

Summer 2025

## Iranian Universities Under Pressure: Lecturers Face Dismissals and Imprisonment



A growing shadow of suppression has fallen over Iranian universities. Academics who dare to voice dissent, support student movements, or critique government policies are increasingly facing punitive measures, from dismissals and forced resignations to suspensions and even imprisonment. This crackdown raises serious concerns about academic freedom and the future of higher education in the Islamic Republic.

The wave of dismissals and suspensions has intensified, particularly after the "Woman, Life, Freedom" protests in 2022. While precise figures remain elusive, estimates suggest dozens, if not hundreds, of university professors have been purged. One former Iranian lawmaker claimed over 1,500 academics endured "administrative punishments" for their perceived support of the protests.

Justifications for these dismissals are often vague and politically charged. Terms like "general disqualification" or "disqualification for non-scientific issues" are frequently cited, leaving little doubt about the underlying political motivations. Some professors have been vaguely accused of "moral issues." The dismissal process itself has been heavily criticized

for its lack of transparency and due process, with many academics receiving abrupt verbal notifications or facing non-renewal of contracts without clear explanation.

The imprisonment of university lecturers further highlights the precarious situation. The recent arrest of Mohsen Borhani, a University of Tehran legal scholar, to serve a prison sentence, despite prior suspension for critical opinions, is a stark example. Saman Pashaei, a lecturer in physiology and sports nutrition, was detained for over a month in 2023 and reportedly pressured to confess to unsubstantiated crimes. The case of Kylie Moore-Gilbert, an imprisoned Australian-British lecturer, also underscores the risks academics face.

These actions are not isolated incidents but rather symptoms of a broader and long-standing issue of severely restricted academic freedom in Iran. The government has a history of attempting to "purify" higher education, suppressing dissenting voices and actively promoting its ideological agenda within university settings.

The consequences of this ongoing crackdown are far-reaching and deeply concerning. The dismissal of experi-

enced and critical thinkers risks a significant decline in the quality of education and the overall intellectual environment within Iranian universities. There are fears of a growing "brain drain" as disillusioned and persecuted academics seek opportunities abroad. Indeed, a recent admission by an Iranian official in late 2024 revealed that a staggering 25% of university professors had emigrated in recent years, citing economic pressures and a lack of respect for their profession. This exodus of intellectual capital poses a serious threat to the future of higher education and research in the country.

Following the death of President Raisi, some dismissed professors saw a glimmer of hope and appealed to his successor, Masoud Pezeshkian, urging him to take a clear stance on reversing the dismissals. However, initial responses from influential figures within the educational establishment have been discouraging. The head of the Supreme Leader's representative in universities appeared to dismiss the possibility of reinstating the dismissed educators.

## Deadly Bandar Abbas Blast Exposes Iranian Worker Safety Crisis and Trade Union



A massive explosion at Shahid Rajai Port in Bandar Abbas on April 26th left at least 70 dead and 1,200 injured, with fears the toll will rise. The blast, caused by improperly stored hazardous materials, highlights the dangerous working conditions and lack of safety oversight for Iranian workers.

CODIR has issued a strong condemnation, highlighting this event as the latest in a long series of industrial disasters that have plagued Iranian workers. They argue that a key contributing factor to this tragedy is the systematic absence of independent trade unions, which are crucial for monitoring workplace safety and ensuring adherence to proper working conditions.

Eyewitness accounts from the scene painted a horrific picture of dockworkers fleeing for their lives before the massive explosion. Labour activists on the ground reported that a staggering 99% of the victims were workers present at the busy commercial port at the time of the incident. Esmail Mohammadzadeh, a prominent

labour activist and representative for dockworkers, is among those still missing, underscoring the devastating impact on the working community.

Arsalan Heydari, head of the Bandar Abbas Labour Retirees Association, lamented the tragic loss of life, emphasizing that repeated warnings about inadequate safety measures at the port had been ignored. He highlighted the lack of basic safety equipment for many workers and the generally unsafe working environment, stating that such conditions inevitably lead to disasters. His poignant question, "Why are workers who are struggling to earn a living sacrificed like this? What sin have they committed?" encapsulates the anger and grief felt by many.

While Iranian authorities have yet to release a definitive cause, speculation is rife regarding the reckless handling and storage of dangerously unstable chemical materials, potentially linked to military armaments, within a major commercial port. Saeed Jafari, CEO of Sina Marine and Port Services Development Company, which oversees operations in the affected area, indicated that initial assessments point towards the misdeclaration of dangerous goods. He stated that highly dangerous cargo, which should have been declared and handled according to international maritime regulations, was instead labelled as ordinary, non-hazardous goods. This misrepresentation, he argued, endangered the entire port area and directly led to the catastrophic explosion. His company intends to pursue legal action.

CODIR argues that this disaster is not an isolated incident but reflects a broader disregard by the Islamic Republic regime for internationally recognized workplace safety regulations and the proper handling of hazardous substances.

Furthermore, CODIR emphasizes the critical link between the lack of worker safety and the severe restrictions on trade union activity in Iran. The Iranian government does not recognize independent, genuine trade unions, and labour activists face persecution for attempting to organize. This suppression of workers' rights, CODIR argues, creates a precarious environment where safety concerns are often overlooked, leading to preventable tragedies like the one at Bandar Abbas.

In response to this crisis, CODIR is calling upon IndustriALL Global Union and other international labour organizations to pressure the Iranian government to adhere to International Labour Organisation (ILO) Conventions 87 and 98, which guarantee the rights to freedom of association and collective bargaining.

The deadly explosion at Shahid Rajai Port serves as a stark reminder of the human cost of neglecting worker safety and suppressing fundamental labour rights. CODIR's demands for justice, accountability, and a fundamental shift in the Iranian government's approach to worker protection and trade union freedoms are now more urgent than ever. The international community is being called upon to support Iranian workers in their struggle for a safe and just working environment.



CODIR calls for a full, independent, and transparent investigation, full disclosure of the materials involved, and measures to prevent environmental fallout. They also urge the Iranian government to adhere to international maritime safety conventions and ILO standards regarding trade union rights, which are currently suppressed in Iran. CODIR calls on international labour unions to pressure Iran to implement these conven-

## **Theocratic regime has declared war on teacher unionists**

**CODIR calls for urgent solidarity  
with beleaguered Iranian trade  
unionists**



Teacher trade union activists struggling for fair pay, decent conditions of service, and quality education provision have long been targets of arrest and imprisonment in Iran.

Despite the empty platitudes and promises made by the Pezeshkian government to stop unlawful rulings and sentences against the country's teachers, we have borne witness to not only the continuation of flawed cases dating from the [previous] Raisi administration's time, but also the lodging and pursual of new cases – and even an uptick in such prosecutions, as well as their becoming more widespread with every passing day.

It has been reported that on Monday 3 March 2024, Ms. Arezoo Jalilzadeh, a teacher in Sardasht, West Azarbaijan province [northwestern Iran], was arrested without a court order and taken to a detention centre in Urumiyeh, the provincial capital. Ms. Jalilzadeh is the mother of a two-year-old child. The Coordinating Council of Iranian Teachers' Trade Associations (CCITTA) in its announcement on the continued detention of Ms. Jalilzadeh, condemned this action by the

authorities, correctly identifying it as stemming from the regime's growing fears in the face of the collapse of its legitimacy [in the eyes of the Iranian people] and the waning effectiveness of its judicial and security arms.

In a separate news report, it was announced that Ms. Turan Soleimani, another teachers' trade union activist in Khuzestan province [southwestern Iran], was summoned to the Shush Revolutionary Prosecutor's Office. In recent months, pressure from the regime's security forces on trade union activists in Khuzestan has increased and, prior to this latest incident, court rulings were issued for four other trade union activists in the province: Koukab Badaghi, Siamak Sadeghi Chehrizi, Ali Koroushat, and Pirouz Nami.

We have also received details of another case, Mohsen Jari, a veteran teacher working in the education department of Khomeini Shahr, Isfahan province [central Iran], was sentenced to four months' suspension of employment by the education ministry's violations board for having shared a number of politically oriented posts in a friends' private social media group.

In another report, it was announced that Ms. Lida Esmaeili, a teacher from Alborz province [adjacent to Tehran, the country's capital], whose previous prosecution had been overturned by the Administrative Court of Justice, was sentenced to four months' suspension of employment by the education ministry. Ms. Esmaeili's charge was stated as the publishing of images of a youth executed in Isfahan.

The CCITTA condemned the issuance of this unjust verdict against Ms. Esmaeili and warned the education ministry that unless it brought a halt to the wave of teacher suppression by the ministry's violations boards over recent months, then any dialogue for managing the increasingly tense atmosphere in schools between the two sides [the union and the board/ministry] would be impossible.

In another news report, it was announced that seven members of the Sanandaj [Kordestan province, northwestern Iran] chapter of the Iranian Teachers' Trade Association: Ms. Leila Zarei, Ms. Nasrin Karimi, Faisal Nouri, Salah Haji Mirzaei, Mohiuddin Reihani, Majid Karimi, and Ghias Nemati had been summoned to appear before the education ministry's disciplinary appeals board.

CODIR has learned from trade union activists in Iran that the ruling theocratic regime, through this heavy-handed treatment and harsh sentences on teachers' union activists, aims to make an example of them and send out a message that it simply will not tolerate any activity even resembling organised opposition in the country. "The regime is clearly in the throes of losing control and is increasingly anxious to stem the growing tide of popular opposition to its rule," stated Jamshid Ahmadi, Assistant General Secretary of CODIR.

CODIR has called for protest letters to be sent to the Embassies of the Islamic Republic of Iran in London as well as in other capitals across Europe and North America.

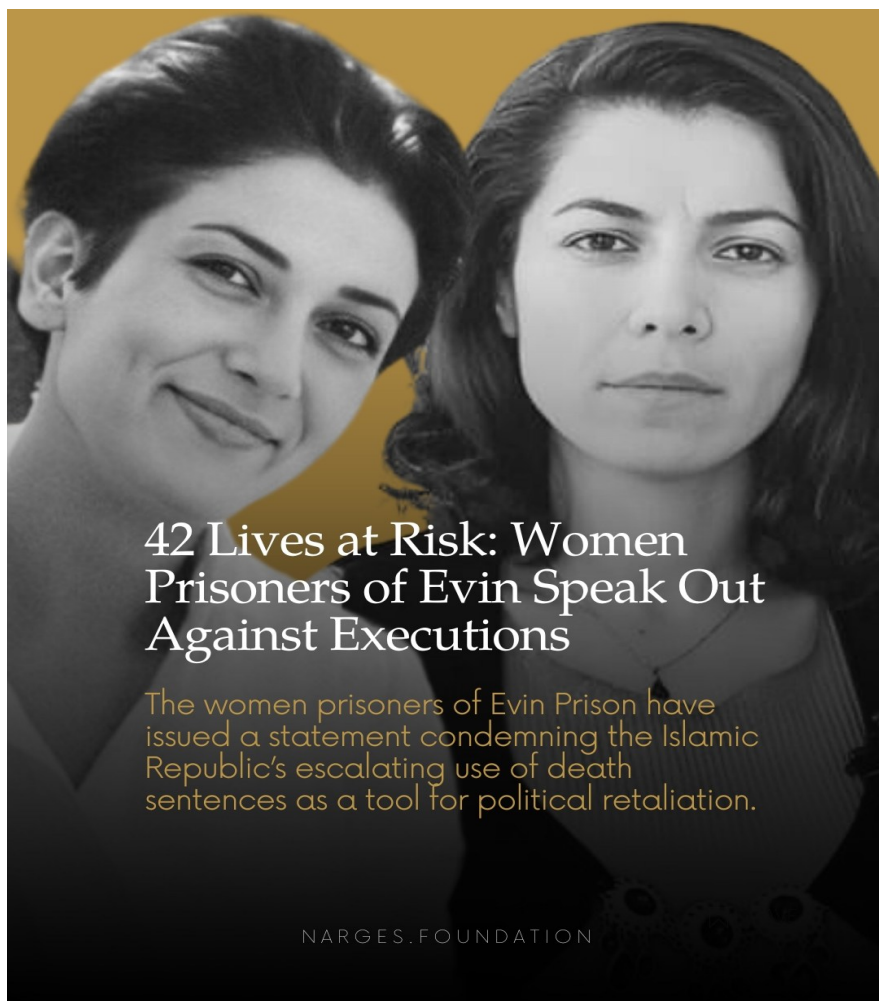
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# Sharifeh Mohammadi, Varisheh Moradi and Pakhshan Azizi, innocent women political prisoners, face execution!

## Join us to campaign against execution in Iran

Iranian authorities have once again sentenced female labor activist Sharifeh Mohammadi to death, despite the Supreme Court previously overturning her initial death sentence. Mohammadi was arrested on bogus charges solely in retaliation for her peaceful activism and handed a death sentence following a sham trial marked by torture, forced "confessions," and grave due process violations.

Now, three women political prisoners—labor activist Sharifeh Mohammadi, Kurdish social and humanitarian worker Pekhshan Azizi, and Kurdish activist Varisheh Moradi—are at risk of execution by the Islamic Republic.



## 42 Lives at Risk: Women Prisoners of Evin Speak Out Against Executions

The women prisoners of Evin Prison have issued a statement condemning the Islamic Republic's escalating use of death sentences as a tool for political retaliation.

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## AFFILIATE TO CODIR



## Solidarity with the struggle of the Iranian people for peace, equality, human rights STARTS HERE!

*CODIR supports the campaign for peace, human and democratic rights in Iran. We campaign for release of all political prisoners and for trade unions to have freedom to organise and campaign effectively. We supply news and analysis of events in Iran and related issues from the world.*

### Affiliation fees:

Local organisations £20 -£50,  
Regional organisations £50,  
National Orgs: £100 to £250.

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