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His Excellency Volker Türk  
Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights  
United Nations Office at Geneva  
CH-1211 Geneva 10, Switzerland

**RE: Human Rights Violations and Abuse and Misuse of Psychiatry in Iran**

Your Excellency High Commissioner Türk:

We are responding to reports from [media outlets](#) and [human rights organizations](#) that school-aged Iranian protesters are being subject to detention in mental health institutions to reform their “anti-social” behavior. In a [recent interview](#) with an independent reformist newspaper, “Shargh,” Iranian Education Minister Yousef Nouri confirmed that an unspecified number of school students have been taken to “psychological institutions” to “reform and re-educate” them to prevent “anti-social” behavior. Nouri further stated that the Islamic Republic “want[s] to correct” these protesters, and that they “will be returned to the school environment once expert friends have done their work” in such mental health centers. As the organization representing more than 37,000 psychiatrists worldwide, the American Psychiatric Association (APA) wants to ensure that you know that this practice, as described, is a serious human rights violation and abuse and misuse of psychiatry, which can result in long-term mental health consequences.

APA maintains a long history of firmly opposing the abuse and misuse of psychiatry and psychiatric facilities for the detention of persons solely on the basis of their political dissent, no matter where it occurs, both because it violates basic human rights and can cause long-lasting psychiatric harm. APA’s positions on these issues are as follows:

- 1. APA opposes the use of psychiatric facilities for the detention of persons on the basis of their political, religious and ideological dissent** (*APA Position Statement on the Use of Psychiatric Institutions for the Commitment of Political Dissenters*, 2016)
- 2. The abuse and misuse of psychiatry occur when psychiatric knowledge, assessment, or practice is used to further organizational, social, personal, or political objectives without regards to individuals’ needs and outcomes** (*APA Position Statement on Abuse and Misuse of Psychiatry*, 2019); and
- 3. Unjust incarceration and cruel and unusual punishment, have psychiatric consequences on victims and their families. The denial or cover-up of human rights abuses by governments and institutions is antithetical to the mental health of victims and their families.** (*APA Position Statement on Human Rights*, 2017).

Psychiatry is a healing profession and not a tool to silence political dissent. “Psychiatric confinement” for any purpose other than the evaluation and treatment of mental illness to promote individuals’ mental health violates psychiatric ethics and is associated with long-term negative health consequences. This concern is especially serious for school-aged children, for whom such confinement may be an adverse childhood experience (ACE), which may increase a child’s risk for developing mental illness and result in higher rates of maladaptive coping, anxiety, and chronic physical illness. Using psychiatry as a tool to pathologize political dissent and detain young protesters is a serious ethical, medical, and moral abuse of psychiatry.

We join [human rights organizations](#) in urging the United Nations Human Rights Council to act with urgency by holding a special session to establish an independent mechanism with investigative, reporting and accountability functions to address these reports of human rights violations and abuse and misuse of psychiatry in Iran.

As a non-governmental organization with special consultative status to the United Nations, APA will continue to monitor the state of affairs in Iran and stand ready with our allied psychiatric and mental health organizations to provide additional support and educational resources.

Sincerely,



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American Academy of Psychiatry and the Law  
American Association for Community Psychiatry  
American Association for Emergency Psychiatry

American Association for Geriatric Psychiatry  
American Association for Social Psychiatry  
American Psychoanalytic Association  
American Society for Adolescent Psychiatry  
Association of Medicine and Psychiatry  
Association of Family Psychiatrists  
Association of Women Psychiatrists

## Position Statement on the Use of Psychiatric Institutions for the Commitment of Political Dissenters

**Approved by the Board of Trustees, December 2016**

Approved by the Board of Trustees, March 1994

**Approved by the Assembly, November 2016**

Approved by the Assembly, May 1994

“Policy documents are approved by the APA Assembly and Board of Trustees. . . These are . . . position statements that define APA official policy on specific subjects. . .” – *APA Operations Manual*

**Position:**

The American Psychiatric Association firmly opposes the use of psychiatric facilities for the detention of persons on the basis of their political, religious and ideological dissent. Further, the APA should collaborate with the World Psychiatric Association and and/or the appropriate United Nations committee to develop acceptable standards and guidelines which need to be established for the rehabilitation of individuals who have been subjected to psychiatric abuse for political purposes.

**Author:** APA Council on International Psychiatry

## Position Statement on Abuse and Misuse of Psychiatry

Approved by the Board of Trustees, July 2019

Approved by the Assembly, May 2019

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**Position:**

The American Psychiatric Association supports the use of psychiatric knowledge, practice, and institutions only for purposes consistent with ethical evaluation and treatment, research consultation, and education.

Abuse and misuse of psychiatry occur when psychiatric knowledge, assessment, or practice is used to further organizational, social, personal, or political objectives without regards to individuals’ needs and outcomes.

**Author:** APA Council on International Psychiatry

## Position Statement on Human Rights

Approved by the Board of Trustees, 2017  
Approved by the Assembly, November 2017

“Policy documents are approved by the APA Assembly and Board of Trustees. . . These are . . . position statements that define APA official policy on specific subjects. . .” – *APA Operations Manual*

### **Position:**

The American Psychiatric Association recognizes that human rights abuses, such as unjust incarceration, cruel and unusual punishment, torture, and human trafficking, have psychiatric consequences on victims and their families. The denial or cover-up of well-documented human rights abuses by governments and institutions is antithetical to the mental health of victims and their families. APA coordinates with agencies and organizations dedicated to human rights on human rights abuses.