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Human rights situations that require the Council's attention

Joint written statement submitted by CIVICUS - World Alliance for Citizen Participation, International Alliance of Women, non-governmental organizations in general consultative status, Women's Human Rights International Association, Association Internationale pour l'égalité des femmes, Edmund Rice International Limited, Human Rights Research League, The Law Society, WomenNC-NC Committee for CSW/CEDAW, Women's Network for Change, World Without Genocide, non-governmental organizations in special consultative status, Association of World Citizens, International Society for Human Rights, Mouvement contre le racisme et pour l'amitié entre les peuples, non-governmental organizations on the roster*

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement, which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[16 August 2026]

* Issued as received, in the language of submission only.



Escalating Political Executions in the Islamic Republic of Iran

We express grave concern at the escalating use of the death penalty by the Islamic Republic of Iran against political prisoners, perceived opponents, and persons arrested in connection with anti-government protests. Executions appear increasingly to be used to suppress dissent, intimidate society and punish the exercise of the rights to freedom of expression, association and peaceful assembly.

This situation must also be assessed as an urgent atrocity-prevention concern. The United Nations Framework of Analysis for Atrocity Crimes recalls that atrocity crimes are processes with histories, precursors, and triggering factors. Relevant indicators include a record of serious human rights violations, motives or incentives to target civilian populations, enabling circumstances or preparatory action, and signs of a widespread or systematic attack against a civilian population.⁽¹⁾

Several of these indicators are now present in the Islamic Republic of Iran.

The Independent International Fact-Finding Mission on the Islamic Republic of Iran (FFMI) described a sharply worsening environment in its March 2026 report. It stated that the authorities had responded to protests beginning on 28 December 2025 with violence, mass arrests, an internet shutdown and emerging reports of expedited death penalty proceedings in violation of the rights to life, due process and fair trial. The Mission also recorded that the Prosecutor General declared all protesters to have committed *moharebeh* (waging war on God), a capital offence, while the Head of the Judiciary called for cases to be handled “quickly” and with “no mercy” or “no leniency”.⁽²⁾

The deterioration continued after the armed conflict that began on 28 February 2026. On 19 June 2026, UN experts led by Special Rapporteur on the Islamic Republic of Iran Mai Sato warned that any agreement failing to address human rights in the Islamic Republic of Iran would be “fundamentally incomplete”. They stated that, since the war began, “Iranian authorities have moved aggressively against dissent”, with thousands detained, many reportedly tortured, forcibly disappeared, subjected to mock executions or forced to confess on camera. ⁽³⁾

Political prisoners, members of ethnic and religious minorities, and protesters remain at acute risk. Amnesty International has documented the intensified use of the death penalty as a weapon of repression since the 2022 uprising and reported that, since 28 February 2026, the authorities have arbitrarily executed at least 21 individuals convicted in politically motivated cases after grossly unfair trials, including protesters, dissidents and persons accused of *baghi* (armed rebellion against the state) or espionage.⁽⁴⁾

Reports on the so-called “Alikhani Square” case in Isfahan indicate that four defendants have now been hanged, all in their teens or twenties: Erfan Esfandiari and Gol-Mohammad Mohammadi on 19 July 2026; and Abolfazl Sepahi Badjani and Amirhossein Safari Hosseinabadi who were publicly hanged at Alikhani Square on 28 July 2026. Reports further indicate that the defendants were denied lawyers of their choosing.⁽⁵⁾ Several other co-defendants remain under death sentence or at risk of execution.⁽⁶⁾ The public nature of the 28 July executions appears intended to extend the intimidation effect beyond the individuals executed.

Amnesty International has also documented executions of dissidents targeted on the basis of their actual or alleged affiliation with the People’s Mojahedin Organisation of Iran (PMOI or MEK). Vahid Bani Amerian, Abolhassan Montazer, Babak Alipour, Pouya Ghobadi, Akbar Daneshvarkar and Mohammad Taghavi Sangdehi were executed between 30 March and 4 April 2026, reportedly in secret and without prior notice to them, their families or lawyers.⁽⁷⁾ Such politically-motivated executions have continued throughout the summer. Political prisoner Mehdi Khanaki was executed on 22 July in Karaj for membership in the PMOI and participating in the January 2026 protests.⁽⁸⁾

These cases form part of a wider pattern in which vague and overly broad offences such as *moharebeh*, *baghi* and *efsad-e fel-arz* (spreading corruption on earth) are used to transform dissent, association, protest activity or alleged opposition links into capital offences. The

FFMI reported that Iran's 2025 espionage law further expanded the use of the death penalty through broad and undefined provisions, including offences linked to sharing images or videos with foreign media.(9)

Despite the risks, Iranians continue to speak out against the death penalty. For more than 132 weeks, political prisoners have been protesting peacefully through the ongoing "No to Executions Tuesdays" campaign in at least 59 prisons nationwide(10), while in July 2026 some 1,500 prisoners took part in a sit-in strike in Ghezelhesar prison that lasted more than two weeks.(11)

The current wave of executions cannot be separated from the unresolved legacy of the 1988 mass executions of political prisoners. Following a six-year investigation, in July 2024, the then Special Rapporteur on human rights in the Islamic Republic of Iran made a legal assessment that the mass extrajudicial executions and enforced disappearances of 1981-1982 and 1988 amounted to crimes against humanity and genocide. (12) Those findings remain directly relevant because the present pattern is unfolding amid persistent impunity and denial of truth, justice, and reparations to victims' families.

The warning signs today are deeply troubling: dehumanisation of political opponents, national security charges used to criminalise dissent, accelerated implementation of death sentences, secrecy surrounding executions, and rhetoric appearing to justify repetition of past atrocities. In July 2025, Fars News Agency, a state-affiliated outlet linked to the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC), portrayed the 1988 executions as a "successful historical experience" and argued for their repetition against contemporary political opponents.(13) UN Special Procedures have also raised concerns regarding destruction of grave sites associated with the 1988 massacre.(14)

The Human Rights Council should treat these developments as urgent warning signs requiring preventive action. The international community failed to prevent the 1988 massacre and should not ignore present indicators of recurrence.

Recommendations

The Member and Observer States of the Human Rights Council should:

- Urge the authorities of the Islamic Republic of Iran to halt all executions, particularly those involving political prisoners, protesters, members of ethnic and religious minorities, and persons convicted on national security-related charges.
- Demand access to independent legal counsel for all detainees and protection from torture and ill-treatment.
- Request enhanced monitoring and reporting by the Special Rapporteur on the Islamic Republic of Iran, the Fact-Finding Mission and relevant thematic Special Procedures.
- Encourage the Office of the Special Advisers on the Prevention of Genocide and on the Responsibility to Protect to assess the situation under the UN Framework of Analysis for Atrocity Crimes.
- Support preservation of evidence and international accountability efforts concerning executions, torture, arbitrary detention, enforced disappearance, and persecution on political grounds.
- Reaffirm the need for accountability for the 1988 mass extrajudicial executions and enforced disappearances, including through an independent international mechanism.

Prevention, accountability and protection of the right to life must be central to the Council's response.

Human Rights, MEDEL - Magistrats européens pour la démocratie et les libertés, Women's UN Report Network - WUNRN, Kazakhstan International Bureau for Human Rights and Rule of Law (KIBHR), Survivors Fund (SURF), Iran Human Rights Monitor (Iran HRM), West African Human Rights Defenders Network (WAHRDN), Justice for the Victims of the 1988 Massacre in Iran (JVMI), Comité de Soutien aux Droits de l'Homme en Iran (CSDHI), Association des femmes Iraniennes en France (AFIF), Associazione delle Donne Democratiche Iraniane in Italia, Associazione Italiana per i Diritti Umani in Iran, NGO(s) without consultative status, also share the views expressed in this statement.

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