

IRAN

*Some students were killed when security forces raided university dormitories. Other students and academics were arrested, imprisoned or sentenced to death on charges based on confessions obtained under torture. Academics specializing in nuclear physics and engineering were assassinated.*⁸⁰²

CONTEXT

The reporting period witnessed many protests against the government's attempts to block reformists from power. The protests, in which students played an important role, were sparked largely by the controversial re-election of conservative Mahmoud Ahmadinejad as president in June 2009. The subsequent suppression of protesters led to a large number of human rights violations,⁸⁰³ with journalists, students, academics and political activists imprisoned.⁸⁰⁴ Further protests erupted in 2011, partly influenced by the Arab Spring.⁸⁰⁵ Iran's security forces, apparently supported by the justice system, repressed the dissent with methods that included arbitrary arrest, imprisonment and torture.⁸⁰⁶

Failure to use due process led to extreme cases of injustice, including arbitrary execution. For instance, in 2010, Farzad Kamangar, a Kurdish teacher with alleged links to the militant Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), was reportedly tortured while in custody and was sentenced to death, and subsequently executed, after a seven-minute trial in which no evidence was presented.⁸⁰⁷

From 2007 to 2013, the Iranian authorities systematically discriminated against politically active students by partially or completely banning them from higher education.⁸⁰⁸ Independent student organizations were also banned and faculty were

purged,⁸⁰⁹ and the social sciences and humanities curricula were restricted.⁸¹⁰ In total, at least 250 students and professors were expelled from April 2005 to March 2013.⁸¹¹ According to a compilation of media and human rights sources, from 2009 more than 200 university teachers were forced to retire each year, reportedly because they did not 'share the regime's direction' or support the rule of the Supreme Leader.⁸¹²

Furthermore, followers of the Baha'i faith were barred officially from attending higher education from 1979, and from 2009 they were increasingly harassed in schools by staff.⁸¹³ Several Baha'is affiliated with the Baha'i Institute for Higher Education – an alternative online system of teaching set up because Baha'is were barred from universities – were arrested.⁸¹⁴ The activities of the institute were declared illegal and its diplomas and degrees were denied legal validity.⁸¹⁵ The UN Special Rapporteur on the Situation of Human Rights in the Islamic Republic of Iran said Baha'is face institutionalized persecution and the government's own documents revealed a policy to deprive them of education.⁸¹⁶

The election of Hassan Rouhani as President on 14 June 2013 raised hopes of political reform, and signalled an apparent thawing in relations abroad⁸¹⁷ and a more liberal policy towards those in education at home, including the reinstatement of some students and professors.⁸¹⁸

In 2011, net enrolment at primary school level was 100 per cent, while at secondary level it was estimated at 79 per cent. Gross enrolment in tertiary education was 49 per cent. The adult literacy rate was 85 per cent (2008).⁸¹⁹

ATTACKS ON SCHOOL STUDENTS, TEACHERS AND OTHER EDUCATION PERSONNEL

According to Human Rights Watch, at least 39 teachers were detained between January 2009 and October 2012 on charges related to national security, many of them in connection with their activities as teacher trade unionists. For example, 15 were imprisoned because of their trade union activity, including protests for higher wages.⁸²⁰ Some teacher trade unionists received long and severe sentences.⁸²¹ In one case, the former head of the Mashad Headteachers' Union was sentenced to six years in prison in 2009 on charges relating to his trade union activity. The sentence was later reduced to two years, but when he was due to be released he was tried on a new charge of 'creating public anxiety'.⁸²²

ATTACKS ON HIGHER EDUCATION

In 2009 alone, there were at least 30 attacks on universities and colleges, including campus raids and arrests of students, faculty and staff.⁸²³

Attacks on academics and students primarily came in the context of anti-government protests. However, there was also a pattern of targeted killings of those specializing in physics and engineering. Iranian officials alleged that these incidents were perpetrated by foreigners and related to the development of the country's nuclear capacity. Among these, on 12 January 2010, a remote-controlled bomb placed on the motorcycle of Massoud Ali-Mohammadi, 50, a physicist at Tehran University, detonated outside his apartment as he was heading to work, killing him instantly.⁸²⁴ This was followed by similar assassinations of Majid Shahriari, a nuclear engineer at Tehran University, on 29 November 2010 and academic Mostafa Ahmadi-Roshan on 11 January 2012. Another

nuclear physicist, Fereidoun Abbasi, was wounded on 29 November 2010.⁸²⁵ Further, on 23 July 2011, two gunmen on motorcycles killed a student who was studying for a master's degree in the field of electrical engineering at Nasir al-Din University in Tehran and working with the Ministry of Defence.⁸²⁶

Students were killed, arrested, imprisoned and sentenced to death in connection with anti-government protests in 2009. Some of these incidents took place during student association activities or on campus.⁸²⁷ Days after the disputed 2009 election, security forces assaulted students in several provincial towns including Shiraz, Isfahan, Tabriz, Bandar Abbas and Mashad.⁸²⁸ In one incident, on 14 June 2009, around 300 riot police and Basij forces armed with guns raided Tehran University's dormitories, resulting in the deaths of at least five students and 133 arrests.⁸²⁹ One witness told The Guardian that police issued a warning on loudspeakers saying: 'If you evacuate the building, we won't harm you. Otherwise you will all be injured or killed.' When the students came out with their hands on their heads, the police beat them with batons.⁸³⁰

In several cases, students or academics were executed after being convicted on spurious charges or confessing under duress. One charge known as moharebeh ('enmity with God') has been defined very broadly. For example, Mohammad Amin Valian, a 20-year-old student who was active in the Islamic Association, a student organization, was charged with moharebeh and sentenced to death in February 2010 for his role in the post-2009 election protests. His alleged crimes included shouting 'Death to the dictator'; being affiliated with the Central Council of the Islamic Association of Damghan Science University and statements published by them; and organizing election debates at the university. He was convicted based on evidence that included photos of

him at a demonstration in December 2009 throwing rocks into an empty area.⁸³¹ Following international protests, the sentence was reduced to imprisonment and a fine.⁸³²

After the 2009 post-electoral conflicts, cases of prolonged detention without charge, arbitrary arrest and sentencing of students and teachers for political reasons continued to be recorded. In the three years from March 2009, the Human Rights Commission of the Iranian student association, Daftar Tahkim Vahdat, identified instances of 436 arrests, 254 convictions and 364 cases of denial of education.⁸³³ As of April 2012, some 31 students were still being held in prison.⁸³⁴ The charges ranged from 'putting up posters' to attending an anti-government rally. Some were given the additional sentence of 'prison in exile', meaning they were sent to a distant prison.⁸³⁵

Omid Kokabee, a PhD student at the University of Texas, was arrested while visiting his family in Iran in 2011 and was held for 15 months before being given a verdict in a rushed trial in which no evidence was presented, according to his lawyer. He was sentenced to 10 years in prison for national security offences after refusing to co-operate on scientific projects in Iran, his lawyer said.⁸³⁶

Another student, Majid Tavakoli, was sentenced to eight-and-a-half years after he spoke at a National Students' Day rally at Amirkabir University of Technology in 2009.⁸³⁷ Charges against him included 'participating in an illegal gathering', 'propaganda against the system' and 'insulting officials'. Tavakoli was convicted after an unfair trial, without a lawyer, and was held for months in solitary confinement and sent to Evin prison.⁸³⁸ He was released on bail in October 2013.⁸³⁹

In early June 2011, following the arrest of many lecturers,⁸⁴⁰ the Baha'i Institute of Higher Education (BIHE) was declared illegal by the Ministry of Science, Research and Technology.⁸⁴¹

ATTACKS ON EDUCATION IN 2013

In January, three teachers were among five founder members of the Alhavar Science and Culture Institute who had their death sentences suspended pending new investigations. Their sentences had followed false confessions made after being tortured, according to the International Campaign for Human Rights in Iran. Alhavar members organized poetry nights and art classes for young Arabs at a location belonging to the education and development ministry, but the institute was banned after organizing demonstrations opposing discrimination against Arab people in 2005.⁸⁴²

Following Hassan Rouhani's election as president, some measures against students were eased. In September, the Ministry of Science announced that student activists who had been expelled from universities after 2011 could resume their studies, but those who were banned earlier remained barred.⁸⁴³

ENDNOTES IRAN

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⁸¹⁵ Statement of the Ministry of Science and Technology, reported by the state news agency, ISNA, 4 June 2011, cited in HRC, Report of the Special Rapporteur on the Situation of Human Rights in the Islamic Republic of Iran, A/HRC/19/66, 6 March 2012, para 61.

⁸¹⁶ HRC, Report of the Special Rapporteur on the Situation of Human Rights in the Islamic Republic of Iran, A/HRC/19/66, 6 March 2012, paras 59, 60.

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