

## HUMAN RIGHTS IN IRAN: REVIEW OF 2024/25

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# IRAN

### Islamic Republic of Iran

Head of state: **Ali Khamenei (Supreme Leader)**

Head of government: **Masoud Pezeshkian**

Authorities further suppressed the rights to freedom of expression, association and peaceful assembly. Women and girls, LGBTI people, and ethnic and religious minorities experienced systemic discrimination and violence. Authorities intensified their crackdown on women who defied compulsory veiling laws, the Baha'i community, and Afghan refugees and migrants. Thousands were arbitrarily detained, interrogated, harassed and/or unjustly prosecuted for exercising their human rights. Trials remained systematically unfair. Enforced disappearances and torture and other ill-treatment were widespread and systematic. Cruel and inhuman punishments, including flogging and amputation, were implemented. The death penalty was used arbitrarily, disproportionately affecting ethnic minorities and migrants. Systemic impunity prevailed for past and ongoing crimes against humanity relating to prison massacres in 1988 and other crimes under international law.

### BACKGROUND

In April the UN Human Rights Council renewed the mandate of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Islamic Republic of Iran and the Independent International Fact-Finding Mission on Iran (FFMI). They and other independent UN experts and international human rights monitors were denied entry to Iran.

In May, President Ebrahim Raisi died in a helicopter crash. He was succeeded by Masoud Pezeshkian in July after a low-turnout election in which the Guardian Council approved only six out of 80 registered candidates.

Iran continued to support Hamas, other Palestinian armed groups and Hezbollah. In April, Iran launched more than 300 munitions at Israel in retaliation for a strike on Iran's consulate in Syria which killed seven members of the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps. In October, Iran launched almost 200 ballistic missiles at Israel in response to the killings of Ismail Haniyeh, the political leader of Hamas, and Hassan Nasrallah, the secretary general of Hezbollah. The attack killed a Palestinian civilian in the West Bank in the Occupied Palestinian Territory. In the same month, Israel carried out air strikes on 20 targets inside Iran, killing one civilian and four military personnel.

Iran provided military support to the government of Bashar al-Assad in Syria before his ousting on 8 December.

Iran provided drones and ballistic missiles to Russia, which were used against civilian infrastructure in Ukraine.

### FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION, ASSOCIATION AND ASSEMBLY

Authorities censored media, jammed satellite television channels, and continued to block or filter mobile apps and social media platforms.

Authorities continued to ban all independent political parties, civil society organizations and trade unions, and subjected workers, including nurses, teachers and labour rights activists, to reprisals for striking and peacefully gathering.

The Internet User Protection Bill, which, if enacted, would further violate people's right to privacy and erode access to the global internet, remained pending before parliament. In January, the Supreme Leader approved a decree prohibiting the use of virtual private networks (VPNs) and coercing users to rely on the domestic internet.

In June, criminal cases were filed against hundreds of people for publicly criticizing Ebrahim Raisi after his death. Hundreds of others received intimidating telephone calls, warnings or summons after authorities declared that "encouraging" presidential election boycotts online was a crime.

Authorities subjected families of victims unlawfully killed during the 2022 Woman Life Freedom uprising and the November 2019 protests to violations for seeking justice.

Authorities subjected protesters, women and girls defying compulsory veiling laws, journalists, artists, writers, academics, university students, LGBTI individuals, members of ethnic and religious minorities and human rights defenders to violations for exercising their human rights, including in advance of the two-year anniversary of the 2022 uprising in September.<sup>1</sup> Violations included interrogations; arbitrary detention; enforced disappearance; unjust prosecution leading to sentences of imprisonment, flogging or fines; and suspension or expulsion from education or employment.

## **ENFORCED DISAPPEARANCES AND TORTURE AND OTHER ILL-TREATMENT**

Authorities routinely subjected detainees to enforced disappearance and incommunicado detention. Torture and other ill-treatment were widespread and systematic. State television aired torture-tainted “confessions”.

Several individuals arbitrarily detained for political reasons in psychiatric facilities were subjected to torture and other ill-treatment, including through enforced administration of pharmaceuticals.

Prison officials and prosecution authorities routinely denied prisoners adequate healthcare, including for torture-related injuries.

Several individuals died in custody in suspicious circumstances, amid credible reports of torture and other ill-treatment, including beatings and denial of healthcare. Among them was Mohammad Mirmousavi, who died the day after his arrest in August. Authorities initially attributed his death to a heart attack, while state media implied that he died from injuries sustained during an altercation before arrest. Authorities only conceded responsibility after a video showing his wounded body led to public outrage. Five police officers were arrested but no information was announced regarding their prosecution.

Prisoners were subjected to cruel and inhuman detention conditions, including overcrowding, unsanitary conditions, poor ventilation, infestation with mice or insects, and poor or no access to bedding, toilets or washing facilities.

The Islamic Penal Code retained punishments amounting to torture, including flogging, blinding, amputation, crucifixion and stoning.

Courts issued at least 186 flogging sentences, according to the Abdorrahman Boroumand Center for Human Rights in Iran. Floggings and amputations were carried out.

## **ARBITRARY DETENTION AND UNFAIR TRIALS**

Trials were systematically unfair, resulting in arbitrary detentions. Due process violations included denial of the right to a lawyer from the time of arrest, admission of torture-tainted “confessions” as evidence, and summary trials.

The judiciary, lacking independence, played a central role in entrenching impunity for torture, enforced disappearances and other crimes under international law.

Impunity prevailed for the arbitrary detention of foreign and dual nationals held for leverage. In some cases, this practice constituted the crime of hostage-taking.

The arbitrary house arrest of dissidents Mehdi Karroubi, Mir Hossein Mousavi and Zahra Rahnava entered its 14th year.

## **WOMEN’S AND GIRLS’ RIGHTS**

Authorities continued to treat women as second-class citizens, including in relation to marriage, divorce, child custody, employment, inheritance and political office.

The legal age of marriage for girls remained at 13, and fathers could obtain judicial permission to subject their daughters to forced marriage at a younger age.

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<sup>1</sup> “Iran: Two years after ‘Woman Life Freedom’ uprising, impunity for crimes reigns supreme”, 11 September

Authorities used politically motivated charges carrying the death penalty against women human rights defenders. Sharifeh Mohammadi was sentenced to death in June<sup>2</sup> and Pakhshan Azizi in July<sup>3</sup>.

From April, the authorities implemented the Noor Plan to intensify their crackdown on women and girls who defied compulsory veiling, including through digital surveillance such as facial recognition technology, further violating women's social, economic, cultural, civil and political rights and restricting their freedom of movement. Increased security patrols subjected women and girls to harassment and violence in public spaces.<sup>4</sup> The crackdown included barring women university students from education; using dangerous car chases to stop women drivers on the road; mass confiscation of women's vehicles; forced "morality" classes; imprisonment and flogging.

In July, police agents seeking to confiscate a woman's car to enforce compulsory veiling laws fired lethal ammunition towards the vehicle, seriously injuring passenger Arezou Badri.

In August, authorities subjected human rights defender Narges Mohammadi and other women prisoners in Evin prison to torture and other ill-treatment, resulting in injuries, and denied them adequate medical care.

In September the Guardian Council approved the bill on the Law Supporting the Family Through the Promotion of the Culture of Chastity and Hijab, further entrenching discrimination and violence against women and girls. The Law was due to be signed by the president and come into force on 13 December, but its promulgation was temporarily paused.

In November, authorities announced plans to open a clinic in the capital, Tehran, "for quitting hijab removal" to provide "scientific and psychological treatment" for women and girls not complying with compulsory veiling.

Those defying compulsory veiling faced imprisonment, exorbitant fines and denial of access to education and public services.

The bill Preventing Harm to Women and Improving Their Security Against Misconduct remained pending before parliament. The draft failed to define domestic violence as an offence, criminalize marital rape or child marriage, or ensure that men who murder their female relatives face proportionate punishments.

## **DISCRIMINATION**

### **Ethnic minorities**

Ethnic minorities, including Ahwazi Arabs, Azerbaijani Turks, Baluchis, Kurds and Turkmen faced widespread human rights violations, including discrimination in access to education, employment, adequate housing and political office. Under-investment in regions populated by ethnic minorities continued, exacerbating their poverty and marginalization.

Persian remained the sole language of instruction in primary and secondary education, despite repeated calls for linguistic diversity.

Security forces unlawfully killed and injured with impunity scores of unarmed Kurdish cross-border couriers (kulbars) between the Kurdistan regions of Iran and Iraq, and Baluchi fuel porters (soukhtbar) in Sistan and Baluchestan province.

### **Religious minorities**

Religious minorities, including Baha'is, Christians, Gonabadi Dervishes, Jews, Sunni Muslims and Yaresan suffered discrimination in law and practice, including in access to education, employment, child adoption, political office and places of worship. Authorities subjected members of religious minorities to arbitrary detention, unjust prosecution and torture and other ill-treatment for professing or practising their faith.

People born to parents classified as Muslim by the authorities risked arbitrary detention, torture and other ill-treatment and the death penalty for "apostasy" if they adopted other religions or atheism.

Authorities raided house churches and arbitrarily detained Christian converts.

Members of the Baha'i faith were subjected to widespread and systematic violations, including arbitrary detention, raids on their homes, exclusion from higher education, expulsion from jobs, forcible closure of businesses, confiscation and

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<sup>2</sup> *Iran: Woman Rights Defender at Risk of Execution: Sharifeh Mohammadi*, 9 September

<sup>3</sup> *Iran: Kurdish Woman Activist Sentenced to Death: Pakhshan Azizi*, 30 September

<sup>4</sup> *Iran: Testimonies Provide a Frightening Glimpse Into the Daily Reality of Women and Girls*, 6 March

destruction of properties, unjust prosecutions, and lengthy prison terms solely for practising their faith. Baha'i women were particularly targeted, with dozens subjected to interrogations and imprisonment.

In January, authorities seized agricultural land belonging to Baha'i families in Mazandaran province. In May, they bulldozed their rice paddies, destroying crops and irrigation berms.

Authorities prevented Baha'i burials in a cemetery used by Baha'is for decades. In March, authorities destroyed more than 30 Baha'i graves in the Khavaran mass grave site. In August, authorities failed to investigate after a Baha'i cemetery in Ahvaz, Khuzestan province, was vandalized.

## **LGBTI people**

LGBTI people suffered systemic discrimination and violence. Consensual same-sex sexual relations remained criminalized with punishments ranging from flogging to the death penalty.

State-endorsed "conversion therapies" amounting to torture or other ill-treatment remained prevalent, including against children. Hormone therapy and surgical procedures, including sterilization, were mandatory for people changing their legal gender.

Gender non-conforming individuals suffered criminalization and denial of access to education and employment.

## **REFUGEES' AND MIGRANTS' RIGHTS**

Afghan nationals faced widespread discrimination, including barriers to education, housing, employment, healthcare, banking services and freedom of movement. Officials dehumanized Afghan nationals, fuelling hate speech and violence against them.

Authorities violently carried out mass arrests and forced returns, and boasted of deporting 850,000 "unauthorized nationals" – likely referring to Afghan nationals and people of Afghan origin – between March and November without due process.

In October, authorities denied reports that security forces used firearms against scores of Afghan nationals at the Iran-Pakistan border, causing deaths and injuries, and failed to carry out effective investigations.

## **DEATH PENALTY**

Hundreds of people were arbitrarily executed.

The death penalty was imposed following grossly unfair trials, including for offences such as drug trafficking which do not meet the threshold of the "most serious crimes" involving intentional killing.<sup>5</sup>

The death penalty was retained for acts protected by the rights to privacy and freedom of expression, religion or belief, including drinking alcohol and consensual same-sex sexual relationships. "Adultery" (sexual relationships outside marriage) remained punishable by stoning to death.

Authorities used the death penalty as a tool of political repression against protesters, dissidents and ethnic minorities.

Oppressed minorities, including Baluchis and Afghan nationals, made up a disproportionate number of those executed.

Two individuals, including a youth with a mental disability, were executed in relation to the 2022 uprising in January<sup>6</sup> and August<sup>7</sup> after convictions in unfair trials and based on torture-tainted "confessions". Several others were sentenced to death.

Authorities continued to sentence to death and execute individuals who were under 18 at the time of the crime;<sup>8</sup> scores of them remained on death row.

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<sup>5</sup> *Iran: Drug-Related Executions Surging in Iran*, 4 April

<sup>6</sup> "Iran: Executions of protester with mental disability and Kurdish man mark plunge into new realms of cruelty", 24 January

<sup>7</sup> "Iran: Shocking secret execution of young man in relation to 'Woman Life Freedom' uprising", 6 August

<sup>8</sup> *Iran: Youth Arrested at 17 at Risk of Imminent Execution: Mohammad Reza Azizi*, 24 October

## IMPUNITY

Systemic impunity prevailed for officials involved in unlawful killings, torture, enforced disappearance and other crimes under international law and grave human rights violations committed in 2024 and previous years.

A bill amending the law on the use of firearms was pending before parliament amid calls by high-level officials to expedite its passing. If approved, the bill would allow additional security and intelligence bodies to carry firearms and further entrench impunity for their unlawful use.

Security forces unlawfully fired at people in cars with impunity, causing deaths and injuries, disproportionately affecting the Baluchi minority.

In March, authorities responded to a December 2023 Amnesty International report by denying that any officials perpetrated sexual violence against protesters in the 2022 uprising. Separately, they responded to an FFMI report by denying its findings that authorities committed the crimes against humanity of murder, imprisonment, torture, rape and other forms of sexual violence, persecution, enforced disappearance and other inhumane acts during the uprising.

Also in March, the Special Committee for Examining the Unrest of 2022, established by the late President Ebrahim Raisi, issued a report covering up violations and blaming unlawful killings on “rioters and terrorists”. Apart from three officials prosecuted behind closed doors, no one was known to have been prosecuted for the unlawful killing and torture of protesters and bystanders during the 2022 uprising.

In January the Supreme Court quashed a death sentence issued by a military court against Jafar Javanmardi, the police commander of Bandar Anzali, Gilan province, for the killing of a protester and sent the case back to a lower court for retrial. In March, a military court in Qazvin province reinstated the death sentence. State media pressured the judiciary to release him, claiming that he had been protecting national security. State media subsequently reported that the judiciary would re-examine the case due to “multiple flaws”.

Authorities continued to conceal the truth surrounding the January 2020 missile strike against Ukraine International Airlines flight 752, which killed 176 people. In August, the Supreme Court quashed the previous military court ruling sentencing 10 officials to prison terms, citing investigative flaws, and sent the case back to the lower court for re-examination.

In March and August, authorities prevented victims’ families from accessing the Khavaran mass grave site, which is believed to contain the remains of some of the several thousand political dissidents forcibly disappeared and extrajudicially executed in 1988. Some of the officials involved in past and ongoing crimes against humanity arising from the 1988 prison massacres continued to hold high official positions.

In June a prisoner exchange deal between Iran and Sweden allowed former Iranian prison official Hamid Nouri, who was sentenced to life imprisonment by a Swedish court in relation to his role in the 1988 prison massacres, to return to Iran.<sup>9</sup> The deal contributed to ongoing impunity for the commission of hostage-taking and other crimes under international law by Iranian authorities.

## RIGHT TO A HEALTHY ENVIRONMENT

Authorities failed to address Iran’s environmental crisis, marked by loss of lakes, rivers and wetlands; groundwater depletion; deforestation; water pollution from discharge of wastewater into urban water sources; land subsidence; and air pollution caused, in part, by the industrial use of substandard fuels, which contributed to thousands of deaths, according to the health ministry, as well as the closure of schools and businesses in December.

Iran maintained high levels of fossil fuel production and subsidies and failed to protect marginalized communities from the impacts of climate change.

The authorities’ mismanagement of water resources led to water shortages, particularly in the provinces of Khuzestan and Sistan and Baluchestan, home to the Ahwazi Arab and Baluchi minorities respectively. Poor water-delivery infrastructure in Sistan and Baluchestan province resulted in several Baluchi villagers, including children, drowning in dangerous pits used to access water.

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<sup>9</sup> *Iran/Sweden: Staggering Blow to Justice for 1988 Prison Massacres in Iran Amid Long Overdue Release of Swedish Nationals*, 18 June