

June 14, 2021

Carmen Twillie Ambar  
President  
Oberlin College  
Cox Administration Building  
70 N. Professor St.  
Oberlin, OH 44074  
Via email: [cambar@oberlin.edu](mailto:cambar@oberlin.edu)

**Re: Oberlin College and Professor Mahallati**

Dear Professor Ambar:

United Against Nuclear Iran (“UANI”)<sup>1</sup> is writing to enquire about the status of your investigation into Mohammad Jafar Mahallati, a tenured Professor at Oberlin College who currently serves as the Nancy Schrom Dye Chair in Middle East and North African Studies.<sup>2</sup> As you know, while serving as a senior Iranian regime official Mahallati engaged in the coverup of Iran’s mass execution of more than 5,000 political prisoners which took place from approximately July to December 1988.

You have been aware of this issue since at least October 2020, when you received a letter signed by 626 people, including former political prisoners in Iran, their families and human rights activists. As the letter notes, Mahallati’s role while Iranian Ambassador to the UN was to “obfuscate and lie to the international community about mass crimes perpetrated by the Iranian regime.” Since the publication of that letter, Mahallati’s past activities and the suitability of his senior position at a leading American liberal arts college have been covered extensively in U.S. and international media.<sup>3</sup>

We would welcome your response to the Amnesty International report published on December 12, 2018, an extensively researched 200-page document which specifically cites Mahallati as one of the officials involved in the coverup of this crime against humanity. Please carefully note pages 13, 70-71, and 77 of the report:<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> UANI is a leading not-for-profit, non-partisan, advocacy organization whose mission is to promote the cessation of economic and financial support of the Islamic Republic of Iran by corporations and business until the Iranian regime verifiably abandons its drive for nuclear weapons and support for terrorism and human rights violations. (<http://www.unitedagainstnucleariran.com>).

<sup>2</sup> Oberlin College, “[Mohammad Jafar Mahallati](#).”

<sup>3</sup> See Cleveland Jewish News, “[Oberlin professor accused of covering up Iran’s mass executions](#),” May 20, 2021; Oberlin News-Tribune, “[Oberlin College professor, former diplomat under fire for 1988 mass killings in Iran](#),” October 8, 2020; Jerusalem Post, “[After ‘Post’ article, college reviews antisemitism of ex-Iran envoy prof](#),” May 6, 2021; The Dispatch, “[An Oberlin Professor Is Under Fire for His Past](#),” April 30, 2021.

<sup>4</sup> Amnesty International, “Blood Soaked Secrets: Why Iran’s 1988 Prison Massacres are Ongoing Crimes Against Humanity,” December 12, 2018.

Since September 1988, after the news of the mass executions attracted international attention, senior government ministers and diplomats from his administration were actively involved in denying the mass killings in media interviews and exchanges with the UN to shield those responsible from accountability.

The officials involved included ... Iran's then permanent representative to the UN in New York, Mohammad Jafar Mahallati,

Furthermore:

It was not until the end of November 1988 that the authorities responded by explicitly denying the wave of executions. During a meeting with the UN Special Representative held on 29 November 1988 concerning the mass prisoner killings of July-September 1988, Mohammad Jafar Mahallati, Iran's permanent representative to the UN in New York, denied the mass execution presenting them as "battlefield killings."

Mohammad Jafar Mahallati reiterated Iran's denials on 3 December 1988 prior to the adoption of a resolution by the UN General Assembly that expressed "grave concern" about "a renewed wave of executions in the period July-September 1988" targeting prisoners "because of their political convictions." Mohammad Jafar Mahallati called the resolution "unjust" and said "a terrorist organization based in Iraq" was the main source of the "fake information" included in it.

In response to the broader claims, Oberlin Chief of Staff David Hertz has stated:

...we're concerned whenever anyone raises allegations of this nature about a member of faculty. We want to support our faculty, but we also want to consider the allegations themselves. That is the basis on which we've been in touch with Prof. Mahallati. We are looking forward to his addressing these issues. He's taking steps to defend his reputation.

We welcome this investigation. However, we are surprised to learn that you have reportedly blocked from your social media account multiple victims -- as well as their relatives and advocates -- of the regime's egregious actions, including the Iranian-American human rights activist Lawdan Bazargan. Bazargan, whose brother was killed in the 1988 massacre, stated, "President Ambar blocked us, which is very shameful, and she even blocked all kinds of human rights lawyers and everybody who was mentioning Oberlin."<sup>5</sup>

This would not appear to comport with the perception of an organization that is genuinely interested in a search for truth and justice. It is peculiar indeed that the president of an academic institution ultimately responsible for conducting a thorough investigation into these allegations would decide to close her ears to the pleas of the victims in this instance. It is especially odd that Oberlin, which enjoys a global reputation for being at the cornerstone of political activism and defending the human rights of individuals against the tyranny of unjust state laws -- notably as a

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<sup>5</sup> Jerusalem Post, "[After 'Post' article, college reviews antisemitism of ex-Iran envoy prof.](#)" May 6, 2021.

bastion of abolitionism and a crucial staging-post on the underground railroad leading black slaves to freedom in Canada – would decide in the first place to employ an individual who chose to work at the very highest echelons of one of the world’s most brutal and repressive regimes. His role in concealing that same regime’s repulsive crimes must surely give Oberlin serious pause regarding the suitability of this individual who has been in your employ for 14 years, since 2007.

Indeed, Oberlin’s own profile of Mahallati is conspicuously short on details regarding his position and responsibilities while employed by the Islamic Republic of Iran. It states, “Mahallati held several administrative positions including Ambassador and Permanent Representative of Iran to the United Nations, where he played a key role in ending the eight-year war between Iran and Iraq (1987-89).” Given the allegations that have come to light, this last point is a remarkably generous reading, an obvious whitewashing of his true role, and no doubt provided by Mahallati himself.

Indeed, while Mahallati is permitted to continue burnishing his ill-deserved reputation as the “Professor of Peace” on your campus, the relatives of those killed by the regime in 1988 have failed to receive any justice. Mahallati’s ongoing tenure at Oberlin is an affront to the memories of those victims. Beyond his shameful role in this coverup, Mahallati is also accused of engaging in antisemitic and anti-Baha’i rhetoric – a regrettable stance given Iran’s treatment of its Jewish and Baha’i minorities.

Finally, we note that Oberlin’s reputation suffered significant damage in 2016 when a court ruled that “Oberlin college and its dean of students maliciously libeled the Gibson family as racists and deliberately damaged their business by suspending and later cancelling its century-long business relationship with the bakery—all while unofficially encouraging a student boycott. And the jury found that the college had intentionally inflicted emotional distress on the Gibsons themselves.”<sup>6</sup> It would therefore seem prudent for Oberlin to avoid still further reputational damage by swiftly concluding its investigation into Mahallati.

Thank you for your kind attention. We look forward to hearing from you.

Very truly yours,



Ambassador Mark D. Wallace

*UANI is a not-for-profit, bi-partisan, advocacy group that seeks to prevent Iran from fulfilling its ambition to obtain nuclear weapons. UANI was founded in 2008 by Ambassador Mark D. Wallace, the late Ambassador Richard Holbrooke, and Middle East expert Ambassador Dennis Ross. UANI’s private sanctions campaigns and state and federal legislative initiatives focus on ending the economic and financial support of the Iranian regime by corporations until Iran verifiably abandons its drive for nuclear weapons, support for terrorism and gross human rights violations. Former U.S. Senator Joseph Lieberman is UANI’s Chairman. UANI’s Advisory Board consists of distinguished leaders in government, academia and business. See [www.unitedagainstanucleariran.com/about/leadership](http://www.unitedagainstanucleariran.com/about/leadership).*

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<sup>6</sup> Commentary Magazine, “O Oberlin My Oberlin,” September 2019.