

**LDDHI**جامعه دفاع از حقوق بشر در ایران
(عضو فدراسیون بین المللی جامعه های حقوق بشر)

League for the Defence of Human Rights in Iran

**FIDH – International Federation for Human Rights
League for the Defence of Human Rights in Iran (LDDHI)**

Joint submission

IRAN

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Covenant not implemented at the national level (Article 2; #1 of the List of Issues)

The status of international human rights treaties in Iran's domestic law has been an ongoing issue for many years. Iran is a party to several international human rights treaties, including the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR). International treaties must be ratified by the parliament (Majlis) before they can become part of domestic law. Once ratified, these treaties are legally binding on Iran under the provisions of Article 9 of the Civil Code, and they should take precedence over conflicting domestic laws. However, Iran's legal system, which is based on Islamic law (Shari'a), poses challenges, especially vis-à-vis international human rights law, and this conflict has not been resolved.

There are no judicial rulings known to contain any reference to the provisions of ICCPR. This is implicitly confirmed by the government of Iran in its "Replies of the Islamic Republic of Iran to the list of issues in relation to its fourth periodic report" (hereafter "reply to the LoI"),¹ in which it failed to mention a single concrete reference to the application of the ICCPR in any domestic legal proceedings. If anything, they confirm that the international treaties do not take precedence over domestic laws.

Proposed national human rights institution falls short of the Paris Principles (Article 2; #2 of the List of Issues)

The Iranian government's proposed bill on the establishment of a national human rights institution (NHRI) envisages the creation of a body that is inconsistent with the Paris Principles, which require the NHRI to be fully independent from the state.

¹ Human Rights Committee - 139th session, *Replies of the Islamic Republic of Iran to the list of issues in relation to its fourth periodic report*, 5 July 2023; UN Doc. CCPR/C/IRN/RQ/4

In its reply to the Lol, the government of Iran stated that the bill needed “further elaboration by experts of various institutions at national level” and that the process was still ongoing.² The bill was submitted to the Cabinet on 6 May 2017,³ and there have been no reports on subsequent developments since then.

The bill envisions the creation of a 15-member Supreme Council and an unstated number of specialized committees. Tasks of the Supreme Council include: approving the NHRI’s policies, plans, and priorities; approving various rules of procedures as required; approving the NHRI’s annual budget; and examining reports of executive bodies and giving recommendations to them. According to Article 5 of the bill, members of the Supreme Council include three members from legally instituted non-governmental organizations (NGOs); two members to be chosen from university professors and religious specialists, nominated by Iran’s President and confirmed by Parliament; two jurists specialized in human rights, nominated by the Head of the Judiciary and confirmed by Parliament; and one representative of the Judiciary’s Islamic Human Rights Commission.

Under Article 14 of the bill, various government agencies, including the offices of the deputy presidents for legal affairs and women; the ministries of interior, justice, foreign affairs, education, sports and youth, labor and social affairs, culture and Islamic guidance; the Prosecutor General; the police, should have representatives with observing status on the Supreme Council.

According to Article 56 of the bill, the proposed NHRI may only benefit from international resources with the approval by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Recommendation:

- Expedite steps to establish a national human rights institution that is fully independent from the state, in line with the Paris Principles.

No plans to decriminalize same-sex sexual relations (Articles 2 and 26; #6 of the List of Issues)

There are no plans to decriminalize same-sex sexual relations, as the punishments stipulated by the Islamic Penal Code and their ongoing imposition show. Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex, and queer (LGBTIQ) individuals can face capital punishment, because of the criminalization of certain same-sex conduct, which is punishable by death in Iran.⁴ Ten such cases were reported in a joint FIDH-LDDHI report published in October 2020.⁵ In September 2022, a court sentenced to death two women defending LGBTIQ rights on charges of promoting homosexuality.⁶

Recommendations:

- Amend the Constitution and other relevant laws to ensure equality before the law for all citizens of Iran.
- Repeal all legislation that results in discrimination against, and persecution of, individuals because of their sexual orientation or gender identity.
- Take all necessary measures to eliminate and prohibit any type of discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation or gender identity.

² *Ibid.*

³ See: *The Bill for the establishment a National Human Rights and Citizenship Institution*, 6 May 2017, available at: <https://shenasname.ir/laws/loi/3834-nahad-bashar>

⁴ See: FIDH-LDDHI, *No one is spared - The widespread use of the death penalty in Iran*, October 2020, p. 27, available at: <https://www.fidh.org/IMG/pdf/iranpdm758ang-2.pdf>

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 27.

⁶ FIDH, *Iran: Death sentence against two women for speaking out in support of LGBTIQ+ rights*, 22 September 2022; available at: <https://www.fidh.org/en/region/asia/iran/iran-death-sentence-lgbt-rights>

Death penalty used against children for crimes that are not “the most serious” (Article 6; #10 of the List of Issues)

The application of the death penalty in Iran is inconsistent with fundamental provisions of international law.

There are currently at least 84 capital crimes in various laws.⁷ The overwhelming majority of them fails to meet the threshold of the “most serious crimes” and, as a result, is in contravention with Iran’s obligations under the ICCPR. Capital offenses that do not meet the “most serious crimes” threshold include, but are not limited to: sex-related offenses; religious offenses; political offenses; drinking alcoholic beverages; drug-related offenses; economic offenses; and cyber-crimes.

For decades, the large number of capital crimes has consistently propelled Iran to second place on the list of the world’s top executioners, after China. Up until 2017, Iran ranked first in per capita executions, and has returned to that rank again in 2022 and 2023, with a spike in the number of executions [See table below]. While amendments to the drug laws caused a drastic drop in the rate of executions from 2018 to 2020, the overall rate of executions increased thereafter with 317 executions in 2021, 576 in 2022, and 515 in the first eight months of 2023. All figures are the minimum known and the real figures are likely higher.

For several decades, Iran has also been the world’s top executioner of children. From 2009 to September 2019, at least 67 executions of juvenile offenders were reported. Iran imposes the death penalty against minors and executes them when they turn 18 or, occasionally, before. The use of the death penalty against minors is in breach of the country’s obligations under the ICCPR and the Convention on the Rights of Child (CRC), both of which expressly prohibit the imposition of capital punishment on individuals who were under the age of 18 when they allegedly committed the crime.

Capital cases in Iran are adjudicated by a criminal justice system that is plagued by numerous violations of defendants’ right to a fair trial. Many death sentences are imposed after proceedings that fall far short of international fair trial standards. Defendants in cases involving capital offenses are routinely sentenced to death on the basis of vague charges and “confessions,” which are usually made under torture or other ill-treatment during pre-trial detention [See below, *Article 7*]. Defendants who face charges for offenses that are punishable by death are often denied access to lawyers of their choosing.

In addition, Iranian authorities have a long record of persecuting and prosecuting lawyers who represent individuals who are charged with capital offenses. Some lawyers involved in defending individuals charged with capital crimes, such as human rights lawyer and 2012 Sakharov Prize Laureate Nasrin Sotoudeh, have been punished with imprisonment for their work. Iranian authorities have also been traditionally hostile towards critics of the death penalty, and anti-death penalty campaigners, such as the currently imprisoned human rights defender Narges Mohammadi, have been frequently prosecuted and imprisoned.

Executions in Iran, 2011 - 2023⁸

Year	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023*
All executions	634	544	704	743	977	567	507	253	251	246	317	576	515

⁷ See: FIDH, *No one is spared - The widespread use of the death penalty in Iran*, op. cit., Table of capital crimes in Iran, pp. 51-57.

⁸ Amnesty International annual reports; available at: <https://www.amnesty.org/en/what-we-do/death-penalty/>; for figures from 1979-2008, see *A State Terror Policy*, 28 April 2009, page 9; available at: <https://www.fidh.org/en/region/asia/iran/A-State-Terror-Policy>; for figures from 2009-2011, see: *No one is spared - The widespread use of the death penalty in Iran*, op. cit., p. 9 & p. 22.

Drug-related	488	351	325	367	630	290	230	25	30	25+	120+	250+	301 ⁹
In public	50	63	44	50+	58	32	31	14	13	1	0	2 ¹⁰	4
Juveniles	7	1	11	13	4	7	4	7	4	4 ¹¹	2	6	0

* First eight months of 2023, including at least five protestors and five political prisoners.

Recommendations:

- Take steps towards the abolition of the death penalty for all crimes, including by immediately establishing an official moratorium on executions.
- Stop the practice of executing individuals who are below the age of 18 at the time of the commission of the alleged crime.
- Prohibit public executions.

Widespread use of torture remains unaddressed (Article 7; #12 of the List of Issues)

Torture and other cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment or punishment of detainees remains widespread across Iran.

The definition of torture in Article 38 of the Constitution prohibits torture only “for the purpose of extracting confession or acquiring information.” Such definition falls short of the definition of torture contained in Article 1 of the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment.

Defendants are often tortured in pre-trial detention in centers run by the Ministry of Intelligence or the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps. They are frequently tortured and subjected to other forms of ill-treatment and forced to make confessions and incriminate themselves.

Even though tortured defendants usually retract their confessions in court and assert that they were coerced to confess, there have never been any reports of investigations into such claims or an alleged torturer being punished. Courts, in particular the Islamic Revolution Courts (IRCs), have generally dismissed allegations of torture and admitted as evidence confessions obtained under torture.

The following are a few examples of cases of prisoners who told the court about tortures and coerced confessions during interrogations, and were totally ignored: Zeinab Jalalian, a Kurdish political prisoner, serving a life sentence; executed juvenile offenders Majid Esmaeilzadeh, Mehdi Sohrabifar, Amin Sedaghat, and Zeinab Sekaavand; executed Kurdish political prisoners Haydar Qorbani, Zanyar Moradi, Loghman Moradi, and Ramin Hosseinpanah; Kurdish political prisoner Houshmand Alipour, who served a prison term; Navid Afkari, a wrestler, executed in Shiraz; protester Mostafa Salehi, who was executed in Isfahan.¹²

In addition, seven protesters who were sentenced to death and executed in connection with their participation in the nationwide anti-government protests that began in September 2022 [See below, *Article 21*] were all forced to confess to crimes they had not committed. For example, the lawyer of Mohammad Mehdi Karami, who visited his client in prison in December 2022, said he had been subjected to “torture, beatings with his eyes blindfolded, and hands and feet tied, kicking in the head,

⁹ Including two who had also been charged with murder.

¹⁰ Including one protester in December 2022.

¹¹ Including one suffering from mental illness.

¹² For details of their cases, see: Op. cit. *No one is spared - The widespread use of the death penalty in Iran*, pp. 12, 18, 23, 31, 32, 33, 35, and 36, respectively.

hitting with metal bar on his foot-soles and use of [electric] shockers” to confess.¹³ Majidreza Rahnavaard’s forced confessions were televised showing him with one broken arm in a cast.¹⁴ Mohsen Shekari’s forced confessions were also televised.¹⁵ Majid Kazemi Sheikh-Shaybani, whose forced confessions were televised along with confessions of Saleh Mirhashemi Boltaghi, and Saeed Yaghubi Kord-Sofla, said before his death that he had made false confessions under torture. He specifically said: “I didn’t have any weapons and I didn’t do anything. They beat me up and told me to say the weapon was mine.”¹⁶

Recommendations:

- Conduct thorough, impartial, and transparent investigations into all allegations of torture and cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment in detention facilities and hold the perpetrators accountable.
- Ensure that defendants are not coerced into incriminating themselves or others and that such “confessions” are not admitted as evidence in court proceedings.

Right to fair trial denied (Article 14; #19 of the List of Issues)

The right to a fair trial has been particularly undermined by the Court’s routine practice of admitting the defendants’ forced confessions as evidence during criminal prosecutions.

In addition, the right to legal counsel has been significantly limited through various practices that are inconsistent with the country’s constitution, which has provisions that specify the right to legal counsel or representation.

Many defendants who face charges for offenses that are punishable by death, including persons accused of drug crimes, are sometimes given access to legal counsel only minutes before their trial is due to commence.

Article 35 of the Constitution guarantees this right by stipulating that “in all courts, both parties to the claim are entitled to appoint a lawyer for themselves. If they do not have the capacity to do it, the means for appointing a lawyer must be made available to them.”

According to Article 48 of the Criminal Procedure Code, defendants have the right to ask for - and have meetings with - a lawyer as soon as they are detained. However, a note to Article 48 stipulates that in cases of “crimes against internal or external security [...] during the investigation phase, the parties to the dispute shall select their lawyer from a list approved by the Head of the Judiciary.” Judicial authorities have sought to extend the imposition of these restrictive regulations on defendants and lawyers to the post-investigation phase by occasionally refusing to accept the defendants’ appointed lawyers.

In January 2018, the then-Head of the Judiciary issued lists of lawyers who were allowed to take up cases involving “national security” charges. This is in stark violation of Article 35 of the Constitution, as well as Article 14(2)(d) of the ICCPR, which stipulates that everyone is entitled to “defend himself in person or through legal assistance of his [/her] own choosing.”

¹³ BBC Persian Service, *Iran protests; Mohammad Mehdi Karami and Mohammad Hosseini executed*, 7 January 2023; available at: <https://www.bbc.com/persian/iran-64196049>

¹⁴ BBC Persian Service, *Execution of Majidreza Rahnavaard; second protestor hanged 23 days after arrest*, 12 December 2022; available at: <https://www.bbc.com/persian/articles/c51e857g23lo>

¹⁵ Iran Wire, *Objections of the “clergy” to death sentence against Mohen Shekari*, 11 December 2022; available at: <https://iranwire.com/fa/news-1/111183>

¹⁶ BBC Persian Service, *Broadcast of “forced confessions” of Isfahan house case defendants and concerns for them*, 12 May 2023; available at: <https://www.bbc.com/persian/articles/cpd7k3y2kl2o>

In June 2018, it was reported that only 20 out of 2,000 lawyers who were members of Tehran's Bar Association were included in the list issued by the Head of the Judiciary. An additional 43 were later added to the list.¹⁷ As a result, many human rights defenders and other political prisoners who face "national security" charges are prevented from being represented by a lawyer of their own choosing and are instead represented by lawyers handpicked by the Head of the Judiciary.

Lawyers face extreme difficulty, when they can and do represent defendants before the Islamic Revolution Courts (IRC) in political cases. Political cases are prepared by security and intelligence agencies, such as interrogators from the Ministry of Intelligence or the Intelligence Unit of the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps. In the IRCs, defendants are detained incommunicado for long periods, often have no access to lawyers during pre-trial investigations, and are frequently deprived of lawyers of their choosing or any lawyers at all.

The IRCs frequently operate outside the scope of any statutory framework by overseeing summary trials and failing to comply with due process, including by withholding information and documents from defense lawyers. Articles 190 and 191 of the Criminal Procedure Code authorize the investigating judges not to disclose important information to defendants and their lawyers, thus preventing them from preparing an adequate defense.

These were abuses that were observed in the cases of: executed juvenile offenders Mehdi Sohrabifar and Amin Sedaghat;¹⁸ women human rights defenders Yassman Aryani, Monireh Arabshahi, Mojgan Keshavarz, Saba Kord-Afshar, and Farhad Mayssami;¹⁹ lawyer Mr. Massood Shamsnejad, a lawyer; and women's rights defenders Hoda Amid, Najmeh Vahedi and Maryam Azad.²⁰

Independent lawyers who take up cases of human rights defenders, civil society activists, and political dissidents before IRCs are routinely targeted, detained, charged, tried, and sentenced to lengthy prison terms, severely restricting the ability of defendants to appoint lawyers of their own choosing.²¹

Recommendations:

- Take all necessary measures to ensure that all defendants have prompt access to a legal counsel of their choosing.
- Stop imposing a select group of lawyers on defendants in the investigation stage and allow defendants access to legal counsel of their choosing in all stages of pre-trial detention, including during the investigation stage.

Religious minorities discriminated against, persecuted (Article 18; #22 of the List of Issues)

Individuals belonging to religious minorities are subject to institutionalized discrimination and, in many cases, systematic persecution.

Article 12 of Iran's Constitution declares Islam, and specifically the Twelver Ja'afari School of Shi'a, as the official religion of the country. Sunni Muslims are officially given a higher status than other religious

¹⁷ Islamic Republic News Agency, *43 new lawyers added to trusted lawyers of Head of the Judiciary*, 15 October 2018 [in Persian]; available at: <https://www.irna.ir/news/83066400/43>

¹⁸ Op. cit. *No one is spared - The widespread use of the death penalty in Iran*, p. 23.

¹⁹ See: *Indefensible: Iran's Systematic Criminalisation of Human Rights Defenders*, available at: <https://www.fidh.org/IMG/pdf/obsiran2019web.pdf>, pp. 15-16, 18.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 22.

²¹ For a few examples, see: Op. cit., FIDH, *No one is spared - The widespread use of the death penalty in Iran*, p. 41; and: FIDH, *Indefensible: Iran's Systematic Criminalisation of Human Rights Defenders*, pp. 19-21.

minorities. Article 12 accords “full respect” to other Islamic schools, including five that “are free” to practice their religious rites.²² Under Article 13 of the Constitution, “Zoroastrian, Jewish, and Christian Iranians are the only recognized religious minorities, who, within the limits of the law, are free to perform their religious rites and ceremonies and to act according to their own rules in matters of personal affairs and religious education.” Various branches of Sufis and some other faiths are not recognized, most significantly the Baha’i faith, which originated in Iran and still has several hundred thousand followers.

Apostates are denied the right to life. Article 167 of the Constitution empowers judges to invoke *fatwas* for apostasy – in this case, renouncing Islam either to convert to another religion or to become atheist. The punishment is death.²³ In addition, Article 14 of the Constitution, which follows Article 13 on recognized religions, expressly denies human rights to those who “engage in conspiracy or activity against Islam and the Islamic Republic of Iran.”

Since the Islamic revolution in February 1979, more than 220 Baha’is have been executed or assassinated.²⁴ Many others have been subjected to enforced disappearance, and are presumed to be dead.²⁵ Others have been victims of extrajudicial killings.²⁶ Followers of the Baha’i faith have continued to face persistent persecution, which has resulted in their arrests and imprisonment, closure of businesses, expropriation of property, desecration of cemeteries, and a ban on higher education for exercising their right to freedom of religion.

There are strongly worded *fatwas* by grand ayatollahs against the Baha’i faith’s followers. For example, Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei urged people to avoid any contact with members of the Baha’i faith and called all its followers deviant, misleading, and impure.²⁷

In a top confidential meeting held on 21 September 2020 in the city of Sari, Mazandaran Province, a high-level government commission decided to significantly increase the repression of religious minorities not recognized by Iran’s Constitution, in particular the Baha’is. Subsequently, on 13 October 2020, 27 Baha’i farming families in Ivel Village, which falls under the administration of the city of Sari, had all their land and property expropriated.²⁸ Between 31 July and 10 August 2021, at least 125 houses of the Baha’i were arbitrarily destroyed, and farmland confiscated in Roshan Kouh, a small village populated mainly by Baha’is in Mazandaran Province.²⁹

²² The English translation of Article 12 available on the website of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (<https://en.mfa.ir/portal/viewpage/3997/constitution>) has omitted the names of those five Islamic schools, giving the wrong impression that all Islamic schools are recognized. For another translation of Article 12, see: <https://www.iranchamber.com/government/laws/constitution.php>

²³ There is no reference to apostasy in various laws, except the Press Code of 1985, which has specifically mentioned apostasy, without specifying its punishment: “Anyone who insults Islam and its sanctities by means of the press, amounting to apostasy, shall receive the sentence for apostasy.”

²⁴ Radio Zamaneh, *Killings of Baha’is are not investigated*, 15 February 2014; available at: <https://www.radiozamaneh.com/125291>

²⁵ FIDH, *A State Terror Policy*, 28 April 2009, page 33; available at: <https://www.fidh.org/en/region/asia/iran/A-State-Terror-Policy>

²⁶ Op. cit., *No one is spared - The widespread use of the death penalty in Iran*, p. 34.

²⁷ Tasnim News Agency, *An inquiry to the leader of the revolution and sources of emulation about contacts with followers of the subversive Baha’i sect*, 15 May 2016; available at: <https://www.tasnimnews.com/fa/news/1395/02/25/1074539/>

²⁸ FIDH-LDDHI, *Iran: Leaked document reveals plans to intensify suppression of Baha’is and other religious minorities*, 9 March 2021, available at: <https://www.fidh.org/en/region/asia/iran/iran-leaked-document-reveals-plans-to-intensify-suppression-of-baha>

²⁹ RFI, *Iran: la minorité religieuse bahaïe, l'éternel «bouc émissaire» du régime*, 13 August 2022 [in French]; available at: <https://www.rfi.fr/fr/moyen-orient/20220813-iran-la-minorite-C3%A9-religieuse-baha-ie-l-C3%A9ternel-bouc-C3%A9missaire-du-r-C3%A9gime>

Since 2022, Baha'is in Tehran have been prevented from burying their dead in the Baha'i cemetery and forced to bury them on the site of Khavaran mass graves of political prisoners executed in the 1980s. In 2022 and 2023, scores of Baha'is, including several of their former leaders, have been arrested or re-arrested and sentenced to long prison terms.³⁰

Other religious minorities regularly face persecution and prosecution for proselytizing. Sufi and Sunni Muslims also face systematic discrimination and are subject to arrests and discrimination. Sunni Muslims have been denied the right to erect mosques in big cities for many years. On 29 July 2015, their private prayer center in Tehran was attacked and almost demolished by the personnel of Tehran Municipality, supported by state security forces. While some of their clerical leaders were victims of judicial and extrajudicial executions in previous decades, some others have been arrested in 2022 and 2023. A few religious leaders have also been sentenced to long-term prison terms in Kurdistan during the large-scale protests that began in September 2022.

In February 2018, 300 members of the Gonabadi Order of Dervishes were arrested during efforts to prevent attacks by security forces on their leader's residence in Tehran. Many were severely beaten while in detention and one protester died in custody. Another was sentenced to death, based on forced confession under torture, and executed on 18 June 2018. In addition, hundreds of men and women from the same faith were subjected to torture and other ill-treatment, and over 200 sentenced after grossly unfair trials to harsh prison terms, floggings, internal exile, travel bans, and/or a ban on membership of social and political groups.

Many rights that the Constitution seems to recognize are extremely restricted and qualified by adding the phrase "in compliance with Islam's criteria," indirectly imposing the Islamic rules on followers of other religions, for example in the field of personal matters such as the dress code.³¹

Recommendations:

- Ensure full respect for the right to freedom of religion or belief, including the right of everyone to change their religion, or not have any religion.
- Stop the discrimination against, and the persecution of, religious minorities, such as Baha'i, Sunni Muslims, and Christians, and recognize equal rights under the law for followers of all religious minorities.
- Abolish all provisions of the law to impose the death penalty on offenders "for cursing the grand prophets" under Article 513 of the IPC of 1976 and 262 of IPC of 2013, and for apostasy under Article 26 of the Press Code.

Human rights defenders criminalized, media censored and attacked (Article 19; #23 of the List of Issues)

Attacks against human rights defenders

Authorities have routinely criminalized human rights defenders who exercised their rights to freedoms of opinion and expression and peaceful assembly by using "national security" provisions of the Islamic Penal Code (IPC).

³⁰ Baha'i International Community, *Iranian authorities arrest 90-year-old Baha'i and target 180 more in relentless spiral of persecution*, 16 August 2023; available at: <https://www.bic.org/news/iranian-authorities-arrest-90-year-old-bahai-and-target-180-more-relentless-spiral-persecution>

³¹ This is also the case with many ordinary laws.

Such provisions include: Article 498 (“establishing a group that aims to disrupt national security”); Article 499 (“membership in a group that aims to disrupt national security”); Article 500 (“spreading propaganda against the system”); Article 508 (“cooperating with hostile foreign States against the Islamic Republic of Iran”); Article 510 (“disrupting [public] order”); Article 514 (“insulting the founder of the Islamic Republic and the Supreme Leader”); Article 609 (“insulting public officials”); Article 610 (“gathering and collusion against internal or external security”); Article 618 (“disrupting order and comfort and calm of the general public or preventing people from work”); Article 697 (“falsely accusing someone of an offence”); and Article 698 (“spreading falsehoods with intent to disturb the public opinion”).

The already precarious situation of human rights defenders further deteriorated since successive rounds of nationwide anti-government street protests in 2017-2018, 2019, and 2022-2023.

Scores of human rights defenders were detained for criticizing the government and exercising their right to freedom of expression, prior to, and during, the 2018 protests, including: Narges Mohammadi; Atena Daemi; Golrokh Ebrahimi Iraee; Sepideh Qoliyani; Arash Sadeqi; Saeed Shirzad; Esmael Abdi; Mehdi Beheshti Langaroodi; Mohammad Habibi; Jafar Azimzadeh; and Esmael Bakhshi. Some were released later. Some of them were rearrested. Narges Mohammadi, Golrokh Ebrahimi Iraee, Sepideh Qoliyani, and Mr. Esmael Abdi are currently serving prison terms.

As a consequence of individual peaceful protests against compulsory hijab laws in 2018, at least 112 women human rights defenders had been arrested or detained.

The following are examples of cases of attacks against human rights defenders, many of whom were convicted and sentenced to harsh prison terms. Prison sentences imposed against human rights defenders became harsher in 2018 and 2019. In some cases, they were sentenced to both prison terms and lashes. For example: Nasrin Sotoudeh, sentenced to a total of 38.5 years imprisonment and 148 lashes; Amir Salar Davoodi, sentenced to 30 years in prison and 111 lashes; and Mohammad Najafi, sentenced to a total of 13 years in prison and 74 lashes.³²

Several human rights defenders arrested in the context of the protests against mandatory hijab laws or for their defense of women’s rights were detained incommunicado and/or solitary confinement for prolonged periods of time, without any contact with family, friends, lawyers or medical doctors. Mostafa Daneshju, Amir Salar Davoodi, and Farhad Mohammadi spent months in solitary confinement.³³ Nasrin Sotoudeh was placed in solitary confinement on several occasions from 2010 to 2013. Zeinab Taheri was detained incommunicado in Qarchak Prison in Shahr-e Rey, southern Tehran, where she was subjected to ill-treatment as a result of which she was subsequently transferred to a hospital. Hoda Amid and Najmeh Vahedi were both held incommunicado in Tehran’s Evin Prison during most of their detention. Rezvaneh Mohammadi and Maryam Azad were also detained incommunicado in Evin Prison. Many other women’s rights defenders have also been targeted extensively.³⁴

Reza Eslami, an Iranian-Canadian Associate Professor of Human Rights and Environmental Rights at Tehran’s Shahid Beheshti University was arrested in May 2020 for his participation in organizing and conducting a course on the rule of law in the Czech Republic. In October 2021, he was sentenced to seven years imprisonment and was banned from teaching and travelling abroad. His sentence was reduced to five years’ imprisonment on appeal.

³² See: FIDH, *Indefensible: Iran’s Systematic Criminalisation of Human Rights Defenders*, <https://www.fidh.org/IMG/pdf/obsiran2019web.pdf>, p. 13, 19, 21, 23.

³³ *Ibid.* p. 26.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 15-18; for a few cases.

On 13 February 2021, women's rights defender Najmeh Vahedi, and lawyer and women's rights defender Hoda Amid were sentenced to seven and eight years in prison, respectively, for jointly organizing educational workshops on topics related to marriage, women's rights, and the legal status of women in Iran. Ms. Amid was also banned from practising law for two years. In addition, the two women's rights defenders have been prohibited from joining any political group or party, from being active on social media, and from travelling abroad for two years.³⁵

In 2019, women's human rights defenders Yassman Aryani, Monireh Arabshahi, Mojgan Keshavarz, Saba Kord-Afshar, and Farhad Mayssami,³⁶ and human rights lawyers were Nasrin Sotoudeh, Zeinab Taheri, Mohammad Najafi, Amir Salar Davoodi, and Massood Shamsnejad were incarcerated.³⁷

After nationwide anti-government protests that began in September 2022, hundreds of human rights defenders faced different repressive measures: tens of human rights lawyers were summoned by security and intelligence organizations and judicial authorities, some were detained for brief periods, and some were prosecuted.³⁸

On 14 August 2022, four human rights lawyers, a civil rights defender, and journalist were sentenced to prison terms ranging from 95 days to four years for meeting to draft a complaint against Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei and other government officials for alleged mismanagement of the COVID-19 pandemic and the ban on the import of US and UK-made COVID-19 vaccines.³⁹

Media censored, attacked

Newspapers have constantly been under severe control by the authorities and have faced occasional closures. As a result, they regularly exercise self-censorship. Some issues are considered highly sensitive by the authorities, such as writings that may be considered even remotely as criticism of the Supreme Leader or certain domestic and foreign relations issues, as in the case of the *Entekhab* news outlet [see below].

On 4 October 2017, the daily newspaper *Mostaqel* was banned after publishing a picture of Mir Hossein Mousavi, one of the 2009 presidential candidates, who remains under house arrest with his wife.

In 2017, Iran-based family members of *BBC Persian Service* journalists working abroad faced harassment including being detained and a ban was issued on financial transactions of more than 150 of current and former BBC journalists.⁴⁰

In 2021, there were threats to kidnap BBC's London staff and take them to Iran.⁴¹ BBC complained to UN bodies.

³⁵ FIDH, *Iran: Convictions and prison sentences upheld for Najmeh Vahedi and Hoda Amid*, 19 February 2021; available at: <https://www.fidh.org/en/issues/human-rights-defenders/iran-convictions-and-prison-sentences-upheld-for-najmeh-vahedi-and>

³⁶ See: FIDH, *Indefensible: Iran's Systematic Criminalisation of Human Rights Defenders*, op. cit., p. 15

³⁷ See: FIDH, *Indefensible: Iran's Systematic Criminalisation of Human Rights Defenders*, op. cit., pp. 20-21.

³⁸ For more cases, see: FIDH, *Joint submission to the United Nations Universal Periodic Review (UPR) of Iran*, November 2019; available at: https://www.fidh.org/IMG/pdf/fidh_omct_iddhi-iran_upr_submission_2019-final.pdf

³⁹ FIDH, *Iran: Appeals by five human rights defenders convicted for denouncing COVID-19 mismanagement rejected*, 19 August 2022; available at: <https://www.fidh.org/en/issues/human-rights-defenders/iran-appeals-by-five-human-rights-defenders-convicted-for-denouncing>

⁴⁰ BBC, *Iran judiciary freezes assets of BBC Persian staff*, 15 August 2017; available at: <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-40936023>

On 20 February 2023, the daily newspaper *Sazandegi* was banned for “persisting on committing violations in publishing untrue content and disturbing the public opinion.”⁴²

On 4 September 2023, the online news outlet *Entekhab* was banned and its website was shut down. The website was shut down for publishing a video clip and a report entitled “Iran’s brand on sale; why has Iranian foreign policy grown so weak,” the content of which was deemed by the authorities to be “unlawful and contrary to national interests.”⁴³

Many journalists are extremely careful about writing on Islamic matters. Article 26 of the 1985 Press Code states: “Anyone who insults Islam and its sanctities by means of the press, amounting to apostasy, shall receive the sentence for apostasy [...]” Under *shari’a*, the punishment for apostasy is death.

“Spreading corruption on Earth” under Article 3⁴⁴ of the Audio-visual Offences Law of 2008 has also been invoked to sentence to death certain cyber activists to death.⁴⁵

There have been recurring cases of suppression of media activists operating through the Telegram messaging platform.

For example, Ruhollah Zam, a journalist, who operated the Amadnews channel, an opposition news and corruption whistleblowing outlet, from abroad, was abducted in Iraq during a trip in 2019, was tried on charge of “spreading corruption earth” in July 2020, convicted, and executed in December 2020.⁴⁶

in March 2017, 12 admins of several pro-reforms Telegram channels were also arrested. Some of them were supporters of the former Iranian President Hassan Rouhani. Eight of them were tried for “spreading propaganda against the system,” “collusion against national security,” “insulting the leader”, or “disturbing public opinion” and sentenced to prison terms ranging from two years to five years.⁴⁷

Recommendations:

- Ensure that all individuals fully enjoy the right to freedom of opinion and expression without discrimination.
- Fully guarantee the right to freedom of expression of independent media, and the right of media workers to freely exercise their profession without fearing prosecution.
- Immediately and unconditionally release all those who are detained for the peaceful exercise of the right to freedom of expression, including all human rights defenders, lawyers, and trade unionists.

⁴¹ BBC, BBC appeals to UN over Iran’s harassment of Persian service staff, 25 June 2021; available at:

<https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-57599746>

⁴² Fars News Agency, *Daily Sazandegi was shut down*, 20 February 2023; available at:

<https://www.farsnews.ir/news/14011201000538/>

⁴³ Fars News Agency, *Entekhab news outlet shut down*, 4 September 2023; available at:

<https://www.farsnews.ir/news/14020613000711/>

⁴⁴ Article 3 concerns “producers of obscene products by force, producers of such products intended for sexual abuse, and principal producers of those products.”

⁴⁵ Op. cit. FIDH, *No one is spared: The widespread use of the death penalty in Iran*, p. 18.

⁴⁶ BBC Persian Service, *Ruhollah Zam executed*, 12 December 2020; available at: <https://www.bbc.com/persian/40223487>

⁴⁷ Radio Farda, *Six Telegram channel admins sentenced to 23 years imprisonment in Iran*, 17 September 2017; available at: https://www.radiofarda.com/a/f4_iran_sentence_six_editor_telegram_23_years_prison/28705832.html

Peaceful assemblies violently repressed (Article 21; #24 of the List of Issues)

For over four decades, the Iranian government has systematically cracked down on vastly peaceful demonstrations and assemblies, in a manner that is inconsistent with Article 27 of the Constitution, which provides for the “free organizing of unarmed assemblies and marches.”

This has led to widespread incidents of violence, arrests, long term prison terms, extra-judicial killings, and executions of protesters on trumped up charges, in addition to related limitations on the right to freedom of expression [See above, *Article 19*].

In recent years, there has been a series of nationwide anti-government protests that were largely peaceful: in December 2017; in January 2018; in August 2018; in November 2019; and the most recent - from September 2022, which lasted at least six months.

Scores of people were killed and thousands arrested in connection with the 2017-2018 demonstrations.⁴⁸ Protesters in November 2019 faced an even harsher deadly crackdown, with sources close to the government reporting more than 1,500 deaths nationwide.⁴⁹ At least 15 protesters faced the death penalty in connection with their participation in the 2018 and 2019 protests.⁵⁰ Hassan Yunessi, lawyer for Navid Afkari, one of the protesters who was executed on 12 September 2020, said on 14 September 2020 that there were more than 30 people on death row, without elaborating.⁵¹

The latest wave of large-scale popular protests began on 16 September 2022, when a young Kurdish woman, Zhina (Mahsa) Amini, died in custody of the morality police in Tehran. The crackdown on protesters resulted in the killing of at least 716 people, including 94 children, the injury of many others, and the arrest and detention of thousands of predominantly peaceful protesters and civil society activists. Police and plainclothes agents have used live ammunition, pellets, tear gas, water cannons, and batons to suppress the demonstrations.

At least seven protesters faced fast-tracked trials and were sentenced to death and executed in connection with their participation in the demonstrations: Mohsen Shekari in Tehran; Majidreza Rahnavard (in public) in Mashhad in December 2022; Mohammad Mehdi Karami and Mohammad Hosseini in Karaj in January 2023; and Majid Kazemi Sheikh-Shaybani, Saleh Mirhashemi Boltaghi, and Saeed Yaghubi Kord-Sofla in May 2023. All seven men faced charges including *moharebeh*⁵² and/or spreading corruption on earth.

Recommendations:

- Fully respect the right to freedom of peaceful assembly and lift restrictions on this right, such as the requirement of “compliance with principles of Islam,” in line with Article 21 of the ICCPR.
- Refrain from the use of unnecessary and disproportionate force against peaceful protesters.

⁴⁸ Amnesty International, *Iran’s ‘year of shame’: More than 7,000 arrested in chilling crackdown on dissent during 2018*, 24 January 2019; available at: <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2019/01/irans-year-of-shame-more-than-7000-arrested-in-chilling-crackdown-on-dissent-during-2018/>

⁴⁹ Reuters, *Special Report: Iran’s leader ordered crackdown on unrest - ‘Do whatever it takes to end it’*, 23 December 2019; available at: <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-iran-protests-specialreport-idUSKBN1YRQQR>

⁵⁰ Op. cit., *No one is spared - The widespread use of the death penalty in Iran*, p. 35-37.

⁵¹ Radio Farda, *Navid Afkari’s lawyer: 30 people are on death-row*, 15 September 2020, <https://www.radiofarda.com/a/navid-afkari-more-executions/30837657.html>

⁵² Article 279 of the Islamic Penal Code defines *moharebeh* as “Taking up arms against life, assets or honor of the people or with the intent to intimidate them in a way that causes insecurity [...]”

- Conduct thorough, impartial, and transparent investigations into all deaths of protesters during the large-scale nationwide protests in 2017, 2018, 2019, and 2022, and hold those responsible accountable.

Elections not genuine, inclusive, or participatory (Article 25; #25 of the List of Issues)

Members of religious faiths other than Islam, and in some cases Shi'a Islam, are prevented from taking part in public affairs, because of their religious beliefs. Under the Constitution, the Supreme Leader, the President, and the Head of the Judiciary can only be Shi'a Muslims. Judges can only be Muslims.⁵³ Seats in Parliament are apportioned for a required Muslim majority, while the three recognized non-Muslim religions have a total of five MPs.

Since its establishment in 1979, the Islamic Republic of Iran has regularly organized parliamentary and presidential elections, but these polls have consistently failed to be genuine, inclusive, and participatory. International observation is not mentioned by the election laws.

A discriminatory legal framework excludes large strata of the population from standing for office. Article 115 of the Constitution requires presidential candidates to “be political and religious *rejal*”⁵⁴ and “be faithful and believe in the fundamental principles of the Islamic Republic of Iran and the official religion of the country.” Article 35 of the Presidential Election Law has further expanded those discriminatory provisions. It requires presidential candidates to “be political and religious *rejal*,” “believe in and have practical adherence to *Velayat-e faqih*,”⁵⁵ “be steadfast in believing in and adhering to Islamic ideas and morals,” “be dedicated and practical adherents of the Islamic Republic of Iran, Islamic revolution and the Constitution,” and “be faithful and adherent to foundations of the Islamic Republic of Iran and to the official religion of the country.”

As a result of such provisions, all non-Shi'a Muslims, including Sunni Muslims, the majority of Iranian Kurds, Baloch, Turkmen, and a portion of the Arab population, who are Sunni Muslims, are expressly barred from standing for president. Women have consistently registered as candidates in all 13 presidential elections in Iran since 1979, but the Guardian Council of the Constitution (GCC) has always disqualified them, without providing any reasons. Members of the political opposition do not even take the risk to stand as candidates. The last time any candidate associated with the opposition registered, and withdrew before the election, was in the first presidential election in 1980. Some critics, who do register occasionally, are disqualified.

With regard to legislative elections, certain legal provisions effectively prevent members of the political opposition, government critics, women, and non-Shi'ites from standing as candidates. Article 27 of the Parliamentary Elections Law requires candidates to “believe in and have practical adherence to Islam,” “have practical adherence to the holy system of the Islamic Republic of Iran,” and “declare loyalty to the Constitution and the progressive principle of absolute *Velayat-e faqih*.”

Every important aspect of all electoral processes is tightly controlled by the GCC, a body that is not independent from the executive branch of government. The GCC has six clerical members appointed by the Supreme Leader and six jurist members picked by Parliament from 12 candidates nominated by the Head of the Judiciary (who is also a Supreme Leader's appointee).

⁵³ Article 163 of the Constitution and the 1982 Law for Selection of Judges; available at: <https://www.qavanin.ir/Law/PrintText/85108>

⁵⁴ The Arabic word “*rejal*” (plural of “*rajol*”), which literally means “men,” is used in the Constitution and the Presidential Election Law. In 2009 and 2017, a spokesperson for the Guardian Council of the Constitution said that the candidacy of women was not banned, but no woman passed the vetting hurdle.

⁵⁵ *Velayat faqih* is the guardianship of a (Shi'a) canonist, currently the supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamanei.

The GCC has the authority to interpret election laws, vet candidates, oversee the electoral process, receive and adjudicate complaints over alleged irregularities, confirm the election results, and notify and direct the Ministry of Interior to announce the results. The GCC’s decisions concerning the eligibility of presidential candidates cannot be appealed.

In 2021, the GCC rejected 585 (or 98%) of the 592 candidates who had registered to contest the most recent presidential election. All 40 female candidates who had registered were rejected as well. The disqualification of nearly all candidates and all female candidates is a trend that was observed in previous presidential elections [See table below].

Presidential elections	Total candidates registered ⁵⁶	Female candidates registered & rejected	Total candidates approved	Percentage of rejections
2009	476	42	4	99%
2013	686	30	8	98%
2017	1,636	137	6	99%
2021	592	40	7	98%

Parliamentary elections	Total candidates registered	Total candidates approved
2008	7,000+	4,500
2012	5,000+	Approx.. 5,000
2016	Approx. 12,000	Approx. 6,000
2020	16,145	9,345

Any objection to the election process is strongly suppressed and heavily punished. For example, on 18 August 2018, two human rights lawyers, Ghasem Sholeh-Saadi and Arash Kaykhosravi were arrested by security forces while they were taking part in a gathering in front of Parliament to protest against the GCC’s control over the election process and the vetting of candidates in all elections, and called for free, fair, and transparent polls. They were taken to Evin Prison in Tehran and remained in detention until December 2018. In late December 2018, they were tried and sentenced to six years in prison each. In February 2020, they were acquitted on appeal.

The Iranian government failed to address the key concerns expressed by the UN Human Rights Committee during its previous review of Iran in October 2011 regarding electoral processes in the country.

The Committee expressed concerns over the low number of candidates approved to run during the 2009 presidential election, the blockage of cell phone signals and opposition websites, and the harassment and detention of political activists, members of religious and ethnic communities, and women’s rights activists, among other issues.

⁵⁶ The law was silent on the age requirement for registration as a candidate. As a result, even children aged six registered for the 2017 election. It was amended in 2021 and set the age limits from 40 to 75. Furthermore, candidates must have a Master’s Degree or its equivalent. Military personnel must have a rank of Major General or higher.

There have been no investigations into the abuses committed in the context of the June 2009 presidential election, during and after which thousands were arrested and were subjected to serious human rights violations, including rape and other acts of sexual violence, hundreds of activists were tried and imprisoned, several protesters executed, and at least 72 lost their lives under torture and other ill-treatment in custody. The perpetrators of those crimes enjoyed complete impunity.⁵⁷ Two candidates in the 2009 presidential election, former Prime Minister Mir Hossein Mousavi and former Parliament Speaker Mehdi Karroubi, as well as Mr. Mousavi's wife, Zahra Rahnavard, have remained under house arrest since February 2011.

Recommendations:

- Conduct a thorough, impartial, and transparent investigation into allegations of killings, torture, and other ill-treatment during and following the 12 June 2009 presidential elections, hold those responsible accountable, and provide reparations for the victims and their families.
- Guarantee genuine, inclusive, and participatory election processes at all levels.
- Ensure all individuals can exercise their right to take part in public affairs without any discrimination based on gender, ethnicity, or religion.

Minorities discriminated against (Article 27; #27 of the List of Issues)

Members of ethnic communities in Iran have traditionally suffered discrimination, particularly through restrictions on their rights to enjoy their own culture and to use their own language.

Article 19 of the Constitution grants equal rights to all people of Iran, "regardless of the ethnic group or tribe they belong to." However, Article 20 stipulates that the enjoyment of "all human, political, economic, social, and cultural rights" is contingent on the "observance of the Islamic criteria."

Article 15 of the Constitution defines the boundaries regarding the use of different languages spoken in Iran: "The Official Language and script of Iran, the lingua franca of its people, is Persian. Official documents, correspondence, and texts, as well as text-books, must be in this language and script. However, the use of regional and tribal languages in the press and mass media, as well as for teaching of their literature in schools, is allowed in addition to Persian."

There is no possibility for individuals belonging to ethnic communities to learn their own languages in schools and to use it as a medium of instruction. Article 15 of the Constitution does not allow education to be conducted in languages other than Persian in schools. It allows only for the "teaching of literature" in languages other than Persian.

The most populous ethnic communities of Iran are the Azerbaijani Turks, the Kurds, the Baluch, the Arabs, and the Turkmens.

Iranian Azerbaijani Turks

Azerbaijani Turks have faced consistent cultural discrimination. Azerbaijani cultural activists have often criticized the local state-run radio and TV channels for not carrying enough Azerbaijani-Turkic language

⁵⁷ *Resolution on the serious and systematic human rights violations in Iran, adopted by FIDH's Congress in Yerevan*, FIDH, 11 April 2010, available at: <https://www.fidh.org/en/region/asia/iran/Resolution-on-the-serious-and>. During the 2009 protests, a number of protesters were detained in Kahrizak, a highly non-standard detention center located south of Tehran, where at least three detainees died; two others died a couple of days after being released. All five had signs of torture on their bodies. Two judges and one assistant prosecutor, who had been directly responsible for detaining 147 protesters in that detention center, were later removed from their post. The main judge in charge, Saeed Mortezaei, was charged with "co-responsibility in homicide," but was sentenced to two years in prison. He was released after spending two-thirds of his term and announced that he had been acquitted.

programs, and criticized the authorities for attempting to block the spread of Azerbaijani Turkic by not broadcasting programs in Azerbaijani Turkic for children.

Numerous Azerbaijani Turkic cultural activists aspiring to promote their language, including for education in schools, publication of newspapers, and other cultural activities have been frequently prosecuted. For example:

Abbas Lessani, a veteran Azerbaijani cultural activist, has been imprisoned several times during decades of advocating for the cultural rights of the Azerbaijani Turkic ethnic community, including by publishing a calendar in the Azerbaijani Turkic language, and taking part in Azerbaijani Turkic cultural gatherings on International Mother Language Day. In 2020, He was sentenced to 15 years in prison and two years exile after an unfair trial. The court cited as evidence his peaceful activities, including holding meetings in his home, attending cultural gatherings, and speaking about the history of the Azerbaijani Turkic ethnic community in Iran.⁵⁸ He was released from Ardabil Prison in February 2023 under unclear circumstances. He was then exiled to Yazd for two years as part of his sentence.

Activists Ali Khayrjoo and Mayssam Jolani were charged with “disrupting public order” and sentenced to two months in prison and 20 lashes each in a criminal court in the city of Ardabil in January 2021. The charges stemmed from their “cultural demands, legal demands, writings in language and identity based on human rights covenants, statements of human rights organizations, and international declarations on minority rights.” They were also charged with “spreading propaganda against the system” and “colluding to take action against national security.”⁵⁹

Alireza Farshi Dizaj Yekan was arbitrarily arrested on 21 July 2020 to serve a two years’ imprisonment sentence, following his 2017 conviction on charges of “gathering and colluding to commit crimes against national security” and “founding groups with the purpose of disrupting national security” for his peaceful human rights activities, including his role in submitting a letter to the head of the UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) in Tehran in February 2015 to seek assistance in obtaining official permission to hold a commemorative event on International Mother Language Day in Tehran.⁶⁰

On some occasions, authorities also resorted to mass arrests of AzerbaijaniTurks for taking part in the cultural life of their community.

During the first week of July 2018, more than 80 ethnic Azerbaijanis were arrested by security forces in the days before and during an annual peaceful gathering at Babak Fort in East Azerbaijan Province to mark the birthday of Babak Khorramdin, a well-known 9th century revolutionary figure from the Azerbaijan region of Iran, and to celebrate the culture of Azerbaijani Turks.⁶¹

On the evening of 9 August 2018, 39 men and one woman were arrested in connection with a peaceful Azerbaijani Turkic cultural gathering at the base camp of Sabalan Mountain near the city of Meshgin-

⁵⁸ Amnesty International, *Iran: Activist’s Sentence Increased to 15 years: Abbas Lesani*, 14 October 2020; available at: <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/mde13/3130/2020/en/>

⁵⁹ VOA, *Ongoing suppression of civil society activists in Iran; two Azerbaijani activists sentenced to imprisonment and lashes*, 17 January 2021; available at: https://ir.voanews.com/a/persiannewsiran_iran-tourk-ali-kheirjo-meisam-jolani-human-rights-activist/6099872.html

⁶⁰ *Iran: Defender beaten and denied health care: Alireza Farshi Dizaj Yekan*, Amnesty International, 20 July 2021, available at: <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/mde13/4484/2021/en/>

⁶¹ Amnesty International, *Iran: Release Azerbaijani Turkic minority rights activists detained for peaceful cultural gatherings*, 11 August 2018; available at: <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/mde13/8889/2018/en/>

Shahr in Ardabil Province, during an annual gathering in which they sang and danced to Azerbaijani Turkic songs.

In November 2018, the only Azeri Turkic student newsletter in Tabriz Azad University was banned for “crossing the red lines”- as the rector of Tabriz Islamic Azad University put it. He did not reveal who had banned it.⁶² In 2021, a bilingual Persian-Azeri Turkic student newsletter was banned in Urmiya Azad University for having a name similar to another previously banned newsletter with “pan-Turkish activities.”⁶³

Baluch

The Baluch people suffer discrimination on the basis of language. Education in schools is conducted only in Persian. The state radio broadcasts a few programs in Baluchi language, but the local state TV channel does not broadcast any such programs. There are no major TV channels broadcasting exclusively in Baluchi. Baluchi publications are mainly imported from Pakistan, but they are not readily available.

Kurds

Kurds are denied of the right to learn and use their own language. Some journalists and other media workers have been prosecuted on national security charges, including Mohammad Sadiq Kabudvand, editor of the bilingual Kurdish-Persian weekly *Payam-e mardom-e Kurdistan* (Kurdistan People’s Message) and President of the Kurdish Human Rights Organization. He was arrested in July 2007 and spent five months in solitary confinement before being sentenced to a total of 11 years in prison. The court ruling included accusations such as intending “to cause anxiety to the public and to sow discord among the various social groups through raising racial and ethnic issues by means of publishing stories,” and “publicizing ethnic Kurdish elements in contravention of national unity and spreading discordant rumors.” He was released in May 2017.

Recommendation:

- Ensure that all ethnic communities enjoy effective protection against discrimination and are able to enjoy their own culture and use their own language in media and for education.

⁶² ISCA | News, *The only Azeri Turkic student newsletter in Tabriz Azad University was banned for “crossing the red lines*, 4 November 2018; available at: <https://www.iscanews.ir/news/975685/>

⁶³ Gunaz TV, *Persian-Turkish Yaghish publication banned in Urmiya University*, 20 October 2021 [in Persian]; available at: <https://shorturl.at/cCJOY>