

Recommendations for the International Community on Iran

Imposing Costs on the Islamic Republic for Its Human Rights Atrocities

INTRODUCTION

Since anti-government protests broke out across Iran after the death in state custody of 22-year-old Jina Mahsa Amini on September 16, 2022, three days after her arrest by the Islamic Republic's morality police for wearing an allegedly improper hijab, state security forces have killed hundreds of protesters (more than 527 as of this writing, including at least 71 children).¹ These are only known cases; actual numbers are likely to be far higher.

As of February 1, 2023, the Iranian judiciary had sentenced at least 20 people to death in connection with the protests, while 47 are facing charges that could carry the death penalty, according to research by the Center for Human Rights in Iran (CHRI); four young men have already been executed after brief, closed trials in which there was no semblance of due process.²

At least 20,000 protesters have been arrested, with violent arrests and abusive detainment conditions causing untold numbers of serious injuries.³ Detained women, including university students, are being subjected to sexual violence while in state custody.⁴ Prominent public figures and members of society, such as athletes and cultural figures who have expressed support for the protesters, have been arrested, tortured, and sentenced to death.⁵ Influential members of civil society have been rounded up and detained "preventatively."⁶ Lawyers peacefully protesting these arrests have been arrested.⁷ Doctors trying to treat wounded protesters have been arrested.⁸ Dozens of school children participating in peaceful protests have been rounded up and sent to "psychological centers."⁹

Condemnations by individual governments and UN officials have had no impact; instead, the authorities in Iran have demonstrated a deepening pattern of lethal suppression of peaceful protest and the complete lack of any accountability for egregious rights violations.¹⁰

The recommendations in this CHRI briefing are aimed at outlining a strengthened international response to these abuses, such that meaningful costs are imposed on the Islamic Republic for their continuation. They have been developed in close consultation with civil society in Iran, including protesters, lawyers, activists, labor leaders, journalists, teachers, students, workers, and others.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Recall ambassadors

Governments that have diplomatic relations with the Islamic Republic should recall their ambassadors from the Islamic Republic in protest against the Iranian government's hanging of protesters and killing of hundreds of peaceful demonstrators in the streets.

Summon Iran's diplomats

Governments worldwide should summon Iranian ambassadors to communicate directly their outrage over the Islamic Republic's executions and violence against the protesters, and warn that further costs and isolation will ensue unless the Iranian authorities immediately take the following actions:

- > Institute a halt to executions against protesters.
- > Annul and cease to issue any and all death sentences against protesters.
- > Cease all lethal violence against protesters in the streets and all physical and sexual violence against detainees in state custody.
- > Release all detained protesters.
- > Provide protesters accused of crimes with the rights accorded to defendants under international standards of due process, including the right to independent counsel of choice.
- > Respect the right to peaceful protest and to freedom of expression.

Designate the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) as a terrorist organization

Governments and transnational bodies such as the European Union (EU) should designate the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC), as well as all of its subsidiary forces, including the paramilitary Basij militia and the Quds Force, as terrorist organizations, as per the European Parliament's January 2023 resolution.¹¹

Strengthen human rights sanctions

Governments around the world should impose and/or expand human rights sanctions against Iranian officials and entities associated with rights violations, and freeze the assets of officials who are human rights violators.

This should include the supreme leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC), the Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting (IRIB), judges who are issuing death sentences after sham trials, and other figures in the judiciary, police, prisons, and detention centers associated with rights violations, as well as the companies they control and the assets they have outside Iran.¹² Governments should consult closely with human rights organizations to further identify and sanction other individuals, companies, state and parastatal organizations, and entities on the national, provincial and municipal levels that are associated with rights violations.

Governments should also work together to facilitate broad and coordinated international enforcement of these sanctions, and enhanced due diligence and information sharing to uncover proxies and shell companies.

Multinational companies should institute rigorous due diligence that includes their supply chains, third-party distributors and resellers to prevent the sale of sanctioned items to Islamic Republic entities that enhance the state's repressive and surveillance capabilities, and governments should make every effort to identify and sanction any individuals and companies who sell these products to the Islamic Republic.

Sponsor individual detainees or prisoners

Legislators and parliamentarians around the world should “adopt” individual detained protesters or political prisoners, especially those who are or may be facing execution, publicizing their cases and the unjust nature of their prosecution or sentences, and publicly demanding their safety and release, both on the international stage and directly with Iranian ambassadors and other Islamic Republic officials.¹³

Suspend negotiations to restore the JCPOA

The nuclear deal with Iran cannot be isolated from the atrocities being committed by the Iranian authorities. While efforts at nuclear nonproliferation are important, a revived JCPOA in its current form would deliver significantly increased oil revenues to the Islamic Republic and access to frozen assets, which will increase the repressive capacity of the state. The Islamic Republic should not be bolstered when it is gunning down hundreds of young women and men in order to crush peaceful dissent.

Expel Iran from international organizations

To protest the Islamic Republic's violent repression, officials and members of multilateral bodies, international NGOs, professional and industry associations, labor organizations, art and cultural associations, and sports committees and federations should initiate action to expel the Islamic Republic from their organizations, especially ones whose principles, including for example non-discrimination and freedom of expression, it violates.

Support safe digital communication for the Iranian people

Tech companies are still by and large not making their communication products available to the people of Iran, despite the U.S. Treasury's new D2 General License which expands the range of communication tools and services that are exempt from sanctions. As a result, Iranians continue to be hampered in their ability to share information online with one another and with the outside world. Given that most of the relevant companies are American, the U.S. government needs to reach out directly to these companies to offer compliance reassurances and urge them to make these tech products available to Iranians.

Given the difficulties Iranians have accessing international financial channels for payments, governments should provide funding to enable companies to offer these products free of charge to the people of Iran. Governments should also provide expedited funding and support for companies to develop new tools and services that will enable the people of Iran to circumvent the state's frequent internet shutdowns.¹⁴

Support the UN's Fact-Finding Mission on Iran

Governments should provide robust support for organizations and experts contributing information to the fact-finding mission set up at the U.N. Human Rights Council (UNHRC) to address the Islamic Republic's violence against protesters in Iran, and assist in the investigation and prosecution of those suspected of criminal responsibility.

Assist those fleeing Islamic Republic persecution

Governments should provide direct, expedited assistance for Iranians fleeing persecution by the Islamic Republic, including expediting asylum cases and providing protection for those seeking asylum.

Expand support and funding for Farsi-language broadcasts

Governments should provide expanded funding and support for Farsi-language broadcasts that deliver independent news and informational broadcasts to the people of Iran.

Strengthen public condemnations and multilateral resolutions

World leaders at the highest levels of government should continue to forcefully and publicly condemn—unilaterally, in joint statements with other governments, and at multilateral gatherings—the Iranian government's executions and violence against protesters. Resolutions should also be initiated at multilateral bodies such as the G7, OECD gatherings, and UN bodies such as the UN General Assembly.

CONCLUSION

Nationwide anti-government protests in Iran are being violently suppressed by Islamic Republic authorities through a combination of lethal state violence against protesters in the streets, mass arrests, prosecutions without due process, and death sentences for protesters after sham trials. Global verbal condemnation has had no impact on the Iranian authorities.¹⁵ The potential for further mass atrocities will increase as the authorities seek to reassert control.

This is the second time in the last three years that the authorities in Iran have responded to nationwide protests with lethal violence on a mass scale. Credible estimates say over 1,500 civilians were killed by state security forces during the November 2019 protests.¹⁶ No state official was ever held accountable for any of those deaths. The current violence against protesters indicates a grave escalation of this pattern of swift, indiscriminate and lethal state violence to crush peaceful protest in Iran.

Without a strengthened international response that imposes meaningful costs on the Iranian authorities for their abuses, they will continue to gun down, execute, and violate the rights of the people of Iran at will. The Islamic Republic has demonstrated resistance to pressure, but it is not impervious. Coordinated action by the international community that imposes severe diplomatic, political and economic costs on the authorities in Iran for the continuation of these violations is imperative.

Endnotes

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ABOUT US

Founded in 2008, the Center for Human Rights in Iran (CHRI) is an independent, nonprofit 501(c)(3) organization that works to protect and promote human rights in Iran. Headquartered in New York City, the Center researches and documents human rights violations throughout Iran, and provides governments, the U.N., think tanks, global media, and research centers around the world with detailed information, analysis and policy recommendations. The Center's approach is nonpartisan; we operate within the framework of international human rights law.

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