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## 17 NGOs Call on Iran to Uphold the Right to Education and Academic Freedom

Washington, D.C. – Today 17 non-governmental organizations published a joint statement calling upon the Islamic Republic of Iran to uphold the right to education and immediately address the alarming state of academic freedom in Iran, in particular the violations of the rights to freedom of expression, association, and assembly on university campuses.

"Each year, hundreds of students are deprived of education because of their religion, belief or social and political activities," said Puyan Mahmudian, a former student activist and researcher at United for Iran who spent nearly 80 days in solitary confinement for peaceful activism.

Mahmudian was ranked sixth in nationwide entrance exams in Iran for graduate school, but was deprived of pursuing his studies by the Ministry of Intelligence for his political activities.

"Deprivation of education is one of the most degrading, immoral and inhumane tools of suppression, which the Iranian government uses to repress political dissent inside Iranian universities," he said.

The right to education for all persons without discrimination is explicitly guaranteed under international instruments, which Iran has accepted or to which it is a party, and is also guaranteed under Iran's Constitution. Despite that, the Network for Education and Academic Rights, an independent NGO that monitors academic freedom reported 92 violations last year.



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[Voice of America: Human Rights Defenders under Attack in Iran](#)

[Payvand Iran News: Ahwazi Arabs facing unfair trial, risk torture in Iran](#)

[United for Iran: Activists Gathered to Celebrate Imprisoned Human Rights Activists with Upcoming Khordad Birthdays](#)

Over 600 students, and some university lecturers, have been arrested since 2009 for the peaceful expression of their opinions, many of whom have been imprisoned. Hundreds have been deprived of education due to their political activities, and hundreds of student gatherings, publications, and organizations have been shut down. More than 30 students are currently in prison for their political activism or for membership in student organizations critical of government policies.

Some of those students are friends of Abbas Hakimzadeh, a former political prisoner in Iran who is currently living as a political refugee and student in the United States.

"I was a member of central council of Daftar-Tahkim-Vahdat, the biggest student union in Iran which promotes academic freedom, human rights and democracy," Hakimzadeh said. "I was arrested three times by the Intelligence Ministry for my political activism. I was held in solitary confinement for 37, 120 and 30 days each time and released on \$400,000 bail."

Iran's minorities also face systematic deprivation and discrimination in higher education. Every year, hundreds of qualified Bahá'í students are prevented from pursuing higher education, discriminated solely on the basis of their religious beliefs. In 2011, authorities raided the Bahá'í Institute for Higher Education (BIHE), an online correspondence university, and arrested and jailed thirty members of the BIHE. Student activists that advocate for ethnic minority rights often face the harshest punishments by Iranian authorities for voicing their discontent, and in some instances the death sentence.

"The right to education is an essential right. How can a government deprive its young people from a future because of their opinion or belief?" said Diane Alai, the Bahai International Community's U.N. representative in Geneva. "What kind of government puts behind bars men and women whose sole aim is to provide their fellow citizens with knowledge?"

The organizations also noted that discrimination against women is increasing within Iran's higher education system. Policies of gender quotas appear to restrict women's admission to specific fields of study and campuses, and recent gender segregation in some universities raise questions about whether men and women will continue to enjoy equal access to the same quality of higher education as required under international law.

"With the new gender segregation policies, as well as new university admissions and enrollment quotas, the Iranian government is putting in place a system designed to limit women's educational opportunities and slow the advancements women have achieved in Iranian society over the last few decades," said Hadi Ghaemi, spokesperson for the International Campaign for Human Rights in Iran. "This is blatant discrimination and an affront on the rights of Iranian women and hard working female students."

The joint letter strongly urges the Islamic Republic of Iran to release all student prisoners of conscience and higher education personnel; allow student organizations to operate freely; abolish all policies and practices that discriminate against women and religious and ethnic minorities; end the practice of firing higher education teaching personnel for the peaceful expression of their opinions; and ensure the governance and curricula of universities are independent from government control.

"The measure of a society lies in its willingness to encourage and tolerate knowledge and ideas, no matter how challenging or inconvenient this may be," said Scott Lucas, Professor of American Studies at Birmingham University and board member of Arseh Sevom.

Read the statement in [full here](#)>>>

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## Take Action

If you haven't already, please take a moment to voice your concern over the death ruling issued for Iranian rapper Shahin Najafi! [Send a letter to urge Iran to condemn Religious ruling to kill Iranian rapper.](#)



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