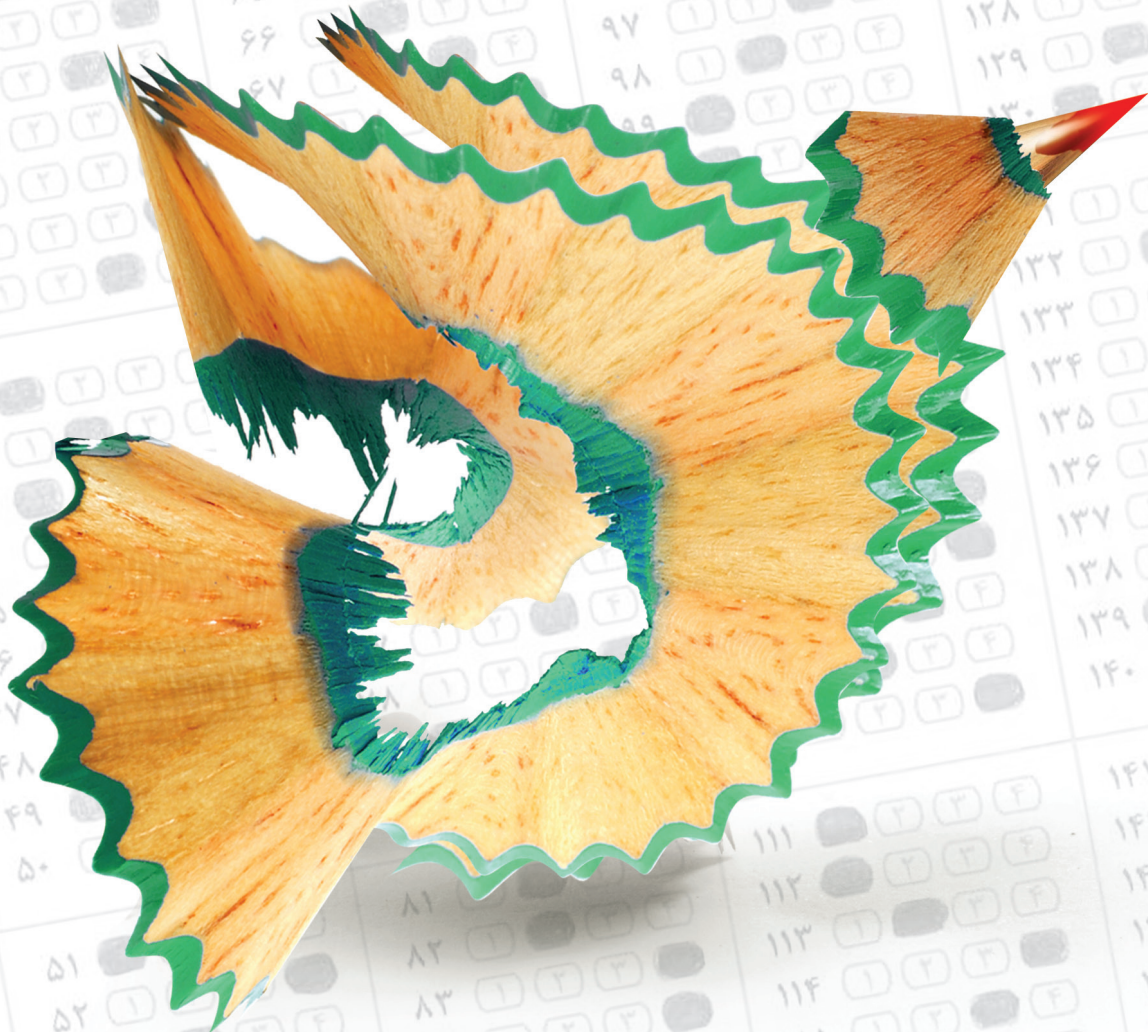


IRAN

Punishing Stars

Systematic Discrimination and Exclusion
in Iranian Higher Education

December 2010



INTERNATIONAL CAMPAIGN
FOR HUMAN RIGHTS IN IRAN

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FOR **HUMAN RIGHTS IN IRAN**

www.iranhumanrights.org

International Campaign for Human Rights in Iran

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The mission of the International Campaign for Human Rights in Iran is to gather support for Iranian human rights activists and defenders who are advocating for their civil, political, social, and economic rights within the framework of international treaties and standards that define Iran's obligations.

The Campaign is founded on these principles: that human rights in Iran, and in every country, are a matter of legitimate international concern and essential to establishing international peace and security; that human rights in Iran can only be implemented with the assistance of civil society, whose role must be protected and sustained; that human rights compliance in Iran should be approached from a non-partisan perspective, and detached from political objectives; and that solidarity with any and all peoples prevented from enjoying their human rights is a moral imperative of our time.

ABOUT US

In order to encourage and assist state authorities to respect and abide by international standards and law, the Campaign will document Iran's compliance with its international human rights obligations, and publicize this and other relevant information to help provide a basis for accurate evaluations and constructive recommendations for improvements.

The Campaign works to inform civil society actors and media from around the world on the situation of human rights in Iran, urging them to support their Iranian colleagues. The Campaign advocates in international institutions, promoting recommendations put forward by human rights and social movements in Iran, and providing a platform for their views. The Campaign reaches out across the world to build a network devoted to its principles, and ready to contribute to the realization of its goals.

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217 Students Barred from Higher Education:
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Soon after Mahmoud Ahmadinejad became President of the Islamic Republic of Iran in 2005, the term “starred students” entered Iranian discourse on higher education. Starring became synonymous with a mechanism for discrimination against, and exclusion of, students from higher education based solely on their political beliefs, the exercise of their freedom of expression, and in the case of Baha’i students, their religious beliefs.

Authorities under Ahmadinejad’s administration, tasked with managing the country’s institutions of higher education and relevant admissions processes, began to flag the academic records of student activists and government critics, as well as Baha’i students, with one to three “stars.” These stars denote the barring of an applicant from gaining admission to bachelor degree programs or from continuing their education in graduate programs. In some cases, authorities have refused to release the results of applicant test scores altogether.

The Ministry of Intelligence has played a prominent role in this process, underscoring the politicization of student selection and enrollment. Generally, the Ministry of Intelligence is engaged in monitoring and detaining critics and dissidents throughout the country. By increasingly using university admissions and disciplinary mechanisms to bar targeted students, the Ministry has expanded its reach into academic environments.

Ministry of Intelligence agents have used threats, intimidation, and even detention to silence students who attempted to seek accountability and legal justification for their deprivation from higher education.

The starring process constitutes a systematic violation of the rights to expression, assembly, and conscience. It represents a form of religious persecution and a serious breach of the right to education.

During the past five years, hundreds of students have been barred from higher education through this process. The International Campaign for Human Rights in Iran interviewed 27 students barred from higher education. Additionally, the Campaign compiled a list of 207 students who were denied their right to education. The true numbers are believed to be much higher, as many targeted students have preferred to remain silent and not make their case public, fearing further persecution and prosecution, or hoping that they can reverse their education bans by giving written guarantees to cease future activism.

Starring and excluding students from higher education has had nothing to do with academic

performance or rankings in highly competitive entrance examinations to bachelor and graduate programs. Indeed, in all cases reviewed in this report, students ranked high enough on entrance exams to gain admission. Nonetheless these candidates faced systematic, politically motivated discrimination and exclusion.

In tandem with discriminatory enrollment policies, authorities also extensively relied on Disciplinary Committees in universities to summon and suspend students already enrolled in programs of higher education based on their social and political activism, involvement in student publications, and participation in student associations. Repeated suspensions through this mechanism have also resulted in effectively denying the rights of targeted students to complete and continue their studies.

Marking students' records with stars as a punitive and exclusionary mechanism is carried out by the Ministry of Science, Technology, and Research, in cooperation with the Ministry of Intelligence. These Ministries determine which students become starred, based on the following scheme:

- *One star* officially denotes individuals who passed the academic examination but whose application authorities have flagged because of prior university disciplinary infractions. In practice, one-star applicants are often those who the Ministry of Science's Central Selection Committee for Faculty and Students has permitted to continue their education conditionally, after giving written guarantees promising not to engage in undesirable political activities.
- *Two stars* officially denote individuals who have passed the university entrance exam but whose applications the Central Selection Committee deemed incomplete. In practice, these are candidates the Ministry of Intelligence does not deem qualified to continue their higher education. These individuals may be granted temporary privileges to continue their education on the condition that they promise to end their political activities. These students must accept that if they continue being politically active, authorities will revoke their university admission.
- *Three stars* denote individuals who have passed the academic examination, but whose qualifications have been completely rejected by the Central Selection Committee and the Ministry of Intelligence, and despite having secured top academic positioning in the entrance examination are barred from entering the university by the Selection Committee.

The Ministry of Science uses these stars as a way of simplifying a 0-5 coding system used internally. Code 1, like three stars, is for a rejected file. Codes 0 and 2, like two stars, are for an incomplete file. Codes 3 and 4 mean acceptance, and Code 5, like 1 and 2 stars, is for student who must provide recognizance.

In March 2007, reacting to public pressure from targeted students, lawmakers, and the media, the Ministry of Science announced stars will no longer be used on student transcripts, that no one would be excluded on the basis of stars, and that any candidate who passed the entrance exam would be allowed to enroll. Nonetheless, authorities have continued a *de facto* policy of starring students and media outlets report that authorities blocked the admission of at least 50 students who passed the

2007 entrance exam, but not all of their names are known. The list of 217 students deprived of higher education provided in this report include the names of 2 students in 2005, 19 in 2006, 19 in 2007, 49 in 2008, 58 in 2009, and 70 in 2010.

In practice, the Ministry of Science no longer prints stars, which were only shorthand for the 0-5 coding system, on the transcripts of applicants. Some applicants with activist backgrounds continue to receive letters instructing them to report to the Ministry of Science or, unable to access their transcripts online, are forced to report. The Ministry of Science informs these applicants of their obstacles or barred admission, or sends them to the Ministry of Intelligence.

The Admissions Process and Systematic Banning of Students

Iranians who want to attend an undergraduate or graduate program at a government university must take an entrance exam. These exams are administered once a year by the *Sanjesh* Organization, the testing arm of the Ministry of Science, and are effectively the sole academic criteria for student admission. Applicants are rejected or accepted based on the score they receive on the entrance exam.

Authorities at the Ministry of Science have justified depriving admission to students who have passed their entrance exams by relying on two regulations issued by the Supreme Cultural Revolution Council: the Moral Selection Regulations for University Entrance Applicants, adopted in 1987, and the Student Selection Criteria, adopted in 1988.

These resolutions require that the Central Selection Committee gain approval for student admissions from non-academic government organs, including the Ministry of Intelligence and the Prosecutor General of the General and Revolutionary Courts. These agencies can block, or make conditional, an applicant's admission irrespective of his or her performance on standardized examinations or academic merits.

Under these regulations, authorities can reject a university applicant if they are drug addicts, are "reputed to be morally corrupt," or are "enemies" of the Islamic Republic. The resolutions make clear that a reputation of moral corruption "must be obvious and without need for investigation," and that "protesters" are different than "enemies." Since at least 2006, the Central Selection Committee and Ministry of Intelligence have barred numerous applicants based on a broader set of criteria including campus or political activism. Based on these regulations, students who enter university must belong to "Islam or other recognized religions (i.e. Christianity, Judaism, and Zoroastrianism)."

The resolutions also allow the Central Selection Committee to make admissions conditional upon an applicant signing a recognizance letter promising to "reform their behavior" and not participate in the activities the government has deemed undesirable. These letters often include promises that if the student resumes the activities in question, he or she will be expelled and forced to repay tuition and fees that are otherwise covered by the government.

The Role of Disciplinary Committees

Authorities have also put in place a process designed to exclude and discriminate against targeted students already enrolled at universities. For this purpose, Disciplinary Committees at each university

have been used to summon students and issue suspension sentences. In the case of many students, these suspensions, typically for one to two semesters, have been renewed several times, effectively resulting in the inability of suspended students to complete their academic work towards graduation.

In Their Own Words: Testimonies of Banned Students

Students who spoke to the Campaign described in detail the arbitrary nature of their exclusion from higher education and the mechanisms leading to this outcome. They also recounted their intensive efforts to seek accountability and remedies for such decisions.

Students who reported being barred from universities were either activists or Baha'is. Activist students were involved in various social and political issues including women's rights, academic freedom, political dissent, human rights and the rights of political prisoners. Some students worked on campus publications, organized forums or protests, or were members of *Daftar Tahkim-e Vahdat* Student Union and other campus organizations. In most of these activities, students were critical of government and university policies and authorities targeted them in connection to their activism. Baha'i students were barred or expelled usually after their faith came to the attention of education officials.

The interviews reveal that authorities targeted students and deprived them of further education regardless of their academic merits. This process has affected some of the best and brightest students in Iranian universities.

For example, Puyan Mahmoudian was ranked sixth in the graduate entrance exam in Chemistry. The entrance exam is highly competitive and receiving top ranks is thus an indication of Mahmoudian's academic excellence. However, despite his impressive academic achievement, he was starred and denied admission to the graduate program due to his student activism during his undergraduate studies.

Other students told the Campaign they had fallen victim to multiple suspensions by Disciplinary Committees. Several students told the Campaign that the university Disciplinary Committee summoned and suspended them simply for protesting the process of banning other students. The efforts of these students to organize and seek accountability and transparency regarding starring led to their own exclusion from higher education.

Zia Nabavi, Sadegh Shojaii, Mahdieh Golroo, and Saeed Feyzallah are examples of student advocates who themselves ended up being banned from continuing their higher education. The three students at Allameh Tabatabai University in Tehran were excluded from continuing their education in 2007 after organizing activities in support of banned students.

The systematic banning of students from higher education has been applied through the starring process to Baha'i students as well. This report includes interviews with Baha'i students who detail how they were prevented from admission altogether, regardless of their academic performance. Baha'i students who had already managed to enroll at universities before the starring process was instituted were identified and expelled from universities or denied graduate admission by becoming starred.

From Denial to Acknowledgment

In 2006, when the news of starred students and their exclusion from higher education became public, authorities in President Ahmadinejad's administration denied the existence of such practices. Ministry of Science officials specifically denied that political motives influenced their admissions process, that any recognition letters required students to cease activism, or that there were any three-starred students or students wholly barred from admission. After affected students and their supporters organized protests and took their case to the media and members of Parliament in 2006, authorities made contradictory and conflicting statements. Throughout the 2006-2007 school year, the issue of starred students was an ongoing controversy drawing repeated government reactions.

On 20 September 2006, the newspaper *Etemad Melli* reported that the Ministry of Science had issued new procedures instructing universities not to enroll starred students. On 22 September 2006, the top official in charge of university admissions, Morteza Noorbakhsh, director of the Ministry of Science's Central Committee of Selection, originally denied the existence of discriminatory policies and claimed that starred students were those with "incomplete files." He further threatened students not to pursue their cases. But on 24 September, Mehdi Zahedi, the Minister of Science, called the existence of starred students a "lie," denying that any students had been excluded or blocked from enrollment because of political activity.

Some of the starred students took their cases to members of Parliament, while others organized protests and publicized their plight in the media. On 4 October 2006, the text of letters sent to starred students was published in the Iranian media which included the following: "According to the student selection criteria adopted by the Supreme Council of Cultural Revolution, you have not been admitted."

Eventually, on 20 December 2006, Zahedi acknowledged the existence of starred students, but accused them of having criminal records relating to "prison, flogging and rape." He further added, "...the individuals referred to as having three stars on their record have been disqualified by authorities other than the Ministry of Science," in a reference to the prominent role of the Ministry of Intelligence in this process.

Students who sought legal counsel to bring their cases to court and seek judicial remedies were told that these decisions are based upon resolutions of the Supreme Council for the Cultural Revolution, "which is above the law."

Violations of International Law

Iran ratified the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) in 1975 and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) in 1975. The ICCPR protects freedoms of opinion, expression, association and assembly. The Iranian government systematically violates these rights by barring or expelling students on the basis of their beliefs, expression of views critical of the government, membership in student organizations, or participation in public forums and peaceful protests.

The ICCPR Iran prohibits Iran from discriminating against persons on the basis of religion. Additionally,

under the ICCPR, restricting access to education on the basis of one's faith violates freedom of religion. By adopting regulations, policies and practices that bar Baha'is from higher education the Iranian government continues to breach the ICCPR.

The ICESCR establishes the "right of everyone to education" and stipulates that, "Higher education shall be made equally accessible to all," without discrimination against religion or political opinion. Iran fails to meet its ICESCR obligations by discriminatorily denying education to activists and Baha'i students.

Recommendations

To the Government of Iran:

- Ensure students and university applicants can exercise their right to expression, association, assembly and religious freedom without interference by authorities and without having fear of persecution, arrests or being expelled or denied university admissions.
- Establish a formal mechanism, within the Ministry of Science, that allows students to appeal decisions of the Central Selection Committee. Ensure this mechanism has independent power to overrule decisions of the Committee.
- Re-instate students barred from education based on their political or religious beliefs or activities. Ensure such students can seek financial restitution in civil courts.
- Release all students detained and prosecuted for activities related to, or advocating on behalf of, those deprived of education.
- Release all student activist and prisoners of conscience that have been detained and prosecuted for exercising their freedom of expression, assemble, and association.

To the Iranian Parliament:

- Launch an impartial investigation, conducted by a committee including representatives of independent student associations, to review all cases of students barred or expelled on allegedly political and discriminatory grounds. This committee should hold public hearings and bring students who allege being subjected to such bars and expulsions to testify. The committee should have the power to subpoena members of the executive branch and security authorities to testify.
- Expand the jurisdiction of civil courts so they can adjudicate cases brought by students regarding deprivation of education.

- Amend all university admissions regulations so to remove any discriminatory or arbitrary criteria for disqualification including religious requirements and vague determinations that an applicant is an “enemy” of the Islamic Republic.
- Amend all university admissions regulations so to remove any role for non-educational bodies, namely the Ministry of Intelligence.
- Amend university rules and regulations, including Disciplinary Committee regulations that allow for suspension of students on discriminatory, vague and arbitrary grounds, including insulting Islamic and national beliefs or acting against national security.

To the Iranian Prosecutor General and Judiciary:

- Investigate, prosecute and hold accountable members of the Ministry of Intelligence responsible for threatening, intimidating, arresting, persecution and expelling student activists based on political and ideological grounds.
- Adjudicate civil claims brought by students regarding deprivation of education. Provide financial restitution for students that suffered undue delays in attaining degrees or losing academic credit because of illegal deprivation of education.

To the Universities and Institution of Higher Learning Outside Iran Partnering Universities:

- Require partner Iranian universities provide a transparent account of any exclusionary policies.
- Provide admission and scholarships to Iranian students barred from Iranian universities.

BACKGROUND

After three decades, the Islamic Republic of Iran's human rights record has generated notable concern amongst United Nations human rights bodies, international NGOs, foreign governments including Iran's diplomatic partners, and a broad spectrum of Iranian civil society.¹ Since the 2005 presidential election of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, the government's human rights record has further deteriorated.²

During Ahmadinejad's tenure, Iranian society has increasingly come under the brutal grip of the Revolutionary Guard Corps and the government's security agencies, most prominently the Ministry of Intelligence, which have inserted themselves into increasing sectors of government and public life.³ In this context, security authorities have exerted greater control over university enrollment and the university admissions process, including barring individuals from higher education as a means of targeting political activists and critics.

Furthermore, since the 1979 Revolution, the Iranian government has subjected members of the Baha'i Faith to various forms of religious discrimination including barring or expelling them from universities.⁴

Higher education in Iran is divided between government and non-governmental (i.e. private) universities called Azad universities. Students at government universities attend for free, while Azad students must pay tuition. In 2010, there were 3.8 million students enrolled in Iranian universities: 27 percent in associate programs, 64 percent in bachelors programs, and 10 percent in graduate programs. Of these enrolled students, roughly half are women and half men.⁴

Higher education in Iran is divided between government and non-governmental (i.e. private) universities called Azad universities.⁵ Students at government universities attend for free, while Azad students must pay tuition.⁶ In 2010, there were 3.8 million students enrolled in Iranian universities: 27 percent in associate programs, 64 percent in bachelors programs, and 10 percent in graduate

¹ Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review, *Report of the Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review: Islamic Republic of Iran*, U.N. Doc. A/HRC/14/12 (15 March 2010). United Nations General Assembly Resolution, Situation of human rights in the Islamic Republic of Iran, U.N. Doc. A/C.3/65/L.49 (29 October 2009).

² Human Rights Watch, "World Report 2010: Iran Chapter," January 2010, <http://www.hrw.org/en/reports/2010/01/20/world-report-2010> (accessed 1 December 2010). For more on about post-2009-election crackdowns see: International Campaign for Human Rights in Iran, "Men of Violence," June 2010, <http://www.iranhumanrights.org/wp-content/wp-content/menofviolence/MenofViolence.html> (accessed 1 December 2010).

³ Ibid. "Men of Violence," International Campaign for Human Rights in Iran, *Accelerating Slide into Dictatorship*, 21 September 2009, <http://www.iranhumanrights.org/2009/09/report09>, (accessed 1 December 2010).

⁴ Iran Human Rights Documentation Center, "A Faith Denied: The Persecution of the Baha'is in Iran," December 2006.

⁵ Most Recent Statistic Regarding the Country's Student Population, Tabnak, 19 October 2010, <http://www.tabnak.ir/fa/pages/?cid=126051> (accessed 1 December 2010).

⁶ Ibid.

programs.⁷ Of these enrolled students, roughly half are women and half men.⁸ Approximately 62 percent of students are enrolled in government universities, while 38 percent are in Azad universities.⁹ Forty-four percent of students study humanities and social sciences disciplines, thirty-three percent pursue technical and engineering degrees, and seven percent study natural sciences. Another six percent study agriculture and veterinary science, while five percent are in arts programs.¹⁰

Traditionally, university students constitute a highly active part of Iranian society, often playing prominent roles in social movements, including the 1979 Revolution. Student activism is also an important part of campus life in Iran. Students form campus groups, organize forums on social and political topics, and are often involved in university issues such as academic freedom and dormitory conditions. University rules and regulations permit such activities, but sometimes include vague standards for impermissible activity, such as prohibitions on insulting Islamic and national beliefs or acting against the Islamic Republic. These exceptions have been used to target students critical of government and university policies.¹¹

Generally, young Iranians are a significant segment of the population. Two-thirds of Iranians are under the age of 30 and Iran boasts one of the world's highest per capita rates of bloggers, most of whom have come of age after the Revolution.¹²

The *International Campaign for Human Rights in Iran* interviewed 27 students barred from higher education, including 19 student activists and 8 Baha'is. The Campaign also compiled a list of 217 students barred from higher education. The true numbers are believed to be much higher, as many targeted students have preferred to remain silent and not make their cases public, fearing further persecution and prosecution, or hoping that they might reverse their education bans by giving written guarantees to cease future activism. The majority of students who spoke to the Campaign, or whose cases were compiled for this report, qualified for government universities and were subsequently barred. However, some students also reported being barred from Azad universities.

Student activists told the Campaign that they were involved in various forms of activism critical of government and university policies including working on campus publications, organizing forums or protests, and membership in the *Daftar Tahkim-e Vahdat* Student Union and other campus organizations. These students were involved in women's rights, defending academic freedom, political dissent, human rights and the rights of political prisoners. Students included in the larger list of 217 barred students were also involved in the promotion of minority and ethnic rights.

Baha'is were barred or expelled from universities once education officials learned of their religion. Baha'is often report that, as an article of their faith, they do not deny their religion.¹³ Up until 2006, university applications required prospective students to state their religion. Many Baha'is note their faith on university applications while some leave it blank. Baha'is, before and after 2006, reported their

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Disciplinary Regulations for University Students in the Islamic Republic of Iran, <http://www.sadjad.ac.ir/rights/A148.asp> (accessed 1 December 2010).

¹² United Nations Development Program, "Human Development Report

2009 Overcoming barriers: Human Mobility and Development," (2009) http://hdr.undp.org/en/media/HDR_2009_EN_Complete.pdf (accessed 2 December 2010); "Iran's Internet Battle Hits New Heights," by Alan Boyle and Suzanne Choney, MSNBC.com, http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/31411475/ns/technology_and_science-tech_and_gadgets/ (accessed 2 December 2010).

¹³ Iranian Human Rights Documentation Center, "A Faith Denied: The Persecution of the Baha'is in Iran," December 2006.

applications being flagged as “incomplete” and sought corrections when government agencies wrote Islam as their religion on university or entrance exam transcripts.¹⁴

The Ministry of Science, Research, and Technology is the government body charged with overseeing higher education in Iran and responsible for administering university entrance exams through its academic measurement bureau, the *Sanjesh* Organization. The Ministry oversees university admissions through the Central Selection Committee and has a full mandate over government universities and admissions.¹⁵ Since 2005 though, President Ahmadinejad’s cabinet has made greater efforts to exert more control over Azad universities.¹⁶

Iranians who want to attend an undergraduate or graduate program at a government university must take an entrance exam administered annually by the *Sanjesh* Organization. Typically, applicants are rejected or accepted based on the score they receive on the entrance exam. However, regulations issued by the Supreme Council of the Cultural Revolution specifically require the Ministry to gain approval for student admissions from non-academic government organs, including the Ministry of Intelligence and the Prosecutor of the General and Revolutionary Courts.¹⁷ These agencies can block, or make conditional, applicants’ admission irrespective of their performance on standardized examinations or academic merits.

Under these regulations, authorities can reject applicants if they are deemed “enemies” of the Islamic Republic. While the regulations make clear that “dissidents” are different than “enemies,” since at least 2006, the Central Selection Committee and the Ministry of Intelligence have barred numerous applicants based on a broader set of criteria, namely campus or political activism.¹⁸ Authorities can also reject students if they are not from an official or recognized religion (i.e. Islam, Christianity, Judaism or Zoroastrianism), resulting primarily in the expulsion of members of the Baha’i Faith.¹⁹

This system of exclusion has come to be known as “starring,” and those barred are known as “starred students,” because of the Ministry of Science’s practice in 2005 and 2006 of marking the exam results of student activists and Baha’is with one to three “stars.” These stars refer to several categories of restrictions. In some cases, authorities have refused to release the results of applicants’ test scores altogether. In other cases students could gain admission after signing a letter promising to cease their activism. Some students told the Campaign that after gaining admission they were expelled on the basis of decisions by university Disciplinary Committees, or were subjected to *de facto* expulsions through repeated suspensions.

Effectively, depriving students from higher education became a method of punishing dissent and a systematic campaign of targeting those critical of authorities. Information on students from university officials, the Judiciary, security agencies, and others acting at their behest is the basis for decisions to deny higher education or require written promises to end undesirable behaviors as a condition

¹⁴ See: Baha’i International Community, “Closed Doors: Iran’s Campaign to Deny Higher Education to Bahai’s,” 2005, <http://denial.bahai.org/> (accessed 30 November 2009).

¹⁵ See: Ministry of Science, Research, and Technology, Iran, www.msrt.ir. Note: Iranian medical schools are under the purview of the Ministry of Health.

¹⁶ “Ahmadinejad Announces New Charter for Azad University,” Aftab

News, 25 April 2010, <http://www.aftabnews.ir/vdcdox0n.yt0jf6a22y.html> (accessed 30 November 2009).

¹⁷ Moral Selection Regulations for University Entrance Applicants, <http://www.ghavanin.ir/detail.asp?id=6918>.

¹⁸ Student Selection Criteria, <http://rc.majlis.ir/fa/law/show/99898>.

¹⁹ Moral Selection Regulations for University Entrance Applicants, <http://www.ghavanin.ir/detail.asp?id=6918>.

for study. These decisions are a form of extrajudicial or arbitrary punishment, having minimal legal legitimacy or basis in broad regulations. There is little transparency in the screening process, and no formal mechanism for appeal (with the exception of appeals to university Disciplinary Committees for expulsion decisions).

Simultaneously, discrimination in the admissions process and the expulsions of Baha'i students, for which there is no appeals mechanism, constituted part of a broader scheme of religious discrimination.

Most students interviewed by the Campaign sought recourse and redress for their denial of education from officials with the Ministry of Science, their universities, courts, members of Parliament, the President and Iran's Supreme leader. They also hoped that appealing to the media and participating in protests would pressure authorities to respond. In some cases individual students regained their places in universities, but some students, including most interviewed by the Campaign, are still barred.

This report documents the systematic and discriminatory exclusion of Iranian students from higher education based on their political and religious views. It includes personal testimonies of university students barred or expelled from education by authorities, documents the historical roots of stalling as a policy, outlines the regulatory and administrative framework used to exclude targeted students, and details the contradictions between these practices and Iran's obligations under international human rights law.

IN THEIR OWN WORDS

Barring the Best and the Brightest

The Cases of Puyan Mahmoudian, Safoura Eliasi and Farzaneh Jalili

When banning students from higher education, Iranian officials often target some of the most academically qualified and gifted students in their fields. Puyan Mahmoudian, despite having achieved the sixth highest rank nationwide in the graduate entrance exam in Polymer Chemical Engineering, was denied the right to continue his education as he was “starred.”

Mahmoudian, currently continuing his education abroad, told the Campaign that his participation in student associations, as well as his involvement in a student publication, led to his deprivation from continuing his education.²⁰ Mahmoudian was an officer for the student journal *Rivar* and a member of *Daftar Tahkim-e Vahdat* Student Union and the Islamic Student Association, campus groups critical of government and university policies.²¹ Mahmoudian was also detained by security forces in 2007 and later publicly alleged he had been tortured.²²

I had previously been a member of the Student Union and the Islamic Student Association at Amirkabir University.²³ I was also the executive officer for the student publication *Rivar*. Security forces detained me in 2007. I was later released on bail and during the same year took the graduate entrance exam. I should add that after my release, I continued my student activism. In 2008, the results of entrance exams were posted on the Internet and I achieved the sixth highest score. In the summer of 2008, officials from the Central Selection Committee [*Hey'at Markazi Gozineh*] contacted me.²⁴

Following these events, Abdolrasoul Pour-Abbas, director of the *Sanjesh* Organization, the academic measurement bureau of the Ministry of Science, and a professor of mathematics at Amirkabir University, contacted Mahmoudian.²⁵ “Pour-Abbas told me it was not a big issue and that representatives of the

²⁰ International Campaign for Human Rights in Iran interview with Puyan Mahmoudian, 2 November 2010.

²¹ *Ibid.*

²² *Ibid.*

²³ *Daftar Tahkim-e Vahdat* Student Union is a national student group often critical of government and university policies.

²⁴ International Campaign for Human Rights in Iran interview with Puyan Mahmoudian, 2 November 2010.

²⁵ *Ibid.*



Puyan Mahmoudian, received the sixth highest score on graduate entrance exams in polymer chemical engineering, but was barred from continuing his education due to his activities and being critical of the government.

Herasat Office wanted to talk with me. I accepted and met with them,” Mahmoudian told the Campaign.²⁶ *Herasat* Offices, which are found in most public facilities and all universities, are representatives of the Ministry of Intelligence and state security apparatuses. Mahmoudian told the Campaign:

There were three meetings, which were really like interrogation sessions, with people who claimed to represent the *Herasat* Office of the Ministry of Science. Dr. Noorbakhsh, the Director of the Faculty and Students Selection Committee, believed they were Intelligence Ministry agents. In the first two meetings, two men confronted me in an unfriendly and threatening manner. They wanted me to accept false confessions regarding my student publications and wanted me to send a letter to the Judiciary denying that I was tortured while in detention. During the second meeting, they even threatened to detain me. I confirmed that I was tortured and refused to deny it.

At the third meeting, they changed their manner. They didn’t ask for a denial [of torture] from me anymore. They just asked that I give guarantees that I will not engage in any more political activism. They had very comprehensive information about me and became friendlier. They said if I ceased political activism

and stopped talking about my detention and torture, I should be able to continue my education. They also offered that I collaborate with the Intelligence Ministry and meet with their agents on a weekly basis...they said if I agree, they would give me guarantees that I would have no problems in pursuing my graduate degree. I accepted to end my political activities but refused to collaborate with them.²⁷

At the time of entrance exam result announcements and student selection of fields of study, Mahmoudian contacted several Ministry of Science officials and members of Parliament to report his meetings to them.²⁸ Eventually, Noorbakhsh invited him to a meeting. “He apologized to me for what had happened and promised there would be no problem,” Mahmoudian said.²⁹

However, when the Ministry of Science announced the names of students who were permitted to register Mahmoudian did not qualify:

I immediately started to follow up this development. I went to *Sanjesh* and met with Dr. Noorbakhsh again. He expressed regret at my disqualification and said it was based on an article of admissions regulations that states ‘An applicant who is an enemy of the state shall not be qualified.’ That’s all he said and asked me to keep it quiet for few months and not make any noise. He again promised to resolve the issue.³⁰

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Ibid.

Mahmoudian also sought assistance for his case from other officials who promised to help resolve the matter:

After a month, they also gave similar answers, that it was the Intelligence Ministry's decision to disqualify me, regardless of my academic record. Interestingly enough, Dr. Noorbakhsh explicitly told me, 'When the Intelligence Ministry is involved, there is nothing that I can do'...I publicized my case in the media and met with members of the Council for the Right to Education [a student advocacy group formed by students barred from continuing their higher education], including Mahdieh Golroo, Zia Nabavi, and Majid Tavakoli...I also met with human rights lawyer, Mr. Dadkhah, who told me there were no legal venues for pursuing my case.³¹

Regarding the lack of legal remedies and venues available to him, Mahmoudian told the Campaign:

A few months before my disqualification, other starved students barred from education filed a complaint with the High Court but received an answer that the Court cannot adjudicate their case because the Supreme Council of the Cultural Revolution was formed based on Ayatollah Khomeini's orders and its decisions are above the law and cannot be evaluated by the Supreme Court.³²

Safoura Eliasi was similarly targeted due to her involvement with publications centered on student issues and her membership in the Guild Council while an undergraduate student:

For the next election of this Council [Guild Council], the Security Unit announced that my name could not be included on the list of candidates for election. During this time, I was barred from entering all buildings on campus. I had to file a complaint with the Ministry of Science against the university Security Unit, as they were barring my entrance without giving me an official letter...the Ministry of Science's Basij took responsibility for this complaint. They offered that in return for cooperating with them, they would transfer me to Tehran University and solve all my problems.³³



Safoura Eliasi, pictured above, was targeted by authorities due to her involvement with student publications and her membership in the Guild Council of her university while an undergraduate.

After graduating, Eliasi took the graduate entrance exam in 2008, but was told her file was incomplete:

In 2008, my transcript was issued in an incomplete way. My ranking was not clear

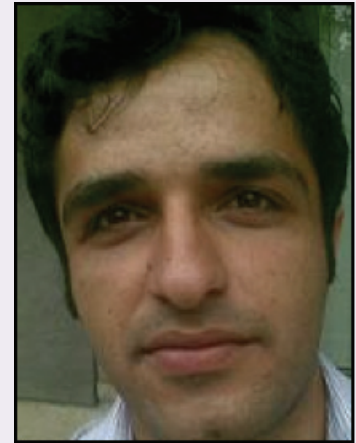
³¹ Ibid

³² Ibid.

³³ International Campaign for Human Rights in Iran interview with Safoura Eliasi, 26 November 2010.

PROFILE: Seyed Ziaoddin (Zia) Nabavi

Seyed Ziaoddin (Zia) Nabavi, a Chemical Engineering student, enrolled in Babol Noshirvani University of Technology in 2002. Between 2003 and 2007, Nabavi was elected a member of the Central Council of the Islamic Association of the university. He was arrested after security forces stormed the university on the night of 5 June 2009, taking him along with 15 other students because they held a hunger strike. He was subsequently suspended from the university for two terms. In 2008, Nabavi passed the graduate entrance exam and qualified for admission, however he was barred from admission. He and a few other banned students formed the “Council to Defend the Right to Education” to defend the rights of banned students.



Nabavi was allegedly physically and psychologically ill-treated during 120 days of interrogations. Human rights activists appealed for his release but Branch 26 of the Revolutionary Court, presided by Judge Pirabassi, sentenced Nabavi to 74 lashes and 15 years of imprisonment, ten years of which must be served in the city is Izeh. The court ruling was later reduced by an appeals court to 10 years imprisonment in exile.

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On 22 November 2010, without prior notice, Nabavi was transferred to Karoon Prison in Ahvaz. Nabavi was accused of cooperating with the *Mojahedin Khalgh Organization* (MKO), a charge he repeatedly denied. He said that the only reason for the court to issue such a decree is the presence of some of his family members in the organization’s Camp Ashraf in Iraq.

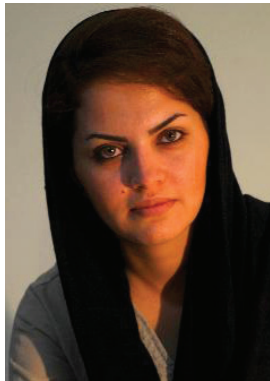
An informed source told the International Campaign for Human Rights in Iran that at the time of Nabavi’s arrest by the Ministry of Intelligence, he was put under intense pressure to confess and sit for a television interview. He was told to declare that the starred students issue was a ploy of the political campaigns of reformist candidates. In addition, he was told to state that he organized protests for barred students under the direction of reformists in an effort to launch a propaganda campaign against Mahmoud Ahmadinejad during the election. According to the source, agents within the Ministry of Intelligence told Nabavi that if he sat for the interview, he would be granted with conditions for his release.

The source told the Campaign that Nabavi rejected this offer and once again denied the Ministry of Intelligence’s allegation of collaboration with the MKO.³⁴

³⁴ International Campaign for Human Rights in Iran, “Seyed Ziaoddin (Zia) Nabavi,” 4 December 2010, <http://www.iranhumanrights.org/2010/12/zia-nabavi/> (accessed 4 December 2010).

on it. My transcript only said that I had until 21 June of that year to go to the *Sanjesh* Organization, 4th Floor. I went there. After I objected to my situation, they did not provide a clear answer about why my ranking had not been announced; they said they would follow through. But after many comings and goings, they never gave me a clear answer and they told me to sign up again next year. Because of my excellent academic take advantage of the 'gifted students privileges' [intended for those who receive high standing during my undergraduate studies, I could grades in their undergraduate studies]. Therefore I went to inquire about continuing my education. They told me that I had to go to the university's Cultural Revolution Council. The people in charge at this department treated me with disrespect and did not provide answers to my objections about the status of my further studies.

Simultaneously, I received a letter from the university's Security Office. I went there and was told me that if I reconsidered my extracurricular activities during the present academic year, perhaps I would be able to register at the university during the following year.



Farzaneh Jalili was banned from continuing her education because of her political activity and involvement in Tehran University school newspapers.

During the coming days, I received a letter from the Ministry of Intelligence in which I was asked to go to one of their offices for what they referred to as 'a friendly chat.' When I went there they told me that my ranking had not been announced because I had not married, and did not have responsibilities in my life, and because I had political activities during my education. They suggested that I get married, build a family, and to take a breather from all my friends for a while.³⁵

Eliasi retook the graduate examination in 2009:

In 2009, after I took the nationwide graduate admission examination in Restoration of Historical Monuments; I ranked third nationwide. This meant that I could attend any university that offered this program. They allowed me to choose my discipline. But when my examination transcript arrived, it indicated that I had 'failed the academic requirements.'

Considering my high ranking, I prepared a long letter of complaint and sent it to the Administrative Justice Court. An interesting point was that when I went to the *Sanjesh* Organization to review my transcript ranking, they told me that there was no applicant with these specifications! It was as if I had never taken part in the examination. After that, my inquiries from the *Sanjesh* Organization for determining the status of my education rendered no results.³⁶

³⁵ International Campaign for Human Rights in Iran interview with Safoura Eliasi, 26 November 2010.

³⁶ Ibid.

Farzaneh Jalili is another distinguished student who was banned from her education due to political activity. Jalili was manager of Tehran University's morning newspapers for one year as an undergraduate. She was summoned to the Revolutionary Court and the Ministry of Intelligence's Follow-Up Unit after police forces attacked Tehran University dormitories following post-election unrest.

Jalili completed the graduate entrance examination in 2010 and despite being ranked sixth nationally, was not allowed to enroll in university. Inquiring about her case, Jalili reported to the Sanjesh Organization and was told that the Ministry of Intelligence had reported negatively about her activities and she was therefore barred from continuing her education.³⁷

Barring Student Activists

Similar to Mahmoudian, Eliasi, and Jalili, students who have participated in political and campus-based activism were barred by the Ministry of Science from enrolling in university or continuing their education. The Campaign documented 217 cases, either through interviews or secondary sources, where the Ministry of Science, often at the behest of the Ministry of Intelligence, reportedly barred students for their activism. Some of these students were involved in activism critical the government's

social and political policies while others concentrate largely on campus related issues.



Isfahan University where students were banned for campus activity by Isfahan's Intelligence Office or the university Disciplinary Committee.

An anonymous student at Isfahan University told the Campaign that they did not have any history of being summoned to the University Disciplinary Committee or the local Intelligence Office, but said, "At the time of announcing the results of entrance exams and registration period, my records were not released and I was told my file was 'incomplete.'"³⁸

The source described their activities prior to being banned:

In 2007, we had a series of student activities at Isfahan University. After a while, all the guys involved with the issue were summoned one by one, either to Isfahan Intelligence [Office], or to the Disciplinary Committee. But I wasn't summoned anywhere, and I didn't go anywhere either. I didn't have any more activities after that. This year, when the time came to publish the results of graduate admission exams, they didn't issue my report card, saying that my file was incomplete.

³⁷ "Farzaneh Jalili Ranking Sixth in Graduate Entrance Examination Barred from Education," Rahan News Agency, <http://www.rahana.org/archives/27299> (accessed 2 December 2010).

³⁸ International Campaign for Human Rights in Iran interview with Pejman Abbasi, 18 August 2010.

I went to the *Sanjesh* Organization, the university security office, and the Ministry of Intelligence's offices in Isfahan, and they told me that the reason for the decision in my case was my student activities, as well as participating in dormitory protests.³⁹

The Ministry of Science barred Zohreh Asadpour, a physics undergraduate student at Gilan University, from continuing her education in 2007 despite Asadpour's qualifying exam score. Then in 2009, the Admissions Office of Azad University, a private university, barred Asadpour from admission. Asadpour claims that her activism for eliminating discrimination against women caused her to be banned.⁴⁰ Asadpour said that several other women's rights activists including Somayeh Rashidi and Leila Sehat were also deprived from education due to their women's rights activism, particularly their efforts on behalf of the "One Million Signatures Campaign for Gender Equality."⁴¹

During the 2009-2010 school year, authorities accelerated their politically motivated targeting of student activists, by denying admission to individuals who had participated in mass protests following the disputed 2009 presidential election. Amongst these students, Arman Sedaghati, Amir Jahangirir, Mansour Shakian, Mohammad Amin Shirzad, Hamed Ghazanfari, Khalil-al-rahman Khalilpour, and Somaneh Navab were students at Tehran's elite Amirkabir University who passed the graduate level entrance exam. An anonymous Amirkabir student told the Campaign they were starred by the Ministry of Science and barred from further higher education. According to these recently barred students, new starring cases mostly affect those who participated in post-election protests.



The main gate of Amirkabir University of Technology where elite students were barred by the Ministry of Science from continuing their education.

A considerable number of students at Tehran's Amirkabir University, including Hamed Ghazanfari, Arman Sedaghati, Mohammad Amin Shirzad, Amir Jahangiri, Mansour Shakerian, Khalilolrahman Khalilpour, and Samaneh Navvab, who had taken the graduate entrance examination in 2010, were rejected due to "incomplete files." A student who was kept from attending the University spoke with the Campaign on conditions of anonymity:

The number of starred students at Amirkabir University is very high this year. Of course, the Central Selection Committee and the *Sanjesh* Organization of the Ministry of Science are using the term 'incomplete file' instead of 'starred student' this year. Almost all students who faced this situation this year have gone to the Sanjesh Organization. Some of the students were asked to sign letters of recognizance and have been allowed to register conditionally. Some of the students have been referred to the Ministry of Intelligence by the Central Selection

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ International Campaign for Human Rights in Iran interview with Zohreh Asadpour, 9 November 2010.

⁴¹ <http://www.we-change.org/english/>

Committee, asking them to resolve their selection issues with the Ministry of Education. Several students have been completely barred from education, and authorities from the *Sanjesh* Organization and the Ministry of Science's Central Selection Committee have told them verbally that they are not allowed to attend graduate school.⁴²

Ali Gholizadeh, is a starred student who was arrested at his father's home in Mashad on 5 November 2010. Gholizadeh is the former Secretary of Shahroud Islamic Association and a current member of the General Council of *Daftar Tahkim-e Vahdat* Student Union.⁴³

He was arrested by the Mashad Intelligence Office on 7 July 2008, due to his student activities, and spent some time inside the city's Intelligence Office Detention Center. In 2009, Gholizadeh was barred from attending graduate school on orders from the Ministry of Intelligence.⁴⁴

Some time before his arrest, Gholizadeh gave his summary of the government's targeting of activists through starring students:

They wouldn't tell us in writing that we have been deprived from education; therefore the exact reason for our education ban is not clear to us, but, generally, any kind of student activities, whether activities in the Islamic Associations, political groups, guild councils, and cultural/artistic societies have led to students becoming starred.

Members of [the pro-government] Student Basij and the Islamic Society are the only two groups of student activists who are allowed to continue their education. This year, most of the starred students did not even have one sheet of paper in their disciplinary files. Starting this year, [prior] activities in the candidate headquarters for presidential election has also caused a deprivation of the basic right to education! Likewise, women's rights activists have also been added to the list of 'starred students.'⁴⁵

Multiple Suspensions and Disciplinary Committees

Some student activists, after being accepted and attending university, were summoned by university Disciplinary Committees, and were suspended for academic semesters because of activism. In practice, these students were systematically targeted and suspended for multiple terms thereby resulting in *de facto* expulsions from university for not completing degree requirements in time. For these students, Disciplinary Committees rather than the admissions process is the mechanism for their deprivation from education.

⁴² International Campaign for Human Rights in Iran interview with anonymous Amirkabir University Student, 27 October 2010.

⁴³ "Right to education is limited to Ahmadinejad courtiers, Interview with barred student Ali Gholizadeh," 20 October 2009; Rooz Online: <http://www.roozonline.com/persian/interview/interview-item/archive/2009/october/20/article/-94621da541.htm>

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ "Right to education is limited to Ahmadinejad courtiers, Interview with barred student Ali Gholizadeh," 20 October 2009; Rooz Online: <http://www.roozonline.com/persian/interview/interview-item/archive/2009/october/20/article/-94621da541.html>.

Mehrdad Islamkhah is a student barred from higher education. He described to the Campaign the events that culminated in his being forced to discontinue his studies:

A student is usually summoned to the Disciplinary Committee and during a process resembling a trial, if the student is sentenced to suspension, notice is sent to him/her in writing, and that student cannot continue their education for the period of suspension. There are also exceptions where there is no process and the suspension is simply verbally conveyed. That was my case and only months later I received a written notice.⁴⁶



Seal of Imam Hossein University where students were barred from education because of campus activity.

Islamkhah believes he was barred from his education at Imam Hossein University due to his student activities. He told the Campaign:

In 2005, I was the founding member and spokesperson for the Student Guild Association for Tuition-Paying Students. I am a tuition-paying undergraduate electrical engineering student at Imam Hossein University. I entered University in 2005. I was first blocked from enrollment for one term in 2006. Since then, my suspension has been renewed every year. If I am barred again this year, I will be expelled because I will not have completed my coursework within the required number of years.⁴⁷

Some students who advocate on behalf of barred and suspended students have themselves been suspended. In 2007, Sadegh Shojaii, Mahdieh Golroo, Zia Nabavi, and Saeed Feyzallah, of Allameh Tabatabai University in Tehran, were suspended or prevented from continuing their education after organizing activities in support of barred students.

Shojaii told the Campaign:

From the beginning of the 2007-2008 school year, I started to organize elections for the Islamic Student Association at the university. The University Chancellor and his administration refused to recognize these elections and I was subsequently suspended for one semester. At the end of this suspension period I was again suspended, this time for two semesters. This took place even though I was barred from entering the campus during the first semester of suspension and had no presence there. The reason for my second suspension was my advocacy on behalf of barred students as well as my determination to keep the election results of the students association valid.⁴⁸

Shojaii told the Campaign that his case underwent four stages: he was summoned to the Disciplinary

⁴⁶ International Campaign for Human Rights in Iran interview with Mehrdad Islamkhah, 23 July 2010.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ International Campaign for Human Rights in Iran interview with Sadegh

Shojaii, 2 November 2010.

Committee and interrogated; a hearing was held by the Committee; a preliminary ruling was issued; and he was eventually deprived of his right to education because he appealed and protested the ruling.⁴⁹

At the time of Shojaii's suspension, university wide suspensions totaled nearly 50 semesters. Shojaii protested these suspensions in his capacity as the secretary-elect of the Islamic Student Association.⁵⁰

Shojaii told the Campaign that it had become clear to him, and other students in his position, that authorities would renew suspensions under different pretenses, thereby making completion of degrees impossible. "We started a sit-in around the clock, day and night, which, after three days ended with our detention," he told the Campaign.⁵¹

According to Shojaii, protestors only demanded that university officials issue "a written guarantee for registration during the next semester," after their two suspension terms ended. He noted that in his own case, he only had 19 units, equivalent to one semester, of course work to graduate. However, after being released from detention, he was again summoned to the Disciplinary Committee and suspended for one more semester.⁵²

Other students have been suspended simply for criticizing university officials and exercising their freedom of expression. Asu Saleh, a student at Kurdistan University in the city of Sanandaj, was originally summoned to the Disciplinary Committee in 2006 because of his criticism of officials in a student publication. He was temporarily suspended. When he filed a complaint with the Kurdistan Judiciary, not only was his suspension confirmed, but the court issued a sentence denying him the right to continue his higher education completely.⁵³

Saleh explained the process of being barred from further education as a punishment for his student activism to hold university officials accountable:

I was the secretary of the research and cultural center 'Hezhan,' and at the same time served as the publisher and managing editor of the student weekly *Dang* at Kurdistan University. In an assembly of various student organizations and associations in May 2006, I was announced as its organizer. Alongside this event, a question and answer session was held at the University in which I expressed several criticisms of university administrators and government officials. Following this session, I was summoned to the Disciplinary Committee on 19 June 2006, and subsequently deprived of continuing my education.

On 10 July 2006, I received a written ruling that was issued by the Disciplinary Committee. I was charged with: insulting university officials, insulting *Hejab* (Islamic clothing) and students who wear it, propagating falsehoods, and disturbing or stopping university programs and order. I was subsequently suspended for three semesters based on this ruling.⁵⁴

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ International Campaign for Human Rights in Iran interview with Asu Saleh, 9 November 2010.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

A student who wished to remain anonymous explained that his own process of being deprived from education stemmed from his activities in exercising his right to free speech on a university campus:

In September 2006, I was suspended for one semester for the specific reason of holding an open microphone event in defense of political prisoners, particularly in defense of Akbar Ganji who had been physically abused in prison. Subsequently, I was barred from even entering the campus. In March 2006, I was summoned to the Disciplinary Committee regarding my activities during the previous spring semester, which included sit-ins, gatherings, and open microphone sessions. This time I was suspended for another two semesters.

By suspending undergraduate students multiple times and for several semesters, officials at the Ministry of Science effectively make it impossible for affected students to finish their course requirements within the six year time frame allotted for undergraduates, thereby preventing them from completing their degree and advancing to graduate school.



Buildings on the campus of *Amirkabir University* where students were targeted and deprived the right to education.

An Amirkabir University activist who requested anonymity told the Campaign that the university Disciplinary Committee barred him from continuing his education at the beginning of the 2007-2008 academic year due to his student activities:

In March 2006, I was summoned to the Disciplinary Committee for my activities since spring 2005: organizing gatherings, sit-ins, and helping produce free publications. My ruling was finalized in spring 2006. I was barred for the

second term of 2006-2007, and the first term of the 2007-2008 academic years. The reason the decision was upheld was the continuation of my activities in the spring of 2007, especially after what happened following the publication of fake newspapers at Amirkabir.⁵⁵

Each time I was summoned to the Disciplinary Committee I defended myself, but the Committee members, whose identities we never knew, without regard for any defense, made their rulings based on decisions dictated from above. The Disciplinary Committee would serve the initial ruling to us. We would object, and after a while, the ruling was upheld. During this process, many articles from the Students Disciplinary Procedures would be violated. We always objected, but it

⁵⁵ "Detained Students Tortured and Beaten to Fabricate Evidence," International Campaign for Human Rights in Iran, <http://www.iranhumanrights.org/2009/05/torturedstudents/> (accessed 1 December 2010).

never had any effect.



Student activist *Mahdieh Golroo* who was barred from education in 2007 as a result of her student and civic activities.

said.⁵⁷

However, Golroo emphasized that when Mahmoud Ahmadinejad came to power, his cabinet used the Disciplinary Committees against students critical of official policy. She says that they are now used for depriving those students from their right to education. Describing the current state of affairs inside Iranian universities, Golroo, during the first meeting of the Right to Education Council on 18 October 2008, said:

Today we have the situation where [being involved with] the Disciplinary Committee has become so arduous for students that many students, even myself, are willing to go to prison for a whole year, but be able to resume our studies. I only have 15 units left before graduating, [but technically] I am just a high school graduate now. In this country, everyone knows how hard it has been for us to be admitted to public universities to not have to pay tuition and how hard we worked in order to pass the entrance examination. Now we have reached the point where after studying for four years, we have nothing, we are just high school graduates. Another example of [what happens with] barred education is our friends at the [Amirkabir] Polytechnic University.⁵⁸ Today I asked after our Polytechnic friends who have been released recently. Their friends said these guys have only been able to enroll conditionally. They were told by the University that they each had three terms of unexcused absence.⁵⁹

Golroo continued:

⁵⁶ Mahdieh Golroo's speech, First Gathering of Right to Education Council; 18 October 2008

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ "Detained Students Tortured and Beaten to Fabricate Evidence," International Campaign for Human Rights in Iran, <http://www.iranhumanrights.org/2009/05/torturedstudents/> (accessed 1 December 2010).

⁵⁹ Mahdieh Golroo's speech, First Gathering of Right to Education Council; 18 October 2008.



Hesam Misaghi, Student Activist

Hesam Misaghi was a student at Senaii University in Isfahan before being expelled from university for being a member of the Baha'i Faith.

The other issue is the process of frequent suspensions at Allameh University. Suspensions become so frequent and take so long that when combined with the length of the student's education, the student is expelled on the grounds of having taken too long to complete his/her education, like myself. In fact, inside Iranian universities today, criticism equals being barred from education. As our lawyer, Mr. Oliaifard said, this process is against the law.

The other issue is the tight cooperation between the Ministry of Science and the Intelligence Ministry. In fact, you could say that the Ministry of Science has turned into a second Intelligence Ministry in the Islamic Republic."⁶⁰

The arrests taking place all over the country are made with the Ministry of Science's 100 percent cooperation.

When the Ministry of Science sees that they cannot stop the students [from participating in campus activism] with education bans, they go to the Intelligence Ministry, hoping that they would stop them through imprisonment."⁶¹

Barring Baha'is

In addition to students barred from education due to their social and political activism, Baha'i students have also faced expulsion and education bans due to their religious beliefs. Baha'i youth are forced to not specify their religion on applications, as any university found to have Baha'i students is ordered to expel them. The denial of higher education to Baha'i youth is part of a systematic, government-sanctioned program of persecution and discrimination against Baha'is.⁶²

Like student activists, some Baha'i students are screened out during the admissions process, through their applications being designated by the Ministry of Science as incomplete -- in other words, being given two stars.

An anonymous Baha'i student who was deprived of the right to higher education in 2007 told the Campaign, "I was barred from education even before enrolling as an undergraduate. Instead of receiving my college entrance exam results, the phrase 'your file is incomplete' was sent to me and thus I never got the chance to enroll."⁶³

Rahil Mehdizadeh, a Baha'i who took the university entrance exam, told the Campaign:

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Iranian Human Rights Documentaiton Center, "A Faith Denied: The Persecution of the Baha'is in Iran," December 2006, http://www.iranhrdc.org/httpdocs/English/pdfs/Reports/A-Faith-Denied_Dec06.pdf.2006 (accessed 1 December 2010).

⁶³ International Campaign for Human Rights in Iran interview with anonymous Baha'i, 26 July 2010.

Every year following the entrance exam, the phrase ‘your file is incomplete,’ would appear instead of my exam results. This was exactly the same process faced by all of my Baha’i friends at the time. Obviously, if there were anything missing from our files, they would not have issued us the ID card necessary for taking the entrance exam in the first place. I took the examination in 2005, 2006, and 2007, but I was not able to enter the university.⁶⁴

Some Baha’i students manage to gain access to universities, only to be expelled by the Ministry of Science once their faith is uncovered.

Hesam Misaghi, a student from Senaii University in the city of Isfahan and barred from higher education, told the Campaign that a large number of Baha’i students are barred from higher education:

I come from a Baha’i family. This was cited in a Ministry of Science letter as grounds for my dismissal from Isfahan’s Senaii University in 2008, after I had finished two terms studying English Translation. I should add that most of my classmates did not know anything about my being a Baha’i, it had never been discussed.

Usually Baha’i students are dismissed after a ruling arrives from the Ministry of Science’s Security Department. The Ministry of Information has all the statistics on Baha’i families; they identify [the students] and carry out the expulsion.

Baha’is don’t conceal their belief because it is forbidden for them. If someone asks them they announce that they are Baha’i.⁶⁵

Misaghi continued:

Objections have been conveyed to the Ministry of Science, the Sanjesh Organization, and the Supreme Council of the Cultural Revolution both in writing and in person, but authorities refuse to provide any answers, claiming innocence in the matter.⁶⁶

Shafagh Timajchi, a student who was barred from continuing her education because she is a Baha’i, said:

I finished my first semester completely. In my second semester, when I tried to enroll for classes, I saw a form that indicated my religion as ‘Islam-Shi’a.’ I requested a correction to my form. So the form was changed to reflect my religion as ‘Other.’ However, after about two weeks, they told me to go to the university to follow-up. I went to the authorities and they announced that they didn’t know exactly what needed to be done, telling me to go to the Ministry of Science’s Sanjesh Organization. They kept sending me and my father from the Education Deputy’s Office to other

⁶⁴ International Campaign for Human Rights in Iran interview with Rahil Mehdizadeh, 15 July 2010.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁵ International Campaign for Human Rights in Iran interview with Hesam Misaghi, 9 March 2010.

offices within the Ministry of Science. They told us, 'We don't know for sure what you need to do,' and in the end, they said that the university would have to write a letter to the Ministry of Science. University authorities said, however, that they couldn't give me a letter.

After going to the University, we were told that we had to go to the Sanjesh Organization, where they answered us just like the Ministry of Science. In the end, when we went back to the University, we were told that we had to withdraw our applications. They were trying to convince us to withdraw, so that there would be no mention of a dismissal. I didn't withdraw, and presently my educational status is 'Suspended Registration.'⁶⁷

Arash Shahsavandi reported being barred from education for being a Baha'i:

After several days of going to the university Security Office, the Head of Security told me that, 'The problem with your file is about religion,' because I had not picked any of the available four choices. My answer was clear, I did not pick because I did not believe in any of the four religions mentioned on the form. Finally, upon his request, I wrote on the form that I follow the Baha'i Faith, and after several days, he served a verbal message to me from the University Chancellor, Dr. Akbari, which said because of my belief in the Baha'i Faith, I will no longer be able to register for classes and study in this university.⁶⁸

Sina Dana, a student who was dismissed and barred from education at Tabriz's Sahand University in 2008, reportedly for being a Baha'i, said in a public letter:

I contacted the university officials several times. They disavowed knowledge and gave me hope that I would continue my education just like the rest of the students. Today, 4 March 2008, even my [biographical] details were deleted from the website, and when I tried to enter the website, I got the message 'This User Is Inactive.' When I saw this message, I contacted the University. After several hours, finally Ms. Cheraghi, Office Manager for the University Chancellor, answered my call and told me, 'The Sanjesh Organization has deleted your name from the list on the website and the only way to follow up your case is through them.' When I asked for the reason for this action, she hung up and did not answer my calls anymore.⁶⁹

Shayan Vahdati reported to the Campaign that authorities barred him from continuing his education "without any legal basis," and "as a result of my legal pursuit of the rights of students who are deprived from their education." Vahdati said, "I was told that according to a resolution of the Supreme Council of the Cultural Revolution, Baha'is are prevented from studying at universities."⁷⁰

⁶⁷ International Campaign for Human Rights in Iran interview with Shafagh Vahdati, 26 July 2010. Timajchi, 9 March 2010.

⁶⁸ Open Letter by Arash Shahsavandi, 14 October 2008.

⁶⁹ Open Letter by Sina Dana, 5 March 2009.

⁷⁰ International Campaign for Human Rights in Iran interview with Shayan

Negin Sayyahi Shahmirzadi, an Agricultural Engineering student at Sari's Agricultural Sciences and Natural Resources University, reported that she and classmate Sona Gholinejad were expelled and barred from education for being Baha'is:

When Sona went to the University Chancellor to inquire about her expulsion decision, the Assistant Chancellor told her 'your friend [he meant me] is about to be expelled, too.' I participated in an 11 March Conference about the Wahabi Sect. A cleric at the conference started saying, 'Baha'is are Russian spies,' and insulted my beliefs as much as he could. I couldn't tolerate it, so I stood up in the middle of many other students and defended my beliefs. The atmosphere became quite tense. In the end, we got to the point where the cleric was at a loss for words. According to what the Vice Chancellor told Sona Gholinejad, this incident finalized my expulsion. Of course this incident had a profound impact among the University students. After this incident, University authorities had to hold a conference called, 'A Historical Critique of the Baha'i Cult' at the University. I didn't participate in the conference for a number of reasons.⁷¹

Recourse

Students who were deprived from education, whether starved, expelled, or among those who passed the entrance exam but were not allowed to register, told the Campaign that no procedures or independent bodies exist to allow those deprived of education to seek remedies for their grievances. These students reported appealing to university officials, the Ministry of Science, the Judiciary, professors, the media, and members of Parliament for assistance in regaining admittance into university to no avail.

As Sadegh Shojaii, a student deprived of education, told the Campaign:

The Ministry of Science said, 'What is happening at Allameh University is illegal, but it is not within our ability to stop it.' The Judiciary no longer accepted our objections after March 2008, based on the resolution from the Supreme Cultural Revolution Council. Publicity, sit-ins in front of the Ministry of Science, Parliament, IRIB [state broadcasting organization], the university, etc...[were all fruitless].

In general, the reasons provided by authorities include vague and routine charges, such as procedural rules, including denying admissions to students who propagate against the regime and work in favor of anti-regime groups. This was the excuse given in my own case during my multiple suspensions that led to the discontinuation of my education.⁷²

Zohreh Asadpour, who has been kept from entering graduate school since 2008, first by the Ministry of

⁷¹ Right to Education Council Interview with Negin Sayahi Shahmirzadi, 16 June 2009.

⁷² International Campaign for Human Rights in Iran interview with Sadegh Shojaii, 2 November 2010.



Sona Gholinejad is a student who was expelled from university after it was discovered by university authorities that she was a Baha'i. (Photo courtesy: Population of Combat Against Educational Discrimination)

Science and later by Azad University, emphasized that:

The procedures to object to decisions to deprive students from education are very complicated.

The road to objecting to the decision to deprive me from education has been a winding one, from pursuing the case inside ministries and universities and the hallways of Parliament, to press conferences and gatherings on the street. A few starred students have been successful in returning to universities after submitting recognizance letters, stating that they would stop their political activities, but most were too hated by authorities to be allowed to return to university.⁷³

Repeatedly, students who spoke to the Campaign said their expulsion or rejection from university was through the interference of the Ministry of Intelligence, with the cooperation of university and Ministry of Science officials. Some students cited the Ministry of Intelligence's involvement as an obstacle to seeking redress for their deprivation of education. Students also reported being threatened, intimidated, arrested, and imprisoned by the Ministry of Intelligence if any objections were raised to screening and expulsion practices.

Puyan Mahmudian, who was barred from graduate school, described his efforts to seek recourse:

I, for one, pushed very hard for this, through members of Parliament, through the Supreme Leader's University Representative Office, through the *Sanjesh* Organization authorities, etc., but I didn't accomplish anything. At the Parliament's Education and Research Committee, and through help from Dr. Abbaspour, a file was opened for starred students. What was interesting was that representatives from the Ministry of Intelligence refused to attend the sessions, so that file never got anywhere.

Basically, there are no legal venues for objections. When the highest judicial authority in the country, the High Court, shrugs off responsibility, there is no place else to go. The problem is that the *Sanjesh* Organization does not accept responsibility, either, saying that the decisions have been the Ministry of Intelligence's call, and that objectors must gain the Ministry's satisfaction and agreement. But there are no defined ways for contacting the Ministry of Intelligence to submit an objection.⁷⁴

Mahmudian continued:

⁷³ International Campaign for Human Rights in Iran interview with Zohreh Asadpour, 9 November 2010.

⁷⁴ International Campaign for Human Rights in Iran interview with Puyan Mahmudian, 2 November 2010.

Generally, after a while, the reply was something like this--they expressed regret and sadness that a student with my kind of high ranking was starred. First, they promised to follow up. After a while they would say, 'We tried, the issue is a Ministry of Intelligence issue. The Ministry of Intelligence is insisting on your case.' I tried very hard to obtain a written notice regarding my deprivation from education but authorities never submitted any such documentation...at the end they made a friendly recommendation to leave the country to pursue higher education abroad.⁷⁵

Most students who spoke to the Campaign appealed or were referred first to the Ministry of Science, including its subdivisions, the *Sanjesh* Organization and Central Selection Committee. Ministry officials sometimes expressed regret for the students' predicament and claimed the matter would be resolved, but often the Ministry took no discernible action. After the Ministry of Science failed to address student's complaints of expulsion and exclusion from universities, many students took their cases elsewhere, particularly appealing to members of Parliament for assistance.

Sona Gholinejad, another barred student who was dismissed from university for being a Baha'i, when asked whether she had protested her expulsion and education ban said:

Yes, very much. And six months later, I am still pursuing the matter. I went to the Ministry of Science three times, in March, May, and June. I went to the *Sanjesh* Organization in March. I went several times to the Sari member of Parliament's Office and 20 times to the university to see the Chancellor, the Vice Chancellor, three members of the University Security Unit, Admissions, the Supreme Leader's Office in the University, a cleric, the Vice Chairman of the department, the department Chairman...I even talked to the professors. They did not give me any documents to show the reasons for my dismissal. The member of Parliament, however, wrote in his letter to the University Chancellor: 'Sona Gholinejad... has been expelled from university...I request her readmission to the University to continue her education.'⁷⁶

A source close to Saeed Moradi, a 2009-2010 graduate admission applicant who was deprived from education this year, told the Campaign:

After Saeed went to the *Sanjesh* Organization, he was told that he had security problems and that security organizations had replied negatively about his admission. He was told his case was under review at the appeals level. Unfortunately, after making seven or eight in-person inquiries and having a meeting with Morteza Noorbakhsh, Head of the *Sanjesh* Organization's Selection Committee, he has not yet received a definitive reply. Additionally, Saeed went to the Iranian Parliament to object to and pursue the matter. He met with Mr. Ali Zanjani, a member of Parliament from Naghadeh, and Mr. Javad Jahangirzadeh, a member of Parliament from Oroumiyeh,

⁷⁵ Ibid.

22-33-16&Itemid=63 (accessed 3 December 2010).

⁷⁶ Interview with Sona Gholinejad, Society Against Discrimination in Education, 27 July 2010, http://www.edu-right.us/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=511:1389-05-02-15-17-49&catid=39:1388-09-03-

and they both promised to help him. The Oroumīyeh Parliament member sent a letter to the Ministry of Science's Security Office. None of these objections, follow-ups, and efforts, however, have had any results.⁷⁷

Sepehr Atefi, a Baha'i deprived from entering university, told the Campaign about his attempts to see his education deprivation reversed:

I went to the Sanjesh Organization personally, and wrote letters to the President, the Parliament's Article 90 Commission,⁷⁸ the Ministry of Science, the *Sanjesh* Organization, Isfahan's Friday Imam, the Administrative Court, members of Parliament representing Isfahan, and all organizations I thought might somehow be related to my deprivation of education or who might be able to do something in this regard. Unfortunately, no organization was accountable. Some only expressed their regret, and other said there was nothing they could do.

After these efforts failed to achieve results, my friends and I tried to take the issue to the media, and we asked international organizations for assistance, but we were unable to achieve our main objective of enabling the barred Baha'i students to enter the universities.⁷⁹

Rahil Mehdizadeh, who was barred from entering university in 2005, 2006, and 2007 because he is a Baha'i, told the Campaign:

After seeing the national entrance exam results every year, I would go to the *Sanjesh* Organization offices in Karaj, and ask to talk to the head. Each time, either they wouldn't let me see him, or eventually they would allow me to see his Deputy. I kept going to have meetings with members of Parliament to present my problem. I even wrote multiple letters to related authorities, demanding equal rights for everyone in higher education. None of these actions resulted in anything.⁸⁰

Soroush Sabet is a banned student who described his efforts to pursue his rights with government organizations:

I first presented my objection to the *Sanjesh* Organization. They said they would respond in writing in about two weeks. After I didn't receive their reply in the promised time, I started talking about the situation, and at least I was able to get the attention of authorities. After that I went to the Selection Center of the *Sanjesh* Organization. They stated their regrets [about the situation] and promised to help me, but nothing came of it. Then, along with a few other barred students, we went to



Ali Gholizadeh, a student expelled from university, reported appealing to authorities as high as the Minister of Science without receiving any help in his case.

⁷⁷ International Campaign for Human Rights in Iran interview with source close to Saeed Moradi, 13 November 2010.

⁷⁸ The Article 90 Commission is tasked with implementing Article 90 of the Constitution which studies people's complaints against the government or the judiciary

⁷⁹ International Campaign for Human Rights in Iran interview with Sepehr

Atefi, 18 July 2010.

⁸⁰ International Campaign for Human Rights in Iran interview with Rahil Mehdizadeh, 15 July 2010.

Parliament and we met with a group of Parliament members, such as Mr. Abbaspour, Head of Education Commission. He took down our information, but nothing came of that, either. We even spoke with Mr. Ahmad Tavakoli at Parliament. He was aware of my case. He said that he had talked about me with the authorities, but while he expressed his regrets, he said that he had no power to help in this area.

What is expected based on justice and equal treatment is that everyone should have equal access to education and ability to continue their higher education as far as they wish and qualify for. If today equal access based on various factors is not available, the least we expect is that those who have proven themselves academically should not be prevented from continuing their education...‘Deprived of Education’ today means that political organs are interfering in academic processes, disturbing their balance, and that the reasoning of intelligence and security organs are trumping academic logic.⁸¹



Negin Sayyahi was in university before being expelled for being a member of the Baha’i Faith. (Photo courtesy: Population of Combat Against Educational Discrimination)

Ali Gholizadeh reported being able to appeal to as high an authority as the Minister of Science himself, Mohammad Mehdi Zahedi, to no avail:

We went to the *Sanjesh* Organization, Azad University’s Testing Center, the Parliament, and other organizations several times. I even met with Zahedi, Kamran Daneshjoo, and several other Deputy Ministers. Most of the authorities shrugged off the responsibility in their meetings with us, attributing the issue to other individuals and organizations. During an unplanned meeting I had with Mr. Zahedi at the Parliament, he promised that our problems would be resolved over the next few days, but nothing ever happened. The responsibility of starring the students lies with the cabinet and Azad University. In a way, Mr. Ahmadinejad and Mr. Jasbi [chancellor of Azad University] are directly responsible for this educational apartheid, even though Azad University officials and Mr. Jasbi himself have announced several times that they have had to agree to starring student activists under pressure from the cabinet. But this does not excuse the gentlemen of their responsibilities.⁸²

Another group of twenty students who were barred from education wrote a letter to Speaker of Parliament Ali Larijani in October 2009 appealing for assistance. The letter said:

One-and-a-half months after the graduate entrance examination results were announced, in which several student activities were ‘starred,’ authorities either deny or shrug off responsibility about it. The barred-from-education students are continually sent [back and forth] among related or unrelated organizations. However,

⁸¹ The Right To Education Society interview with Soroush Sabet, 27 November 2007.

⁸² “Right To Education Is Limited in Ahmadinejad’s Courty: Interview with Student Ali Gholizadeh, Deprived From Education,” Rooz Online, 20 October 2009, <http://www.roozonline.com/persian/interview/interview-item/archive/2009/october/20/article/-94621da541.html> (accessed 30 November 2010).

so far, and after numerous inquiries, we have not achieved any results. Even the promises and orders made by Messrs. Zahedi, Daneshjoo, Pourabbas, and Abbaspour for resolving the issue of ‘starred students,’ promised in face-to-face meetings or during interviews with official news agencies and after our repeated inquiries, have not yet led to the registration of students who have been deprived from continuing their education at universities which have admitted them.⁸³

Some students sought judicial redress. A source close to Saeed Moradi, a barred law student at Gilan University, told the Campaign:

Saeed went to the Administrative Court to file a complaint against the Sanjesh Organization. Not only did the Court refuse to receive his complaint, he was told that the Supreme Council of the Cultural Revolution had barred the administrative court from reviewing such cases. Peyman Aref is a friend of Saeed’s from when the two worked at Mehdi Karroubi’s presidential election campaign headquarters in Gilan. Aref received a ruling from the Administrative Court in 2007 to resume his education. The Supreme Council of the Cultural Revolution wrote a strongly-worded letter to the Administrative Court, barring it from entering the domain of barred-from-education students.⁸⁴

Mehrdad Islamkhah described such a case:

In 2007, several students, including Peyman Aref, filed a complaint with the Administrative Court. The Court ruled for the continuation of their education. Unbelievably, though, Tehran University refused to honor the ruling and they couldn’t continue their education. My arrest in 2007 was due to the press reports about my deprivation, and for the interviews I did with the media.⁸⁵

Asu Saleh, a student who was deprived from education by the Disciplinary Committee, found no recourse through the Committee’s appeal process:

They refused to give any answers and each member of the Disciplinary Committee blamed the other. I objected to the ruling and was served the decision regarding the appeal, and this is how the earlier decision was upheld without any changes.”

In fact, except for the Supreme Leader’s agents in the university, no other institution or person would defend the issued ruling. So in this way, I was assured that this verdict was issued by the Supreme Leader’s Organization at the University. Before this, I had my differences with this organization. These disputes continued even after this happened. The Supreme Leader’s Organization at Kurdistan University wrote a letter to the Kurdish Student’s website , for which I was responsible, denying all my

⁸³ “Mr. Larijani! Pursue The Situation of Starred Students, Letter of 20 Starred Students to Parliament Speaker;” Mardomsalari Newspaper, No. 2106, 17 October 2009, <http://www.mardomsalari.com/Template1/News.aspx?NID=64147> (accessed 30 November 2010).

⁸⁴ International Campaign for Human Rights in Iran interview with source close to Saeed Moradi, 13 November 2010.

⁸⁵ International Campaign for Human Rights in Iran interview with source close to Mehrdad Islamkhah, 23 July 2010.

statements.⁸⁶

Negin Sayyahi, a student who reported being expelled from Sari University for being a Baha'i, said:

I went to the Registrar's Office at my university. The person in charge asked for my student ID number. When he punched in the number, he told me 'you made a mistake!' because my file didn't open. Then he entered my name and last name. He got the message 'you are not allowed to enroll for classes.' I had my class enrollment sheet with me. He said, 'There is a problem with your registration. You must go to Mr. Akbari. He is the liaison between the Registrar's Office and the Security Office.' When Akbari asked for my student ID number and entered it on his computer, he said, 'You have a security issue. You must go to Mr. Saranjam.' Mr. Saranjam had nothing to do with this issue. I told Mr. Saranjam the story. First, he didn't show any reaction, he was laughing. After he entered my student ID number, he said, 'The person in charge of this issue is Mr. Erfani, Head of the University Security Office.' After a while, when Mr. Erfani came, he said 'your issue is related to Dr. Fazlollah.' This was the man who had deleted Sona's [Gholinejad] course choices. He came to me and told me that my issue is a security issue. The last time I went to the Security Office, Mr. Akbari gave me the address for the Sanjesh Organization, without saying anything. I asked him, 'Is it an ideological issue?' and he said, 'Unfortunately, yes.' This happened on 10 May.

The authorities' reaction, without exception, was to say, 'We are employees and must carry out orders.' When I asked to see my file, they said, 'We have been ordered not to provide any documents, not even one piece of writing.' But the professors treated us appropriately. There were courses for which I needed grades. They were willing to give me my tests, especially my Statistics and Probability professor who said, 'Education is your human right.' This individual was present at the Wahabi Conference, and afterwards asked me several times he asked me whether I had faced problems with my dismissal. He was always concerned and caring.⁸⁷

The barring and expulsion of students activists and Baha'is not only affects the student in question but also has repercussions on their families. Many parents often become involved in their children's cases.

Sayyahi described her mother's efforts to help her seek recourse:

My mother and I did a lot. We went to the university Security Office several times. My mother met with the Provincial and Local Governor's Offices. We hired a lawyer and met with Mr. Shojaee, a member of Parliament. He wrote us two letters, one addressed to the University Chancellor and the other to the Minister of Science, Research, and Technology, Mr. Daneshjoo. My mother and I met with the University Chancellor. He did not treat us well. He said, 'We will implement justice. You deserved to be

⁸⁶ International Campaign for Human Rights in Iran interview with Asu Saleh, 9 November 2010. See: www.kurdishstudents.com.

⁸⁷ Interview with Negin Sayyahi, Society Against Discrimination in Education, 16 June 2010, http://www.edu-right.us/index.php?option=com_

[content&view=article&id=480:1389-03-26-20-18-25&catid=39:1388-09-03-22-33-16&Itemid=63](http://www.kurdishstudents.com/content&view=article&id=480:1389-03-26-20-18-25&catid=39:1388-09-03-22-33-16&Itemid=63) (accessed 1 December 2010).

dismissed.' My mother's voice was rising. She told him that he was treating people unfairly because of his position. I told my mother to try and understand that if he sided with us, he would lose his livelihood. Our discussion lasted about half an hour, but we didn't reach any particular conclusions.⁸⁸

The mothers of other starred students wrote a letter to Mahmoud Ahmadinejad in 2007, objecting to the decision to ban their children from education. They complained about "a lack of attention to the situation of starred students," and demanded Ahmadinejad's personal attention to the matter. In their letter, dated 3 March 2007 the mothers wrote:

They tell us, your children are hostile with the regime and security organizations do not approve of their continued education. No one explains to us and our children when and through which actions they have been hostile to a regime in whose creation we, too, have had a share. Why should the right to continue one's education be taken away from academic youth who have never been involved in any student activities? Or those who have had legal and well-identified student activities for which they have never been found guilty in any disciplinary or judicial courts? And even if they have been found guilty, they have never been hostile to the regime? Would the Islamic Republic's security face a crisis if those in charge do not deprive a group of gifted and hard-working Iranian youth from their deserved chance to continue their education? Or would it conversely aid them and their families to be more hopeful? Which religious and humane order would accept that the fate, nerves, and feelings of a group of young people and their families be mocked liked this and for the deserving students to be deprived of continuing their education due to differences in taste?⁸⁹

This letter was signed by Jina Hassanpour, mother of Saeed Ardeshteri; Soghra Shakeri, mother of Mehdi Aminzadeh; Nosrat Azizi, mother of Mohammad Shooresh Moradi; Salimeh Fotoohi, mother of Hannan Azizi Banitorof; Zahra Ghasemi, mother of Hamed Hassandoust; Mehri Kafi Ahmadabadi, mother of Mohsen Fatehi; Azemat Golrokh, mother of Zahra Janipour; Sobieh Mohammadzadeh, mother of Salar Saket; Mahnaz Modaberi, mother of Peyman Aref; Mansoureh Movafaghi, mother of Siamak Karimi; and Sedigheh Noghrehi, mother of Farhad Zatalifar. A copy of the letter was sent to the office of Mohammad Mehdi Zahedi, former Minister of Science, Research, and Technology, and the office of Morteza Nourbakhsh, Head of the Central Committee for the Selection of Faculty and Students.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ Source has been removed from internet.

UNFOLDING OF THE STARRED STUDENT CONTROVERSY

Starring Gains Public Exposure

In September 2006, a year after Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's election as President, a public controversy arose over allegations by some students that the Ministry of Science was depriving qualified applicants of admission to graduate and post-graduate studies on political, ideological and religious grounds.

That month, a number of students held a series of protests in front of the *Sanjesh* Organization (academic measurement bureau), Parliament, and the Ministry of Science, alleged that despite having passed university entrance examinations, government authorities in charge of university admissions at the *Sanjesh* Organization had refused to enroll them and that stars printed next to their names on their transcripts indicated they had been singled out for denial of admission.

These students, most of whom were applicants to graduate and post-graduate programs, alleged that during the selection process, the Central Selection Committee marked their exam transcripts with stars signaling different levels of exclusion from university programs.

One star officially denoted individuals who passed the entrance exam, but whom authorities had singled out because of prior university disciplinary infractions. In practice, one star denoted students who had disciplinary or other issues, such as a history of student activism, and whom the Central Selection Committee had deemed could continue their education conditionally, after they had written a recognizance letter, promising that they would not engage in "undesirable political activities."

Two stars officially denoted individuals who have passed the entrance exam but the Central Selection Committee has singled out because their application forms were "incomplete." In practice, according student testimonies collected by the Campaign, many of these students had prior records that the Ministry of Intelligence deemed warranted disqualification from admission. These individuals may be granted conditional admission into a graduate program on the stipulation that they promise, in a recognizance letter, to end their political activities. The students must further acknowledge that if they

continued their political activities, they would lose their university admission and be forced to pay tuition for any coursework already completed. The Ministry of Science also designates the files of many Baha'i students as "incomplete."

Three stars refers to individuals who have passed the entrance exam, but whose "qualifications" have been completely rejected by the Central Selection Committee and Ministry of Intelligence, and have thus been barred by government agencies from entering a university.

The Ministry of Science eventually officially confirmed that a policy that bars student from university admission existed and such decisions rested primarily with the Ministry of Intelligence and the Judiciary. The Ministry denied using three stars to designate these students and the students did not report finding three stars on their transcripts. However according to an activist from the Education Rights Council, which advocates for the rights of starred and Baha'i students, some students reported receiving test results with three stars printed on them in 2006.⁹⁰ Other barred students, who spoke to Ministry of Intelligence officials about their cases, reported to the Campaign that these officials sometimes referred to them and their cases as three-starred, indicating that the measures against them went beyond those of one and two starred students.

Reports of starring and excluding students quickly garnered attention from members of Parliament and news outlets in Iran.

On 11 September 2006, MP Hossein Amiri Khomeini, a member of Parliament's Education and Research Committee criticized the government's politicization of student selection, the rejection of qualified applicants, and the practice of requiring others to promise that they would not engage in political activities. Khomeini told the official *ISNA News Agency*:

Considering the large number of applicants who have not passed the university entrance examinations for undergraduate and graduate levels, and the fact that many of our youth want to continue their education into graduate and Ph.D. levels ... no additional limitations should be enforced.⁹¹

On 20 September 2006, the daily newspaper *Etemad Melli* reported that "university registrars all over the country had received new enrollment procedures, [entitled the Procedures for Non-Enrollment of Starred Students] in which registrars were told not to enroll 'starred students' in the new academic term," and that "students who object ... should be guided to the Central Selection Committee."⁹²

According to *Etemad Melli*, "starring students was a punitive action," where the Central Selection Committee divided the students into those "allowed to enroll," and "one-, two-, or three-starred," applicants, for whom the Committee has limited or barred from enrollment.⁹³

⁹⁰ International Campaign for Human Rights in Iran interview with Safoura Eliasi, 1 December 2010.

⁹¹ "The Political Selection of University Admissions is Inappropriate and Prosecutable," *ISNA News Agency*, 20 September 2006, <http://www.isna.ir/>

ISNA/NewsView.aspx?ID=News-792466 (accessed 1 December 2010).

⁹² "Starred Students Deprived from Education," *Etemad Melli Newspaper*, 20 September 2006.

⁹³ *Ibid.*

The Ministry of Science's Initial Reaction

The Ministry of Science's reaction to questions about the starring policy was characterized by three denials: (1) that no student were starred or made to sign recognizance letter due to a prior history of political activism; (2) that no students were pre-emptively unable to enroll, saying that most starring cases were due to incomplete applications and implying that all cases were either resolved or soon to be resolved; and (3) no applicant had received three stars, implying that no student faced a full and permanent bar to continuing his or her education.

The first reaction by a government official to student protests about starring came from Morteza Noorbakhsh, Head of the Ministry of Science's Central Selection Committee.

On 18 September 2006, without referring specifically to starring, Noorbakhsh admitted that, "some of the students signed recognizance letters at the time of their enrollment."⁹⁴ However, he added, "None of the individuals who passed the graduate admission examination have been asked to provide promises not to engage in political activities."⁹⁵ Noorbakhsh stressed that officials requested students to sign recognizance letters because of university disciplinary records and not their political activities. He explained that:

Some of the students who, during their undergraduate studies, have had a record of disregard for educational, research, and moral rules, have provided guarantees that they would act within the university regulations during their graduate studies, and if they did not observe the university regulations, their admission would be nullified.⁹⁶

In the face of a growing controversy, however, Ministry of Science officials began criticizing the media's coverage of the starring story. The Ministry also tried to counter many of the claims made in the press, particularly any political motivation behind starring and the existence of three-starred students who were completely barred from higher education.

Speaking to semi-official *Mehr News Agency* on 23 September 2006, Noorbakhsh said that the news coverage about,

Starred students merely creates public anxiety [and that] among all accepted candidates in the graduate entrance exam, the files of fifty-four of them were incomplete, and after review by the Ministry of Science, the cases of all these candidates but eight, have been resolved.⁹⁷

In a different interview, published by *Mehr* on 23 September 2006, Noorbakhsh began to offer more denials but also more details about the starring process:

⁹⁴ "Head of Professor and Student Selection Committee of Ministry of Science," ISNA News Agency, 18 September 2006, <http://www.isna.ir/ISNA/NewsView.aspx?ID=News-790805> (accessed 1 December 2010).

⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶ "Head of Professor and Student Selection Committee of Ministry of Science," ISNA News Agency, 18 September 2006, <http://www.isna.ir/ISNA/NewsView.aspx?ID=News-790805> (accessed 1 December 2010).

⁹⁷ Ibid.

There is no such thing as a three-starred student, and what has been reported on this in the media, by news agencies and on websites is false. ... This year's graduate entrance examination results, like the previous year's, were accompanied with one or two stars, but, unfortunately, some newspapers and websites related this [act] to the students' political activities during their undergraduate studies. ... The existence of 'stars' is in no way indicative of a political screening of the admitted applicants and I deny the reports about this. [These students] were accepted academically, but their files are incomplete, and we will complete their files by October...When a student has two stars, it means that he had an incomplete file or that when disciplinary committees or other relevant organizations requested information about their situation, the responses had not been received by the time the results were announced.⁹⁸

On 24 September 2006, then Minister of Science Mohammad Mehdi Zahedi denied the existence of "starred students" and in particular those who were academically barred for their political or student activism, saying:

Regarding non-enrollment of some of the students who have been admitted to universities, on grounds of political activities, membership in Tahkim-e Vahdat Student Union, and dismissal of students for political reasons, these are complete lies and falsehoods, and, unfortunately, some media intensify it. ... If they are telling the truth, they should formally provide one instance of people who were claimed to be starred, and who were not registered because of the prior-mentioned problems.⁹⁹

Starred Students Come Forward

On 25 September, the day after Minister Zahedi challenged critics to come forward with examples of starred students, *Etemad Melli* Newspaper reported that Mohammad Ali Dadkhah, lawyer and member of the Center for Human Rights Defenders, had "agreed to represent 17 starred graduate students who have been unable to gain entry into the universities."¹⁰⁰

Mohammad Ali Dadkhah said that the 17 starred students he represented were only a small part of the overall number of starred students, adding, "The Executive Branch's interference in the admission of individuals who have met the academic requirements for gaining access to higher education is dubious."¹⁰¹

On 29 September 2006, members of the *Tahkim-e Vahdat* Student Union held a press conference where they revealed more details about some "starred students," including their names and backgrounds.¹⁰²

⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁹⁹ "Existence of 'Starred Students' Creates Public Anxiety: Head of the Faculty and Student Central Selection Committee Secretariat," Mehr News Agency, 23 September 2006, <http://www.mehrnews.com/fa/NewsDetail.aspx?NewsID=384164> (accessed 1 December 2010).

¹⁰⁰ "Lawsuit of 17 Starred Students Was Registered With the Judiciary;"

Etemad Melli Newspaper; No. 190; 25 September 2006.

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

¹⁰² "Tahkim-e Vahdat's Report on Starred Students," *Etemad Melli* Newspaper; No. 194, 30 September 2006.

Ali Nikounesbati, a member of Tahkim-e Vahdat's Central Council, provided reporters with documents showing seven students who passed the entrance exams but were later kept from continuing their education. Nikounesbati named several three-starred students in particular; Hannan Azizi, Siamak Karimi, Yashar Qajar, Zahra Janipour, Mohsen Fatehi, Mehdi Aminzadeh, Mohammad Hossein Naeemipour and Hamed Hassandoust, and explained that "although they achieved academic admission to the university, they were kept from their education [by] the Selection Committee, based on a report by Ministry of Intelligence."¹⁰³

Nikounesbati explained that there are no judicial convictions that would allow for barring these students:

Janipour has an outstanding sentence, but no qualified court has issued a ruling that he is not fit to continue his education. Or Mohsen Fatehi, a former member of Tehran University's College of Social Sciences Islamic Association, has a Disciplinary Committee ruling, but no qualified court has issued a ruling about his lack of qualifications to continue his education. Yashar Qajar was imprisoned for several months last year, but he was never charged and there are no rulings in his case," said the Tahkim-e Vahdat Spokesperson. [Hannan Azizi] has never had any political activity.¹⁰⁴

Nikounesbati alleged that authorities deprived Azizi, whose father is a journalist, and Naeemipour, whose father is a former MP, of university admission because of their parents' activities.¹⁰⁵

Mehdi Aminzadeh, a member of the Central Council of the Iranian Islamic Alumni Association (Advar Tahkim), said during the same press conference:

In 2006, I was admitted in Qom Mofid University's Graduate Program in Political Science. After I registered, I was called in by the University's Registrar's Office on the first day of classes. They showed me a letter from the Sanjesh Organization's Selection Unit, which stipulated that I am not qualified to continue my education. I went to see Mr. Noorbakhsh, Head of the Central Faculty and Student Selection Committee, and he said that Ministry of Intelligence had written a letter in which they have talked about my contact with illegal political groups, saying that I was not entitled to continue my education...During my entire education, I have not once gone to the Disciplinary Committee. I have several judicial cases. I have gone to prison, but in none of my cases has a judicial order been issued for me to be ... deprived from [my] right to continue [my] education based on [my] political and ideological beliefs.... [T]hese [sanctions] have neither a Sharia nor legal basis. ... Could Disciplinary Committee or judicial rulings be used for a punishment larger than the one those rulings have already stipulated, depriving students of their rights?¹⁰⁶

¹⁰³ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

During the same press conference, Mohammad Hashemi, Spokesperson for *Tahkim-e Vahdat's* Central Council alleged that:

One hundred one- and two-starred students have been registered conditionally and after they signed guarantees. ... Despite what Ministry of Science authorities say about the guarantees being only about the necessity of observing the rules and regulations, the guarantees are mostly about the necessity of cooperating with university authorities and security and intelligence organizations, practically barring the students from political activities.¹⁰⁷

On 4 October 2006, ISNA published the complete text of the letter sent from the Central Selection Committee to “starred students:”

Greetings. This is to inform you that your case in this year’s entrance examination has been reviewed. Unfortunately, according to the student selection criteria adopted by the Supreme Council of Cultural Revolution, you have not been admitted. Therefore, if you would like to object to the decision issued by the Secretariat, please submit your reasons for requesting an appeal and answer the following questions, within one month following the receipt of this letter for the next steps. Results of the further review will be sent to your address. This is a reminder that the mentioned terms are stipulated on the back of this letter.¹⁰⁸

The *ISNA* also published a text of a recognizance letter, provided to the agency by Noorbakhsh, which “two-starred students” were required to sign before enrolling in their university programs:

I,, son/daughter of, with Birth Certificate Number....., issued in, born on, acknowledge that I have been allowed to conditionally enter the university by the Central Professor and Student Selection Committee Secretariat, and promise to observe all ideological, moral, and political principles within the framework of current laws and regulations, particularly the university’s disciplinary regulations. In case I make any movements against the content of this letter, the related officials will be allowed to revoke my admission and to prevent me from further education. Obviously, should this happen, I am committed to re-paying expenses related to my education.¹⁰⁹

Students Seek Answers From the Parliament

On 24 September 2006, several “starred students” met with members of the Iranian Parliament’s Commission on Education and Research, and presented details and documentation about their denial of

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

¹⁰⁸ “A Review of The Story Of ‘Starred Students,’ From Absolute Lies to Explanation of The Truth,” ISNA News Agency; 4 October 2006 <http://newsmanager.gooya.com/politics/archives/2006/10/053362.php> (accessed 1 December 2010).

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

university admission.¹¹⁰ On 25 September 2006, after the meeting, Shahriar Moshiri, an MP and member of the Commission, said, “The Minister of Science must present [any] documentation and evidence used to deprive [admission to] several graduate students this year, and provide an explanation for this [action].”¹¹¹

Ali Abbaspour Tehrani Fard, head of the Commission, said, “With the follow-ups we have done with the Ministry of Science, all ‘starred students’ will be registered.”¹¹² Fard stated that “our recommendation was that all of these students be registered, and if they have committed an offense, it must be dealt with according to the university disciplinary regulations.”¹¹³ While refusing “to express what groups of students had become starred,” Fard acknowledged that the main reason for denying most “starred students” university admission was “political,” saying, “I am not aware of what type of students they have been, but what is certain is that political activities in universities must be according to the law.”¹¹⁴

On 30 September 2006, *Etemad Melli* Newspaper published a short interview with Minister of Science Zahedi in which he “vehemently” denied allegations that the government has barred qualified students from enrolling in universities on political grounds.¹¹⁵ “He added that [the media’s] reporting these allegations were ‘major sins.’ Of course I am not a *mujtahed*, but you can ask the [religious] scholars.”¹¹⁶ However, when *Etemad Melli* pressed Zahedi on the issue, he confirmed that there were one- and two-starred students and that officials required some students sign a recognizance letter.¹¹⁷ He added:

We told the universities that it was necessary to take guarantees. Taking the letters of recognizance from the students does not mean that they are facing disciplinary action; it is to remind and warn them of the university environment and to remind them to observe morality in this environment.¹¹⁸

Zahedi’s most novel admission came when *Etemad Melli* asked him if, besides starred students, the names of other students might have been omitted from the published list of those who had passed the entrance exam.¹¹⁹ To which Zahedi replied:

What was being discussed before was about the one- and two-starred [cases], but what you now say is different. If someone’s name has not been announced, he must have had special issues or special violations, which relevant [government agencies] have reported.¹²⁰

Members of Parliament soon publically criticized the screening policy Zahedi described, including MP Shahriar Moshiri, who on 4 October 2006 said:

In addition to the “starred students,” we have also had those who passed the graduate programs entrance examinations, whose names did not appear on the list of accepted students at all. ... I have the necessary papers and documents [to

¹¹⁰ “Return of Selection Process to Universities,” *Sarmayeh Newspaper*, 25 September 2006.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹¹² *Ibid.*

¹¹³ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁵ “Interview with Mohammad Mehdi Zahedi, Minister of Science about

Starred Students,” *Etemad Melli Newspaper*, No. 194, 30 September 2006.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*

confirm this practice]. I have also warned the officials, if these students are not registered by [the coming] Saturday and Sunday, I will distribute their names and copies of the letters they have been sent by the *Sanjesh* Organization, announcing the reasons they have not be registered, during Parliament's open session.¹²¹

Reacting to the support shown certain MPs for the plight of these “starred students,” and banned students, Mohammad Hosseini, then Legal and Parliamentary Deputy of the Ministry of Science, said, “Some people, without knowledge about these types of students, have expressed an opinion.”¹²²

Continued Protests

Throughout October and November, the Ministry of Science continued to deny that any of their screening was related to a student's activism or criticisms of the government and that authorities had designated any three- starred students or barred anyone from enrolling in universities. The Ministry claimed that it had resolved all, or nearly, all of the starred students' cases and no, or very few, unregistered students remained.

Reacting to the repeated government denials, starred students launched a second wave of protests. On 14 November 2006, they gathered in front of the Ministry of Science, demanding they had a right to continue their education. Mehdi Aminizadeh, one of the starred students told reporters:

The Minister of Science has repeatedly stated that “starred students” don't exist. We are here to say that we do exist; don't deny our existence in the media. ... Activity in the Islamic Associations and Tahkim-e Vahdat Student Union, activity in student publications, judicial rulings against parents of students, and ethnic problems are some of the instances for which the Ministry of Science has starred the students in the past, depriving them from education.¹²³

On 17 November 2006, Minister Zahedi said, “The gathering of those students who call themselves three-starred in front of the Ministry of Science is sheer political maneuvering, and I strongly deny the existence of such students.”¹²⁴

On 5 December 2006, starred students had another gathering, this time in front of the Iranian Parliament. MP Fard, Head of the Education and Research Commission, reacted by saying,

Because of the resolutions passed by the Supreme Council of the Cultural Revolution, there are those who have been refused [university admission] due to security issues, and their number is fewer than 10 to 12. There have always been a specific number about whom this has been the case, but this year the issue has intensified due to the existence of the “starred students.” But according to ... the

¹²¹ “A Review of The Story Of ‘Starred Students,’ From Absolute Lies to Explanation of The Truth,” ISNA News Agency, 4 October 2006, <http://newsmanager.gooya.com/politics/archives/2006/10/053362.php> (accessed 1 December 2010).

¹²² “Interview with Mohammad Hosseini, Legal and Parliamentary Deputy of Ministry of Science,” Mehr News Agency, 7 October 2006, <http://www.mehrnews.com/fa/NewsTextOnlyVersion.aspx?NewsID=390657> (accessed 1 December 2010).

¹²³ “Gathering of A Group of Students In Front Of Science Ministry,” Mehr News Agency, 14 November 2006, <http://www.mehrnews.com/fa/NewsDetail.aspx?NewsID=406674> (accessed 1 December 2010).

¹²⁴ Ibid.

Ministry of Science, all “starred students” have been registered.¹²⁵

That same day, a group of students, identifying themselves as two- and three-starred students, gathered in front of the Karaj Teacher Training University. The group stated that their “graduate level admissions to the [university] had been suspended” and that they had not been able to register.¹²⁶

On 20 December, Minister Zahedi accused starred students of having criminal records related to “prison, flogging, and rape of people,” and said these “individuals described as three-starred students have been disqualified by authorities other than the Ministry of Science.”¹²⁷

Zahedi’s comments were met with protest by the students, and even by some members of the Parliament.

MP Moshiri publicly defended these students against Zahedi’s accusations:

The Minister of Science’s statements surprised me, because these students do not have a record of rape, nor prison sentences, nor any other criminal cases...I followed up and it turned out that in the Ministry of Science’s reports [about these students], there have never been any particular violations attributed to these students, and none of the cases mentioned could have been used as cause to prevent them from their education. In the reports, nowhere was it mentioned whether the student should or should not be registered. All these students were admitted in the entrance examination, and some of them ranked between second and tenth position. ... However, next to their report cards, there was a secret number, meaning that their admission must not be announced.¹²⁸

The Minister Confirms Most Allegations and Parliament’s Scrutiny Intensifies

On 24 December 2006, the Ministry of Science held a press conference where the Minister clarified the government’s starring policies. Authorities kept reporters from several press outlets that had published critical pieces about the starring controversy, including *Etemad Melli*, *Ayandeh-No* Newspaper and *ILNA* News Agency, from attending the press conference.¹²⁹

At the press conference, Minister of Science Zahedi told the reporters:

Since the topic of starred students has come up, the Ministry of Science has never denied the issue. But what some media have reported, with political motivation, were lies, which were denied by the Ministry of Science.¹³⁰

He said that he had only denied “the existence of three-starred students.”¹³¹ Zahedi also expressed that,

¹²⁵ “Interview with Head of the Education and Research Commission of the Parliament,” ISNA News Agency, 5 December 2006, <http://www.isna.ir/ISNA/NewsView.aspx?ID=News-837769> (accessed 1 December 2010).

¹²⁶ “Starred Students Gather in Front of Teacher Training University” Mehr News Agency, 5 December 2006, <http://www.mehrnews.com/fa/NewsTextOnlyVersion.aspx?NewsID=416896> (accessed 1 December 2010).

¹²⁷ “Minister of Science: Be assured, in the Ministry’s New Era Nothing Goes Forward Without Study and Planning,” Fars News Agency, 20 December 2006, <http://www.farsnews.net/newstext.php?nn=8509290545> (accessed

1 December 2010).

¹²⁸ “MP: Minister of Science Must Not Accuse,” *Etemad* Newspaper, No. 1292, 24 December 2006.

¹²⁹ “Statements by Mohammad Mehdi Zahedi,” Mehr News Agency, 24 December 2006, <http://www.mehrnews.com/fa/NewsTextOnlyVersion.aspx?NewsID=426703> (accessed 1 December 2010).

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*

¹³¹ *Ibid.*

“it is perfectly normal to mark students with stars,” and that the “Ministry of Science had [done so] according to the explicit word of the law.”¹³²

Zahedi outlined again the starring system and implied that the Ministry had used recognizance letters:

If there is one star in front of a student’s name, it means that this student has previously had some problems with student violations during his education. This will be pointed out to him so that he will not repeat the same violations during his next term of education.

Two-starred students are those students whose selection files are incomplete. Even so, if we have said that one- and two-starred students don’t exist, it is because all these students have been registered, and not even one student’s admission has been made conditionally.¹³³

While denying that there was such a thing as three- starred students, and without using the term, Zahedi did concede that there was a third group of students deprived of education, what Shahriar Moshiri had called “black listed” students.

Before the results are announced by the *Sanjesh* Organization, there are some students [on the list], next to whose names there are digits. This means that according to relevant authorities, these students are not qualified to enter the university. The Ministry of Science has nothing to do with this, as this has been decided according to resolutions made by the Supreme Council of the Cultural Revolution Council. Even so, these individuals could object to the relevant [government agency] and request an appeal about the case, and rest assured that the Ministry of Science would do its best to alleviate their problems.¹³⁴

At the press conference Noorbakhsh also outlined the underlining regulatory system behind the starring process. Stating that the Supreme Council of the Cultural Revolution’s regulations required the Central Selection Committee to investigate the background of each university applicant’s political, ideological, religious, and moral backgrounds by sending various government agencies information requests.¹³⁵

Noorbakhsh explained that the Committee then codes applications for undergraduate, graduate, and doctorate programs. “Code 1” is indicative of the applicant’s rejection, “Codes 0 and 2” are indicative of incomplete files, “Codes 3 and 4” represent those who have been admitted, and “Code 5” means that the student will have to sign a letter of recognizance.” Noorbakhsh specified that, “Code 1 represents rejected [candidates], meaning those about whom Ministry of Intelligence or the courts have written negative reports, based on [having] a prior existing file.”¹³⁶ According to Noorbakhsh Sanjesh covered these codes into a simpler starring system in order to more easily convey the information to university administrations across the country.¹³⁷

¹³² Ibid.

¹³³ “Stated In The Minister of Science’s Press Conference: There Are No Three-Starred Students,” ISNA News Agency, 24 December 2006, <http://www.isna.ir/ISNA/NewsView.aspx?ID=News-850114> (accessed 1 December 2010).

¹³⁴ “Statements by Director of Student Selection Committee,” Mehr News Agency, 24 December 2006, www.mehrnews.com/fa/NewsDetail.

[aspx?NewsID=425794](http://www.mehrnews.com/fa/NewsDetail.aspx?NewsID=425794) (accessed 1 December 2010).

¹³⁵ Ibid.

¹³⁶ Ibid.

¹³⁷ Ibid.

Noorbakhsh stated that there were a total of 56 starred students and another ten candidates in the third category, who had been rejected during the selection process by the Ministry of Interior, the Judiciary or other government agencies. Despite earlier claims about the non-existence of three-starred students, he said that, "They are students whose general qualifications have not been approved by the relevant government agencies."¹³⁸

After this press conference on 26 December 2006, three MPs wrote to Minister of Science Zahedi the Minister of Intelligence Gholamhossein Mohseni Ejehiabout, asking for a review of the cases of 17 students who had met with members of the Parliament in September alleging authorities had denied them university admission.¹³⁹

By January 2007, the controversy surrounding starred students eventually causes the Parliament's Education and Research Committee, to form a five-person sub-committee to review it and determine why some qualified students had been denied university admission.

According to MP Moshiri, who served on the sub-committee, the MPs were charged with "reviewing admissions files from the Ministry of Science and Ministry of Intelligence about students who had been deprived of education, and to evaluate whether the evidence used to disqualify several students from continuing their education was sufficient."¹⁴⁰

On 18 February 2007, Moshiri, reported that:

Findings have been unprecedented in the country. ... Upon going to the *Sanjesh* Organization's website, a group of students realized that they had passed the graduate entrance examination, with high ranking scores, but the *Sanjesh* Organization has refused to announce that these students have passed [publically].¹⁴¹

Moshiri explained:

These students, who have not received any stars, have all been heads of Islamic Associations and the *Tahkim-e Vahdat* Student Union. Due to their political activities, the *Sanjesh* Organization has not announced news of their passing the entrance test.... After follow-up, we found 13 such students whose situations we are currently studying.¹⁴²

The Ministry of Science Claims to Resolve the Matter

In March 2007, even though most of the three-starred students continued to remain deprived of

¹³⁸ "Stated In The Minister of Science's Press Conference: There Are No Three-Starred Students," ISNA News Agency, 24 December 2006, <http://www.isna.ir/ISNA/NewsView.aspx?ID=News-850114> (accessed 1 December 2010).

¹³⁹ "Written Notice to Ministers of Science and Intelligence regarding the six-month deprivation of 17 students," Mehr News Agency, 27 December 2006, <http://www.mehrnews.com/fa/NewsDetail.aspx?NewsID=427629> (accessed 1 December 2010).

¹⁴⁰ Ibid.

¹⁴¹ "Un-starred students: Zahedi's New Problem, Interview with Shahriar Moshiri," Aftab News Agency, Sunday, 18 February 2007; <http://www.aftabnews.ir/vdcdz90k.yt0596a22y.html> (In 2008, this article title was eliminated from the agency's records).

¹⁴² Ibid.

education, authorities allowed several one- and two-starred students to conditionally register after signing recognizance letters. Noorbakhsh later confirmed this, saying, “The registration problems of some graduate applicants have not yet been resolved.”¹⁴³ He stressed, however, that “this limitation was not imposed by the Science Ministry, and several [other government bodies] had deemed this necessary.”¹⁴⁴

On 1 March 2007, Abdolrasool Pourabbas, then Head of the *Sanjesh* Organization, promised 2007 graduate entrance exam results would be announced without any stars or any other markings. He said:

We have made arrangements so that no applicants would face any problems with star markings or any other markings, which might show a conditional selection, and so that examination applicants know their situation before the results are announced. Therefore we will no longer have what has come to be known as ‘starred’ applicants.¹⁴⁵

Pourabbas added that “the 2007 graduate entrance exam will not lead to conditional selections under any circumstances.”

Noorbakhsh also promised:

In this year’s graduate student examination there won’t be any rejected students starred students, and any candidate who receives passing academic grades will be able to register. This will not have any ill effects on the general qualification of the candidates.

Noorbakhsh added:

Of course this does not mean that the activities of the [Central Selection Committee] will cease, but [it] will take a broader approach [to selection]. ... Ultimately, if a candidate has received passing academic grades but has moral and disciplinary problems at the university, his issues will be resolved by obtaining commitments [he will conform to university policies].¹⁴⁷

“Invisible” and Recurring Stars: The Policy Continues

After the 2007 exams, *Etemad Melli* reported that, despite having passed the graduate entrance examination for that academic year, at least 50 students were barred from education by the Ministry of Science’s Selection Committee, and this time the students had received what the paper called “invisible stars”—meaning that authorities had screened out their applications but had not used stars on their exam transcripts to identify them.¹⁴⁸

¹⁴³ “Morteza Noorbakhsh: The Registration Problems of Some 2006 Graduate Applicants Have Not Yet Been Resolved,” Mehr News Agency, 3 April 2007, <http://www.mehrnews.com/fa/NewsTextOnlyVersion.aspx?NewsID=465090> (accessed 1 December 2010).

¹⁴⁴ Ibid.

¹⁴⁵ “Results of the 2007 Graduate Entrance Examination Will Be Announced Without Stars Or Any Other Markings,” 1 March 2007; <http://www.mehrnews.com/fa/NewsTextOnlyVersion.aspx?NewsID=455067>

[mehrnews.com/fa/NewsTextOnlyVersion.aspx?NewsID=455067](http://www.mehrnews.com/fa/NewsTextOnlyVersion.aspx?NewsID=455067)

¹⁴⁷ Morteza Noorbakhsh, In the 2007 Academic Year, There Will Not Be Any Starred Students; 24 March 2007; Mehr News Agency: <http://www.mehrnews.com/fa/NewsTextOnlyVersion.aspx?NewsID=465090>

Nikoonesbati, *Tahkim-e Vahdat's* spokesman, told *ILNA News Agency*:

The results of the graduate student examination were published in a way that once again we observed problems for student activists, ... and a number of them were not able to receive their transcripts via the Internet, and they have been asked to go to the *Sanjesh Organization*.¹⁴⁹

He described "a new method for starring students," saying,

Last week, the results of the graduate entrance examination were published, and based on the information we have gathered, so far nearly 50 students have been unable to receive their report cards. After going to the *Sanjesh Organization*, these students have been told that they must go to the security organizations that have issued such orders, in order to solve their problems. After that they will be able to enroll ... By referring the students to other [government bodies], officials of the Ministry of Science, try to avoid accountability.... Once again, contrary to the statements by the officials from Ministry of Science who claimed during the academic year 2007 there will no "starred students", we observe that this year students were given stars again.¹⁵⁰

When asked by a reporter why some of the 2007 test takers were not able to access their transcripts, Noorbakhsh replied, "I do not know, I don't have an answer to give you about this."¹⁵¹ He added students who have been deprived of education "must go to the *Sanjesh Organization*."¹⁵²

Zahedi, when confronted by questions about the fate of [unresolved] starred students in early May 2007, replied: "I'm surprised you raise this forgotten issue. The problem of starred students is over."¹⁵³

¹⁴⁸ "This Year Again Starred Students Were Given Invisible Stars," 26 May 2007, Etemad Melli Newspaper.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid.

"This Year Again Starred Students Were Given Invisible Stars," 26 May

2007, Etemad Melli newspaper.

¹⁵¹ Ibid.

¹⁵² Ibid.

¹⁵³ Ibid.

REGULATORY FRAMEWORK FOR DENIAL OF EDUCATION

University Admission and Entrance Exams

Iranians who want to attend a government university program (at the undergraduate or graduate level) must complete secondary school and take an entrance exam known as the *concour*.¹⁵⁴ The *concour* is administered once a year in the spring by the *Sanjesh* Organization, the Ministry of Science's academic measurement bureau, and is the sole academic criteria for admission to institutions of higher education.¹⁵⁵

Exam takers must also fill out an application form that asks for basic biographic and educational data.¹⁵⁶ Test takers also select their academic major and degree and register for the corresponding exam.

Applicants are rejected or accepted to government universities based on the scores and rankings they receive on the entrance exam. As the number of test takers outstrips the number of available university seats, the exam and admissions process is highly competitive. According to the *Sanjesh* Organization, out of 1,286,813 participants in the nationwide 2010 entrance exam, 517,068 were admitted, a rate of 40.1%. Government universities are generally elite schools. Seats are highly coveted at the best government schools, including the University of Tehran, Sharif University of Technology, Amirkabir University of Technology and Shahid Beheshti University, as well as universities in major cities such as Shiraz, Isfahan, and Tabriz. The government has also adopted a quota system that sets aside quotas for applicants from special social groups such as family members of war veterans and Basij voluntary militia.

Results of the *concour* are released a few months after the test's administration. The names and rankings of applicants who passed the exam are widely publicized, as they are published in newspapers and on the *Sanjesh* website. Students are allowed special access to more thorough test results online. Applicants that pass the exams visit the *Sanjesh* website and rank, in order of preference, the universities they want to attend.

¹⁵⁴ "Registration Guidelines for Applicants to All Universities and Institutes of Higher Education," issued by Sanjesh Organization and available on the Campaign's website at: <http://iranhumanrights.org/typo3cms/wp/wp-content/uploads/registration-guidelines-applicants.pdf>

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

Regulations Permitting Screening and Exclusion

Two regulations issued by the Supreme Council of the Cultural Revolution empower the Central Selection Committee at the Ministry of Science to disqualify graduate school candidates: the Moral Selection Regulations for University Entrance Applicants, which was ordered on 5 January 1987, by then-president Ali Khamenei, who headed this council; and the Student Selection Criteria, adopted by the Supreme Council of the Cultural Revolution on 7 June 1988.¹⁵⁷

Under the Moral Selection Regulations, “determination of moral qualification is the responsibility of the Central Selection Committee, which is under direct supervision by the Minister of Culture and Higher Education. This Committee is appointed by the Supreme Council of the Cultural Revolution,” and “the [Minister of Science] is required to inform the Supreme Council of the Cultural Revolution of its activities on a regular basis.”¹⁵⁸

The Moral Selection Regulations require that academic questions in university entrance examinations include ideological, political, and moral questions, and in response to these questions, exam participants must earn passing scores.¹⁵⁹ Furthermore, the “moral and political backgrounds of the exam participants must be investigated [and documented], in writing, by the [Ministry of Science], Prosecutor General and Revolutionary Courts, and Ministry of Intelligence.” The Student Selection Criteria, however, prohibits these government bodies from conducting background investigations at a candidate’s residence or place of work, or by interviewing his or her neighbors.¹⁶⁰

The Moral Selection Regulations stipulate that:

After registration, information from all university applicants, the names of those accepted, and the names of an [additional] 10% to 15% of applicants on the admissions waitlist, must immediately be submitted to five [governmental] bodies for investigation and verification [that they meet] necessary requirements, as outlined by the Supreme Council of the Cultural Revolution.¹⁶¹

The names of final term high school students, who have taken the exam, are first sent to the relevant branches of the Ministry of Education, “so any student who is reputed to be morally corrupt, etc. is identified in advance,” and the Central Selection Committee is informed of it.¹⁶²

Next the names are sent to the Ministry of Intelligence, Prosecutor General, the Judiciary, and the Research Documents Center to inquire about the entrance exams from previous years.¹⁶³

Under the Moral Selection Regulations for University Entrance Applicants:

If these five organizations do not provide any negative reports about an applicant,

¹⁵⁷ Moral Selection Regulations for University Entrance Applicants, <http://www.ghavanin.ir/detail.asp?id=6918>
Student Selection Criteria, <http://rc.majlis.ir/fa/law/show/99898>

¹⁵⁸ The Moral Selection Regulations for University Entrance Applicants, Articles E and F <http://www.ghavanin.ir/detail.asp?id=6918>

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, Article B1

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, Article D4

¹⁶¹ *Ibid.*, Article C1

¹⁶² *Ibid.*, Note to Article C1

¹⁶³ *Ibid.*, Article C1

then enrollment of the applicant into the university is permissible, unless documented negative reports from other reliable sources have been filed.¹⁶⁴

The files of applicants who receive at least one negative report, whether from the five bodies or “other reliable sources,” are sent to the Central Selection Committee, where “the final verdict of admission, or prevention thereof, for these university applicants must be issued by the Committee’s Judge, after review by Central Selection Committee.”¹⁶⁵

Under the Student Selection Criteria:

Those who meet any of the following criteria will be deprived from entering the university:

- A) Those addicted to drugs.
- B) Those who are reputed to be morally corrupt.
- C) Enemies of the Islamic Republic (but not critics)¹⁶⁶

The regulations make clear that a reputation of moral corruption “must be obvious and without need for investigation,” and explicitly differentiates between “critics” and “enemies” of the state.¹⁶⁷

The Central Selection Committee can also give some candidates “conditional permission for education.”¹⁶⁸ Some candidates are also “accepted to universities under their own recognizance.” The regulations require that candidates about “whom the Ministry of Intelligence or legal authorities have given reports of moral corruption or political activities, must give guarantees to reform their behavior upon admission to universities.”¹⁶⁹

The Student Selection Criteria notes that to the extent possible, “efforts must be made so that the number of these kinds of individuals will not become too great, so the issue of giving guarantees will not lose its significance.”¹⁷⁰

The Administrative Starring Process and the Role of Security Organizations

According to Morteza Noorbakhsh, director of Central Selection Committee, the process of starring begins when the *Sanjesh* Organization sends the Central Selection Committee a CD containing the names of all university applicants, along with a list of those who passed the entrance exam. The total number of applicants is equivalent to roughly 1.5 to 2 times the admission capacity for each degree program.

As Noorbakhsh explains:

¹⁶⁴ Ibid., Article C2

¹⁶⁵ Ibid., Article C3

¹⁶⁶ Student Selection Criteria, article 1a-c, <http://rc.majlis.ir/fa/law/show/99898>

¹⁶⁷ Ibid., Articles 1b and 1c

¹⁶⁸ The Moral Selection Regulations for University Entrance Applicants, Note to Article 2 <http://www.ghavanin.ir/detail.asp?id=6918>

¹⁶⁹ Ibid., Article C2

¹⁷⁰ Ibid. note to Article C2

This CD is presented to the relevant authorities [i.e. the Ministry of Intelligence, Revolutionary Courts, Ministry of Education, Prosecutor General and the Research Documents Center] to review the student's general qualifications and to provide their decision. ... [N]ext to each student's name, there will appear a code from 0 to 5. These codes will define these students' status to the *Sanjesh* Organization.¹⁷¹

Noorbakhsh clarifies that "Code 1 is indicative of the applicant's rejection, Codes 0 and 2 mean incomplete file, Codes 3 and 4 mean acceptance, and Code 5 means student recognizance required."¹⁷²

He explained that Code 1 candidates are rejected on the basis of negative reports from the Ministry of Intelligence or the courts. As former Minister of Science Mohammad Mehdi Zahedi put it, "This means that according to the relevant authorities, this group of individuals is not qualified to enter the universities."¹⁷³

According to Noorbakhsh, the names of these individuals are never publicly reported and they are barred from higher education.¹⁷⁴

Noorbakhsh explained that Codes 0, 2 and 5 are markers used by the Central Selection Committee, but the *Sanjesh* Organization simplifies the system by using one and two stars.¹⁷⁵

Some starred students are able to object and appeal the decision, and could gain admission after signing a recognizance letter. In this letter, the student must promise to cease engaging in the activities deemed by the Ministry of Intelligence or other government agencies to be grounds for disqualification.¹⁷⁶

According to Noorbakhsh, these students should also acknowledge that "the authorities are allowed to deprive them from continuing their education, should they see any 'movement,' and the student would be obligated to re-pay the university's costs."¹⁷⁷

Regulations of Disciplinary Committees

The disciplinary committees are charged with investigating student misconduct and are empowered to hand down punishments. According to the Disciplinary Regulations for University Students in the Islamic Republic of Iran, the purview of the disciplinary committees covers a broad range of offenses including criminal, educational and administrative, political, and moral offenses.¹⁷⁸ Among the political offenses defined in the Regulations are "insulting Islamic and national beliefs and committing actions against the Islamic Republic (such as writing slogans, distributing announcements)" and "providing false information intentionally."¹⁷⁹

The committees can order punishments that include suspending students from the university, expelling

¹⁷¹ "Stated In The Minister of Science's Press Conference: There Are No Three-Starred Students," ISNA News Agency, 24 December 2006, <http://www.isna.ir/ISNA/NewsView.aspx?ID=News-850114> (accessed 1 December 2010). ¹⁷² Ibid.

¹⁷³ Ibid.

¹⁷⁴ Ibid.

¹⁷⁵ Ibid.

¹⁷⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷⁷ Ibid.

¹⁷⁸ Disciplinary Regulations for University Students in the Islamic Republic of Iran, Article 6, http://lawoffice.mohme.gov.ir/laws/dedicated_law/laws.jsp?id=2&id2=469&c=3 (accessed 28 November 2010).

¹⁷⁹ Ibid., Article 6c

students, and even banning students from education in all universities for up to five years.¹⁸⁰

The composition of the committees is determined by the university administration. In each university, the disciplinary committee has five voting members: a representative of Supreme Leader of Iran Ayatollah Khamenei, the dean of students, a member of the faculty appointed by the university president, and two students also appointed by the university president; there is also a non-voting committee secretary. Committee decisions require a simple majority.¹⁸¹

Regulations Regarding Student's Religious Beliefs

The Moral Selection Regulations for University Entrance Applicants explicitly requires university students to profess belief either in Islam or other recognized religions in the Iranian Constitution (Christianity, Judaism, and Zoroastrianism). Article A of these regulations explicitly forbids students who believe in other religions from having access to higher education:

Students who have the right to enter universities, in addition to passing the entrance examinations, must also fulfill the following requirements:

1- Belonging to Islam or other recognized religions.

Note1: Determination of their belief is based on their own statements and no one has the right to inquisition or to investigate their beliefs.

Note 2: Whenever a student applicant for entry to university claims to be a Muslim or belong to other recognized religions, his/her claim will be accepted unless in a qualified court of law the opposite is proven. In such a case the right of this person to education at a university will be taken away and does not have the right to continue his/her education.¹⁸²

In February 1991, the Supreme Council of the Cultural Revolution issued a set of recommendations for government agencies in dealing with Baha'is.¹⁸³ The Council instructed authorities to block the "progress and development" of Baha'is in Iran. The recommendations state that Baha'is "can be enrolled in schools provided they have not identified themselves as Baha'is," but "they must be expelled from universities, either in the admission process or during the course of their studies, once it becomes known that they are Baha'is."¹⁸⁴

¹⁸⁰ Ibid. Article 7

¹⁸¹ Ibid. Article 3

¹⁸² The Moral Selection Regulations for University Entrance Applicants, Article 1, note 1 to Article 1, note 2 to Article 1, <http://www.ghavanin.ir/detail.asp?id=6918> (accessed 29 November 2010).

¹⁸³ Iranian Human Rights Documentaiton Center, "A Faith Denied: The Persecution of the Baha'is in Iran," Appendix 7, December 2006, http://www.iranhrdc.org/httpdocs/English/pdfs/Reports/A-Faith-Denied_Dec06.pdf.2006 (accessed 1 December 2010).

¹⁸⁴ Ibid.

VIOLATIONS OF INTERNATIONAL LAW

Iran ratified the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) in 1975 and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) in 1975.¹⁸⁵ Together, these treaties obligate the Iranian government to respect freedom of opinion, expression, association, religion, the right to education and the right to be free from discrimination.

Freedom of Opinion and Expression

Article 19 of the ICCPR states that “everyone shall have the right to hold opinions without interference.”¹⁸⁶ According to the Human Rights Committee (HRC) General comment No. 10, a government cannot place restriction on one’s freedom of opinion.¹⁸⁷

Article 19 also requires that “everyone shall have the right to freedom of expression; this right shall include freedom to ... impart information and ideas ... either orally, in writing or in print, in the form of art, or through any other media of his choice.”¹⁸⁸

The Iranian government has breached its obligations under article 19 by barring or expelling students on the basis of their beliefs or expression of views critical of the government or their university, whether at public forums, in publications, on blogs, at protests, within their work, to the press or in the classroom. These bars and expulsions are measures that punish students for exercising their article 19 rights and place an undue chilling-effect on the exercise of these rights.

Freedom of Association and Assembly

ICCPR article 22 obligates the government of Iran to ensure:

Everyone shall have the right to freedom of association with others, including the right to form and join trade unions for the protection of his interests.¹⁸⁹

¹⁸⁵ International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), adopted December 16, 1966, G.A. Res. 2200A (XXI), 21 U.N. GAOR Supp. (No. 16); International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), adopted December 16, 1966, G.A. Res. 2200A (XXI), 21 U.N. GAOR Supp. (No. 16) at 49, U.N. Doc. A/6316 (1966), 993 U.N.T.S. 3, entered into force January 3, 1976.

¹⁸⁶ ICCPR, Article 19(1).

¹⁸⁷ Human Rights Committee, General Comment 10, Freedom of expression, U.N. Doc. CCPR/06/29/1983, (1983), para. 1.

¹⁸⁸ ICCPR, Article 19(2).

¹⁸⁹ Ibid. Article 22(1).

The Iranian government has violated article 22 by barring or expelling students for membership and participation in student groups critical of official policy, including activists and leaders in the Council for the Right to Education and *Daftar Tahkim-e Vahdat* Student Union.

Article 21 of the ICCPR requires governments to recognize “the right of peaceful assembly.”¹⁹⁰

The Iranian government has breached its obligation under article 21 by barring or expelling students that organized or participated in public forums, gatherings or peaceful protests.

Freedom of Religion and Non-Discrimination

Under article 18 of the ICCPR:

Everyone shall have the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion. This right shall include freedom to have or to adopt a religion or belief of his choice, and freedom, either individually or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in worship, observance, practice and teaching.¹⁹¹

HRC General Comment No. 22 explains that:

The terms “belief” and “religion” are to be broadly construed. Article 18 is not limited in its application to traditional religions. ... The Committee therefore views with concern any tendency to discriminate against any religion or belief for any reason, including the fact that they are newly established, or represent religious minorities that may be the subject of hostility on the part of a predominant religious community.¹⁹²

Article 18 further stipulates that:

No one shall be subject to coercion which would impair his freedom to have or to adopt a religion or belief of his choice.¹⁹³

HRC General Comment No. 22 adds that, “Policies or practices ... restricting access to education ... [are] inconsistent with article [18].”¹⁹⁴

Article 18 also states that:

Freedom to manifest one’s religion or beliefs may be subject only to such limitations as are prescribed by law and are necessary to protect public safety,

¹⁹⁰ Ibid. Article 21.

¹⁹¹ Ibid. Article 18(1).

¹⁹² Human Rights Committee, General Comment No. 22, The Right to Freedom of Thought, Conscience and Religion, U.N. Doc. CCPR/C/21/Rev.1/Add.4 (July 1994), para. 2.

¹⁹³ ICCPR, Article 18(2).

¹⁹⁴ Human Rights Committee, General Comment 22, para. 5.

order, health, or morals or the fundamental rights and freedoms of others.¹⁹⁵

The HRC explains that the “[r]estrictions may not be imposed for discriminatory purposes or applied in a discriminatory manner.”¹⁹⁶

Furthermore, under article 26 Iran has undertaken that:

All persons are equal before the law and are entitled without any discrimination to the equal protection of the law. In this respect, the law shall prohibit any discrimination and guarantee to all persons equal and effective protection against discrimination on any ground such as race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status.¹⁹⁷

The Iranian government’s regulations restricting university admissions to members of the official and recognized religions only, constitutes a violation of article 18 and denies the “equal protection” guarantee of article 26. Moreover, such regulations alongside a policy of barring Baha’is from universities, is a form of coercion impairing freedom of religion and amounting to a form of discrimination prohibited under articles 18 and 26. These policies specifically discriminate against a religious minority subjected to hostility from Iran’s predominant religious community. Furthermore, requiring Baha’is deny, hide or lie about their religion in order to gain access to universities breach’s Iran’s article 18 obligation to respect a person right to publically adopt a faith.

Right to Education

Article 13 of the ICESCR “recognize(s) the right of everyone to education,” stating that:

Education shall be directed to the full development of the human personality and the sense of its dignity, and shall strengthen the respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. They further agree that education shall enable all persons to participate effectively in a free society, promote understanding, tolerance and friendship among all nations and all racial, ethnic or religious groups, and further the activities of the United Nations for the maintenance of peace.¹⁹⁸

Article 13 stipulates that, “Higher education shall be made equally accessible to all, on the basis of capacity.”¹⁹⁹ The Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights General Comment No. 13 explains that, “educational institutions and programs have to be accessible to everyone, without discrimination,” especially against “the most vulnerable groups.”²⁰⁰ Article 2 of the ICESCR makes clear that:

The States Parties to the present Covenant undertake to guarantee that the rights enunciated in the present Covenant will be exercised without discrimination of any

¹⁹⁵ ICCPR Article 18 (3).

¹⁹⁶ Human Rights Committee, General Comment 22, para. 8.

¹⁹⁷ ICCPR, Article 26.

¹⁹⁸ ICESCR, Article 13(1).

¹⁹⁹ Ibid. Article 13(2)(c)

²⁰⁰ Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, General Comment No. 12, The Right to Education, Conscience and Religion, U.N. Doc. E/C.12/1999/10 (December 1999), para. 6(b).

kind as to race, color, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status.²⁰¹

In 1993, the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights specifically raised concern with Iran's "[p]rohibition of the admission to university of Baha'is."²⁰²

The Iranian government has violated the right to education under ICESCR article 13 by barring or expelling activists and Baha'i students, discriminatorily denying them access to higher education on the grounds of political opinion and religion.

²⁰¹ ICESCR, Article 2.

²⁰² Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, Conclusions and recommendations of the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, Iran, U.N. Doc. E/C.12/1993/7 (1993) para. 5(e).

RECOMMENDATIONS

To the Government of Iran:

- Ensure students and university applicants can exercise their right to expression, association, assembly and religious freedom without interference by authorities and without having fear of persecution, arrests or being expelled or denied university admissions.
- Establish a formal mechanism, within the Ministry of Science, that allows students to appeal decisions of the Central Selection Committee. Ensure this mechanism has independent power to overrule decisions of the Committee.
- Re-instate students barred from education based on their political or religious beliefs or activities. Ensure such students can seek financial restitution in civil courts.
- Release all students detained and prosecuted for activities related to, or advocating on behalf of, those deprived of education.
- Release all student activist and prisoners of conscience that have been detained and prosecuted for exercising their freedom of expression, assemble, and association.

To the Iranian Parliament:

- Launch an impartial investigation, conducted by a committee including representatives of independent student associations, to review all cases of students barred or expelled on allegedly political and discriminatory grounds. This committee should hold public hearings and bring students who allege being subjected to such bars and expulsions to testify. The committee should have the power to subpoena members of the executive branch and security authorities to testify.
- Expand the jurisdiction of civil courts so they can adjudicate cases brought by

students regarding deprivation of education.

- Amend all university admissions regulations so to remove any discriminatory or arbitrary criteria for disqualification including religious requirements and vague determinations that an applicant is an “enemy” of the Islamic Republic.
- Amend all university admissions regulations so to remove any role for non-educational bodies, namely the Ministry of Intelligence.
- Amend university rules and regulations, including Disciplinary Committee regulations that allow for suspension of students on discriminatory, vague and arbitrary grounds, including insulting Islamic and national beliefs or acting against national security.

To the Iranian Prosecutor General and Judiciary:

- Investigate, prosecute and hold accountable members of the Ministry of Intelligence responsible for threatening, intimidating, arresting, persecution and expelling student activists based on political and ideological grounds.
- Adjudicate civil claims brought by students regarding deprivation of education. Provide financial restitution for students that suffered undue delays in attaining degrees or losing academic credit because of illegal deprivation of education.

To the Universities and Institution of Higher Learning Outside Iran Partnering Universities:

- Require partner Iranian universities provide a transparent account of any exclusionary policies.
- Provide admission and scholarships to Iranian students barred from Iranian universities.

217 STUDENTS BARRED FROM HIGHER EDUCATION 2005 TO NOVEMBER 2010

This is a partial list of students deprived of higher education in the past six years. The true numbers are believed to be much higher.

During the past months, in addition to interviewing several barred university applicants, conducting extensive research, and accessing information gathered by credible student organizations that have been active in the area of demanding the rights of students barred from education, the *International Campaign for Human Rights in Iran* has been able to compile a list of individuals who have been barred from education between the years of 2005 and 2010. It should be noted that this list may not be reflective of all the names, and the Campaign is committed to add names to the list as more reports are received. Additionally, several individuals who have been deprived from education for various reasons, or who have become “starred” during various years, have preferred that their names be withheld from this report, so that they can pursue their status and gain their admission to universities. Therefore, the numbers of people included in this report could have been higher.

The International Campaign for Human Rights in Iran hopes that publishing these individuals' names would help them to be heard by Iranian authorities. Instead of waiting outside the doors of universities, these individuals must be sitting inside classrooms and studying in those institutions. Hopefully this would encourage the authorities to compensate these individuals for their losses, and to pave the way for their university attendance as soon as possible.

This list is not complete and is based on the available resources to the Campaign. The sources for compiling this list include: Campaign's interviews with students deprived of right to education, student activists, the website of ADVAR Organization, web site of the Human Rights Defenders Center, Follow-up Committee for Right to Education, Human Rights Activists News Agency, Council for Defense of Right to Education, Society for Defense of Right to Education, Daftar Tahkim-e Vahdat Student Union, and Daneshjoonews website.

2005

1. **Mehdi Aminizadeh**; a Civil Engineering student at Rajae University; Political Science at Mofid University in Qom; barred from education in 2005 for membership in Tahkim-e Vahdat Student Union, and later, the Central Council of Advar Tahkim Alumni Organization.
2. **Peyman Aref**; a graduate student of Political Science; three-starred student; expelled

from Tehran University in 2005. After Mahmoud Ahmadinejad came to power, due to Aref's continuous pursuit of the right to education, he was barred from entering Tehran University. During the past years, he has been arrested several times; his last arrest took place on 18 June 2009 which last through early March 2009.

2006

1. **Matin Meshkin**, a Ph.D. student in Electrical Engineering at Amirkabir University, an active member of the student movement and a former member of the Central Council of Amirkabir University's Islamic Association; expelled from the university and barred from continuing his education.
2. **Gharib Sajjadi**; a graduate of Social Sciences, majoring in Research, from Tehran Tarbiat Moallem University; deprived from education between 2006 and 2008. He was allowed to enter Azad Islamic University's graduate program in Political Science. Reason for his deprivation was his Kurdish rights activism.
3. **Farhad Zatali Fard**; Industrial Engineering at Elm-o-San'at University; three-starred at Sharif University; barred from education.
4. **Siamak Karimi**; Bou Ali University's Law School in Hamadan; Human Rights at Shahid Behshti University in Tehran; three-starred in 2006; barred from education.
5. **Saeed Ardehshiri**; Chemical Engineering at Bahonar University in Kerman; Sociology at Allameh University in Tehran; three-starred in 2006; barred from education.
6. **Zahra Janipour**; Ecology at Birjand University; Environmental Engineering at Tarbiat Modarres University; three-starred in 2006; barred from education.
7. **Salar Saket**; Industrial Engineering at Kurdistan University; Industrial Engineering at Tehran University; three-starred in 2006; barred from education for Kurdish rights activism.
8. **Hannan Azizi Banitorof**; Arab Literature at Tehran University; Arab Literature at Tehran University; three-starred in 2006; barred from education for his father, Yousef Azizi Banitorof's ethnic activities.
9. **Mansour Ezzati**; Mechanical Engineering at Isfahan University; Management at Tehran's Allameh Tabatabaee University; three-starred in 2006; barred from education for membership in the Students Islamic Association.
10. **Yashar Ghajar**; Mines Engineering at Amirkabir University; Mines Engineering at Tabriz University; three-starred in 2006; barred from education.
11. **Mohammad Shoresh Moradi**; Industrial Engineering at Kurdistan University; Industrial Engineering at Tehran University; three-starred student in 2006; barred from education.

12. **Mohsen Fattehi**; Sociology at Tehran University; Sociology at Tehran University; three-starred in 2006; barred from education.

13. **Roozbeh Riazi Moghaddam**; Mechanical Engineering at Amir Kabir University, “three starred,” Barred from graduate education.

14. **Mehdi Zamani**; a 2006 “starred” student, and a representative from “starred students” in 2006.

15. **Tohid Alizadeh**; Social Sciences at Tehran University; Social Sciences at Tehran University; three-starred in 2006; barred from education.

16. **Mohammad Hossein Hassanpour Bisheh**; three-starred in 2006; barred from education.

17. **Hamed Hassandoust**; Industrial Civil Engineering at Isfahan University; Industrial Civil Engineering at Isfahan University; three-starred in 2006; barred from education.

18. **Ehsan Nojoomi**; Petroleum Engineering at Petroleum University of Technology; graduate Political Science program at Imam Khomeini University in Qazvin; three-starred, barred from education.

19. **Mehrdaad (Meghdaad) Islamkhah**; Student at Imam Hossein University, Deprived of continuing his education by Disciplinary Committee due to student activism.

2007

1. **Morteza Hosseinzadeh**; Agricultural Engineering at Bou Ali University in Hamadan; Sociology; did not receive a transcript in 2007; barred from education.

2. **Alireza Khoshbakht**; Civil Engineering at Bou Ali University in Hamadan; Political Science; did not receive a transcript in 2007; barred from education.

3. **Farshid Moghaddam Salimi**; Sociology at Allameh Tabatabaee University in Tehran; Sociology; did not receive a transcript in 2007; barred from education.

4. **Hanif Karageri**; Electrical Engineering, Babol Industrial University; did not receive a transcript in 2007; barred from education.

5. **Yasser Goli**; Architecture at Sanandaj Azad University; he was barred from attending graduate programs at public universities in 2007; he was former Secretary of Kurd Students Union.

6. **Zahra Tohidi**; Sociology at Bou Ali University in Hamadan; Political Science; did not receive a transcript in 2007; barred from education.

7. **Yahya Safi Aryan**; Physics at Bou Ali Sina University in Hamadan; Social Communication

Sciences; did not receive a transcript in 2007; barred from education.

8. **Zohreh Asadpour**; Physics at Gilan University; barred from continuing her education at graduate level; did not receive a transcript in 2007; women's rights activist and a member of the One Million Signatures for Change Campaign.

9. **Farhad Zatalifar**; Mathematics at Elm-o-San'at University; Industrial Engineering; did not receive a transcript in 2007.

10. **Afshin Rezapour**; English Language Translation; Social Communication Sciences; did not receive a transcript in 2007.

11. **Shayan Moghimi Firouzabad**; passed university entrance examination with ranking of 108; Sadoughi Medical School in Yazd; expelled in 2007; member of Baha'i faith.

12. **Ghader Kiani**; International Relations at Tehran University; Graduate Program of International Relations at Tehran University; did not receive a transcript in 2007; barred from education; Azarbaijani identity activism.

13. **Parham Aghdassi**; Student at Bou Ali University who according to ISNA news agency was expelled from the university after one semester due to his religious beliefs.

14. **Shayan Vahdati**; Baha'i student barred from education, did not receive academic record due to claim of "incomplete file."

15. **Sepehr Atefi**; Baha'i student barred from education, did not receive academic record due to claim of "incomplete file."

16. **Rahil Mehdizadeh**; Baha'i student barred from education, did not receive academic record due to claim of "incomplete file."

17. **Dorsa Sobhani**; barred from education at Sari University because of her Baha'i faith;

18. **Amir Salimiha**; in 2006 and 2007 took the university entrance exam in sociology and ranked 132nd the first time and 96th the second time and was told he could not register.

19. **Eftekhar Barzegarian**; attended Ferdowsi University in Mashad and was expelled from university in 2007

2008

1. **Sadegh Shojaee**; Allameh Tabatabaee University; barred from education by Disciplinary Committee and arrested in 2008; barred from education.

2. **Mahdieh Golroo**; Allameh Tabatabaee University of Tehran; barred from continuing her education in 2008; member of the Right to Education Council.

3. **Majid Dorri**; Starred Student and barred from education in 2008; founding member of Right To Education Council.
4. **Asu Saleh**; Kurdistan University; barred from education by Disciplinary Committee in 2008, followed by summons to court, detention and trial; barred from education.
5. **Navid Khanjani**; barred from education in 2008 due to Baha'i faith; a founding member of Committee to Pursue Baha'is' Right to Education, and founding member of "Society to Combat Education Discrimination.
6. **Hessam Misaghian**; barred from education in 2008 due to Baha'i faith; a founding member of Committee to Pursue Baha'is' Right to Education, and founding member of Society to Combat Education Discrimination.
7. **Ali Saberi**; Industrial Engineering at Amirkabir University; Industrial Engineering; did not receive a transcript in 2008; barred from education.
8. **Nasser Pouyafar**; Polymer Engineering at Amirkabir University; Polymer Engineering; did not receive in a transcript in 2008; barred from education.
9. **Seyed Ziaeddin Nabavi**; Chemical Engineering at Babol Industrial University; Sociology; did not receive a transcript in 2008; barred from education.
10. **Samad Pashae**; Agricultural Engineering at Tabriz University; Agricultural Engineering; did not receive a transcript in 2008; barred from education; political and ethnic identity activism.
11. **Nader Mahd Gharebagh**; Electrical Engineering at Tabriz University; Electrical Engineering; did not receive a transcript in 2008; barred from education; political and ethnic identity activism.
12. **Amin Emami**; Mechanical Engineer at Tabriz University; Mechanical Engineering; did not receive a transcript in 2008; barred from education; political and ethnic identity activism.
13. **Nahid Babazadeh**; Educational Sciences at Tabriz University; Educational Sciences; did not receive a transcript in 2008; barred from education; political activities.
14. **Tohid Alizadeh**; Sociology at Tehran University; Sociology; did not receive a transcript in 2008; barred from education.
15. **Seyed Hamed Ahmadi**; Arabic Language and Arab Literature at Tehran University; Arabic Language and Arab Literature; did not receive a transcript in 2008; barred from education.
16. **Mohammad Hashemi**; Finance and Economics; student activist; barred from education in 2008.

17. **Mohsen Fatehi**; Sociology at Shiraz University barred from education at graduate level in 2008.
18. **Asghar Ghanbari**; Political Science at Isfahan University; Political Science; did not receive a transcript in 2008; barred from education.
19. **Hossein Najafi**; Political Science at Ferdowsi University in Mashad; Political Science; did not receive a transcript in 2008; barred from education; defending Iranian culture and history at the University during 2006, and initial sentencing from the Disciplinary Committee.
20. **Adib Rostampour**; Western Philosophy at Mohaghegh Ardability University; Western Philosophy; did not receive a transcript in 2008; barred from education.
21. **Reza Mohseni**; Physics at Isfahan University; Physics; did not receive a transcript in 2008; barred from education; member of Students Islamic Association at Isfahan and Medical Sciences Universities.
22. **Hassan Khalili**; Social Sciences at Yazd University; Political Science; did not receive a transcript in 2008; barred from education.
23. **Ali Hossein Asadzadeh**; Agricultural Engineering at Tehran University; Agricultural Engineering; did not receive a transcript in 2008; barred from education.
24. **Puyan Mahmoudian**; Polymer Engineering at Amirkabir University; ranked number 6 among those admitted to the graduate program of Polymer Engineering in 2008; barred from education; membership and activity in the Amirkabir University Guild Council and Islamic Association; Manager of student publication, Rivar; arrested in 2007 on charges of publishing the student publication.
25. **Siamak Karimi**; Bou Ali University's Law School in Hamadan; Law; selected in the final round of admissions in 2008; barred from education.
26. **Sivan Bahmani**; Social Sciences at Bou Ali University in Hamadan; Political Science; barred from education in 2008.
27. **Mohammad Javad Dordkeshan**; Agricultural Engineering at Lorestan University; Agricultural Engineering; selected in the final round of admissions in 2008; barred from education.
28. **Sadegh Motamed**; Mechanical Engineering at Kashan University; Mechanical Engineering; selected in the final round of admissions in 2008; barred from education.
29. **Davood Habibi**; Electrical Engineering at Babol Industrial University; Electrical Engineering; selected in the final round of admissions in 2008; barred from education.

30. **Ali Taghipour**; Civil Engineering at Babol Industrial University; Civil Engineering; selected in the reserved list in 2008; barred from education.
31. **Amid Moshrefzadeh**; Civil Engineering at Babol Industrial University; Civil Engineering; selected in the reserved list in 2008; barred from education.
32. **Marzieh Deylam Salehi**; Chemical Engineering at Babol Industrial University; Chemical Engineering; selected in the reserved list in 2008; barred from education.
33. **Shiva Nazar Ahari**; Civil Engineering at Azad University; Civil Engineering; selected in the reserved list in 2008; barred from education.
34. **Afshin Akbarian**; Mines Engineering at Yazd University; Mines Engineering; selected in the reserved list in 2008; barred from education.
35. **Mohammad Bakhshandeh**; Mines Engineering at Yazd University; Mines Engineering; selected in the reserved list in 2008; barred from education.
36. **Mojtaba Kharazian**; Mines Engineering at Yazd University; Mines Engineering; selected in the reserved list in 2008; barred from education.
37. **Amir Salimiha**; Mathematics at Tehran University; Mathematics; did not receive a transcript in 2008; barred from education.
38. **Siamak Karimi**; Bou Ali University Law School in Hamadan; Law; did not receive a transcript in 2008; barred from education.
39. **Hadi Haj Amini**; Physics at Sanandaj University; Physics; did not receive a transcript in 2008; barred from education.
40. **Ghader Kiani**; one of the top ten students admitted to International Relations at Tehran University; International Relations; did not receive a transcript in 2008; deprived from education.
41. **Afshin Akbarian**; Mines Engineering at Yazd University; Could not access the registration file online despite excellent ranking in the entrance examination results; disqualified for continuing education in 2008; barred from education; Manager of a satirical student publication named "Hees," and active in Yazd University's cultural centers.
42. **Javad Alizadeh**; Graduate Program for Human Rights at Allameh Tabatabaee University in Tehran; expulsion with the ruling of the Disciplinary Committee; guild activities and public speaking on 7 December 2008 [Students Day]; Javad Alizadeh was arrested on 16 January 2009 in Sanandaj, Kurdistan, after he delivered a speech at a memorial service for Ebrahim Lotfollahi, a Kurdish student, and was sentenced to one year in prison at Kermanshah's Dizel Abad Prison, and was transferred to prison.
43. **Mojtaba Kharazian**; Mines Engineering at Yazd University; graduate Mines Engineering

program; barred from education in 2008.

44. **Ebrahim Rashidi**; Mechanical Engineering at Orumiyeh University; Mechanical Engineering; General Disqualification, and barred from education on orders from Sanjesh Organization; ethnic identity activist; Azari poet and writer; former manager of Oldoos student publication.

45. **Mohammad Saleh Ayouman**; Political Science at Tehran University; arrested, tried, and sentenced to four years in prison at Branch 28 of Tehran Revolutionary Courts; definitive expulsion from Tehran University; barred from education.

46. **Mohammad Bakhshandeh**; Mines Engineering at Yazd University; Graduate Mines Engineering Program; barred from education in 2008.

47. **Sama Nourani**; barred Medical Engineering student at Sahand University in Tabriz; barred after three terms at the University in 2008, due to her Baha'i faith.

48. **Rashid Ismaeli**; Graduate student at Alameh Tabataba'i University in Human Rights Studies, received suspension sentence and subsequently expelled. Was active in Advar Tahkim organization

49. **Sina Dana**; Baha'i student at Sahand University in Tabriz.

2009

1. **Safoura Eliasi**; took the graduate entrance exam in 2008 and 2009 but each time was prevented from registration despite her excellent academic record. In 2009, she received the third highest rank nationwide in her field of Restoration of Historical Monuments,

2. **Mohammad Sharif**; a doctorate student of Law at Allameh Tabatabai University; First Class Court Lawyer and founding member of Human Rights Defense Center; barred from education in 2009 by a letter from Jamshid SalehiSadaghiani Director of Graduate Studies at the university.

3. **Somayeh Rashidi**; a graduate student of Sociology from Allameh Tabatabai University in Tehran. She ranked very high in the graduate entrance exam in the field of Women's Studies and Cultural Studies, but by the order of Sanjesh Organization was labeled as a "starred student" and was barred from education in 2009. She is also a member of the Council for Defense of Rights to Education, and a women's rights activist.

4. **Seyed Rouhollah Torabi**; a graduate student of Mining from the Imam Khomeini International University in Ghazvin; barred from education by the order of the Disciplinary Committee in 2009.

5-13. **Bina Momtazi, Sepehr Ghodrat, Mahnoosh Dehghan, Ghazal Sadeghi, Danial Motahari, Leva Baghi, Niloofar Kan'ani, Nasim Mo'atar, Arman Roshani**; 9 students at the

Shahid Bahonar University in Kerman, by a citation letter from the Sanjesh Organization were expelled from the university in 2009 due to their Baha'i Faith.

14. **Younes Zareyon;** a last-term Political Science undergraduate student from Tabriz Azad University, was expelled by a letter from Eastern Azerbaijan Intelligence Office in 2009, barred from education. He was the former secretary and president of the founding board of Arman Formation.

15. **Vahid Sheikh Begloo;** an Economics graduate student from Tabriz Azad University, was expelled by a letter from Eastern Azerbaijan Intelligence Office in 2009, barred from education. He was a member of the Central Council of the former Arman Formation and head of Azerbaijan's Committee of the Islamic Association of Tabriz Azad University.

16. **Behnam Tarkanpour;** a second-term Industrial Management graduate student from Tabriz Azad University, was expelled by a letter from Eastern Azerbaijan Intelligence Office in 2009, barred from education. He was a member of the Central Council of the former Arman Formation and secretary of the art section of the Arman Publication.

17. **Navid Mohammadi;** a Computer Engineering graduate student from Tabriz Azad University, barred from registration by a letter from the Testing Center of the "Islamic Azad University" despite passing the graduate entrance exam in 2009. He was the editor of the Azeri section of the weekly magazine Hydarbaba, and contributing writer for Varligh, Dealmaj, Akhtar, Navid Azerbaijan publications, and political secretary and member of central council of the former Arman Formation.

18. **Shayan Sanaei;** an Information Technology undergraduate student from Bojnourd Payame Noor University - North Khorasan, expelled at the end of the first term due the Baha'i Faith in 2009, barred from education.

19. **Mona Sharifi Mohabati;** a Geology undergraduate student from Bojnourd Payame Noor University - North Khorasan, expelled at the end of the forth term due to the Baha'i Faith in 2009, barred from education.

20. **Anoush Sharifi Mohabati;** a Computer Hardware undergraduate student from Bojnourd Payame Noor University - North Khorasan, expelled at the end of the first term due to the Baha'i Faith in 2009, barred from education.

21. **Mona Rezaei;** an Electronics associate student from Mashhad Sajad University, prevented from enrolling in the third term due to the Baha'i Faith at the end of the second term based on a letter by the Sanjesh Organization in 2009, barred from education.

22. **Payman Nodinian;** an English Literature graduate student from Kurdistan Azad University, barred from education in 2009, He was arrested on 8 April 2010 at the same time as execution of Farzad Kamangar. Payam Naviddian is the co-founder and secretary of the Teachers Association of Kurdistan.

23. **Leila Sehat**; a Sociology graduate student from [Tehran] Azad University, barred from education in 2009. She is an activist for the One Million Signatures Campaign, a women's rights activist in Tabriz, and one of Mir Hossein Mousavi's women's staff members in Azerbaijan.

24. **Razieh Jafari**; Sociology major from Shiraz University, barred from education by the order of the Disciplinary Committee in 2009. She was sentenced to one year in prison by Shiraz Revolutionary.

25. **Saba Mohebpour**; barred from education due to the Baha'i Faith.

26. **Ali Qolizadeh**; a Mechanical Engineering student from Shahrood University, barred from education despite ranking 43rd in the graduate entrance exam in 2009. A former secretary of the Islamic Association of Shahrood University, and current member of General Council of Tahkim Vahdat office was arrested on 5 November 2010 by the security forces at his house.

27. **Ali Taghipour**; Babol Nooshiravani Industrial University, barred for one year by the order of the Revolutionary court, 2009.

28. **Amid Moshrefzadeh**; Babol Nooshiravani Industrial University, barred for one year by the order of the Revolutionary court, 2009.

29. **Iman Sedighi**; Babol Nooshiravani Industrial University, barred for one year by the order of the Revolutionary court, 2009.

30. **Mohsen Barzegar**; Babol Nooshiravani Industrial University, barred for one year by the order of the Revolutionary court, 2009.

31. **Nima Nahvi**; Babol Nooshiravani Industrial University, barred for one year by the order of the Revolutionary court, 2009.

32. **Nikzad Zanganeh**; barred from continued education in graduate program despite being academically accepted due to being active in women's movement, 2009.

33. **Katayoun Rahimi**; Beheshti University student, expelled by the order of the Disciplinary Committee with the charges of "disorder and disturbances of the university order", 2009.

Other students barred from education in 2009:

34. **Alborz Zahedi**, Tehran University

35. **Behzad Jeddi**, Tabriz University

36. **Ebrahim Shahbazi**, Tabriz University

37. **Ameneh Ghasempour**, Tabriz University

38. **Vahid Sheibani**, Birjand University
39. **Saeed Akbari**, Birjand University
40. **Mehrnoosh Karimi**, Esfahan University
41. **Sohail Ziaei**, Polytechnic University (Amir Kabir)
42. **Sayed Ashkan Madani**, Azad University
43. **Hamid Tofigh**, Azad University
44. **Saeed Komijani**, Azad university
45. **Hakimeh Sehat**, Azad University
46. **Mahsa Jazini**, Azad University
47. **Sourna Hashemi**; Member of Zanjan University Islamic Students Association, exposed attempted rape of a female student by a university official and subsequently deprived of continuing his education
48. **Bahram Vahedi**; Member of Zanjan University Islamic Students Association, exposed attempted rape of a female student by a university official and subsequently deprived of continuing his education
49. **Alireza Firouzi**; Member of Zanjan University Islamic Students Association, exposed attempted rape of a female student by a university official and subsequently deprived of continuing his education
50. **Negar Mishaghian**; Baha'i student at Shiraz University, Accepted in Computer Science program but prevented from registration
51. **Pejman Abbasi**; Student at Isfahan University, barred from higher education due to student activism
52. **Shafagh Timajchi**; Baha'i student in Business Administration of Amol University
53. **Negin Sayahi Shahmirzadi**; Baha'i student at Sari Agricultural University in Agricultural Engineering
54. **Sona Gholinejad**; Baha'i student at Sari Agricultural University in Herbal Medicine
55. **Naim Kamali**; Baha'i student at Sari Agricultural University

56. **Ardalan Tabianian**; Baha'i student at Semnan University

57. **Frahnaz Felfeli**; Baha'i student at Semnan University

58. **Mojdeh Noorani**; Baha'i student at Semnan University

2010

1. **Majid Makouee**; Ship Building at Isfahan's Malek Ashtar University; barred from education at graduate level; he did not receive his transcript in 2010; Makouee is an activist in the Azerbaijan National Movement; his first arrest was on 22 May 2006; his second arrest by Tabriz Intelligence Office was in summer of 2008, he was released three months later; Tabriz Revolutionary Courts sentenced him to one year in prison and two years' suspended imprisonment in 2009.

2. **Seyed Hanzaleh Hedayati**; deprived from education at graduate level in 2010, despite having been summoned by the Central Selection Committee, having been interrogated by the Intelligence Ministry and writing a letter of recognizance, Hedayat was barred from education; he was head of Advertising and Information Committee of Mir Hossein Mousavi's elections headquarters during the 2009 election; Hedayati is son of Seyed Hashem Hedayati, a member of the Islamic Revolution Mujahedin party.

3. **Kamelia Kowsari**; Literature at Allameh Tabatabaee University; barred from graduate education; Kowsari was summoned by the Central Selection Committee and did not receive a transcript in 2010; barred from education; student activist at Allameh University, and elected member of College of Literature at the Islamic Association; a supporter of barred students and the Right to Education Council.

4. **Arman Sedaghati**; Petroleum Engineering at Amirkabir University (Tehran Polytechnic); admitted to graduate program; his transcript indicated "Incomplete File;" barred from education in 2010.

5. **Amir Jahangiri**; Metallurgy at Amirkabir University (Tehran Polytechnic); admitted to graduate program; his transcript indicated "Incomplete File;" barred from education in 2010.

6. **Khalil-ol-Rahman Khalilpour**; Textile Engineering at Amirkabir University (Tehran Polytechnic); admitted to graduate program; his transcript indicated "Incomplete File;" barred from education in 2010; Sunni Muslim.

7. **Samaneh Navvab**; Mathematics major at Amirkabir University (Tehran Polytechnic); admitted to graduate program; her transcript indicated "Incomplete File;" barred from education in 2010; daughter of Ahmad Shirzad, member of the Central Council of Participation Party and former Member of the Parliament.

8. **Mohammad Amin Shirzad**; Information Technology major, prevented from Master's program registration due to "incomplete file"

9. **Mansour Shakerian**; Civil Engineering at Amirkabir University (Tehran Polytechnic); admitted to graduate program; his transcript indicated “Incomplete File;” barred from education in 2010.
10. **Hamed Ghazanfari**; Industrial Engineering at Amirkabir University (Tehran Polytechnic); admitted to graduate program; his transcript indicated “Incomplete File;” barred from education in 2010.
11. **Saeed Moradi Naghadeh**; Law at Gilan University; admitted to graduate program; his transcript indicated “Incomplete File;” barred from education in 2010; Manager of Ghopoz publication and Secretary of Shahriar Society; member of Gilan Reformists Student Campaigners, supporting Mehdi Karroubi during the 2009 presidential election; Saeed Moradi had been arrested twice for his student activism, each time detained for about a month.
12. **Siamak Mirzaee**; last term student of Husbandry at Rasht University; rejected at selection despite academic admission in the graduate program of Rural Development in 2010; Azari identity activist; arrested in Pars Abad, Moghan, on 9 October 2010.
13. **Hafez Sardarpour**; Husbandry at Rasht University; rejected at selection stage despite admission in the graduate program of Husbandry in 2010; barred from education; former manager of Kimlik, a student publication at Kurdistan University; Azeri poet.
14. **Emad Behavar**; Industrial Engineering at Yazd University; graduate student of Political Science at Mazandaran University; expelled in 2010 on orders from Mazandaran University Chancellor, Alizadeh Afrouzi; barred from education; Head of the Youth Branch of Freedom Movement of Iran and member of Freedom Movement of Iran’s Political Office; member of Central Unit of Mowj-e Sevvom to support Khatami and Mousavi; he was first arrested on 28 May 2009 and released after three days. After the elections he was arrested again and was released 46 days later on 29 July 2009. Behavar was arrested for the third time on 7 March 2010 and he remains in prison. In November 2010, Emad Behavar was sentenced to 10 years in prison on charges of “creating public anxiety,” and “membership in Freedom Movement of Iran.”
15. **Ashkan Zahabian**; final term Chemistry student at Ferdowsi University in Mashad; in 2008, on orders from the Disciplinary Committee and Alireza Ashouri, Ferdowsi University Chancellor, Zahabian was barred from education for two terms and forced to transfer to Mazandaran University; on 16 June 2009, he was beaten and injured by Ansar plainclothes forces and arrested by Sari Intelligence Office; he was sentenced to another two terms’ ban on education by Ferdowsi University authorities in September 2009, and based on the time-to-completion rules of the university, Ashkan Zahabian was expelled.
16. **Siavash Saliminejad**; Computer Engineering at Babol’s Noshirvani Industrial University; he was arrested on 20 June 2009 by Mazandaran Intelligence Office, and sentenced to 10 months’ suspended imprisonment and one year’s deprivation of education by Babol Revolutionary Courts; Saliminejad passed the graduate school entrance exam for Computer

Engineering at Elm-o-San'at University in 2009, but was unable to present his documents and to register, so his deprivation from education was extended for another two years.

17. **Iman Sedighi**; Computer Engineering at Babol's Noshirvani University; in 2008, Sedighi was sentenced to two term's education ban by the Disciplinary Committee; on 18 June 2009, he was arrested by Mazandaran Intelligence Office, and Babol Revolutionary Courts sentenced him to 10 months in prison, suspended for three years and one year's deprivation from education. After he spent half of his prison term, he was released, but on orders from Askar Janalizadeh, Noshirvani Industrial University's Chancellor, he was expelled because he had exceeded the allowable time-to-completion for his degree.

18. **Hamed Honarhah**; last term student of Psychology at Qazvin International University; expelled by Disciplinary Committee; ruling upheld by Appeals Committee; barred from education in 2010.

19. **Payam Heydar Ghazvini**; last term student of Theology and Law at Qazvin International University; received ruling of "expulsion and three years' deprivation from education at all Iranian Universities" from the Disciplinary Committee in 2010; student activist and head student campaigner for Mehdi Karroubi's presidential campaign in Qazvin Province in 2009.

20. **Sara Khademi**; Sociology at Mazandaran University; barred from education at graduate level through written notice from Sanjesh Organization announcing her "rejected through selection in 2010;" barred from education; arrested by Mazandaran Intelligence Office in 2006 for student activism.

21. **Behnam Farazmand**; student activist and member of Mazandaran University Islamic Association; arrested twice by Mazandaran security forces in the aftermath of 2009 elections; barred from education for three terms; not allowed to enroll in classes in 2010; expelled by orders from University Chancellor; awaiting court sentencing.

22. **Kaveh Daneshvar**; former Students Guild Secretary at Babol's Noshirvani Industrial University, embarked upon a hunger strike to protest the widespread arrests of the University's student activists during the post-election events. He was summoned to Babol's Information Office and was interrogated. Daneshvar was sentenced to two terms' education ban by the University's Disciplinary Committee. Upon completion of the ban period, he received his expulsion ruling from the University's Chancellor. After pursuing the matter through Ministry of Science, Daneshvar received his definitive expulsion orders in November 2010.

23. **Hajar Kabiri**; Social Research at Tabriz University; she did not receive her 2010 transcript to enter graduate studies; barred from education; women's rights activist and Editor-in-Chief of the barred publication, Talangor.

24. **Mohsen Saghafi**; Arts and Architecture at Tehran Azad University; was admitted to graduate studies but with orders from the Ministry of Intelligence, he received an "Incomplete File" code on his transcript in 2010; barred from education; Saghafi is a student activist who was arrested during the International Labor day along with his father, Alireza Saghafi, writer,

journalist, and Editor-in-Chief of the barred monthly, Rah-e Ayandeh.

25. **Ali Ojaghi**; Economics at Isfahan University; three terms- ban by the Disciplinary Committee and expulsion in 2010; arrested on 8 July 2009 in Isfahan and barred from education.

26. **Arash Sadeghi**; graduate student of Philosophy at Allameh Tabatabaee University; barred from education in 2009; member of Allameh Tabatabaee University's Islamic Association Central Council; arrested on 27 December 2009; sentenced by Tehran Revolutionary Courts to five years in prison and 74 lashes (the lower court had sentenced him to six years in prison, three years' suspended imprisonment, and 74 lashes).

27. **Arsalan Sadeghi**; Information Technology Engineering at Isfahan University; 2010 expulsion through a letter from Isfahan Information Office and ruling by Isfahan University Disciplinary Committee; one of Isfahan University's leftist students.

28. **Maziar Masoumi**; Philosophy at Isfahan University; expelled in 2010 with letter from Isfahan Information Office and orders of Isfahan University Disciplinary Committee; a leftist activist.

29. **Vessal Momtazi**; Agriculture-Irrigation at Qazvin's Khomeini International University; expelled in 2010, after completing seven terms and 124 units, due to belonging to Baha'i faith.

30. **Mohsen Rajabi**; Physics at Isfahan's Industrial University; expelled in 2010

31. **Hossein Ghabel**; Electrical Engineering at Ferdowsi University in Mashad; barred from education in 2010 through orders from Disciplinary Committee.

32. **Kazem Rezaee**; Mechanical Engineering at Shiraz University; Expelled by the Central Disciplinary Committee in 2010; Rezaee was Editor-in-Chief of Farvardin student publication at Shiraz University, and was arrested four times for his student activism between the years 2007 and 2009.

33. **Abdoljalil Rezaee**; former Secretary of Shiraz University Islamic Association; expelled by the Disciplinary Committee; Student activist.

34. **Hamdollah Namjoo**; Political Science at Shiraz University; expelled by the Central Disciplinary Committee in 2010; Namjoo was barred for two terms when he was arrested on 21 June 2009 by the Shiraz Intelligence Office. Once released, though his two-term ban had been completed and he should have been allowed to continue his education, he was expelled from the University; Namjoo was a member of the Central Council of Shiraz University Islamic Students Association, and a member of Mehdi Karroubi's Student Campaign in Shiraz in 2009.

35. **Esmail Jalilvand**; Shiraz University student, expelled by the Central Disciplinary Committee in 2010. He was arrested on 21 June 2009 by the order of Shiraz Intelligence Office. Student activist, manager of Osyon student magazine and vice chancellor of Mehdi Karroubi's

student headquarter in Shiraz.

36. **Younes Mir Hosseini**; Shiraz University law student, expelled by the Central Disciplinary Committee in 2009. Student activist from Shiraz University. Younes Mir Hosseini was arrested by the order of Fars Province General Intelligence Office in the days following the 2009 election.

37. At Shiraz University; **Alma Ranjbar** and;

38. **Hadi Alamli** were sentenced to exile by the order of Central Disciplinary Committee; and

39. **Arash Roostaei** and;

40. **Mohsen Zarinkamar** who had passed all their academic units have not been able to graduate yet due to their university authorities' obstruction. Expulsions of all these students have been due to political activities.

41. **Farzaneh Jalali**; Bachelor of Arts in Anthropology from college of Social Sciences, Tehran University, barred from entering graduate program despite receiving transcript and 2010 admission.

42. **Ali Khairjoo**; undergraduate student in physics from Mohaghegh Ardabili University, graduate student candidate, transcript was not issued in 2010, barred from education. Student civic activities.

43. **Shaida Neekravan**; Baha'i student at college of Industrial Management Organization – following an order by the Intelligence Ministry.

44. **Nariman Afshar**; Baha'i student at college of Industrial Management Organization – following an order by the Intelligence Ministry.

45. **Fouad Nemaei**; Baha'i student at college of Industrial Management Organization – following an order by the Intelligence Ministry.

46. **Arsalan Saeedi**; Baha'i student at college of Industrial Management Organization – following an order by the Intelligence Ministry.

47. **Mahsa Meshkin**; Baha'i student at college of Industrial Management Organization – following an order by the Intelligence Ministry.

48. **Soha Yazdani**; Baha'i student at college of Industrial Management Organization – following an order by the Intelligence Ministry.

49. **Farivar Yazdani**; Baha'i student at college of Industrial Management Organization – following an order by the Intelligence Ministry.

50. **Milad Mahrami**; Baha'i student at college of Industrial Management Organization – following an order by the Intelligence Ministry.
51. **Faez Samimi**; Baha'i student at college of Industrial Management Organization – following an order by the Intelligence Ministry.
52. **Ramin Derakhshan**; Baha'i student at college of Industrial Management Organization – following an order by the Intelligence Ministry.
53. **Naghmeh Rastgar**; Baha'i student at college of Industrial Management Organization – following an order by the Intelligence Ministry.
54. **Saghar Aghdasi**; Baha'i student at college of Industrial Management Organization – following an order by the Intelligence Ministry.
55. **Fouad Khanjani**; Baha'i student at college of Industrial Management Organization – following an order by the Intelligence Ministry.
56. **Babak Saran**; Civil Engineering student. Barred from education in 2009. Son of Amir Hossein Heshmat Saran, Secretary General of the National United Front of Iran who mysteriously lost his life in Gohar Dasht Prison in Karaj in 2008.
57. **Sima Didar**; manager and former license holder of Tehran University's literary publication Yashmaq and an Azerbaijani cultural activists; barred from graduate school in 2010. She was arrested following the arrest of her husband on 18 June 2009 and released more than a month later after posting bail; the Tabriz Revolutionary Court sentenced her, along with her husband, to six months imprisonment.
58. **Ruhollah Ghodrat**; accepted as a medical degree student in Rafsanjan University in 2010. He was expelled from the university by a letter from the Central Selection Committee in the second day of the academic year due to his Baha'i faith.
59. **Pouya Sharifi**; student activist from the Science and Technology University who was barred from education upon entering graduate school at Amir Kabir University in 2009. He was arrested on the evening of 3 November 2009.
60. **Hammid Reza Sahraei**; Mechanical Engineering student of the college of Science and Technology, former secretary of the University Guild Council, barred for four terms, counted towards the years to finish school, by the ruling of the Disciplinary Committee in 2010. By the end of this sentence and the end of the academic year, in practice he will have been expelled from the university.
61. **Ali Asadollahi**; Railway Engineering student from the Science and Technology University, barred for four terms, counted towards the years to finish school, by the ruling of the Disciplinary Committee in 2010. By the end of this sentence and the end of the academic year, in practice he will have been expelled from the university.

62. **Sajjad Darvish**; Industrial Engineering student from the Science and Technology University, barred for four terms, counted towards the years to finish school, by the ruling of the Disciplinary Committee in 2010. By the end of this sentence and the end of the academic year, in practice he will have been expelled from the university.

63. **Siamak Amin**; Bachelor of Economics from Uromiyeh University, after being summoned to the Disciplinary Committee he was expelled from the university by a ruling from this committee in 2010.

64. **Arezoo Sammimi**, Baha'i student from Behshahr Science and Technology University, expulsion due to the belief in the Baha'i Faith in 2010.

65. **Sahar Kohbar**; accepted as a student in Shiraz Payam Noor University. He was prevented to register by the university authorities due to her Baha'i Faith in 2010.

66. **Abbas Rashidi**; student at Karaj Teachers' College.

67. **Amin Arya**; student at Karaj Teachers' College.

68. **Yaser Rahmani**; student at Shiraz University Medical College.

69. **Amir Hossein Tavakoli**; International University of Ghazvin, Electrical Engineering.

70. **Anoush Nokhoudberiz**; Ferdowsi University of Mashhad, Political Science.

Soon after Mahmoud Ahmadinejad became President of the Islamic Republic of Iran in 2005, the term “starred students” entered Iranian discourse on higher education. Starring became synonymous with a mechanism for discrimination against, and exclusion of, students from higher education based solely on their political beliefs, the exercise of their freedom of expression, and in the case of Baha’i students, their religious beliefs.

“Punishing Stars: Systematic Discrimination and Exclusion in Iranian Higher Education” is a thorough study of Iran’s on-going discriminatory higher education practices, based on close examinations of official policies and on direct testimonies from students about being barred from study, and their efforts to seek accountability by Iranian authorities.



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