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**ADVOCACY COUNCIL FOR THE RIGHT TO EDUCATION \* AMNESTY  
INTERNATIONAL \* JUSTICE FOR IRAN \* SHIRIN EBADI**

**IRAN: End clampdown on university students and release those imprisoned for their peaceful activism**

In advance of Iran's National Student Day on 6 December, Nobel Peace Laureate Shirin Ebadi and three human rights groups, [Advocacy Council for the Right to Education](#) (Council to Defend the Right to Education), Amnesty International and [Justice for Iran](#) join together to call on the Iranian authorities to immediately and unconditionally release all prisoners of conscience, including students imprisoned for the peaceful expression of their conscientiously held beliefs.

The organizations urge the authorities to put an end to the campaign of repression against students' peaceful exercise of their rights to freedom of expression, association and assembly.

The Iranian authorities are urged to review all policies and practices relating to restrictions on individuals' access to all forms of higher education to ensure that everyone has equal access to higher education, on the basis of capacity, without any form of discrimination on grounds of sex, religion, political opinion or other grounds.

Restricting access to education on account of a person's origins, gender, religious beliefs or opinions is a human rights violation. It violates the rights to education and non-discrimination, as well as freedom of expression, peaceful assembly and association.

As a state party to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), Iran is required to guarantee and not to unduly restrict individuals' right to freedom of expression, association and assembly. As a state party to the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), Iran is also required to uphold the right of all Iranians to non-discrimination in regard to access to higher education (Articles 2 (2) and 13 (2) (C)).

**The state of Iranian students on Iran's National Student Day**

On 6 December, as thousands of students in universities across the country commemorate Iran's National Student Day – a day that marks the deaths of three students killed by security forces in Tehran during a demonstration in 1953 – dozens of students will spend the day behind bars simply for exercising their rights to freedom of expression, association, and assembly, while many others will remain banned from pursuing their education.

Since the disputed presidential election in June 2009 the annual peaceful Student Day demonstrations held across university campuses, have at times been forcibly disbursed.

In recent months, dozens of students have been arrested, summoned to serve prison sentences after being convicted in unfair trials on vaguely-worded charges not amounting to recognisably criminal offences, or otherwise banned, permanently or temporarily, from pursuing their education.

University disciplinary bodies use “stars” inserted into the personnel files of students alleged to have carried out anti-government activities, which generally entail the peaceful exercise of their human rights to freedom of expression, association and assembly, to discipline and ban students. The allocation of three “stars” results in an outright ban on a student continuing his or her university education.

Students who have recently been arbitrarily arrested, imprisoned, or banned from academic study include:

- **Nasim Soltan Beigi**, women’s rights activist and student at Allameh Tabatabai University, began serving a three-year prison sentence on 13 October 2012, imposed after she was convicted in 2010 of “spreading propaganda against the system” and “gathering and colluding against national security”. Two years of her sentence were imposed for her participation in a 12 June 2006 demonstration by women’s rights defenders calling for equal rights for women;
- **Rashid Esmaili**, a member of the Graduates’ Association ([\*Advar-e Tahkim-e Vahdat\*](#)), was arrested in Esfahan on 8 September 2012 and released after two months in “temporary detention” in solitary confinement without charge. He continues to be banned from pursuing his graduate studies in human rights at Allameh Tabatabai University as a result of being “starred” in 2006. In December 2009, he was charged with “insulting the Leader” and sentenced to 18 months in prison.
- **Leva Khanjani**, a member of the Baha’i religious minority, banned from pursuing higher education on account of her faith, began serving a two-year sentence in Evin Prison on 25 August 2012, on the charges of “gathering and colluding with intent to harm state security”, “spreading propaganda against the system” and “disturbing public order”. The charges were imposed for her alleged role in demonstrations against the authorities which took place in late December 2009 during the Ashoura religious commemorations.
- **Abbas Khosravi Farsani**, a PhD student at Esfahan University was arrested on 21 June 2012 for writings on his blog and book called “The Gentle Whispers: A criticism of the Islamic Republic of Iran and its leaders”, in which he had expressed peaceful criticism of the Iranian authorities. He was released on bail and is awaiting trial for a number of charges including “insulting officials” and “insulting the founder of the Islamic Republic”. He is banned from pursuing his degree and from teaching in any Iranian university.

The co-signatories continue to call for the immediate and unconditional release of the following students held as prisoners of conscience who were imprisoned in previous years:

**Majid Dorri**, a student and member of the Advocacy Council for the Right to Education, was arrested in July 2009 in Qazvin, northern Iran and is serving a six and a half year prison sentence in “internal exile”, far from his home, after being convicted of charges including “enmity against God”. He has not been permitted any prison leave since his arrest.

Student and women’s rights activist, **Bahareh Hedayat**, a member of the Central Committee of the Office for the Consolidation of Unity (OCU - a national student body which in recent years has been active in calling for political reform and opposing human rights violations) and Chair of its Women’s Committee, was arrested on 31 December 2009 and is serving a 10-year prison sentence, imposed after she was convicted of charges including “insulting the President”, “insulting the Leader”, “gathering and colluding to commit crimes against national security”, and “spreading propaganda against the system”.

Student leader and winner of the Norwegian Student Peace Prize 2013, **Majid Tavakkoli**, was arrested on National Student Day in 2009 after giving a speech at a peaceful rally at Amir Kabir University of Technology in Tehran where he was a student. A prisoner of conscience, he is serving a nine-year prison sentence in Raja’i Shahr Prison after he was convicted of “participating in an illegal gathering”, “spreading propaganda against the system”, and “insulting officials”. He is not

only banned from university coursework whilst in prison but also faces a lifetime ban on enrolment in universities throughout the country after he is released.

**Sayed Ziaoddin (Zia) Nabavi**, imprisoned student activist and co-founder of the Advocacy Council for the Right to Education, a body set up in 2007 by students barred from further study because of their political activities, was banned from further university study in 2007 after receiving three “stars” for his peaceful political activities. Arrested on 14 June 2009 shortly after attending a mass protest following the disputed presidential election, he is sentenced to 10 years’ imprisonment in internal exile on the charge of “enmity against God”, which he is spending in “internal exile” in Karoun Prison, south-western Iran far from his home.

## **Background**

Since the beginning of the 2012-2013 academic year in September, dozens of student activists across Iran have been arrested by security forces on vaguely-worded charges, summoned by the Revolutionary Courts to serve prison sentences, or have been banned from pursuing their education in the new academic year, apparently on account of their peaceful activities. Other students have had old cases against them re-opened by the judiciary.

Discriminatory restrictions which prevent students from being able to access higher education remain in place. Members of non-recognized religious minorities such as the Baha’i community are generally banned from pursuing higher education. The Baha’i faith is not recognized under the Constitution and members of the Baha’i community face persecution on account of their faith.

New measures preventing women from certain areas of academic study have been imposed by dozens of universities, which are under the authority of the Ministry of Science, Research and Technology, in the new academic year. The Minister of Science, Research and Technology is an advocate of gender segregation in universities and has previously called for women-only colleges to bring Iranian universities in line with Islamic customs.

Students banned from study because of their peaceful exercise of their rights to freedom of expression, association and assembly, or their political or religious beliefs or on gender grounds are deprived of their right to education as guaranteed by Article 13 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), to which Iran is a state party. Equal access to higher education without discrimination is guaranteed under Article 26 (1) in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and Article 1 (a) of the UNESCO Convention against Discrimination in Education, which Iran has accepted.

The International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) protects the rights of individuals to freedom of opinion, expression, association, and assembly and the right of minorities, in community with others, to enjoy their own culture, to profess and practice their own religion, and to use their own language. Further, the International Convention on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD) and the ICESCR prohibit discrimination against any person on grounds of political or other opinion, sex, race, religion, ethnicity, language, birth or other status in respect of their right to education.

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For more information please call Amnesty International's press office in London, UK, on +44 20 7413 5566 or email: [press@amnesty.org](mailto:press@amnesty.org)

International Secretariat, Amnesty International, 1 Easton St., London WC1X 0DW, UK [www.amnesty.org](http://www.amnesty.org)