

Fact Sheet

Professor Mohammad Jafar Mahallati

Oberlin College & Conservatory Biography

- Arrived in 2007
- Professor of Religion
- Nancy Schrom Dye Chair in Middle East and North African Studies
- Developed innovative courses with interdisciplinary approach to friendship and forgiveness studies
- Initiated the Oberlin annual Friendship Day Festival. The initiative prompted Friendship Circle, a chartered student organization active since 2011.

Academics Prior to Oberlin

- Visiting professor of trans-regional studies at Princeton University (1998-99)
- Adjunct professor of international affairs at Georgetown and Yale Universities (1998)
- For seven years, was adjunct professor of international affairs at Columbia University, New York teaching graduate courses on peacemaking, international relations, and religion (1991-97)

Professional Experience

- Held several administrative positions including Ambassador and Permanent Representative of Iran to the United Nations; played a key role in ending the Iran-Iraq War (1987-89)

Recent Allegations and Oberlin's Steps to Determine Their Veracity

- An October 8, 2020, letter describing an Amnesty International (AI) report first alerted the college to the allegations against Professor Mahallati. The author demanded the college terminate Professor Mahallati.
- The college reviewed the AI report and began a series of internal conversations, including with Professor Mahallati, who denied the allegations. Through a law firm, Oberlin engaged professional investigators, who used their expertise to gather and evaluate information available from 1988.

Information that Emerged

- The inquiry did not find proof to corroborate the allegations that Professor Mahallati knew of the atrocities at the time he was asked about them during his tenure at the United Nations.

- In speaking with Professor Mahallati, he denied knowing of the atrocities when they took place in Iran in 1988.
- The review could not identify a pattern of anti-Semitic behavior or ongoing calls for the destruction of Israel.
- Since coming to Oberlin, Professor Mahallati has espoused religious tolerance and the value of seeking peace and understanding between all people.
- His record at Oberlin is exemplary, and includes no instances of anti-Semitic behavior.
- He has stated that he believes in all people's right to exist in peace, including a two-state solution that would allow Israel and the Palestinian people to exist together in peace.

Professor Mahallati's Response

Professor Mahallati and his attorney, Gregory Kehoe of the Greenburg Traurig law firm recently wrote separate letters to Arts & Sciences Dean David Kamitsuka denying the allegations. Here are excerpts from both letters:

From Professor Mahallati:

- The official positions I formally took at the United Nations during the time I served do not portray my personal views.... My personal views are well portrayed in all my published books, articles, and teachings during the last 30 years since I left the U.N. post. It is important to note that my accusers have not found a single statement from me that is remotely consistent with their unfounded accusations.
- I firmly believe that all human beings including Muslims, Jews, Bahais and others must be free and fully respected in choosing their faith and must enjoy religious freedom irrespective of their ethnicity, nationality and other identity factors.
- I firmly believe in the liberties granted by the U.S. Constitution, including freedom of religion, speech, and academic liberties. By the same token, I believe that no people or state should be exempt from academic criticism.
- I fully sympathize with all people who have suffered from human rights abuses in any country based on political, religious, or ethnic orientations. I am against all kinds of capital punishment, because, based on Abrahamic teachings, even in the extreme cases of proven murder, there must be a chance for apology and forgiveness.
- The Bahai community must remember that it was (my father) Ayatollah Mahallati in Shiraz who risked his life to save their lives against mobs in the Sa'di village of Shiraz in the early revolutionary days of 1980s.

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- The MEK organization must also remember that my father was condemned to exile in early 1970s because he protested against the execution of MEK member Mr. Meshkinfam by the Iranian monarchy regime.

From Kehoe:

- The criticisms currently being leveled against Professor Mahallati are completely unjustified and without merit. For more than three decades, Professor Mahallati has consistently dedicated his life to global peacemaking and research, teaching, and writing about religious tolerance, peace, and friendship.
- The secret executions of MEK members in Iran in the summer of 1988 are now well documented. Reports indicate that political and religious dissidents were executed upon the order of so-called secret “Death Commissions.”
- Professor Mahallati, who was in New York, had no knowledge in real time about the covert executions nor did he attempt to conceal the facts once they were revealed.
- The recent criticism leveled at Professor Mahallati, more than three decades after he left his diplomatic post at the UN, assumes that somehow, he had been made aware of these secret executions. There is, however, no factual basis to support this contention.
- As the UN Permanent Representative for Iran, he did not enjoy the traditional diplomatic communication relationship with his country, which was in turmoil. Faced with a complete lack of information about these events, Professor Mahallati attempted to defend his country when the evidence of these executions first surfaced. To resolve the issue diplomatically, Professor Mahallati suggested that a UN fact-finding mission be sent to Iran to examine human rights matters; hardly the methodology to be employed when one wants to subvert the truth.
- He categorically denies any knowledge about the 1988 executions while serving at the UN. There was not a single communication from Tehran to Iran’s UN Mission informing Professor Mahallati of these incidents.
- Professor Mahallati has devoted his life to being a humanitarian and a peacemaker. As the UN Ambassador, he was dedicated to ending the Iran-Iraq war and, as an educator, through his teaching, publications, and political activism over the past three decades, he has worked for the peaceful reconciliation to the world’s conflicts. His courses at Oberlin College and elsewhere promote peace studies and conflict

resolution, and his two books (*Ethics of War and Peace in Iran and Shii Islam*, and *Friendship in Islamic Ethics and World Politics*) are groundbreaking contributions to the field of modern comparative peace theology.

- Because many Iranian leaders uncompromisingly pressed only for a military solution, Mahallati's diplomatic measures brought him under heavy domestic criticism, which remarkably continues until today. Being accused of going beyond his official mandate in pressing for peace, he was dismissed from his position in the spring of 1989 amid his regular four years tenure.

Oberlin's Statement

Oberlin Professor Mohammad Jafar Mahallati was Iran's ambassador to the United Nations from 1987-89. During that same period, the regime ruling Iran committed atrocities against its own people. The College extends its sympathies to all victims who suffered at that time and continue to suffer today.

Recently, allegations have arisen that while he was ambassador, Professor Mahallati was aware of and helped conceal the executions of MEK members in Iran, and that he engaged in anti-Semitic behavior, including calling for the destruction of Israel.

Oberlin deeply empathizes with the pain and suffering caused by the executions in Iran. After becoming aware of the allegations against Professor Mahallati, Oberlin initiated its own process to determine their validity.

After consulting a number of sources, and evaluating the public record, the College could find no evidence to corroborate the allegations against Professor Mahallati, including that he had specific knowledge of the murders taking place in Iran.

Since coming to Oberlin in 2007, Professor Mahallati has developed a reputation as a scholar and a teacher for espousing religious tolerance and seeking peace and understanding between all people. His record at Oberlin includes no instances of the anti-Semitic or anti-Israel behavior of which he has been accused.