An Open Letter to the Scientific Community
To Support the Women’s Movement of Iran

When dictatorship is a fact, revolution becomes a right. In the past two weeks we have witnessed, once again, numerous demonstrations within Iran and around the world. These demonstrations, which build on a grass-root movement spurred on by the women of Iran, were sparked by the brutal murder of Mahsa Amini, who was in police custody in Tehran. The late Miss Amini was about to begin her bachelor studies this fall.

Iran has numerous discriminatory bylaws against women in its society. The freedom of dress only scratches the surface of women’s demands and the demands of so many others in this country. But it is the match that lit the flame to what we are now calling the ‘Iranian Women’s Movement’, a movement that has gained momentum across the globe.

After four decades of repression, students and teachers have taken to the streets in cities throughout the country. My goal in writing this letter is to highlight some vital facts, old and new, which are of significant importance and have affected the lives of thousands of students from the creation of Iran’s authoritarian regime in the aftermath of the Islamic Revolution in 1979 to the present day.

- Peaceful demonstration is a right that, paradoxically, is explicitly mentioned in the current Iranian constitution. Over the years, there have been some peaceful protests on university campuses, in particular at the University of Tehran (my alma mater) and Sharif University of Technology. The latter is where the late, celebrated mathematician, Maryam Mirzakhani received her Bachelor of Science before moving to the USA for her graduate work. Yet, many students were arrested and some are still in custody today. And being released in no way ensures a happy ending. The sad reality is that all these students will continue to face barriers and nonvisible government sanctions throughout their academic life. The simplest of these ‘blockades’ is to be overlooked for scholarships, fellowships, and other such benefits in order to continue pursuing one’s studies. Or it could be that a graduate student is denied access to key positions in Iranian universities or government offices.

- The trained militia presence in the universities, for example, Basij’s, is widespread. There are many other forms of such entities, some even disguised under the guise of scientific or other educational projects, but their main goal is to spy, to report, and to boycott any democratic movements. Non-scientific organizations, among professors and university employees, are similar government tools used to control the masses. Again, the true nature of these organizations is usually masked under the heading of cultural clubs and institutions to hide their primary mission.

- The discrimination against minorities in Iran, either religious minorities (Christians, Jews, Zoroastrians, Sunni, Bahais, and Sufis) or ethnic groups (Kurds, Baluchis, Turkmens, …) is so transparent that no further explanation is needed.
The murder of Mahsa Amini brought back flashbacks from my youth in the early 80s when I shared a bench in our high school with Touraj Amini, a young and incredibly talented classmate. Nevertheless, he was banned from continuing university studies because he was Baha’i! Such discriminations are outrageous and must be stopped.

Today’s demonstrations are not just about wearing a headscarf. It is a symbol of the battle against tyranny, a repressive government and the denial of basic human rights. I hope this letter raises awareness, helps to eliminate such ruthless practices and brings better days for Iranian students and the Iranian people.

Javad Mashreghi
Outgoing President
Canadian Mathematical Society
28.09.2022