

Norway must support democracy and human rights defenders in Iran

(Oslo, June 26, 2023) The human rights situation in Iran is precarious. Large parts of the population have become victims of extensive and systematic human rights violations, which may amount to crimes against humanity.

On September 13, 2022, Jina ‘Mahsa’ Amini, a 22-year-old Iranian woman from the Kurdish minority, was arrested for allegedly failing to comply with the country's strict dress code for women by wearing what was characterized as an “incorrect” hijab. Three days later, she was dead. The investigation into her death sought to exonerate the police and lacks credibility. Available evidence in the case points to her death as a result of police brutality.

Amini’s death and the authorities’ cover-ups sparked nationwide protests across the country, where women and young people took the lead under the banner “Zan, Zendegi, Azadi” (“Women, Life, Freedom”). The protests spread to 160 cities and all 31 provinces in the country. All segments of the population participated and demanded an end to the theocratic, dictatorial regime.

The regime met the protests with violence. Security forces were instructed to use all means to stop the demonstrations. Especially in the Kurdish and Baluchi regions, there were many victims. Security forces [used](#) live ammunition, water cannons, tear gas, and beat participants. About 500 people were confirmed dead by the end of the year, and an estimated 14,000 had been arrested, including journalists, lawyers, activists, artists, and athletes who expressed support for the protest movement.

There are numerous reports of torture and rape of arrested protesters. In December 2022, two men were executed in connection with the protests, after summary trials without fair hearings. At least 40 others have received death sentences and are at risk of execution. The regime continues its repression, and the number of executions increases significantly. More than 500 people were executed in 2022—the highest number since 2017. So far this year, 494 people have been [executed](#) (until 8 September 2023).

The UN Special Rapporteur for Iran [emphasizes](#) that “[s]evere violations of the rights to life, liberty and security of person, the right not to be subjected to torture or cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment, the right not to be subjected to rape and other forms of sexual violence, and the right not to be subjected to arbitrary arrest or detention have been documented since the start of the protests as part of an apparent policy instigated at the highest level of the State to crush the protests at all costs. The scale and gravity of these violations point to the possible commission of international crimes, notably the crimes against humanity of murder, imprisonment, enforced disappearances, torture, rape and sexual violence, and persecution.”

Crimes against humanity are severe violations of personal integrity committed as part of a widespread or systematic attack on a civilian population. They can be committed in both peacetime and wartime. These are very serious crimes that the international community has a special responsibility to address and prosecute. The International Criminal Court (ICC) has jurisdiction over such crimes when the territorial state or nation-state is a member of the court. Individual states can also prosecute persons for such crimes under the principle of universal jurisdiction, as Sweden has done with Hamid Noury, who was [sentenced](#) to life imprisonment by a Swedish court for the murder of political prisoners and war crimes in Iran.

Iran is not a member of the ICC but is a member of the UN and has [ratified](#), among others, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (in 1975), the Convention against Racial Discrimination (in 1968), the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (in 1975), and the Convention on the Rights of the Child (in 1994). But even though the state is obliged to respect and secure human rights, authorities violate them on a large scale with no consequences for the perpetrators.

Anyone who does not support or is part of the regime is at risk, including women who have played an important role in the protests, LGBTIQ+ people, and activists. Children are also at risk. People belonging to the Kurdish and Baluchi minorities are over-represented among the people who are killed in connection to the protests, and other serious human rights violations. According to the [UN](#), 130 Baluchis were killed by Iranian security forces from the start of the protests until 31 December 2022. At least 125 Kurdish protesters were killed in the same period, including 13 children and 8 women. Authorities are cracking down hard on political parties based on ethnic minorities.

Other ethnic and religious minorities, including Azerbaijanis, Baluchis, Arabs, Turkmen, Bahá'ís, Christians, and Mandaean are also vulnerable. These minorities have for decades been victims of systematic discrimination and persecution.

On this basis, we urge Norway and like-minded states to address the very serious and systematic violations of human rights in multilateral forums as well as bilaterally. Human rights should not be sacrificed for other considerations, such as negotiations related to Iran's nuclear program. Norway should also contribute to investigations, legal proceedings, and targeted sanctions, in coordination with the EU or like-minded states, against individuals who are responsible for the violations. The sanctions must be followed up with effective control mechanisms to ensure compliance.

Recommendations

Norway should, along with like-minded states:

1. Condemn the ongoing systematic and widespread human rights violations against Iranian women, ethnic and religious minorities, human rights defenders, journalists, lawyers, LGBTIQ+ people, students, and other groups targeted by the regime. Norway must urge Iranian authorities to release those unjustly imprisoned.
2. Urge Iran to adhere to its obligations as a state party to international human rights conventions.
3. Implement targeted sanctions, along with the EU and/or like-minded states, against Iranian officials responsible for the most severe human rights violations.

4. Collaborate with like-minded states to investigate and prosecute international core crimes in Iran under the principle of universal jurisdiction.
5. Raise specific individual cases with Iranian authorities, related to executions, torture, and other serious human rights violations. Based on experience, international attention can lead to better treatment of imprisoned persons.
6. Promote recognition of the political rights of Iran's minorities, including the right to form organizations and parties. Advocate for a peaceful solution for the Kurds and Baluchis in Iran and issues related to other minorities, in accordance with international norms for the protection of minorities.
7. Be a driving force in the UN Human Rights Council, the UN General Assembly, and other international bodies to condemn Iran's human rights violations:
 - a. Address the situation of political prisoners and demand their immediate release.
 - b. Call for a moratorium on executions and the abolition of the death penalty. Draw attention to, and name, if possible, children who are at risk of execution.
 - c. Focus the spotlight on Bahá'ís and individuals from other religious minorities, who are serving prison sentences because of their religious beliefs.
 - d. Continue to play an active role in drafting resolutions on Iran in the Human Rights Council. The language was strengthened in 2022 and should be further strengthened given the negative developments in the country.
 - e. Along with other countries, use the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) or bilateral talks to stop the persecution of minorities, including ethnic minorities, Bahá'ís, and other religious minorities, as well as Iranian civil society in general.
8. Establish a support scheme for organizations and individuals inside or outside Iran who are working to document human rights violations, promoting respect for democratic principles and human rights, particularly women's rights, and/or supporting minority rights.
 - a. Norway should facilitate that human rights defenders in exile, from Iran and other countries with precarious human rights situations, can continue their work in Norway.
 - b. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs should have a dialogue with these groups and encourage the establishment of platforms where these individuals can effectively contribute relevant information to Norwegian authorities.
 - c. This type of work should be recognized in the introductory program for newly arrived refugees. This also entails ensuring the possibility of transferring funds to actors inside the country.
9. Norway must continue to offer protection to individuals fleeing persecution in Iran, including those belonging to ethnic or religious minorities, women, and LGBTIQ+ individuals.
 - a. Persons who have participated in political opposition and protests abroad, converts, and others, should not be returned to Iran.
 - b. LGBTIQ+ persons and female human rights defenders should be prioritized in the selection of quota refugees (from Turkey and elsewhere), as Norway is a safer place for these groups to live than many other countries.

Organizations and Individuals Supporting the Statement

1. Amnesty International Norway
2. Association for the Human Rights of the Azerbaijani People in Iran
3. Baluchistan Human Rights Association, Oslo
4. Benyamin Farnam, Iranian Documentary Producer, Editor, and Filmmaker
5. The Norwegian Helsinki Committee
6. The Norwegian Human Rights Fund
7. Hengaw Organization for Human Rights
8. The Norwegian Confederation of Trade Unions (LO)
9. Leila Ghahremani, Iranian Writer, Poet
10. Legal Counseling for Women (JURK)
11. Church of Norway Council on Ecumenical and International Relations
12. Mental Health and Human Rights Info
13. Norwegian PEN
14. Plan International Norway
15. Rafto Foundation
16. Sex and Politics
17. Stefanus Alliance
18. The Norwegian Students' and Academics' International Assistance Fund (SAIH)