



BRISMES

British Society for Middle Eastern Studies

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Dr Masoud Pezeshkian

President of the Islamic Republic of Iran

Prof. Hossein Afshin

Vice President for Science, Technology and Knowledge-Based Economy Affairs

Mr Mohammad Bagher Ghalibaf

Speaker of the Islamic Consultative Assembly

Dr Hossein Simaei Sarraf

Minister of Science, Research and Technology

Ayatollah Ahmad Jannati

Secretary of the Guardian Council

Mr Seyed Ali Mousavi

Ambassador of the Islamic Republic of Iran to the United Kingdom

Sent via email: islamic@parliran.ir; info@isti.ir; pr@isti.ir; iranconsulate.lon@mfa.gov.ir; iranemb.lon@mfa.gov.ir.

3rd September 2026

Dear President Pezeshkian, Vice President Afshin, Speaker Ghalibaf, Minister Simaei Sarraf, Ayatollah Jannati and Ambassador Mousavi,

We write on behalf of the Committee on Academic Freedom of the British Society for Middle Eastern Studies (BRISMES) to urge the Iranian authorities not to adopt the [proposed](#) *Bill to Counter the Infiltration of Foreign Intelligence Services and Governments or Foreign Entities*. We are deeply concerned that the current draft, if adopted, would threaten academic freedom, international scholarly exchange and the rights of students, researchers and university staff in Iran.

The BRISMES Committee on Academic Freedom monitors and defends academic freedom in the research, study and teaching of the Middle East and North Africa in the UK and Europe, as well as across the region itself.

We understand that the Iranian Parliament approved the general principles of the bill on 16 August 2026 and has begun considering its individual provisions. We are particularly concerned that the [draft](#), if approved, would appear to place ordinary academic activities under extensive security control. For example, it proposes that the Ministry of Intelligence would prepare an annual list of foreign



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governments, universities, research institutions and other organisations from which Iranian students and researchers could receive scholarships or grants, with which they conclude agreements, or in whose conferences and scientific activities they could participate. The Intelligence Organisation of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps would also play a role in proposing and classifying these institutions. Cooperation outside the approved framework could carry criminal penalties.

Other [provisions](#) would restrict contact with foreign media, embassies and non-Iranian organisations, with such contact sometimes requiring prior notification or written permission. Students and academics could therefore need security approval to apply for scholarships, accept research funding, attend conferences, travel for academic purposes, establish institutional partnerships or communicate with colleagues abroad. The draft bill therefore appears to place routine academic work within a security framework and exposes students and researchers to investigation or punishment for legitimate professional and educational activities.

Academic research depends on the exchange of evidence and ideas, professional contact across borders and access to conferences and research. Security control over these activities would weaken the independence of universities and encourage self-censorship, because researchers may avoid legitimate contact because they cannot be sure how that contact will be interpreted. These measures would further isolate Iranian higher education at a time when students and researchers already face considerable barriers arising from sanctions, banking restrictions, visa difficulties and limited access to international funding and academic travel.

The right to seek, receive and impart information across borders is protected by [Article](#) 19 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. Article 15 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights also requires states to respect the freedom indispensable for scientific research and to support the development and diffusion of science. Iran is a party to both covenants. The [UNESCO](#) Recommendation concerning the Status of Higher-Education Teaching Personnel further recognises the importance of institutional autonomy, international exchange and the freedom to conduct and publish research without interference. The measures in the draft bill may therefore be incompatible with Iran's international legal obligations.

Our concerns are heightened by the growing pressures on Iranian students and university staff. For example, recent [reports](#) indicate that six students at Sharif University of Technology have been issued expulsion orders. Reza Dalman, a master's student at the university, has also [reportedly](#) been expelled and barred from studying at any Iranian university for four years following an act of peaceful



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expression on campus. Such a severe punishment reinforces fears that expression or communication considered politically sensitive may have lasting consequences for a student's education and career.

In light of these concerns, we respectfully urge the relevant authorities to halt the passage of this bill and affirm their commitment to academic freedom, institutional autonomy and the participation of Iranian scholars and students in international academic life. We furthermore urge the relevant authorities to review the disciplinary action against Reza Dalman and all other students who have been punished for peaceful expression.

We would be grateful for your response and for information about the steps being taken to prevent these restrictions from becoming law.

Yours sincerely,

Professor Nicola Pratt
BRISMES President

Dr Lewis Turner
Chair, BRISMES Committee on Academic Freedom

On behalf of the BRISMES Committee on Academic Freedom