



VICTORIA UNIVERSITY STUDENTS' ADMINISTRATIVE COUNCIL

150 Charles St. West, Room 127
Toronto, ON, M5S 1K9
(416) 585 - 4473
www.vusac.ca | fb.com/vusacuoft

December 30, 2022

RE: Demanding Support from the University of Toronto for Iranian Students

We, the elected and hired representatives of the Victoria University Students' Administrative Council (VUSAC), stand in solidarity with Iranian student protestors being subjected to extreme violence by the security forces of the Islamic Republic of Iran. The VUSAC calls upon student unions, clubs, and other organizations at the University of Toronto to take action and demand that our administrators do more to support future and current Iranian students not simply with moral support, but tangible assistance as well.

As many students know, the current protest movement in Iran broke out in mid-September in response to Mahsa Amini's murder by the morality police for violating the "state's forced-hijab law."¹ Since then, the Iranian government's response has been to restrict internet access to suppress protestors and control information.² Such actions are part of a deliberate attempt by the regime to mask ongoing efforts to regain control of women's bodies and maintain existing structures of gendered violence.

Women and students have been at the forefront of protests against the Iranian regime, and have received much of the retaliation as a consequence. In early October, in response to over two weeks of protests across the country, Iranian security forces violently suppressed peaceful student activists at the Sharif University of Technology in Tehran.³ Indeed, according to the Centre for Human Rights in Iran (CHRI), at least 574 university students have been arrested by state security forces since the beginning of the movement in mid-September, and while in state custody have been subjected to torture, sexual abuse, and the denial of basic necessities such as medical treatment.⁴ This unstable environment prevents potential University of Toronto students

¹"Mahsa Amini is Another Victim of the Islamic Republic's War on Women," Center for Human Rights in Iran, September 16, 2022.

<https://iranhumanrights.org/2022/09/mahsa-amini-is-another-victim-of-islamic-republics-war-on-women/>.

²"Internet disrupted in Iran amid protests over death of Mahsa Amini," Netblocks, September 19, 2022. <https://netblocks.org/reports/internet-disrupted-in-iran-amid-protests-over-death-of-mahsa-amini-X8qVEwAD>.

³"Sharif students violently attacked, arrested by security forces as protests in Iran spread," Center for Human Rights in Iran, October 3rd, 2022.

<https://iranhumanrights.org/2022/10/sharif-students-violently-attacked-arrested-by-security-forces-as-protests-in-iran-spread/>.

⁴"Iran Protests: detained students subjected to sexual assault and disappearances." Center for Human Rights in Iran, December 6th, 2022.



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in Iran from applying and meeting admission requirements and is not conducive to the well-being or success of current students with family members who remain in the country. The risks that the government crackdown poses inform and provide the impetus for this statement.

Students are often first to denounce abuses of human rights as they emerge. On many occasions, however, our urge to take action leads us to forget other violations of human rights occurring much closer to home. For example, Quebec's Bill 21⁵ violates the equality rights⁶ and gender equality rights⁷ of Muslim women by prohibiting their wearing of hijabs in civil service and other public sector positions, limiting the employment options available to people simply seeking to practice their faith. The VUSAC encourages student activists to keep in mind that no governments are free of criticism, and when denouncing the Iranian regime's attempts to maintain its restrictions on women's autonomy, we must also ensure that the similar, albeit less intense efforts to do the same thing locally are called out as well.

Apart from the VUSAC's commitment to rejecting all forms of control over women's bodily autonomy, we would also like to use our platform to express our support for the following demands from UofT:

1. Extend admissions deadlines for students at risk. The violent government crackdowns and widespread internet shutdowns imposed on Iranians present significant obstacles to their completion of admissions applications on time and in accordance with faculty deadlines. These barriers can be combatted by extending the deadline for which the University accepts applications.
2. Accept all admissions appeals from students at risk. If potential students miss the admissions deadlines set by the University due to the circumstances they are currently being subjected to by the Iranian government, the University must not prevent them from attending on those grounds. To ensure that students of all backgrounds are given equal access to a post-secondary education of their choosing, they cannot be penalized for something over which they have no control, such as their living circumstances.

<https://iranhumanrights.org/2022/12/iran-protests-detained-university-students-subjected-to-sexual-assault-disappearances/>.

⁵"An act respecting the laicity of the state," Bill 21, 2019 Chapter 12, Québec Official Publisher. <http://www2.publicationsduquebec.gouv.qc.ca/dynamicSearch/telecharge.php?type=5&file=2019C12A.PDF>.

⁶"Section 15 - Equality Rights," Charterpedia, Government of Canada, April 14th, 2022. <https://www.justice.gc.ca/eng/csj-sjc/rfc-dlc/ccrf-ccd/check/art15.html>

⁷"Section 28 - Gender equality rights," Charterpedia, Government of Canada, April 14th, 2022. <https://www.justice.gc.ca/eng/csj-sjc/rfc-dlc/ccrf-ccd/check/art28.html>



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An important fact the VUSAC would like to acknowledge is that domestic unrest, violence, and instability are not dangers solely affecting Iranian students. Students across the world in various countries suffer similar ills, even many in Canada. Yet, the Iranian protest movement is another iteration of violence that has the potential to impede the applications of Iranian students seeking to apply to the University as well as the studies and well-being of Iranian students currently here. It goes without saying that the VUSAC advocates for the same support for all students at risk to have the opportunity to achieve their full potential, but this is something that the University of Toronto refuses to provide. By highlighting each instance of instability impacting students and recognizing that this violence is still ongoing, the VUSAC hopes to force our administrators to realize that there is an increasing and ever-present need to put the necessary supports in place.

The protest movement in Iran will certainly continue well into 2023, and the University of Toronto, its faculties, and colleges need to take whatever immediate measures they can, including those we have outlined, to ensure Iranian students seeking admission to the University and those currently studying receive the support to which they are entitled. As Iranian students continue to protest despite threats from their government, we must also continue calling on the University to live up to its commitments to provide equal access to and opportunities for success to all current and future students - a commitment that it has yet to meet. By fostering a coalition of solidarity with Iranian students and protesting against the University's failure to adequately provide support for them, it is our hope that we will see change occur.

In service and solidarity,

The Victoria University Students' Administrative Council

Sooyeon Lee, President

Shane Joy, Vice-President External

Jackson Leslie, Vice-President Internal

Michael Elsaesser, Vice-President Student Organizations

Dhir Shah, Academic Commissioner

Amanda Li, Academic Co-Chair

Amelia Collet, Arts & Culture Commissioner

Maarib Kirmani Haseeb, Commuter Commissioner

Emilie Nero, Commuter Co-Chair

Diana Vink, Equity Commissioner

Cameron Miranda-Radbord, Equity Co-Chair

Julie Seeger, Mental Wellness Commissioner

Vincent Espenida, Mental Wellness Co-Chair

Ninon Crestois, Scarlet & Gold Commissioner



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Amy Mann, Sustainability Commissioner
Rebecca Muscant, Sustainability Co-Chair
Zoe Lazaris, Councillor
Caitriona Federico, Councillor
Tariq Harney, Councillor
Kate Mochina, Councillor
Medha Barath, Councillor
Juhyung Yun, Councillor
Carolyn Gao, Councillor
Luca Carnegie, Councillor
Charlie Sun, International Councillor
Anne Huynh, Chair
Thomas Keough, Finance Chair
Lara Athena Reyes, Office Manager
Jackie Ko, Communications Coordinator
Pooja Ajit, Chief Returning Officer

Financial Resources

Scholars and Students at Risk Award Program:

<https://registrar.utoronto.ca/finances-and-funding/awards-scholarships-bursaries-grants/in-course-awards/scholars-and-students-at-risk-award-program/>

The Robins Access Awards Program (Victoria College-specific):

<https://www.vic.utoronto.ca/future-students/financial/>

Mental Health Resources

Counselling & Psychological Services at Health & Wellness - (416)-978-8070

Gerstein Centre Mental Health Crisis Line - (416)-929-5200

Good 2 Talk Student Helpline 1-(866)-925-5454

Health and Wellness Centre - (416)-978-8030

Other Resources

Iranian Association at the University of Toronto (UTIRAN) - <https://utiran.org/>

Center for Human Rights in Iran (CHRI) - <https://iranhumanrights.org/>

Iran Human Rights (IHRNGO) - <https://iranhr.net/en/>