

An interview in Arabic with Dr. Hassan Fartousi, Secretary-General of the Iranian National Commission for UNESCO, on the targeted killing of Iranian scientists and academics in recent Israeli attacks – Radio Monte Carlo

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Following the recent assassinations of Iranian scientists by the Zionist regime, Dr. Hassan Fartousi, Secretary-General of the Iranian National Commission for UNESCO, spoke to *Radio Monte Carlo* about the targeted killings of academics and researchers. He cited the martyrdom of at least 32 prominent Iranian scientists in assassinations and bombings, calling these acts a threat to "rationality, science, and peace" and a violation of international law and UNESCO's peace-oriented values.

Fartousi warned that these attacks not only undermine scientific security but also target the psychological well-being of families, children, and students. He described the loss of these scholars as a devastating blow to Iran's—and the world's—scientific community. However, he stressed that such killings have failed to break the resolve of Iranian academics, instead strengthening national unity and their determination to continue scientific progress.

He urged the international community and relevant institutions to take immediate action, uphold conventions protecting scientific freedom, and safeguard scholars against targeted violence to prevent further tragedies.

Host:

In Israel's recent attacks that reached deep into Iranian territory, the bombings were not limited to military sites or nuclear facilities. According to multiple reports, academic and scientific figures—who were not necessarily linked to Iran's nuclear defense program—were also targeted. Among the list of victims and injured are prominent scientists and university professors from various fields, raising serious questions about the nature and scope of these targeted killings. This is not the first time such incidents have occurred; in recent years, there has been a chain of assassinations against Iranian scientists, especially those involved in the nuclear sector. But what is new is the apparent targeting of scientific intellect itself. What lies behind this recurring pattern? And how have these attacks affected Iran's academic research and scientific-cultural atmosphere? To answer these questions, we welcome Dr. Hassan Fartousi, Secretary-General of the Iranian National Commission for UNESCO. Welcome!

Secretary-General:

Greetings and respect to you.

Host:

Dr. Fartousi, today we are discussing the extensive targeting of scientists and university professors. To begin, I'd like to ask: Were these individuals' areas of expertise directly related to Iran's nuclear program?

Secretary-General:

Hello. First, I'd like to take this opportunity to welcome you and your esteemed listeners and to thank you for this initiative, which allows the voices of our scientists, UNESCO, particularly the Iranian National Commission, and the broader scientific community to be heard. As you mentioned, sometimes the link is direct and sometimes indirect. Scientists specializing in fields such as physics, artificial intelligence, and lasers — and possibly experts in other disciplines, whether educated domestically or abroad—have all been targeted.

And I must stress that these operations have not been limited to eliminating nuclear scientists. Specialists in various fields have been targeted, spreading fear among both these individuals and those collaborating with official or academic institutions. It is clear that this is not confined to any one group. All the targeted professors came from reputable universities, especially national institutions like Shahid Beheshti University or Azad University. Some were university president or deans of faculties or heads of academic departments, they were entirely academic.

Recently, I met with one of the officials of these universities. God is my witness, this man spoke with a heavy heart and said: “One of my greatest problems is that I don't know how to revive this physics faculty—without the professors who were martyred”; a faculty that was once one of the strongest scientific and physical centers in Iran and even the region. He was concerned about the fate of the students who had chosen this university as their academic destination, but not only were they themselves assassinated in a single night—whether in their sleep or in their homes—their families were targeted as well.

Host:

If we look at the list of targeted professors, we notice that some of their specializations had no connection to the nuclear program at all. For example, Dr. Marzieh Asgari, an assistant professor of neonatology at the University of Tehran, was targeted. In your view, what is the stance of international law on such operations?

Secretary-General:

Thank you. I want to emphasize not only international law but also UNESCO's core mission, which is the preservation of peace. Today, more than ever, humanity needs that concept—peace. According to UNESCO, Education, culture, science, communication, and even media—your field—are all tools for achieving peace.

And let me be clear: international law provides no justification for targeting scientists, even under the pretext that their work may pose risks in peaceful nuclear projects. Let alone targeting their families and children. One professor who survived an assassination attempt in Tehran moved to the green and beautiful region of Gilan—yet 16 members of his family were martyred in a single night! What connection do these innocent lives have to the nuclear program?

International law — as you know, my own academic and professional field of expertise — even protects military personnel during peacetime, if they are in their homes or not on active duty, in the same way it protects civilians.

Host:

Dr. Fartousi, after this chain of assassinations, do scientists and university professors feel they could be directly targeted? Has a climate of fear overtaken Iran's scientific community?

Secretary-General:

To be honest, the fear is greater among the families than the scientists themselves, because the danger no longer stops at the individual scientist—it extends to their families. Look at Iraq and Syria—even after regime changes, scientists continued to be targeted. So, what's under threat is **science** itself.

UNESCO has clear programs to support the freedom and security of scientists, but unfortunately, those commitments have been grossly violated. Nevertheless, these assassinations have actually strengthened the spirit of resistance and solidarity among the scientists and the public. The real aim of these killings was to sow fear and disrupt scientific activity. But the psychological impact on families, children, and students has been far more severe.

Host:

How have the recent attacks, which targeted more than 14 scientists and professors, affected Iran's scientific and cultural environment?

Secretary-General:

Thank you for this timely question. Please be informed that I have a list in front of me that I have submitted to UNESCO, which includes at least 32 scientists, professors, and students — not just 14 individuals.

Host:

Were these 32 people directly targeted or killed?

Secretary-General:

Both directly and indirectly. The situation has become so complex that it's difficult to say whether the targets were martyred by bombs or other methods like missiles or drones. That's not my area of expertise. For us, it was a week of mourning. These were elite professors—some beyond the full-professor rank, and as you know, reaching that level requires many years of effort and experience. Do you know how many years it takes to cultivate a seasoned, knowledgeable scientist?

The impact of these losses has undoubtedly been negative for Iran's scientific community, because losing even a single scientist is equivalent to losing a great treasure. However, praise be to God, Iran is full of brilliant elites and thinkers who shine not only on a national level but also

regionally—and indeed globally. In my view, these events have only strengthened the national determination of these scientists

Host:

Is there an internal discussion about how to protect scientific elites from such targeted killings?

Secretary-General:

Yes, absolutely. First, these events have fostered solidarity among scientists and led to the drafting of multiple statements to international organizations, including UNESCO. Just last week, I witnessed efforts to establish international treaties for the protection of scientists, because, unfortunately a scientist anywhere in the world can be targeted. It is deeply regrettable to see such blatant and clear double standards in this regard. There's an Arabic proverb that says: "Your actions are allowed, ours are not." Today, if the U.S. or Israel develops missiles, it's considered normal. But if a Syrian, Iraqi, or Iranian joins the scientific field, it's condemned! This is unacceptable. Self-defense is a right of every nation, and this is clearly stated in international law. But should a scientist be targeted simply because they *might* contribute to building a bomb?! Just like they found weapons of mass destruction in Iraq, one day they'll find Iran's bomb too! It's all just a game and a lie.

Host:

Finally, Dr. Fartousi, regarding the universities where these scientists taught—has education come to a halt? Are there replacements? Could you briefly explain?

Secretary-General:

Fortunately, we are currently in the summer holidays, although this incident led to the early closure of universities. The main university targeted was Shahid Beheshti University. Coincidentally, my cousin's daughter — a brilliant physics student — studies there. Her family lives in Ahvaz, while she resides in the university dormitory in Tehran. Her family spoke with me and expressed deep concern. Naturally, this situation has caused significant anxiety among families — even more so than among the students and professors themselves. Of course, it has also had negative effects on the faculty members, but God willing, life will go on, and so will the pursuit of knowledge.

Yes, there have been negative consequences. But, God willing, life will go on—and so will science.

Host:

Dr. Hassan Fartousi, Secretary-General of the Iranian National Commission for UNESCO, thank you for your time and for accepting our invitation.