

The Interest Organization of Doctoral Candidates at NTNU (DION) and the Association of Doctoral Organizations of Norway (SiN) support the Iranian PhD candidates at NTNU

Background

In May this year, three Iranian PhD candidates at NTNU were denied temporary work permits in Norway, after working at the university on an early work start visa for up to seven months. The candidates are now forced to leave Norway and quit their positions at NTNU. During the last year, at least five other PhD candidates at NTNU were denied work permits after working on their projects a similarly long time.

The Norwegian Directorate of Immigration (UDI) has rejected the applications for temporary work permit based on the fear of illegal transfer of sensitive information and technology. UDI refers to the immigration regulations (*Utlendingsforskriften §6-35*) and the EU and UN sanctions against Iran.

The sanctions against Iran apply to technology that can be used to develop weapons. None of the candidates have been working directly on weapons technology, but on projects related to for example wind power and CO₂ emissions reduction in industry.

We support the Iranian PhD candidates

We represent the interest organization for PhD candidates at NTNU (DION), and the national PhD candidate association SiN. We are very concerned with how the visa processes of the Iranian PhD candidates have been handled.

A PhD candidate position at a Norwegian university is a three or four year period of intensive work. We find it troubling that the candidates have been allowed to work for up to seven months – a significant part of this period – before they are forced to leave their positions and Norway. In at least two of the cases, the candidates had turned down positions at other universities in favor of the ones at NTNU. For international candidates the PhD project is also a time spent in a foreign country, far away from the support of family and friends.

To our knowledge, the Iranian candidates are not informed about what it is in their background or current research that has caused UDI to reject their visa applications. PhD candidates who are employed by NTNU have all gone through a rigorous selection procedure. The defense of a PhD thesis at Norwegian universities is a public event, and the thesis itself is made publicly available. During the work with the thesis, the PhD candidate is supervised by experienced researchers at the university. In a majority of cases the candidates work in close collaboration with others in a research group or at their departments.

The way the cases of the Iranian PhD candidates are handled is very damaging to the individual candidates as well as to the university. It is also negative for the reputation of Norway as a nation of openness and knowledge. We are pleased that NTNU's Rector Gunnar Bovim has taken action in support of the PhD candidates and asked UDI for an explanation of the long handling times (Rector's blog 20/5/2014ⁱ). NTNU has also sent an appeal of the cases to UDIⁱⁱ.

We want to show our support for the PhD candidates at NTNU, who are now in a very difficult position. We urge UDI to show transparency in the handling of the cases, and to listen to the

opinions of the scientific staff at the university. We also strongly support the Rector's plea for shorter visa approval handling times and NTNU's appeal of the visa rejections.

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ⁱ <http://www.ntnu.no/blogger/rektoratet/2014/05/vi-kan-tape-kampen-om-de-beste-hodene/>

ⁱⁱ <http://www.universitetsavisa.no/politikk/article22411.ece>