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**Human rights situations that require the Council's attention**

### **Situation of human rights in the Islamic Republic of Iran, the nationwide protests and their aftermath**

#### **Report of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Islamic Republic of Iran, Mai Sato\***

##### *Summary*

In the present report, submitted pursuant to Human Rights Council resolution 58/21, the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Islamic Republic of Iran, Mai Sato, examines the rights to freedom of expression, peaceful assembly and association in the Islamic Republic of Iran, and the human rights impact of the nationwide protests that began on 28 December 2025.

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\* The present report was submitted to the conference services for processing after the deadline so as to include the most recent information.



## I. Introduction

1. The present report covers the human rights situation in the Islamic Republic of Iran between January 2025 and February 2026. It builds on the Special Rapporteur's previous report, which covered the period from January to July 2025.<sup>1</sup> In the report, she addresses the human rights impact of the nationwide protests that started on 28 December 2025, as well as human rights developments in the country not directly linked to the protests.

2. Since her previous report to the Human Rights Council, the Special Rapporteur, in most cases jointly with other thematic mandate holders, transmitted 25 communications,<sup>2</sup> received 19 responses<sup>3</sup> and issued individually or jointly 23 press releases.<sup>4</sup>

3. She held meetings with representatives of the Permanent Mission of the Islamic Republic of Iran to the United Nations Office and other international organizations in Geneva and of the Permanent Mission of the Islamic Republic of Iran to the United Nations (in New York). She also received written submissions from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the High Council for Human Rights of the Islamic Republic of Iran. The Special Rapporteur reiterates her readiness to receive an invitation to conduct a country visit to the Islamic Republic of Iran. The seriousness of the allegations documented in the present report further underscores the need for independent access and first-hand assessment.

4. The Special Rapporteur is grateful to the numerous individuals and civil society organizations for their input. The number of submissions received was significantly higher than for any of the previous reports since she assumed her mandate in August 2024, reflecting the breadth and depth of concern surrounding the situation in the country. In addition to submissions from civil society organizations, she received contributions from families who had lost loved ones and from those whose family members remained in detention or were missing. Submissions came from individuals inside the country, members of the Iranian diaspora and non-Iranians alike – underscoring the depth of global concern over the authorities' response to the nationwide protests and their aftermath. The courage of those who came forward, often at great personal risk, and the pain conveyed in their accounts left a profound impression on the Special Rapporteur.

5. To protect the identity of individuals who shared information, the Special Rapporteur has chosen not to reference them as sources in the present report, which accounts for the lack of citations in certain sections. Consistent with her established practice, the Special Rapporteur continues to attribute information received from organizations and the Iranian authorities, both to acknowledge their contributions and in the interest of transparency.

6. In drafting the report, the Special Rapporteur received many names of individuals who were killed, detained or missing, submitted by families and civil society organizations. Obtaining consent to report such testimonies has, however, been a considerable challenge. Fear of reprisals for engaging with the Special Rapporteur appears more widespread than prior to the nationwide protests. The allegations received in January and February 2026 came not only from established activists or civil society organizations, but also from individuals with no prior history of activism or public dissent. The protests were, in this sense, genuinely nationwide: representing a cross section of Iranian society, united by a desire for a different future. The difficulty in obtaining consent should not therefore be interpreted as absence of evidence; rather, it speaks to the scale of what occurred. Many of those who engaged with the Special Rapporteur for the first time had not before felt the weight of the State's scrutiny and now find themselves living under the climate of fear that pervades the country.

7. Since the finalization of the report, the situation in the Islamic Republic of Iran has deteriorated further, following military strikes launched by Israel and the United States of America against the Islamic Republic of Iran. The Special Rapporteur has condemned these attacks as unlawful under the Charter of the United Nations, on the grounds that they violated

<sup>1</sup> [A/80/349](#).

<sup>2</sup> One communication was sent to Israel and one to the United States of America.

<sup>3</sup> All communications mentioned in this report are available from <https://spcommreports.ohchr.org/Tmsearch/TMDocuments>.

<sup>4</sup> Press releases available from <https://tinyurl.com/ynvc6uer>.

the principles of sovereign equality and the prohibition on the use of force.<sup>5</sup> She has also expressed serious concern over the retaliatory strikes by the Islamic Republic of Iran across the broader region. The Special Rapporteur calls upon all parties to immediately cease hostilities and resume diplomatic dialogue. The human cost is already being felt, with many civilian lives lost. Among the incidents reported, the most devastating involved a strike on a primary school in Minab, Hormozgan Province, carried out during the school day. Attacks on medical facilities have also been documented. The deliberate or indiscriminate targeting of civilians, educational institutions and hospitals constitute grave violations of international humanitarian law and human rights law. The Iranian authorities have placed a telecommunications shutdown, with Internet connectivity reportedly collapsing to approximately 1 per cent of normal levels. Reports indicate that conditions inside prisons have become critical, with detainees facing acute shortages of food and medical care and little prospect of outside scrutiny. The Special Rapporteur stresses that unlawful military intervention must not be mistaken for a solution to the human rights situation in the Islamic Republic of Iran. Any path forward must be grounded in the rule of law, the will of the Iranian people and full accountability for the violations documented in the present report.

## II. Nationwide protests

### A. Background: freedom of expression, peaceful assembly and association

8. The protection of protesters lies at the intersection of several fundamental rights: freedom of expression, of peaceful assembly and of association.<sup>6</sup> The Human Rights Council, in its resolution 44/20, stressed that:

everyone, including persons espousing minority or dissenting views or beliefs, must be able to express their grievances or aspirations in a peaceful manner, including through public protests, without fear of reprisal or of being intimidated, harassed, injured, sexually assaulted, beaten, arbitrarily arrested or detained, tortured, killed or subjected to enforced disappearance, or subjected to abusive criminal or civil proceedings.

The Human Rights Committee, in its general comment No. 37 (2020), further recognised a presumption in favour of considering assemblies to be peaceful,<sup>7</sup> and that any prior notification procedure must facilitate, rather than restrict, the exercise of the right to peaceful assembly and association,<sup>8</sup> including through spontaneous assemblies.<sup>9</sup>

9. The laws and practice of the Islamic Republic of Iran fall short of the standards required by those provisions. Its Constitution qualifies the right to organize unarmed gatherings by requiring that they not contravene the “foundations of Islam”.<sup>10</sup> The Law on the Activities of Political Parties and Groups imposes a prior authorization system – rather than a notification procedure – under which demonstrations require prior permission,<sup>11</sup> and only officially licensed political parties or registered organizations may apply.<sup>12</sup> The Islamic Penal Code criminalizes the establishment, or membership, of any group of more than two persons deemed to be aiming to disrupt national security, provisions that have been applied very broadly.<sup>13</sup> The 2025 Espionage Law criminalizes individuals for holding, or participating in, unauthorized marches and gatherings during wartime, punishable by 5 to

<sup>5</sup> See [www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2026/02/iran-un-experts-demand-transparency-and-accountability-following-nationwide](http://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2026/02/iran-un-experts-demand-transparency-and-accountability-following-nationwide).

<sup>6</sup> International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, arts. 19, 21 and 22.

<sup>7</sup> Human Rights Committee, general comment No. 37 (2020) on the right of peaceful assembly, para. 17.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., paras. 70–73.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., paras. 17 and 72.

<sup>10</sup> Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran, art. 27. See Human Rights Committee, general comment No. 37 (2020), para. 46.

<sup>11</sup> Law on the Activities of Political Parties and Groups, art. 11.

<sup>12</sup> Islamic Penal Code, art. 13.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., arts. 498 and 499.

10 years' imprisonment.<sup>14</sup> The Special Rapporteur underscores that the domestic legal framework renders almost all forms of unsanctioned collective action unlawful.

10. Despite this restrictive framework, however, the Islamic Republic of Iran has a rich history of mass movements. For over four decades, Iranians have taken to the streets to demand change – from the women who marched in Tehran against the mandatory veil as early as 1979, to the student protests in 1999, the Green Movement in 2009, the economic protests in 2019 and the Woman, Life, Freedom movement in 2022. Beyond those landmark protests, demonstrations of varying sizes have regularly occurred across the country. The persistence of these movements is striking, given that permit applications are routinely ignored or denied, independent unions are refused registration and organizers have been pre-emptively arrested before gatherings can take place.<sup>15</sup>

11. The State has consistently responded to such dissent with force, operating under a domestic legal framework that facilitates rather than constrains its use. The Law on the Use of Weapons by Armed Forces in Necessary Cases permits law enforcement officers to use force to quell “illegal demonstrations” when other means have been used to no effect and a warning and ultimatum have been given.<sup>16</sup> It does not limit the use of lethal force to situations involving an imminent threat to life or of serious injury and does not require that force be proportionate – safeguards demanded by international standards.<sup>17</sup> In practice, lethal force has been a consistent feature of the State's response to protests for decades.<sup>18</sup> During the 2022 protests, for example, disproportionate lethal force by security forces included use of assault rifles and shotguns loaded with metal pellets aimed at the vital body parts of protesters, resulting in at least 551 deaths and extensive permanent injuries.<sup>19</sup>

12. Crackdowns do not end when protests subside. Forced confessions are often broadcast on State television,<sup>20</sup> and lawyers who defend protesters face harassment, imprisonment and disbarment.<sup>21</sup> Artists, writers and journalists who use creative expression as a form of resistance, or who support protesters, face criminal punishments ranging from execution to mandatory attendance of “behavioural management classes”.<sup>22</sup> Beyond the sphere of criminal law, individuals may be banned from studying, dismissed from employment, denied business permits and subjected to ongoing surveillance and open-ended judicial proceedings designed to maintain a continued state of intimidation.

13. On 28 December 2025, severe economic hardship ignited demonstrations that rapidly spread into a nationwide movement, spanning all 31 provinces, with people from diverse ethnic, religious and socioeconomic backgrounds, including children, demanding fundamental change in governance.<sup>23</sup> What distinguishes these nationwide protests is not the nature of the State's response, but the scale of both the mobilization and the repression it has provoked – representing some of the most severe violence deployed against protesters in recent history.

<sup>14</sup> The Act of Confronting Hostile Actions of the Zionist Regime against Peace and Security, art. 4.

<sup>15</sup> Submission by Abdorrahman Boroumand Center for Human Rights in Iran.

<sup>16</sup> Law on the Use of Weapons by Armed Forces in Necessary Cases, art. 4.

<sup>17</sup> International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, art. 6; Human Rights Committee, general comment No. 36 (2018) on the right to life, para. 12; Human Rights Committee, general comment No. 37 (2020), paras. 78–90; and Basic Principles on the Use of Force and Firearms by Law Enforcement Officials.

<sup>18</sup> See communications IRN 2/2015, IRN 16/2019, IRN 17/2019, IRN 2/2020, IRN 9/2021, IRN 32/2021, IRN 37/2021, IRN 11/2022, IRN 14/2022, IRN 23/2022, IRN 30/2022 and IRN 11/2025. See also the online mapping tool of the Abdorrahman Boroumand Center for Human Rights in Iran on the State's use of lethal force against protesters, available from [www.iranrights.org/projects/protestmap/en/?intro=open](http://www.iranrights.org/projects/protestmap/en/?intro=open).

<sup>19</sup> [A/HRC/55/67](#), paras. 22–32.

<sup>20</sup> See communication IRN 23/2022.

<sup>21</sup> See communications IRN 11/2025 and IRN 30/2022.

<sup>22</sup> E.g. the case of Toomaj Salehi, see [A/HRC/WGAD/2024/53](#) and communications IRN 26/2022, IRN 22/2023 and IRN 6/2023.

<sup>23</sup> See communication IRN 1/2026.

## B. Digital space

14. Prior to the nationwide protests, digital space in the Islamic Republic of Iran was already subject to extensive restrictions. Numerous international platforms, including major social media and messaging applications, had been blocked or filtered. Legislative and policy frameworks, including successive iterations of “user protection” and “cyberspace regulatory” plans, had progressively expanded the authority of security bodies over Internet governance, embedding filtering, surveillance and control mechanisms within communications infrastructure.<sup>24</sup> Those measures significantly narrowed the space for online expression, civic mobilization and independent journalism, raising serious concerns regarding freedom of expression, access to information and the securitization of digital governance.

15. Central to this architecture is the National Information Network, a State-managed domestic digital infrastructure developed progressively since the early 2010s.<sup>25</sup> The Network is designed to operate independently of the global Internet, enabling authorities to restrict or sever access to international networks while maintaining domestic services and State-approved platforms. Mandatory SIM registration, platform licensing requirements and identity-linked access models further facilitate traffic inspection and user identification.

16. During the 2019 economic protests, a near total telecommunications shutdown enabled a crackdown in which hundreds were killed. During the military escalation of June 2025, a nationwide Internet shutdown was again imposed.<sup>26</sup> The judiciary sent text messages warning citizens that interactions with social media channels deemed to be linked to Israel could be prosecuted, and authorities in several cities coerced public sector employees, including healthcare workers, into installing State-linked surveillance applications on personal devices.<sup>27</sup>

17. Reports also describe the deployment of multiband jamming systems on elevated structures in urban areas, capable of disrupting satellite communications, Global Positioning System and user-level connectivity across wide geographical areas. The authorities retain broad powers to monitor digital traffic, intercept communications and access user data through centralized gateways and platform-level controls. Intelligence agencies are reported to have conducted bulk harvesting of follower lists and account activity data from social media platforms.<sup>28</sup>

18. Those measures are situated within a legislative framework that risks entrenching them further. The bill on the protection and adjudication of violations in the field of pervasive audiovisual media in cyberspace (user protection bill II), re-submitted to the Islamic Consultative Assembly in November 2025, is the latest iteration of initiatives introduced in 2018 and revised in 2022, which has faced significant public opposition. If passed, the bill would centralize control over Internet access under the Supreme National Security Council, institutionalize powers to disconnect or selectively restrict connectivity, prioritize the National Information Network over the international Internet and criminalize the use of tools such as virtual private networks.<sup>29</sup>

19. On 8 January 2026, authorities imposed a near total shutdown of telecommunications services nationwide.<sup>30</sup> Both international connectivity and significant elements of domestic communications were disrupted. The shutdown significantly disrupted protest coordination and access to emergency services, financial transactions and essential communications, leaving many families unable to determine the fate or whereabouts of detained or injured

<sup>24</sup> Submissions by ASL19, Iran Open Data and Holistic Resilience. See also <https://freedomhouse.org/country/iran/freedom-net/2024>.

<sup>25</sup> Submission by Holistic Resilience.

<sup>26</sup> A/80/349 and A/80/484.

<sup>27</sup> A/80/349, para. 42.

<sup>28</sup> Submission by Holistic Resilience.

<sup>29</sup> Submission by ASL19.

<sup>30</sup> Submissions by Article 19, ASL19, Iran Open Data and Holistic Resilience.

relatives for days. The imposition of telecommunications shutdowns, in parallel with the use of force, as described below, creates conditions that shield human rights violations from scrutiny.

20. The near total shutdown lasted approximately three weeks, after which a phased and partial restoration began. Traffic levels have reportedly remained significantly below pre-shutdown levels. Access has been re-established through a reconfigured model whereby connectivity to the global Internet is blocked and only selected platforms and services are permitted. Reports further describe tiered or identity-linked access arrangements in certain institutional settings, where connectivity to international services is granted on a conditional basis subject to registration or security approval. This model represents a structural shift, from episodic shutdowns towards a system of managed and conditional connectivity, in which access to the global Internet is treated not as a general public service but as a controlled and revocable privilege.

21. The shutdown has had significant economic repercussions, as acknowledged by Iranian officials.<sup>31</sup> Small and medium-sized enterprises reliant on online platforms for marketing and sales reported revenue losses of up to 80 to 90 per cent. Millions of workers connected to the digital economy were directly or indirectly affected, with disruptions to e-commerce, digital payments and logistics, compounding economic activity already strained by inflation and currency devaluation.

22. The pattern documented above reflects a deliberate endeavour to deploy communications infrastructure as an instrument of repression. The scale and duration of the January 2026 shutdown, the architecture of the National Information Network, the harvesting of user data and the legislative trajectory represented by user protection bill II point to a policy of treating access to information not as a right but as a privilege to be revoked at will. The human cost – measured in families unable to locate loved ones, injuries untreated, livelihoods destroyed and violations concealed – underscores the Special Rapporteur's concerns about the State's failure to comply with its obligations to uphold the rights to freedom of expression, access to information and privacy.

### C. Use of force and arrests

23. In 2025, the Special Rapporteur continued to receive submissions concerning the use of unlawful lethal force by authorities against protesters, detainees,<sup>32</sup> Kurdish *kolbars* (cross-border couriers) and Balochi *sukhtbars* (fuel porters)<sup>33</sup> and the use of the death penalty (see sect. III.A.1 below). This pattern is not new: previous mandate holders have long reported it, and it is against this backdrop that the State's response to the nationwide protests must be understood.

24. The authorities' use of lethal force has been reported since the beginning of the nationwide protests but has intensified significantly from 8 January 2026, coinciding with the shutdown of telecommunications. The Special Rapporteur has received numerous submissions with visual material and witness accounts documenting security forces' use of machine guns mounted on vehicles, rifles fired from elevated positions, shotguns, handguns, pellet-firing weapons, bladed weapons, batons, as well as tear gas and lasers. The evidence of gunshots directed at vital areas – the head and the torso – and of shots fired at unarmed crowds from rooftops provides compelling evidence of the use of excessive lethal force against protesters.

25. Extensive destruction of property, including hospitals, ambulances, banks, public vehicles and bridges, has been reported, which the State has attributed to terrorists and violent protesters.<sup>34</sup> However, this does not appear to be the complete picture. For example,

<sup>31</sup> Submission by Iran Open Data. See also [www.mehrnews.com/news/6732293/](http://www.mehrnews.com/news/6732293/) - خسارت-روزانه-۵-هزار-میلیارد-نومانی-قطعی-اینترنت-به-اقتصاد-کشور.

<sup>32</sup> See communication IRN 19/2025.

<sup>33</sup> Submissions by Balochistan Human Rights Group, Hana Human Rights Organization, Kurdistan Human Rights Network Kurdistan Human Rights Association-Geneva and Volunteer Activists.

<sup>34</sup> See [www.mashreghnews.ir/news/1778621/](http://www.mashreghnews.ir/news/1778621/) - ۲۱-شهر-DB%۰۰% خسارت-حداقل-۱۰٪ - هزار-میلیاردی-پهلوی-به-۲۱-شهر.

testimonies from Rasht describe the night of 8 January 2026, when a large crowd moved peacefully towards the city centre and security forces began shooting at protesters. Many sought shelter inside the Rasht Bazaar, which then caught fire; as they were forced out by the flames, they were shot at by armed forces. Witnesses observed uniformed motorcycle security officers armed with shotguns and Basij members in plain clothes and wearing face masks. Those circumstances suggest that the State's narrative is partial and underscore the need for further independent investigation.

26. There are also significant disparities in the reports of casualty numbers during and in the aftermath of the nationwide protests. According to a statement of 22 January by the National Security Council, 3,117 people were killed. Of them, the State describes 2,427 as "innocent civilians and defenders of public order and security" allegedly killed by "terrorists" and the remaining 690 as "terrorists". Figures submitted to the Special Rapporteur from non-State sources run into the tens of thousands, including reports from health professionals and information from families who visited overwhelmed morgues across various cities. A conservative estimate from 15 February records 7,015 confirmed deaths (at least 6,508 protesters, including 226 minors; 214 security force members; and others), with a further 11,744 deaths under review.<sup>35</sup> Even that conservative estimate is more than double the figures published by the State. The discrepancy between official and grass-roots figures only deepens the anguish of families still searching for their loved ones. The Special Rapporteur stresses that even a single death resulting from the exercise of the right to peaceful protest is one too many.

27. One such case brought to the Special Rapporteur's attention is that of Sahand Naseri, who was 15 years old when he was fatally shot in the chest while participating in the protests in Karaj. Before returning to school, he had written down his wishes – the words of a boy full of hope about his future:

"Today, as we are on the last day of summer, I feel a lot of excitement and enthusiasm for tomorrow, because it is the first day of school. In my new school, my field of study is electronics and related to electricity. I hope a bright future is waiting both for me and for my family."

Sahand's words speak to the aspirations shared by so many Iranians who took to the streets – aspirations that the State's narrative of terrorism and criminality fails to account for and which must be at the centre of any honest reckoning with the events of the nationwide protests.

28. There are many respects in which the Special Rapporteur is unable to reconcile the State's narrative with the evidence that she has received. As discussed above, the evidence raises serious concerns about the State's use of excessive force. Furthermore, the telecommunications shutdown that started on 8 January 2026 is itself instructive. Communications were severed on that day, as reported violence intensified, obstructing real-time documentation and verification; meanwhile, street checks of individuals' mobile phones for protest-related content were being carried out. Reports of what are widely regarded as forced confessions, broadcast by State media, raise more questions about the integrity of the State's account. Also of concern is the treatment of the dead. Submissions from various provinces report families being required to pay the equivalent of US\$5,000–\$7,000 to retrieve bodies, which appears to have been used as leverage to pressure families into signing documents characterizing their deceased family as Basij members.

29. Similar characterizations (labelling protesters as terrorists, rioters or mercenaries) were also deployed during the 2022 protests. In recent weeks, Baha'is have faced increased detention and scapegoating in connection with the protests, which echoes the State's response during the military escalation of 2025.<sup>36</sup>

30. The total number of current detainees connected to the nationwide protests remains unknown, leaving families with no certainty about whether their loved ones are alive and, if so, where they are being held. Some have received notice of a family member's death without

<sup>35</sup> Human rights activists news agency (see [www.en-hrana.org/day-50-of-the-protests-intensification-of-security-prosecutions-and-uncertainty-regarding-the-status-of-detainees/](http://www.en-hrana.org/day-50-of-the-protests-intensification-of-security-prosecutions-and-uncertainty-regarding-the-status-of-detainees/)).

<sup>36</sup> Submission by Baha'i International Community.

any prior acknowledgement that the individual was even in custody. In the absence of transparency, a deeply troubling picture begins to take shape, with unverified reports of secret burials, deaths in custody and secret executions emerging.

31. On 16 January 2026, Iranian domestic media, citing security officials, reported approximately 3,000 arrests.<sup>37</sup> Data compiled by civil society organizations indicate that total arrests may run into the tens of thousands, with arrestees including protesters, medical professionals, children, students, artists, writers, lawyers, journalists and human rights defenders. By mid-February, the judiciary's spokesperson confirmed that over 10,500 people had been referred for prosecution and nearly 9,000 indicted.<sup>38</sup> Most worryingly, at least 30 individuals, including two children 17 years of age, are reportedly facing the death penalty in connection with the nationwide protests, following expedited judicial proceedings. The proceedings relied on broadcasted confessions widely regarded as forced, raising serious concerns about compliance with international fair trial standards.<sup>39</sup>

32. The impact of the nationwide protests on children merits specific consideration. At least 216 children were reportedly killed by security forces, with families subsequently banned from publicly mentioning their names and forced to carry out secret burials.<sup>40</sup> Children have also reportedly been arbitrarily detained, while many children have witnessed the arrest of, and violence against, their parents or other family members.<sup>41</sup> Children have also witnessed violence on the streets more generally. Some children have had no contact with parents held in detention, and most are without access to psychological support.<sup>42</sup>

#### D. Medical neutrality

33. The Special Rapporteur has received numerous submissions documenting a pattern of violations of medical neutrality during the nationwide protests.<sup>43</sup> The evidence indicates that hospitals and medical facilities – spaces that, under international humanitarian and human rights law, must be protected as sanctuaries for the wounded and the sick – were instead converted into instruments of State repression, surveillance and control. The principle of medical neutrality – that medical services must not be interfered with, that the wounded and sick are to receive care without discrimination and that healthcare personnel must not be punished for performing their professional duties – is among the most firmly established norms of both international humanitarian and human rights law.<sup>44</sup> The submissions paint a deeply disturbing picture of each of those aspects of the principle being repeatedly violated.

<sup>37</sup> No comprehensive official figures have since been released.

<sup>38</sup> See [www.hrw.org/news/2026/02/24/iran-tsunami-of-arbitrary-arrests-enforced-disappearances](https://www.hrw.org/news/2026/02/24/iran-tsunami-of-arbitrary-arrests-enforced-disappearances).

<sup>39</sup> See [www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2026/02/iran-children-among-30-people-at-risk-of-the-death-penalty-amid-expedited-grossly-unfair-trials-connected-to-uprising/](https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2026/02/iran-children-among-30-people-at-risk-of-the-death-penalty-amid-expedited-grossly-unfair-trials-connected-to-uprising/).

<sup>40</sup> Submission by Center for Human Rights in Iran. See also <https://iranhumanrights.org/2026/02/over-200-schoolchildren-killed-by-security-forces-in-iran-theyve-effectively-massacred-an-entire-school/>.

<sup>41</sup> Joint submission by Children of Imprisoned Parents International and International Coalition for Children with Incarcerated Parents.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

<sup>43</sup> Joint submission by the International Independent Physicians and Healthcare Providers Association, Jurists' Council for a Democratic Iran, Simorgh Network, Aktion für Menschenrechte, Center for Mind–Body Medicine, Iran Human Rights Documentation Center and Canadian Iranian Doctors for Human Rights. Additional submissions by All Human Rights for All in Iran, Medical Staff for Human Rights Austria, Association for Human Rights of Azerbaijanis in Iran, Kurdistan Human Rights Network, Center for Human Rights in Iran, Iran Human Rights and submissions by individuals.

<sup>44</sup> Geneva Conventions of 12 August 1949, common art. 3; Protocol Additional to the Geneva Conventions of 12 August 1949, and relating to the Protection of Victims of International Armed Conflicts, arts. 12–16; and Protocol Additional to the Geneva Conventions of 12 August 1949, and relating to the Protection of Victims of Non-International Armed Conflicts arts. 9–11); International Committee of the Red Cross, Database of Customary International Humanitarian Law, Rules of Customary International Humanitarian Law, rules 25, 26 and 28. Available from <https://ihl-databases.icrc.org/en/customary-ihl/v1>. International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, art. 12; and Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, general comment No. 14 (2000) on the right to the highest attainable standard of health, para. 34.

34. Submissions document attacks on hospitals between 4 and 14 January 2026 across the provinces of Alborz, Ardabil, East Azerbaijan, West Azerbaijan, Fars, Golestan, Ilam, Isfahan, Kerman, Kermanshah, Khorasan, Lorestan, Qazvin and Tehran, each involving forced entry into wards, the physical assault of medical professionals and the arrest of wounded protesters who, as patients within medical facilities, were entitled to protection. The Special Rapporteur notes that, based on various published accounts, such incidents very likely occurred across all provinces and were not limited to those listed here, as the list only reflects formal submissions. One submission described agents of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps agents beating emergency physicians in front of patients and nurses before detaining them. Another described medical professionals being beaten for refusing to cooperate with the arrest of patients and security forces firing tear gas inside hospital facilities. Security forces reportedly carried out searches room by room, in some cases extending into operating theatres, and seized patient admission lists. The Special Rapporteur finds that the violence against medical professionals and wounded protesters, combined with surveillance, severely restricted access to medical care. Hospitals must remain safe and accessible, yet many injured protesters abandoned treatment out of fear of arrest. One submission from a medical professional described patients presenting days after the protests with severely infected pellet wounds, having been too afraid to seek timely treatment.

35. In first-hand testimony, medical professionals described how the quality of medical care was itself compromised. Hospitals faced mass-casualty conditions, with multiple operating rooms running simultaneously throughout the night. The Special Rapporteur has received reports of individuals affiliated with security forces actively obstructing the treatment of injured protesters, directing resources to wounded members of the security forces. In one instance, a doctor reportedly instructed nurses to disconnect ventilators from injured protesters. Other medical professionals were reportedly forced to withhold treatment from protesters, creating a situation in which the decision to provide or deny care was no longer determined by medical need.

36. The numbers of healthcare professionals reportedly detained, charged, killed or missing continue to grow. A list submitted to the Special Rapporteur on 16 February 2026 documents over 100 arrested healthcare professionals, including doctors, nurses, pharmacists, operating room technicians and medical students, from cities across the country. Among the alleged violations are the killing of healthcare professionals, including nurses, while they were providing medical assistance. Others have been subjected to torture in custody, while the whereabouts of many remain unknown. Some have faced capital charges of “waging war against God” for treating the wounded, and others were arrested specifically for confronting security forces who were obstructing medical care.

37. The Special Rapporteur is seriously concerned that hospitals and medical infrastructure were used not only as sites of repression but also to conceal the scale of State violence. Submissions describe gunshot injuries being recorded under different diagnoses and doctors being instructed to issue death certificates and release bodies directly for burial without post-mortem examination by the Forensic Medicine Organization. Security forces also reportedly confiscated large numbers of patient files from multiple hospitals. The Special Rapporteur has also received a copy of a directive issued by the Deputy for Security and Law Enforcement of the Ministry of the Interior to the heads of medical university hospitals instructing them to provide information on injured individuals. The directive frames the request as necessary “for the purpose of examining and compensating bodily injuries inflicted upon members of the public and verifying the status of innocent individuals and bystanders as having sustained injuries”. However, such a blanket directive compelling hospitals to disclose clinical records to security authorities bypasses patient consent and, in the context of the wider pattern documented in the submissions, raises alarm about the misuse of medical data to target those who sought treatment. Bodies have also been found in body bags with respiratory tubes, urinary catheters and other hospital instruments still connected, raising concerns that the wounded may have been transferred from hospitals to morgues while they were still alive.

38. The picture emerging from the submissions is unambiguous: the State’s systematic targeting of medical professionals and the wounded within hospitals has violated the protections that medical neutrality guarantees under international law. The result is a

healthcare system in which the injured fear seeking treatment more than the injuries themselves and the act of saving life has become criminalized. The Special Rapporteur has become acutely aware that medical professionals who witnessed the events first-hand carry a profound psychological burden and live under the ongoing threat of arrest or detention simply for having fulfilled their duty of care.

### III. Overall human rights situation

#### A. Death penalty

##### 1. Scale and transparency

39. In her report covering January to July 2025, the Special Rapporteur expressed alarm at the extraordinary rate of executions in the Islamic Republic of Iran, which was then averaging three to four per day.<sup>45</sup> That trend has accelerated. At least 1,639 people were executed in 2025, compared with 975 in 2024 – and at least 100 were executed in January 2026 alone.<sup>46</sup> Among those executed in 2025, at least 149 were Baloch, 82 Kurdish and 28 Arab.<sup>47</sup> The Baloch community is acutely affected by drug-related executions – cases often marked by poverty, undocumented status and lack of due process protections, including reliance on forced confessions.<sup>48</sup> At least 83 Afghans, three Iraqis and one individual referred to only as a “foreign national” by State media were also executed.

40. Some civil society organizations reported over 2,000 executions in 2025.<sup>49</sup> Such discrepancies are not surprising, given that only 7 per cent of executions were announced by official sources, leaving civil society organizations with the painstaking work of documenting executions.<sup>50</sup> As the Special Rapporteur has repeatedly stated, people have a right to know the extent to which the death penalty is applied and the circumstances in which it is used.<sup>51</sup> The responsibility to publish accurate and comprehensive execution data lies squarely with the State. Without transparency, States cannot demonstrate that they uphold the principles of non-discrimination and equal justice. Until the authorities honour that obligation, civil society organizations, journalists and the families of those executed will remain the primary source of credible information – and discrepancies in reporting will persist as a direct consequence of the State’s failure to account for its use of the death penalty. The Special Rapporteur reiterates her requests for statistics on the use of the death penalty, which to date remain unanswered.

##### 2. Overview of capital offences applied

41. The death penalty continues to be applied in violation of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. Serious allegations of procedural violations, including torture, are raised in almost every criminal case for which information reaches the Special Rapporteur. Although the Covenant restricts the application of the death penalty to the “most serious crimes”, interpreted as those involving intentional killing,<sup>52</sup> around half (49 per cent) of those executed were convicted of drug-related offences. A similar proportion (46 per cent) had

<sup>45</sup> See [A/80/349](#).

<sup>46</sup> Submission by Iran Human Rights. The figure of 1,639 excludes 500 or more additional executions that Iran Human Rights could not verify through its standard methodology that requires two independent sources.

<sup>47</sup> Submission by Iran Human Rights.

<sup>48</sup> For background on individual cases, see communications IRN 9/2025 and IRN 24/2025.

<sup>49</sup> For 2025, Human rights activists news agency reports 2,063 executions, and Abdorrahman Boroumand Center for Human Rights in Iran reports 2,066. Kurdistan Human Rights Association-Geneva reports 1,748 executions for the period from 1 January to 30 November 2025.

<sup>50</sup> 10 per cent of executions were accounted for by official sources in 2024 and 15 per cent in 2023. Submission by Iran Human Rights.

<sup>51</sup> See [A/80/349](#) and [A/HRC/58/62](#).

<sup>52</sup> Human Rights Committee, general comment No. 36 (2018).

been convicted of homicide.<sup>53</sup> The remaining 5 per cent were for rape and national security-related offences, including *baghy* (armed rebellion against the foundations of the Islamic Republic of Iran), *efsad-fil-arz* (corruption on earth) and *moharebeh* (enmity against God). The Special Rapporteur examines the application of security-related charges, the use of the death penalty in the context of the nationwide protests and its gendered dimensions below.

### 3. Security-related offences

42. Among those executed for security-related offences in 2025, 13 were convicted of espionage for Israel, with a further execution for the same offence in January 2026.<sup>54</sup> In her previous report, the Special Rapporteur raised concerns about a bill that would significantly expand the scope of conduct amounting to espionage. That bill has since been adopted into law. The Law on Strengthening the Penalty for Espionage and Cooperation with the Zionist Regime and Hostile States, promulgated on 15 October 2025, now broadens the definition of espionage by including activities linked to the dissemination of information and media work, such as contact with foreign and diasporic media outlets defined as *resaneha-ye mo'aned* ("enemy media"). In January 2026, the head of the judiciary linked the nationwide protesters to Israel, declaring that no leniency would be shown and that no justifications would be accepted from those involved in the protests.<sup>55</sup> The Special Rapporteur notes with concern that such statements, combined with the new law, heighten the risk that detained protesters may be sentenced to death on espionage-related charges.

43. Beyond espionage, other broadly defined security offences continue to be used to silence dissent. Three women – Kurdish humanitarian worker Pakhshan Azizi,<sup>56</sup> Kurdish activist Varisheh Moradi,<sup>57</sup> and Zahra Shahbaz Tabari – currently face the death penalty under the charge of *baghy*. Labour rights activist Sharifeh Mohammadi's death sentence was reportedly commuted to 30 years' imprisonment in October 2025, although the question remains as to whether she should have been convicted of a criminal offence for her peaceful activism in the first place.<sup>58</sup> Ms. Tabari was sentenced to death for *baghy* in October 2025, following a trial conducted by videoconference lasting less than 10 minutes.<sup>59</sup> The evidence against her consisted of a piece of cloth bearing the slogan "Woman, resistance, freedom", a popular slogan from the 2022 protests, and an unpublished audio message. The authorities claimed that she planned to display the cloth as a banner in public as a challenge to the State.<sup>60</sup> These cases illustrate the State's use of capital charges to punish the exercise of fundamental rights, including freedom of expression, association and peaceful assembly. Indeed, in 2025, two individuals were executed in connection with the 2022 protests.<sup>61</sup>

44. Following the nationwide protests, the same pattern may be repeating. On 10 January 2026, the Prosecutor General stated that judicial authorities should pursue cases arising from the protests decisively and without leniency, emphasizing accountability for those involved and the expedited handling of related cases.<sup>62</sup> The provincial prosecutorial authorities in Ilam explicitly characterized acts linked to the protests as *moharebeh* (enmity against God), a capital offence, and stated that such cases would be prosecuted firmly and without tolerance.<sup>63</sup> To date, at least 30 death sentences have been imposed (see para. 31 above).

<sup>53</sup> In these cases, the sentence was *qisas* (retribution in kind). The Special Rapporteur reiterates her previous analysis that the sentence of *qisas* is incompatible with the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and refers to the reasoning set out in her earlier reports and communications, see [A/HRC/58/62](#), paras. 14–18; and communication IRN 20/2025.

<sup>54</sup> Submission by Iran Human Rights.

<sup>55</sup> See [www.asriran.com/fa/news/1130132/اغتشاشگران-نمی-کنیم](#).

<sup>56</sup> See communication IRN 15/2024.

<sup>57</sup> See communication IRN 21/2024.

<sup>58</sup> See communication IRN 13/2024.

<sup>59</sup> See communication IRN 22/2025.

<sup>60</sup> See the response by the State to communication IRN 22/2025.

<sup>61</sup> Submission by Iran Human Rights. One of the individuals is Mojahed Kourkouri (see communication IRN 13/2023).

<sup>62</sup> See [www.mashreghnews.ir/news/1778000/گرفته-اغتشاشگران-داده-استان-کل-کشور-نظام-تصمیم-به-برخورد-قاطع-با-اغتشاشگران](#).

<sup>63</sup> See [www.irna.ir/news/86062591/برخورد-دبایر-ونده-های-نازار-امی-های-اخیر-قاطع-و-بدون-ارفاق-خواهد-بود](#).

While no known executions have yet been reported, the Special Rapporteur continues to receive reports of protesters being charged with capital offences, potentially forced confessions being broadcast and death sentences being communicated orally to families only to be later retracted. All of this reinforces the climate of fear to which detainees and their families are being subjected. The death penalty – whether or not it results in execution – has been operationalized as a tool of political repression, with a chilling effect on the rights to freedom of expression, assembly and association.

#### 4. Public executions

45. At least 11 executions were carried out in public in 2025.<sup>64</sup> There are reports of a court ordering that the execution of an individual sentenced to death in connection with the nationwide protests be carried out publicly at the scene of the alleged crime.<sup>65</sup> The international standard is clear: public executions constitute cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment or punishment.<sup>66</sup> They do not serve the interests of accountability or justice; they are designed to instil fear and to consolidate State authority through the spectacle of death. The staging of executions before crowds exposes members of the public, including children, to serious psychological harm.

#### 5. Gender-based violence

46. At least 48 women were executed in 2025, of whom 32 were sentenced to *qisas* (retribution in kind) for homicide.<sup>67</sup> Significant numbers of women on death row continue to be convicted of homicide committed in the context of gender-based violence and sentenced to *qisas*. The case of Goli Kouhkan illustrates how gender-based discrimination and ethnic marginalization intersect within the *qisas* system.<sup>68</sup> Ms. Kouhkan, an undocumented Baloch woman who was forced into marriage at age 12 and endured years of domestic violence, was sentenced to *qisas* after a confrontation with her abusive husband resulted in his death. Following significant international attention, blood money was raised and Ms. Kouhkan was released. Although the State disputes some of these details, it acknowledges that her release followed “the efforts and mediation undertaken by the judicial authorities and a formal conciliation session”.<sup>69</sup> While this is a welcome outcome, the executions carried out in 2025 make clear that it is an exception. Many women facing *qisas* are executed without international public attention and with little means to raise the blood money that might save their lives.<sup>70</sup> The *qisas* system – under which a victim’s family may demand execution or accept blood money – reduces the right to life to a financial transaction, with devastating consequences for those who lack the resources to pay.

47. The discrimination that women face within the justice system of the Islamic Republic of Iran operates in both directions. As the cases above illustrate, when women kill husbands or partners – often in self-defence or after years of domestic violence, sexual abuse and child marriage – they face execution. Conversely, when women are killed by male family members, the legal framework provides protections for perpetrators through discriminatory provisions that excuse them from standard penalties, treating as justification factors such as so-called “honour”, a woman’s perceived disobedience or her attempt to leave a marriage.<sup>71</sup> In 2025, at least 207 cases of femicide were documented.<sup>72</sup> The primary perpetrators were those

<sup>64</sup> Submission by Iran Human Rights.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid.

<sup>66</sup> Human Rights Committee, general comment No. 36 (2018), para. 40.

<sup>67</sup> Submission by Iran Human Rights.

<sup>68</sup> See communication IRN 20/2025.

<sup>69</sup> See the response to communication IRN 20/2025.

<sup>70</sup> See [www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2025/12/iran-must-halt-execution-goli-kouhkan-domestic-violence-survivor-un-experts](http://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2025/12/iran-must-halt-execution-goli-kouhkan-domestic-violence-survivor-un-experts).

<sup>71</sup> See [A/HRC/58/62](#) and submissions by Association for Human Rights of Azerbaijanis in Iran and Balochistan Human Rights Group.

<sup>72</sup> The Hengaw Organization for Human Rights notes that the true scale of femicide is likely to be significantly higher than the recorded figure. In many parts of the Islamic Republic of Iran, independent civil society organizations capable of documenting femicides do not exist, leaving some

closest to the victims: husbands, ex-husbands, fathers, brothers and other family members. The documented motives included maintaining so-called “honour”, a woman’s rejection of a marriage proposal or request for a divorce and disputes arising from child or forced marriages.

48. The formal withdrawal of a domestic violence bill in 2024 has deepened the Special Rapporteur’s concern.<sup>73</sup> In the absence of dedicated legislation, the State fails to recognize domestic violence as a distinct and serious offence, which would be a necessary first step towards providing women with legal protection from the abuse that precedes both their killing and their criminalization. Legislation alone will not eliminate gender-based violence, but, beyond its practical function, it serves as a declaration that such violence is neither acceptable nor tolerated.

49. Together, the extraordinary scale of executions (at least 1,639 in 2025), the weaponization of capital charges against protesters and the discrimination against women and ethnic minorities within the justice system, reflect how deeply embedded the death penalty is in the State’s exercise of governance.

## B. Civic space

50. Despite the severely restrictive civic environment discussed in section II above, the people of the Islamic Republic of Iran continued to exercise their right to freedom of expression and assembly in 2025, most notably during the truck drivers’ strike that began in May 2025, which became one of the largest labour actions in recent years.<sup>74</sup> Even prisons – primary sites under direct State control – have become significant locations of organized resistance. A group of political prisoners in Ghezel Hesar prison began a weekly hunger strike, referred to as “No death penalty Tuesdays”, in January 2024.<sup>75</sup> By January 2026, the protest had continued and spread to over 30 prisons across the country. In October 2025, two significant collective hunger strikes took place: women in Qarchak prison protested the deaths in custody of three fellow prisoners; and more than 1,500 prisoners in Ghezel Hesar prison went on a mass hunger strike against the surge in executions and the use of solitary confinement.<sup>76</sup>

51. The space for such resistance is being dismantled, however. The harassment, imprisonment and disbarment of lawyers is key to understanding how civic space has been systematically eroded. Lawyers serve as a critical safeguard for those exercising their rights to freedom of expression and assembly. They should be permitted to provide the legal defence that stands between individuals and the State. In the Islamic Republic of Iran, however, this protection is being dismantled through two mutually reinforcing means, both before<sup>77</sup> and since the nationwide protests. First, the criminalization of lawyers themselves: following the protests, at least 17 lawyers remain in detention across multiple provinces, as of 20 February 2026.<sup>78</sup> This has been combined with the reactivation of dormant cases against previously targeted lawyers, including Nazanin Salari and Shima Ghosheh.<sup>79</sup>

52. Second, the note to article 48 of the Code of Criminal Procedure denies detainees legal representation of their own choosing for national security cases, in contravention of article 14 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights – by restricting them to State-approved counsel. The consequences are twofold: those who are arrested for expressing dissent are not represented by lawyers whom they trust and believe to be acting in their best interest; and lawyers who seek to provide that protection are themselves subjected to the very

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regions unaccounted for among the data. See <https://hengaw.net/en/reports-and-statistics-1/2025/12/article-7>.

<sup>73</sup> See A/HRC/58/62 and A/80/349.

<sup>74</sup> See <https://iranhumanrights.org/2025/06/irans-truck-drivers-strike-sweeps-163-cities-dozens-arrested/>.

<sup>75</sup> Tuesdays were chosen because that is the day on which death row prisoners are typically transferred to solitary confinement in preparation for execution in Ghezel Hesar prison.

<sup>76</sup> See communication IRN 19/2025.

<sup>77</sup> See communication IRN 11/2025.

<sup>78</sup> Submission by Abdorrahman Boroumand Center for Human Rights in Iran.

<sup>79</sup> See communication IRN 2/2026.

persecution they seek to challenge. This results in heightened risk of torture, forced confessions and severe sentences within a judicial process that falls well short of minimum international fair trial standards. In her most recent report to the General Assembly, the Special Rapporteur welcomed the approval by the Legal and Judicial Commission of the Islamic Consultative Assembly, in February 2025, of a draft amendment to remove the note to article 48 of the Code of Criminal Procedure.<sup>80</sup> However, no further progress has been made, as the draft amendment is awaiting approval by the Islamic Consultative Assembly and therefore the note to article 48 remains in place.<sup>81</sup> The Special Rapporteur notes with concern that a lawyer known for representing protesters from the Woman, Life, Freedom movement was found dead in his office in December 2025 in circumstances that have not been fully explained.

53. Beyond the legal profession, artists and writers who used creative expression as a form of resistance were also targeted in 2025.<sup>82</sup> At the memorial ceremony for the lawyer mentioned above, security forces arrested Narges Mohammadi and at least 38 others. Days before her arrest, Ms. Mohammadi had published a piece in TIME magazine calling for international pressure on the Islamic Republic of Iran to end human rights violations. She was subsequently sentenced to a further seven and a half years in prison. In the aftermath of the nationwide protests, members of the Iranian Writers Association were also arrested.

54. The restriction on civic space is not limited to activities inside the country. The Special Rapporteur remains concerned about the Iranian authorities' alleged involvement in transnational repression – attempts to silence members of the Iranian diaspora who speak out about human rights violations in the Islamic Republic of Iran by targeting them or their families inside the Islamic Republic of Iran. Examples include the intimidation of families of victims of the shoot-down of Ukraine Airlines flight 752 victims, journalists from BBC Persian and Iran International and individuals from the civil society organization Hengaw.<sup>83</sup> Such practices continued during and after the nationwide protests at the end of 2025, with reports of intimidation and assault against peaceful protesters supporting the protests in cities outside the Islamic Republic of Iran, including in the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland.<sup>84</sup> In addition, on 30 January 2026, armed agents abducted, tortured and brutally beat Mohammad Amer Dadafarin, the son of Baloch human rights activist Fariba Balouch, before releasing him. This occurred two days after she had addressed the European Parliament about the human rights situation in Balochistan, in circumstances likely intended to silence her advocacy. Such incidents reflect a pattern of using family members inside the Islamic Republic of Iran as leverage to suppress peaceful advocacy beyond the country's borders.

55. The developments documented in this section point to a sustained and deliberate effort to curtail means of expressing, organizing and hearing dissent – whether inside the Islamic Republic of Iran or beyond its borders.

## C. Minorities

### 1. Ethnic minorities

56. The ethnic minorities in the Islamic Republic of Iran (Kurds, Baloch, Arabs, Azerbaijani Turks and Turkmen) continue to face discrimination across multiple dimensions.<sup>85</sup> Unemployment, land confiscation and environmental degradation entrench poverty in border regions. The Yarsan religious minority, who are primarily ethnically

<sup>80</sup> A/80/349, para. 31. However, the Special Rapporteur cautioned that the amendment introduced a concerning provision whereby prosecutors were allowed to deny access to legal counsel for up to 10 days during investigations in cases related to national security.

<sup>81</sup> See [www.etemadonline.com/بخش-سیاسی-761126/9-چکش-آهنگین-وکیل](http://www.etemadonline.com/بخش-سیاسی-761126/9-چکش-آهنگین-وکیل).

<sup>82</sup> Submission by PEN America.

<sup>83</sup> A/80/349, para. 44.

<sup>84</sup> Submission by Impact Shift.

<sup>85</sup> Submissions by Balochistan Human Rights Group, Volunteer Activists, Association for Human Rights of Azerbaijanis in Iran and Association for the Human Rights of the Azerbaijani People in Iran.

Kurdish, face additional layers of discrimination, including exclusion from public sector employment. Historical administrative neglect and systematic discrimination have left many Baloch individuals without *Shenasnameh* (Iranian identity booklet), limiting their access to education, healthcare and employment. Minority languages remain suppressed in schools and public life, eroding cultural identities and negatively affecting children's educational outcomes. State television continues to reinforce harmful ethnic stereotypes, further normalizing discrimination against non-Persian communities.

57. Severe water scarcity, dam construction beyond hydrological limits and large-scale water transfer schemes implemented with limited transparency have devastated ecosystems that minority communities depend on for their livelihoods.<sup>86</sup> For example, the Hoor al-Azim wetland in Khuzestan, the backbone of Arab cultural identity and livelihoods, has faced severe degradation due to the construction of the Karkheh Dam, which has reduced water inflow, caused droughts and increased sediment erosion.<sup>87</sup> Water diversion from Khuzestan has increased salinity levels, rendering farmland unusable and reducing the quality and quantity of drinking water and food production. Oil drilling has deposited heavy metals and hazardous organic compounds into local waterways and soil, while dam construction and oil exploitation have contributed to extreme erosion and increased dust storms. These combined pressures have led to biodiversity loss and the forced displacement of families from their ancestral homes and have created pollution-related health issues among Arab communities.

## 2. Religious minorities

58. In 2025, the Baha'i community faced persecution extending beyond arbitrary arrests and imprisonment to home and business raids, the confiscation of assets, including through text message notifications without formal court rulings, exclusion from higher education and employment and attacks on Baha'i cemeteries.<sup>88</sup> Following the military escalation with Israel, Baha'is were scapegoated as alleged Israeli spies. Following the nationwide protests, incitement intensified further, with State television broadcasting what are widely regarded as forced confessions portraying Baha'i individuals as part of an "organized, violent and foreign-backed network" with alleged links to "Zionist networks". Although Christianity, unlike the Baha'i faith, is a recognized religion under the Constitution, Christians, in particular converts from Islam, were also targeted.<sup>89</sup> As with the Baha'i community, the military escalation in 2025 similarly triggered a wave of arrests of Christians, often accompanied by home searches and the seizure of personal belongings, with the authorities labelling those detained as "Mossad mercenaries".

## 3. Afghans in the Islamic Republic of Iran

59. Reports suggest that there was an acceleration of the expulsion and forced return of Afghans from the Islamic Republic of Iran in 2025, creating humanitarian and protection challenges.<sup>90</sup> Afghans remaining in the Islamic Republic of Iran, and in particular undocumented families, face restrictions on education, employment, housing and movement. Even registered refugees holding Amayesh documentation report encountering obstacles in access to services and renewing documentation. Rising social tensions and violence reportedly have heightened insecurity, in particular among those with former affiliations with the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, some of whom reportedly face detention, torture and murder.

## 4. Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and other gender-diverse people

60. In February 2026, the Islamic Republic of Iran was elected Vice-Chair of the Commission for Social Development – a body tasked with advancing social inclusion and ensuring that "no one is left behind".<sup>91</sup> At the same session, the delegate of the Islamic

<sup>86</sup> Ibid.

<sup>87</sup> See communication IRN 2/2025.

<sup>88</sup> Submission by Baha'i International Community.

<sup>89</sup> Submission by Article 18.

<sup>90</sup> Information by the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Afghanistan.

<sup>91</sup> See <https://press.un.org/en/2026/soc4933.doc.htm>.

Republic of Iran objected to “gender-related” concepts being included in a resolution of the Commission,<sup>92</sup> stating that the country would implement them in accordance with its domestic legal framework and cultural and religious values. This position sits uneasily with the mandate of a Commission dedicated to inclusion and social justice, given the record of the Islamic Republic of Iran on gender equality and the rights of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and other gender-diverse people.<sup>93</sup> Reports indicate that lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and other gender-diverse individuals have participated in the nationwide protests. While individuals from across all segments of society took part in the nationwide protests, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and other gender-diverse individuals are vulnerable in detention, where the exposure of their identity may subject them to additional forms of abuse.<sup>94</sup> The Special Rapporteur urges the Islamic Republic of Iran to use its role as Vice-Chair of the Commission for Social Development as an opportunity to advance the Commission’s principles of inclusion and social justice, both internationally and domestically.

## D. Sanctions

61. The authorities have attributed the nationwide protests primarily to the economic condition caused by sanctions.<sup>95</sup> The Special Rapporteur acknowledges that sanctions have compounded the economic difficulties of the country, but the available evidence indicates that current economic hardships reflect multiple, intersecting factors, including decades of domestic policy decisions across the social, economic and environmental sectors.<sup>96</sup> It is also clear that the nationwide protests, while initially sparked by economic grievances, subsequently encompassed demands for wider governance reforms.

62. The Security Council sanctions were reimposed in September 2025 through the snapback mechanism. They arose from the country’s non-compliance with its commitments under the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, including its curtailment of monitoring access for the International Atomic Energy Agency and the continued enrichment of uranium beyond agreed levels.<sup>97</sup> The renewed sanctions impose an arms embargo, ballistic missile restrictions, asset freezes, and travel bans on designated individuals and entities; they also authorize the inspection and seizure of prohibited cargo. However, some national and regional restrictive measures go beyond the Security Council sanctions.<sup>98</sup> They include asset freezes on the Central Bank of the Islamic Republic of Iran and major commercial banks. Such restrictive measures, combined with overcompliance by international banks and pharmaceutical companies, have in some cases obstructed access to essential medicines and medical equipment, even where humanitarian exemptions formally exist.<sup>99</sup>

<sup>92</sup> See [E/CN.5/2026/L.4](#).

<sup>93</sup> See [A/HRC/58/62](#).

<sup>94</sup> See the conference room paper containing the consolidated findings of the Independent International Fact-Finding Mission on the Islamic Republic of Iran, available at [www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/documents/hrbodies/hrcouncil/sessions-regular/session58/advance-version/a-hrc-58-crp-1.pdf](http://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/documents/hrbodies/hrcouncil/sessions-regular/session58/advance-version/a-hrc-58-crp-1.pdf).

<sup>95</sup> Submission by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

<sup>96</sup> International Monetary Fund, *World Economic Outlook 2025*, available at [www.imf.org/-/media/files/publications/weo/2025/october/english/text.pdf](http://www.imf.org/-/media/files/publications/weo/2025/october/english/text.pdf); K. Madani, “Water bankruptcy: the formal definition”, *Water Resources Management*, vol. 40, No. 78; S.N. Romaniuk et al., “Iran’s water crisis: a national security imperative”, *Geopolitical Monitor* (2026); and S. Faridi et al., “Health burden and economic loss attributable to ambient PM2.5 in Iran based on the ground and satellite data”, *Scientific reports*, vol. 12, No. 14386.

<sup>97</sup> See <https://press.un.org/en/2025/sc16181.doc.htm>.

<sup>98</sup> See <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32025R1975>; [www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2025/09/29/iran-sanctions-snapback-council-reimposes-restrictive-measures/](http://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2025/09/29/iran-sanctions-snapback-council-reimposes-restrictive-measures/); and [www.whitehouse.gov/fact-sheets/2025/02/fact-sheet-president-donald-j-trump-restores-maximum-pressure-on-iran/](http://www.whitehouse.gov/fact-sheets/2025/02/fact-sheet-president-donald-j-trump-restores-maximum-pressure-on-iran/).

<sup>99</sup> See [www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2023/02/iran-over-compliance-unilateral-sanctions-affects-thalassemia-patients-say](http://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2023/02/iran-over-compliance-unilateral-sanctions-affects-thalassemia-patients-say).

63. Nevertheless, the Special Rapporteur emphasizes that not all of the human rights and humanitarian challenges of the Islamic Republic of Iran can be attributed to sanctions. The systematic repression of dissent, restrictions on civil and political freedoms, discrimination against minorities, women and girls, economic mismanagement and corruption and decades of environmental degradation reflect domestic policy choices for which the Iranian authorities bear responsibility. The obligation of the Iranian authorities to protect the rights of their people remains independent of, and is not diminished by, the sanctions framework.

## IV. Conclusions

64. The events documented in the present report represent a watershed moment in the human rights situation of the Islamic Republic of Iran. The nationwide protests that began on 28 December 2025 brought into sharp relief the systemic nature of the violations long recorded by the Special Rapporteur: use of lethal force against those exercising fundamental freedoms, weaponization of digital infrastructure both to suppress dissent and to conceal the scale of that suppression, dismantling of medical neutrality, deployment of capital charges to silence opposition and deliberate erasure of accountability through secrecy and intimidation. The scale of the State's response – the thousands killed, the tens of thousands detained, the families still searching for loved ones, the medical professionals arrested for saving lives – is without recent precedent. It did not emerge in a vacuum, however: it is the most acute expression of patterns that have developed over decades. The voices of those who submitted information for the preparation of the report, many of whom had never before engaged with any United Nations human rights mechanism and who did so at considerable personal risk, speak to the depth and breadth of suffering and to an equally profound desire for a different future. The Special Rapporteur calls upon the authorities of the Islamic Republic of Iran to take immediate, definitive and verifiable steps to address the violations documented herein, and she renews her standing offer to conduct an official country visit, which she believes is now more necessary than ever. She equally calls upon the international community to ensure that accountability, documentation and the protection of the people of the Islamic Republic of Iran remain matters of the highest priority.

## V. Recommendations

65. The Special Rapporteur appeals to the Islamic Republic of Iran to:

- (a) Immediately release all individuals detained solely for exercising the rights to freedom of expression, peaceful assembly and association, including protesters, lawyers, healthcare workers, artists, writers, journalists and human rights defenders;
- (b) Disclose the whereabouts and fate of all individuals detained or missing in connection with the protests; end the harassment, intimidation and financial coercion of their families; and return bodies in ways that respect the dignity of those involved and without preconditions;
- (c) Guarantee unimpeded access to medical treatment for all injured persons and cease all interference with healthcare facilities and personnel;
- (d) Ensure that the use of force by law enforcement complies with the Basic Principles on the Use of Force and Firearms by Law Enforcement Officials;<sup>100</sup>
- (e) Immediately cease all Internet and telecommunications shutdowns and refrain from using digital infrastructure as an instrument of surveillance and repression;

<sup>100</sup> See [www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/basic-principles-use-force-and-firearms-law-enforcement](http://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/basic-principles-use-force-and-firearms-law-enforcement).

(f) Conduct prompt, independent and impartial investigations into all reported killings and injuries during the protests; acknowledge publicly the full scale of deaths, injuries and arrests arising from the protests; and ensure that victims and their families have access to truth, justice and reparation;

(g) Establish a moratorium on executions with a view to abolition; abolish the death penalty for offences not meeting the threshold of being the “most serious crimes”; publish comprehensive disaggregated data on executions; and immediately cease public executions;

(h) Remove the note to article 48 of the Code of Criminal Procedure; ensure prompt access to legal counsel of the detainee’s choosing at all stages of proceedings; and cease the broadcasting of confessions obtained under duress;

(i) Enact comprehensive domestic violence legislation; end legal distinctions that mitigate penalties for killings committed in the name of so-called “honour”; and ensure the fair review of death sentences imposed on women for homicide committed in the context of gender-based violence;

(j) Ensure equal treatment before the law for all, without distinction on the grounds of ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation, gender identity or political opinion; and guarantee the rights of minorities to cultural and religious expression;

(k) Halt the mass deportation of Afghan nationals and ensure compliance with the principle of non-refoulement;

(l) Ensure that resource and environmental management policies do not disproportionately harm minority and marginalized communities and cease the repression of peaceful environmental protesters;

(m) End all forms of transnational repression targeting members of the Iranian diaspora and their family members inside the Islamic Republic of Iran;

(n) Ensure that any retaliatory use of force strictly complies with the requirements of necessity and proportionality under international law; and engage in good-faith diplomatic dialogue towards the peaceful settlement of disputes in accordance with Article 2 of the Charter of the United Nations.

66. The Special Rapporteur invites States to:

(a) Support individuals, in particular protesters, lawyers and healthcare workers, affected by the nationwide protests, including through emergency visas;

(b) Support efforts to document the impact of the nationwide protests, including by funding civil society organizations engaged in recording violations and preserving evidence for accountability processes;

(c) Call upon the World Health Organization to investigate reported violations of medical neutrality during the protests, including the use of hospitals as sites of arrest and the obstruction of medical care;

(d) Coordinate efforts to address transnational repression and provide protection to diaspora members facing intimidation on their territory;

(e) Expand humanitarian pathways for at-risk Afghan nationals and support the Islamic Republic of Iran as a host country in ensuring access for Afghan refugees to education, healthcare and livelihood opportunities in compliance with the principle of non-refoulement;

(f) Ensure that mechanisms examining the human rights situation in the Islamic Republic of Iran are adequately resourced to carry out their mandates;

(g) Ensure that sanctions include effective humanitarian exemptions that are broadly and practically applied, so as to minimise adverse human rights consequences for the people of the Islamic Republic of Iran, including with regard to access to medicines, medical equipment and essential goods;

(h) **Immediately cease all military strikes against the Islamic Republic of Iran and refrain from any further use of force in violation of the Charter of the United Nations; and ensure that any diplomatic or nuclear negotiations are conducted in accordance with international law and not at the expense of the human rights of the Iranian people.**

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