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To the girl who never came home

Seven-year-old Raha Zarei was among the children killed in the U.S.-Israeli missile attack on Shajareh Tayyebeh School in Minab, southern Iran on February 28. On World Children's Day, November 20, her mother, Fariba Bastam, has written an open letter to the conscience of the world, remembering her daughter and the dreams she never had the chance to fulfill. In her letter, Bastam calls on the international community to remember the children killed in Minab and demand justice and accountability. Below is her letter:

A letter from Fariba Bastam, Raha's mother, to the conscience of the world

Today, the world celebrates children: their little smiles, paint-stained hands, colorful schoolbags and dreams that deserve the chance to come true.
But I am a mother from Minab. Today, instead of kissing my daughter's forehead, I am left with the memories of her final days. My share of this day is not the sound of a child's laughter, but the heavy silence left by a little girl who never came home.
My daughter's name was Raha. She was seven years old, a little girl with a pink backpack and a green dress who set off for school each morning with the hope of learning. She dreamed of becoming a dentist. She wanted to treat the toothaches of children in disadvantaged communities and bring smiles back to their little faces. Who could have imagined that a girl whose dream was to ease the pain of others would herself fall victim to a violence for which there is no cure?
Raha was killed in the deadly U.S.-Israeli attack on Shajareh Tayyebeh School in Minab, southern Iran on February 28 alongside children who had barely begun to learn the alphabet of life.
That day, it was not only the small bodies of children that were buried beneath the rubble. Their schoolbooks, unfinished drawings, unfulfilled dreams and a future that could have made the world a more beautiful place were buried too.
I am a mother. And to be a mother is to see a future in your child's eyes until your very last breath. But how can I speak of the future when my daughter's future was taken from her?
Today, on November 20, the world speaks of children's rights: the right to life, safety, education and the opportunity to grow. But I ask: How much protection can these rights offer against missiles? What can conventions designed to protect children do when schools are reduced to rubble? And where is global justice when school desks stand as silent witnesses to the loss of young lives instead of being filled with students?
Did the children of Minab have as much right to life as children anywhere else in the world? Was an Iranian girl's dream of becoming a dentist worth less than the dream of a child in another part of this planet?
I am not asking the world for pity. I am demanding justice. I am demanding an impartial account of the truth and accountability from those responsible for this tragedy. No power should be so great that the deaths of children go unanswered.
To the United Nations, UNICEF, human rights organizations and all free-thinking people around the world, I say: Do not mark World Children's Day without hearing the voices of Minab's children. Do not speak of children's rights while remaining silent when a child is killed. Do not allow these children's names to be lost amid the noise of politics and war.
My dear Raha,
Today is your day. I should have been buying you balloons, fixing your hair and asking you about your dreams. You were supposed to grow up, wear a white coat and treat the pain of other children. But now all I have is the doctor's coat you never got to wear, the pink backpack you will never carry again and a dream that was taken from you when you were just seven.
My daughter, perhaps I could not bring you home from the skies of war, but I will not let your name disappear into the silence of the world.
I will be your voice until the day the world understands that no cause, no border, no political agenda and no power is worth more than a child's life.
Childhood knows no borders. A mother's tears are a language shared by all humanity.
In the name of life, in memory of Raha and all the children of Minab.

Fariba Bastam
Mother of Raha Zarei

Tehran book fair to return in December after war disruption

Arts & Culture Desk



Visitors browse books at the 35th Tehran International Book Fair in Tehran, Iran, in May 2024.
FATEMEH AMUZAD/MEHR NEWS AGENCY

Iran's 37th Tehran International Book Fair will open on December 23, seven months later than its usual spring schedule, after wartime conditions forced organizers to cancel the in-person event in May and move it online.
The fair, one of Iran's biggest cultural events, is usually held in May in Tehran. Organizers opted for a virtual format this year, following the 40-day war waged by the United States and Israel against Iran in late February.
Mohsen Javadi, the fair's head and deputy culture minister, said on Wednesday that the event would begin on December 23, coinciding with the birth anniversary of Imam Ali (PBUH). The registration call for publishers is expected to be issued in the coming days, he said.
Officials later considered several dates for an in-person event, including November and December. In October, the policy council ruled out holding it during Iran's Book Week, saying overlapping events could undermine the quality and promotion of both programs.
It initially moved the fair to December, before organizers announced the December 23 opening date.
Javadi called the fair "the country's most important cultural event," saying it helped create social vitality and supported the publishing cycle.
"Staging an event of this scale required cooperation beyond the Culture Ministry and the Iran Book and Literature House, and urged publishers and other institutions to help ensure a high-quality event," he added.
Details on the venue, duration and international program have not yet been announced.

Japanese children invited to send peace drawings to Minab students



Arts & Culture Desk

A cultural campaign in Japan is inviting children to draw pictures carrying messages of peace and friendship for Iranian students, in memory of pupils killed at a school in Minab, southern Iran.
The Shajareh Tayyebeh school in Minab was hit by a US missile strike on February 28, the first day of the US-Israeli war against Iran, killing 168 people, most of them children.
The "Peace Picture Letter" campaign was launched by Iran's cultural office in Japan to mark World Children's Day on November 20. It invites Japanese children aged 3 to 15 to create drawings on the theme of "My Dear Peace" and send them as messages to an Iranian friend.
Participants can submit their artwork through four channels: a dedicated website, the LINE messaging app, email and postal mail. The deadline for entries is December 14, 2026.
According to the organizers, the original drawings will be collected and transferred to the Melal Cultural Center before being donated to the school in Minab.
Small gifts from Iran will also be presented to selected participants.
The campaign aims to build connections between Japanese and Iranian children and offer a way for young participants to express solidarity with the students in Minab through art.
Organizers are publicizing the initiative through the cultural office's website, its events section, mobile application and social media accounts on Instagram, X and LINE.
The campaign reflects an effort to use children's artwork as a shared language across national borders, bringing messages of friendship and empathy to students affected by the loss of their classmates.

UNESCO approves sustainable urban planning chair outside Tehran

Social Desk

UNESCO has approved a chair in urban planning and sustainable development at Semnan University in east of Tehran.
According to Iran's National Commission for UNESCO, it is the first UNESCO chair in the natural sciences to be established outside Tehran.
The chair will advance research into sustainable urban development and develop integrated models for designing and planning human settlements.
Its priorities include aligning urban planning research with the UN Sustainable Development Goals, promoting responsible land use and encouraging interdisciplinary approaches to settlement design.
It will also seek to strengthen local identity, reduce the environmental impact of human settlements and foster cooperation among universities, policymakers and local communities.
The chair's responsibilities include producing and publishing open-access educational materials and developing policy tools and solutions to promote sustainable settlement patterns.
Omid Rezaeifar, a faculty member at Semnan University, will lead the initiative.
The new chair is expected to expand the university's international academic cooperation in urban planning and sustainable development and strengthen links between academic research and local community needs.
Semnan University, located in northeastern Iran, began operating in 1974 as the Semnan Higher School of Technology. It was upgraded to university status in 1993.
The university is a major higher education and research institution in Semnan province. It has five academic campuses, around 400 faculty members, 14,000 students and nearly 300 fields of study, and is active in education, research and technology.



An undated file photo shows Semnan University in northeastern Iran
semnan.ac.ir