



Association for
**Iranian
Studies**

March 7, 2022

We write on behalf the Association for Iranian Studies (AIS) and its Committee for Academic Freedom (CAF) to express our concern for the violations of academic freedom in Iran in light of the news of a spate of dismissals of university faculty over the past months. These include Professor Arash Abazari, Department of Philosophy of Science, Sharif University of Technology, Professor Mohammad Fazeli, Department of Sociology, Shahid Beheshti University, and Professor Reza Omid, Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Tehran.

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. AIS's CAF has been closely following the recent news of a number of disturbing dismissals of university professors.

Each of these professors is a renowned scholar in his field whose research and publications, teaching, and service to their communities make them important academics and public servants. The AIS CAF joins our colleagues around the world in protesting what amounts to politically-motivated purges.

Professor Abazari is a Johns Hopkins trained philosopher of science and an expert on 19th Century German Philosophy. He was hired in 2018. During his brief time at Sharif University, Professor Abazari published numerous peer-reviewed articles and a monograph on Hegel, by Cambridge University Press in 2020. Despite this evidence of promise, his contract was not renewed. The chair of his department at Sharif, Professor Ebrahim Azadegan, stated that Iranian authorities erroneously claimed that Professor Abazari had been a signatory of a 2010 open letter in protest of the 2009 Iranian presidential election results.

Professor Fazeli is a well-known sociologist of politics and science, particularly the energy sector. Since 2015, Fazeli has also been a faculty member at Shahid Beheshti. After the August 2021 inauguration of Iran's new president, Ebrahim Raisi, news of Professor Fazeli's dismissal began to emerge. Under the previous government of President Hassan Rouhani, Professor Fazeli was employed at the Center for Strategic Studies, the research unit of the President's office, from 2013-2017. Shahid Beheshti University personnel attributed the university's decision not to renew Professor Fazeli's contract in part to his absence while working in the former President's Center. Yet, his dismissal in 2022 is consistent with a broader sweep of academic dismissals.

Professor Omidi was hired at the University of Tehran in 2018. His teaching and research focus on social welfare policies and inequality. University officials stated that Professor Omidi's contract was not renewed because he did not pass the government's vetting policies.

Taken together, these cases raise concerns about academic purges similar to previous such actions taken during the administration of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad (2005-2013) and post-revolutionary "cultural revolution," which led to the closing of universities for some years. Such actions not only harm individual faculty and their students, but also weaken Iranian social science and humanities education and research sectors, and deplete institutions of higher education in Iran.

We call on the Iranian government and university administrators to reinstate these professors and to change course by emphasizing the protection of academic freedom in Iran, as called for in Iran's own constitution and guaranteeing the much-needed and desired educational and scientific opportunities for Iranian students and the public for years to come.