violent repression and respect the rights of protestors. This is hardly the first example of the state seeking the consultation of its prisoner-scholars. The simultaneous persecution and consultation of its scholars, intellectuals, and scientists demonstrates the extent to which the Islamic Republic of Iran is its own worst enemy and creates unnecessary turmoil through its aggressive repression of peaceful demonstrators and observant critics. A sad footnote to this saga is that one of Dr. Madani’s own lawyers, Mohammad Ali Kamfirouzi, has now also been arrested and faces similar charges in the same court, before the same judge.

The harsh sentence against Dr. Madani is among the latest examples of the continuing persecution of Iranian scholars and researchers in the country since the state killing of Mahsa Jhina Amini, on September 16, 2022, which sparked nationwide outrage and protests that have continued to this day. The arbitrary arrest, interrogation, imprisonment, and killing of Iranian professors, scholars and researchers are continued violations of Iran’s Constitution, Article 23, concerning the freedom of opinion, thought, and conscience.

We continue to call upon Iranian authorities to release all protestors, including those like Dr. Madani, who have been sentenced to lengthy prison terms simply for expressing their views and publishing their research. We demand that the authorities halt the targeting of scholars, students, academics, and researchers, release all political prisoners and prisoners of conscience, and

respect academic freedom, which is consistent with their domestic laws and their legal obligations under international law.