

MUNAPAC'26

UNHRC Study Guide

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United Nations Human
Rights Council

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1. Letter from the Secretary-General

Dear Participants of MUNAPAC'26,

My role as the Secretary-General grants me the distinct honor of contributing to a conference that embodies the principles of education, excellence, and collaboration. Engaging with a team of exceptionally dedicated and talented individuals, I am truly excited to help shape an event that reflects the very best of our community. Motivated by our shared vision, we strive to deliver an experience that captures the spirit and ambition of our club. Rooted in a strong tradition of Model United Nations excellence, this year's conference continues to build upon years of dedication and growth.

Every member of our academic and organizational teams has worked tirelessly to ensure that MUNAPAC'26 becomes an unforgettable experience. Not only do we aim to provide three remarkable days, but also to contribute meaningfully to your academic and personal growth. In this spirit, our conference offers a wide and dynamic range of committees designed to appeal to all styles of debate. Notably, this year we are proud to present 12 unique committees, each crafted with immense care and originality.

Among them are Historical GA1: DISEC where you can relieve the political tension of the breakup of a major state, GA4: SPECPOL which brings you an out-of-this-world debate experience; forming the backbone of our General Assembly and international governance discussions.

Moreover, our special committees consist of UNHRC in which you will be the voice of the unheard, Historical UNSC where the dust of the Middle East can be felt, Historical NATO and the desperate need for a reform, Parlamento Italiano with its unique Mediterranean atmosphere, World Trade Organization where global trade is in your hands, and the Worcester Convention where the fight for equality is born; all bringing diverse political perspectives to the table.

Keeping innovation and adrenaline at the core of our crisis committees; the Department of Homeland Security attempts to maintain public security, FCC: Small Council is challenged with the well-being of Westeros, FCC The Apocalypse of St. John plunges delegates into a world of prophecy and chaos, and JCC: Anglo-Soviet Invasion of Iran takes delegates back to WWII to relive the unjust nature of war.

On behalf of the APAC Model United Nations Team, I truly hope MUNAPAC'26 will be an unforgettable experience for each and every one of you, and eagerly anticipate welcoming you all to our conference this June.

Warm regards,
Saniyar Safari
Secretary-General, MUNAPAC'26

2. Letter from the Under-Secretary-General

Dear Delegates,

Hello, my name is Melody, and it is my distinct honor to welcome you to the UNHRC committee on the topic of The Collapse of Human Rights in Iran. I would also like to add that this is my final MUN and it's an honor to have my last MUN be about my country.

This agenda invites you to engage with one of the most pressing and controversial human rights crises facing the international community today. The erosion of fundamental freedoms in Iran, including restrictions on freedom of expression, suppression of peaceful protest, gender-based discrimination, arbitrary detentions, and violations of civil liberties, has raised urgent concerns within the global human rights framework, making this issue both deeply significant and highly relevant to the work of UNHRC.

As delegates, you will be asked to consider not only the immediate realities of human rights violations in Iran, but also the wider political, social, and institutional conditions that have allowed such practices to persist. This includes examining the role of state authority, the treatment of women and minority groups, limitations on political participation, and the international community's responsibility in responding to such crises.

This topic calls for thoughtful discussion, careful research, and a genuine commitment to understanding the complexities surrounding sovereignty, accountability, and universal human rights. I encourage each of you to approach this committee with seriousness, open-mindedness, and empathy, and to work toward solutions that are practical, cooperative, and grounded in the principles of human dignity and international responsibility.

I am confident that this committee will demonstrate professionalism, respect, and meaningful engagement throughout our sessions. I look forward to hearing your ideas and seeing the depth of your preparation.

For my final words, I would like to thank our dear academic assistant PERIHAN DAVISON. She is amazing, and she wrote most of the study guide, so my sincere thanks and gratitude go to her.

And finally, I wish you all the best in your preparation and in the sessions ahead. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me via email:

zafermelody@gmail.com

Sincerely,

Melody Zafer

3. Letter from the Academic Assistant

Dear Delegates,

We extend our warmest greetings and formally welcome you to the upcoming session of the United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC).

The agenda of this committee, “The Collapse of Human Rights in Iran,” addresses one of the most complex and continuously evolving human rights situations in the contemporary international system. This topic requires not only a comprehensive understanding of Iran’s political and legal structures but also a strong grasp of international human rights law, particularly the frameworks established under the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) and other core UN human rights instruments.

Delegates are expected to approach this committee with a high level of academic preparation and analytical depth. This includes a thorough understanding of key areas such as freedom of expression, women’s rights, protest movements, judicial processes, digital surveillance, minority rights, and the use of capital punishment. Equally important is the ability to evaluate state behavior within the context of international legal obligations and to distinguish between political narratives and verifiable human rights standards.

Furthermore, delegates are strongly encouraged to move beyond descriptive arguments and engage in critical analysis of structural causes, state accountability mechanisms, and the effectiveness of international responses. Successful participation will require the ability to propose realistic, legally grounded, and diplomatically viable solutions that reflect both respect for sovereignty and the protection of fundamental human rights.

We trust that each delegate will contribute meaningfully to the academic quality and diplomatic rigor of the committee. Should you require any clarification regarding procedural matters or expectations, please do not hesitate to contact us.

We look forward to a highly engaging and productive session.

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Perihan Davison

Academic Assistant of UNHRC

4. Introduction to the Committee

4.1. About UNHRC

The United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC) is the principal intergovernmental body within the United Nations responsible for the promotion and protection of human rights around the world. Established in 2006, the Council consists of 47 Member States elected by the UN General Assembly and is tasked with addressing human rights violations, conducting investigations, appointing Special Rapporteurs, and creating fact-finding missions in situations of particular concern.

The Council serves as a forum where states, international organizations, and civil society actors discuss violations of internationally recognized human rights and explore mechanisms for accountability, protection, and reform. While the UNHRC cannot directly prosecute perpetrators or impose sanctions, its investigations and resolutions often shape international responses and contribute to future accountability efforts.

4.2. Introduction to the Agenda

The agenda 'Collapse of Human Rights in Iran' examines the gradual decline of civil, political, social, and cultural rights of individuals in the Islamic Republic of Iran since the 1979 Revolution.

The establishment of the Islamic Republic changed the whole political system of Iran. After the revolution, power was transferred to the institutions which were governed by the *Velayat-e Faqih* doctrine (Guardianship of the Islamic Jurist). It presented large-scale authority to religious heads. Despite the fact that the government that emerged from the revolution claimed to be an Islamic and popular system, many critics argue that the political framework it produced allowed for a systematic restriction of political opposition, freedom of expression, freedom of assembly, women's rights and minority rights.

Over the years after the revolution, there have been many incidents of state repression getting worldwide attention. Repression has been part of an ongoing pattern by the Iranian authorities that goes back to the early days of the Islamic Republic. The most significant examples include the suppression of opponents, mass executions of political prisoners in 1988, a crackdown on student protests in 1999, an attack on the Green Movement in 2009, a violent response to economic protests in 2017-18 and 2019, and a crackdown all over the country after the murder of Mahsa Amini in 2022.

International observers are particularly concerned about the repeated use of deadly force against protesters, widespread refuge to the death penalty, restrictions on women's rights, internet shutdowns, torture and forced confessions, discrimination against ethnic and religious minorities, and restrictions on the media.

Findings by the United Nations Fact-Finding Mission on Iran in 2014 reveal that many violations during the crackdown of the 2022 protests may amount to crimes against

humanity. The Mission recorded evidence of unlawful deaths, detention, torture, sexual violence, and systematic discrimination against women and girls. Human Rights Organisations and UN experts have raised similar concerns about developments in the years 2025 and 2026.

The agenda poses a complicated challenge for delegates. The history of Iran is told using more than one national narrative; these range from national sovereignty and security to cultural tradition, religious values, sanctions, foreign intervention and universal human rights norms. Because of that, delegates should carefully distinguish between verified facts, documented allegations, political claims and contested information.

5. Historical Background: From Revolution to Repression (1979–1998)

5.1. The 1979 Islamic Revolution

The Iranian revolution of 1979 was a major political downfall, which resulted in the overthrow of HIM Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi and the establishment of the Islamic Republic. The revolution was not the product of a single ideological group but was the result of a broad coalition of religious clerics under Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, Marxist organisations, and leftist students.

The growing unrest in the country throughout 1978 was marked by strikes in important economic sectors, particularly in oil, and small demonstrations in large cities. By early 1979 the Shah had fled Iran and gone into exile. Shortly after this, Ayatollah Khomeini returned from France in February 1979 to become the central political figure of the revolution. After the monarchy fell, a transitional government was put into place for a short while, but power soon fell into the hands of the revolutionary structures under the command of Khomeini. In April 1979, the creation of the Islamic Republic was officially approved by a national referendum. Later that year, a new constitution was adopted, which introduced Velayat-3 Faqih, giving ultimate authority to the Supreme Leader over elected institutions.

This structural change fundamentally changed Iran's political system, replacing a secular monarchy with a mix of dictatorship and republic.

5.2. Mandatory Hijab and Women's Protests

One of the first human rights disputes after the revolution was over women's rights and the introduction of Islamic dress codes. In March 1979, Ayatollah Khomeini publicly declared that women working in government institutions would have to abide by Islamic dress standards. When first proposed as a policy recommendation, rather than a binding law, it raised alarms among women's rights groups and sections of the urban population.

International Women's Day fell on 8th of March 1979, and that day thousands of women took to the streets of Tehran and other major cities. Students, teachers, professionals and women who had supported the revolution but objected to mandatory veiling took part in the protests. Protesters called for freedom of choice, equal rights and protection from

state-imposed restrictions on personal dress. The slogans stressed that women had been involved in the revolution but did not desire to give up their social and legal rights subsequent to it.

The protests went on for days and met with resistance from both pro-state groups and revolutionary supporters who saw Western-style dress codes as incompatible with the new Islamic system. Reported evidence accumulated through this period also describes forms of verbal harassment or intimidation, as well as increasing forms of pressure on women when they are in public spaces. Although a formal national law mandating the wearing of the hijab was not established at this time, enforcement gradually became more frequent through continued enforcement of societal norms.

By the early 1980s, the use of the hijab had become systematised for all women working within government offices, as well as to all other women in public spaces. Formal approaches for policing the hijab were added as legal codes to an overall body of law governing the enforcement of morality in Iran. The evolution of these policing systems represented the beginning of a long-term systematic violation of human rights associated with women's rights to equality and their right to determine what happens to their bodies.

The protests that occurred at this time were significant historically because they represented the first organised challenge to the Islamic Republic's direction of social policy after the revolution.

5.3. Revolutionary Courts and Political Executions

After the establishment of the Islamic Republic, revolutionary courts were formed as a part of a new judicial system to hold accountable those who previously served in the Shah's monarchy and those who posed a threat to the revolution itself. These courts operate independently from Iran's standard court process and use expedited procedures in their cases.

During the early months of the revolution, many Shah officials, military personnel, and members of intelligence were put on trial and executed by firing squads for their past employment. Advocates of that system argue that these trials were necessary to remove any remains of the previous oppressive regime in order to provide stability for Iran while it entered into a political transition.

Yet, human rights organisations have been critical of the lack of fundamental international due processes in these revolutionary courts. Defendants are often deprived of sufficient access to legal counsel, trials occur rapidly, and in many instances, verdicts are issued without sufficient evidentiary proof provided in an open manner.

As the early period of the revolution progressed, the number of defendants tried and convicted grew to also include those who are affiliated with non-religious groups, leftist

political groups, minor political groups, and other secular activists. Attempts to eliminate potential threats to the new government increased greatly in the early 1980s as the Iran government sought to reinforce political power and eliminate competing ideological movements.

5.4. The Iran-Iraq War and Consolidation of Power

September of 1980 saw the start of the Iran - Iraq War with Iraq invading Iran launching an eight year conflict, one of the longest conventional wars of the 20th century, with hundreds of thousands of fatal losses on each side. It was a war that would greatly impact the political structure and human rights environment of Iran.

During this time, Iran utilised the concept of utmost security as justification for the necessity of the war being put in that manner. The emergency situations allowed for consolidation of societal controls through tight regulations regarding political activity, with considerable amounts of censorship being imposed by the state to ensure that disagreement was easily identified as being in collaboration with the enemy and a threat to the state.

The Iranian military's actions during the war strengthened the government's use of revolutionary ideology as a motivator and 'justification' for its actions, and pluralism as a means of governance would continue to decline as a result of these developments due to economic pressures and restrictions on civil liberties due to the impact of war.

At the conclusion of the war in 1988, Iran had complete institutional unification, however this period would create the conditions for one of the most extreme human rights violations in the history of Iran.

5.5. The 1988 Mass Executions of Political Prisoners

The end of the Iran - Iraq war in 1988 marked a significant point in Iran's history where numerous political prisoners lost their lives in what has been acknowledged as one of the most notorious cases of human rights violations to ever take place in Iran. Many of those who were killed were linked to groups that opposed the regime, specifically the *People's Mojahedin Organisation of Iran (MEK)* and other leftist organisations.

According to witnesses to the killings as well as investigators from human rights agencies, many of the victims had endured very brief interrogations through a special panel often referred to as a 'death commission'. These panels would typically question all prisoners regarding their ideology and the group with which they had been involved. Once they would refuse to give up their connections, they were given an execution sentence.

All executions took place over a short period of time across many of Iran's prisons. In many instances, families of the deceased were never made aware of what had happened to their loved ones, nor were they informed where they had been buried. It has also been

reported that there are still mass graves throughout Iran, most of which either have no markers or are not publicly disclosed.

While estimates regarding the number of victims differ widely, some organisations, including Amnesty International, believe the number of victims to be several thousand people. The United Nations Special Rapporteur on Iran requested that independent investigations be conducted into the events and said that they could constitute crimes against humanity because of the magnitude and continuous nature of events.

The Islamic Government does not have a comprehensive official investigation to date, and no one has been held accountable for their actions.

6. Major Protest Movements and State Crackdowns (1999–2025)

6.1. The 1999 Student Protests

The protest that occurred in July 1999, known as the '18 Tir Movement' was the first large-scale challenge by Iran's youth generation to the Islamic Republic following its establishment in 1979. They resulted from the Tehran branch of the government ordering a reformist newspaper, Salam, to be closed down. Salam had provided coverage of the Iranian Intelligence Ministry and reported on the political repression that had been occurring in Iran since the Islamic Revolution.

The events of July 8 and 9 included protesters being attacked by both government security forces and the Basij (a paramilitary group) with sticks and clubs and being arrested, destruction of property, and forcing students to leave their dormitories. The state's attacks on the protesters and their dormitories led to a fueling of public anger against the State and greatly expanded the geographic area of the protests beyond university campuses in Tehran.

Following the violent attacks on students in their dormitories, protests erupted in cities throughout Iran and students began to openly demand accountability for those who committed violent acts against them, and to call for freedom of the press and for political reforms. The students established increasingly explicit criticisms of hardline governmental agencies, and they transitioned their activism from localised to a comprehensive confrontation with the Islamic Government.

The crackdown on student activists led to the killing of many students. However, one of the most publicised student activists that was killed during the protests is *Ezzat Ebrahim Nejad*. His death represents the violence and brutality of the governments towards the students, and has been used as a reference in later protests.

The government arrested numerous students, but no one knows the exact number, estimates vary from several hundred to over one thousand. However, because of the lack of reporting on the issue, it is impossible to know how many students were arrested. Many arrested students found themselves in Revolutionary Courts; student organisations were intimidated and faced long term consequences.

The protests in 1999 have been cited as a transition in the post-revolution Islamic Republic by specifying that politically disengaged youth had become passionate about political activity, and would ultimately be responsible for significant political change.

6.2. The 2003 Student Demonstrations

Context for the February 2003 student demonstrations is based on declining confidence in the reformist administration of President Mohammad Khatami. Prior to the early 2000s, reformists had engaged in political liberalization and created the expectation of continued reforms. After 2000, due to structural obstacles from conservative elite institutions, the majority of students felt there would not be further structural reform within the Khatani Administration.

The February protests began with grievances associated with higher education, such as increased privatisation of education services, lack of public funding, and systematic inequality in accessing higher education services. However, quickly after the protests began, there were broader political grievances relating to limits on freedom of speech, freedom to criticise the government, and state-controlled media and judiciary systems.

While most protests occurred around Tehran and select university centers, the overall protest participation was significantly less than prior protests in 1999. Nonetheless, the protests indicated a significant change in student activism. No longer was student activism simply oppositional, instead students began expressing their opinions and determining if reform was even possible within the current structure.

The government's response was to control the protests through monitoring and deterrence. Government representatives and security forces monitored the assemblies, they arrested the student organisers, and they applied extra pressure on university-based political groups. The lack of significant casualties does not mean this protest period was insignificant, rather it illustrates a change toward using preventative repression and institutional control as a means of managing dissent.

Analysts often describe 2003 as a transitional phase where political engagement among students began shifting from reformist optimism toward long-term skepticism of institutional change.

6.3. The 2009 Green Movement

The 2009 Green Movement marked one of the most severe political crises in the history of Iran since the Revolution. It originates from the presidential election that places Mahmoud Ahmadinejad as president over Mir-Hossein Mousavi despite a multitude of allegations of election fraud.

In contrast to prior student protests, the Green Movement consisted of many social groups, including middle class urbanites, students, professionals and political reformers,

demonstrating social coalition. The scale of the demonstrations was unprecedented, with millions of participants in Tehran alone during some peak activity of the protests.

The main aim of the Green Movement was to secure the legitimacy of the election process, through the phrase '**Where is my vote?**' Initially, the protests were relatively peaceful, featuring silent marches and coordinated protests. However, as the number of participants increased, so too did the response of the regime.

Thousands of security force members (including Basij forces) were utilised to break up protests. Human rights organisations documented the widespread arrests of protestors, journalists, political activists and opposition leaders. Additionally, the regime imposed increasingly strict restrictions on media coverage, severely limiting independent reporting.

One of the most well-known incidents associated with the Green Movement was the death of *Neda Agha-Soltan*, the killing of whom was filmed and later broadcasted widely. Her case served as an international symbol of the regime's crackdown against dissent and sharply increased the extent to which the regime was scrutinised by the international community.

Estimated numbers of casualties range greatly, many reports cite numerous deaths (usually dozens but sometimes in excess of 100) and the number of people arrested has been in the thousands. Many of the key opposition leaders subsequently were placed on house arrest, eliminating organised leadership within this movement.

In addition to being one of the largest protests in recent history, the Green Movement fundamentally changed how protests could operate because they were able to utilise digital means of communication for the rapid distribution of information (despite government censorship).

6.4. The 2011 Demonstrations

The protests in Iran in 2011 were motivated in part by the events of the Arab Spring elsewhere in the Middle East, however the international political situation in Iran was very different. Some opposition groups sought to organise demonstrations like those of the Arab Spring, but they did not achieve the size or unity of the 2009 protests.

There were smaller protests and greater fragmentation, with most of the demonstrations occurring only in Tehran and some urban areas of Iran. The smaller protests were largely due to the Islamic Government's capabilities for state surveillance having increased considerably since 2009, combined with the effect of the 2009 crackdown, which has weakened the networks of opposition political parties.

The government's use of preventative arrests, restrictions on assembly, and greater monitoring of activists was extremely effective when it responded quickly to the demonstrations that occurred in 2011. Many of those associated with reformist politics or prior protests were monitored or arrested.

Unlike previous cycles, there was no sustained national unrest in Iran in 2011, rather 2011 illustrated the Islamic Government's increasingly rapid capacity for containment of mobilisation efforts.

6.5. The 2017–2018 Economic Protests

With the protests in Iran from 2017-2018 reflecting their dissatisfaction, economic-based grievances were the major driver of unrest at that time. Initially sparked in Mashhad, protests quickly spread throughout Iran and expanded to include multiple cities and smaller towns throughout the entire country.

The key grievances included unemployment, inflation, accusations of corruption, and what many perceive as mismanagement of the economy. Unlike previous protests that were primarily driven by urban middle-class groups, this wave also included a high number of working-class and rural inhabitants from the provinces.

While the protests were initially driven by economic demands, the slogans changed to include negative political commentary regarding various state institutions and political governance.

In order to suppress the protests, the state used several means to stop the protests including arresting, dispersing groups of protesters and increasing the number of police and other security forces present in the cities during protests. According to numerous human rights organisations, thousands of people were arrested, however due to differences in reporting standards across regions and difficulty in performing data collection due to reporting restrictions, an accurate number of those arrested cannot be obtained.

The significance of this wave of protests is its broad scope across many socio-economic classes. It shows a clear shift away from just being about the demand for political reform toward the demand for structural economic change in many different socio-economic classes within Iran.

6.6. The 2019 November Protests

The fuel price increase that occurred overnight by 300% originally sparked the protests that began in November 2019 with a government announcement, which caused protests to occur in well over 100 cities, making them some of the most widespread protests across Iran.

Protests quickly escalated into blocking roads, clashes with the police or military & attacking any government or militia in some areas, which demonstrated the frustration and lack of legitimate input from the citizens to affect the government's decisions.

In fact, the state's reaction to this was one of the most extreme and documented acts throughout history in modern Iranian standards. Through imposing a nearly complete blackout of the internet was done for several days, which greatly inhibited communication

and prevented documentation of the historic events. Amnesty International reported 304 deaths confirmed, thousands arrested, most deaths were caused due to live ammunition being used by the police/militia against citizens.

Additionally, numerous human rights organisations have documented that there was a restriction on the ability of all victims and families to obtain medical treatment, in addition to the families of the victims being pressured by police/militia. The United Nations further criticised the lack of independent investigations and lack of accountability for the state-authorized acts of violence.

6.7. The 2021 Water and Economic Protests

In 2021, there were protests throughout Iran, especially in Khuzestan Province because people were angry mostly about a lack of water, but also because they were dissatisfied with a variety of issues such as employment and access to resources.

The provinces where most of the protests took place were predominantly populated by Iranian-Arab people who have raised concerns about being marginalised as far back as the time of the Iranian Revolution. This wave of protests not only included complaints about the lack of water, but also protests concerning employment, economic inequality, as well as many other concerns. All of these protests spread across a number of different cities within Khuzestan Province.

To combat the protests, Iranian security forces conducted arrests of protesters and used force to disperse the protests. While there are no comprehensive records relating to the number of casualties related to the use of force by the Iranian security forces on the protesters, different human rights organisations reported that during the course of this wave of protests many people were injured through the use of excessive force by the security force.

This wave of protests also confirmed that environmental and resource scarcity from drought conditions has become an increasingly new and important causal factor for unrest in Iran.

6.8. The 2022–2023 "Woman, Life, Freedom" Movement

In 2022, the protests began following the murder of *Mahsa Amini*, who died due to brain bleed while in custody after being arrested for allegedly not complying with hijab regulations and security forces bashing her head with batons. Following her death, protests erupted immediately in Tehran, quickly escalating into a nationwide movement.

This movement is different from all past cycles of protest in that it is very decentralised and extends geographically throughout all 31 provinces. It also includes students, women, workers and youth, and has become closely aligned with demands for freedom.

A key theme of these protests is the presence of symbolic resistance, with one of the most prevalent symbols being women removing their hijabs as a part of the public demonstrations.

The state responded to these protests in vast numbers, the UN Fact-Finding Mission estimating that hundreds of protesters have been killed (many estimates exceed 500), thousands of protesters have been arrested, there are widespread allegations of torture and mistreatment occurring, and many have also reported that they were subject to unfair trial and/or forced confessions. The murders of many children including but not limited to, *Nika Shakarami* and *Kian Pirfalak*, caused outrage among the people and brought attention to the situation internationally.

The UN has said that many violations committed during this time may be considered crimes against humanity, based on systematic patterns of repression.

6.9. 2025-2026 Protests

The largest protests in the history of the Islamic Republic. The 2025-2026 protests are the Iranians' latest cry for help and demand for the immediate return of Crown Prince Reza Pahlavi, the son of HIM Mohammad Reza Shah Pahlavi and the grandson of HIM Reza Shah Pahlavi, whom he was named after. The IRGC however, as expected, responds with live bullets to the protestors. It is estimated that 80.000-100.000 were killed in under a week, and the government openly carries all the bodies across the town in commercial grade refrigerator trucks, waiting for them to be claimed. The government demands unbelievable fees to give the bodies back to the families, with them reaching 20 Billion Iranian Rials, approximately 15.000 USD. The protestors continuously get shot at both with rifles and shotguns, with the cities having established multiple checkpoints, searching cars, undressing passers to check for bruises and gunshots, and going through their devices. The Corps have also raided and killed hospitalized protestors on many occasions.

In summary, recently a huge percentage of the protestors either got shot at and murdered, or were tried and executed. The protests brought with them a country-wide long lasting digital blackout, preventing the people from having almost any kind of communication with the outside world, and vice versa.

7. Human Rights Violations in Iran

7.1. Women's Rights

Women's rights are one of the most debated and high profile issues regarding human rights in the Islamic Republic of Iran. Since the 1979 Revolution, Islamic law and social policy in Iran have been greatly influenced by the government's interpretation of Islamic principles and created a legal system that many human rights organisations believe disadvantages women in many areas of both public and private life. While Iranian women have achieved high literacy rates and high levels of university enrollment, and they comprise

a majority in the medical, scientific and educational professions, many legal and social restrictions still exist on them.

One of the most apparent and visible issues in relation to women's rights is the mandatory hijab. After the revolution, laws that required women to wear Islamic dress in public have been slowly but methodically established and enforced as law. Compliance has historically been enforced through a variety of law enforcement authorities, including the Guidance Patrol (i.e., the morality/vice police). Women who are accused of not following the dress code can face warnings, fines, detention and even legal action against them. The situation drew international attention in September 2022 after the murder of Mahsa (Jina Amini) in police custody. Ms. Amini was a 22-year-old woman of Kurdish Iranian descent who died after being arrested by officers of the Guidance Patrol because she was accused of not complying with the compulsory veiling law of the Islamic Republic. Her death sparked mass protests around the country and has brought more international attention to the issue of the forced veiling of women.

Concerns about family law have been raised by various women's rights organizations. Iranian family law provides different legal rights to men and women for marriage, divorce, custody of children, and inheritance; men almost always have more ability to initiate divorce than women (who have to meet specified legal requirements); female heirs receive smaller inheritances than male heirs; and many of the legal processes of divorce, custody of children, and inheritance use different criteria for men and women. Many critics assert that these practices violate international law because they fail to extend the same equality under the law to men and women.

Regardless of these legal restrictions, women have played an important role in Iranian society and have participated in many of the social and political movements in Iran. Female activists, lawyers, journalists, students, and human rights defenders have been particularly influential in advocating for legal equality and civil rights issues. Women participated vigorously in the Green Movement in 2009 and were the most prominent force behind the “Women, Life, Freedom” movement of 2022–2023. Women's rights have become closely connected to discussions regarding political participation, freedom of expression, and human rights reform in Iran.

7.2. Freedom of Expression and the Press

The Islamic Government's history of treating dissenting voices in its society as threats to national security is well established. These voices can include advocates for freedom of expression and freedom of the press who have been prevented from exercising their rights under the Iranian Constitution because these constitutional provisions are subject to various restrictions, which include religious restrictions (Islam), public morals, national security, and the state's interests.

For many years, the Islamic government has undertaken various methods to suppress voices speaking out against the regime. For example, over the last several decades, Iranian

authorities have closed or suspended a large number of newspapers, magazines, and other media organizations. This has had a direct impact on journalists, editors, authors, academics, and activists, the vast majority of whom have faced arrest or prosecution for simply writing something the Islamic government perceived as anti-establishment or questioning its authority as a representative of the people.

Often these individuals have been charged with a number of different theories of criminal liability, including the following: “Propaganda against the Islamic Republic of Iran,” “Disseminating false information,” “Insulting sacred values,” and “Acts against national security,” among many others. Many of these are vague in nature; therefore, many critics and human rights advocates argue that the Islamic Government has abused its legal system by using vague statutes to limit the expression of political dissidents or independent investigative journalism.

The media has often come under greater restrictions during at least four different events in recent Iranian history, specifically during the 1999 student-led protests, the 2009 Green Movement, the November 2019 protests and the Woman, Life, Freedom movement from 2022-2023. During these times, both international and domestic media restrictions were placed by authorities on their ability to cover the protests, and journalists trying to cover any demonstrations were often threatened, detained, restricted from travelling, or had their credentials removed. International media organizations also faced restrictions in gaining access to areas of the protests and in conducting independent media coverage.

The issue of press freedom is highlighted due to the murder of Mahsa (Jina) Amini in 2022. Journalists *Elaheh Mohammadi* and *Niloofar Hamedi* were arrested for their involvement in reporting on the circumstances surrounding the death and funeral of Amini and were charged with crimes for their work. Their cases are among the most high-profile and raise serious concerns regarding freedom of the press in Iran. International Press organizations, like Reporters Without Borders (RSF), have consistently ranked Iran as one of the most restrictive nations in the world when it comes to freedoms for journalists and independent media.

Supporters of the government’s view claim that media regulations are needed to ensure social stability, the security of the nation and public order. However, international human rights organisations affirm that limitations on journalism, political speech and independent reporting have really restricted freedom of expression, and access to information. Therefore, freedom of the press has become an important topic in discussions about human rights and democratic participation in Iran.

7.3. Internet Shutdowns and Digital Surveillance

Digital rights have become a pressing human rights issue in Iran as more people than ever are utilizing the internet and social media to communicate, organize as activists, cover news, and connect politically. The Islamic government has created a sophisticated infrastructure that regulates the internet, censors online content, and surveils its citizens

digitally over the past two decades. Human rights groups argue that these restrictions significantly reduce people's rights to freedom of expression and access to information through using the internet.

Iran has one of the most restrictive internet environments in the world. For example, many popular news sites, social media platforms, and communication services, including Facebook, X, Telegram, YouTube, and, in some cases, Instagram and WhatsApp, have been either blocked or restricted at different points in time, even though there is a high level of use of these platforms in Iran through the use of virtual private networks (VPNs). The Islamic Government has justified these measures based on the claim that they are necessary to combat "disinformation" and protect against foreign interference and threats to national security. Many critics of these measures argue that they prevent access to independent sources of information and limit people's ability to communicate freely.

Internet shutdowns have become particularly linked to times of political turmoil. The largest and most significant example of political unrest is the protests that began in November of 2019 when fuel prices suddenly spiked. Various forms of social unrest developed quickly in response, prompting authorities to impose a total internet shutdown for several days across the nation. The internet blackouts halted communication between citizens both within Iran and globally, according to digital rights organizations. Human rights organizations alleged that the blackout made it more difficult for citizens to document abuses and reduced citizens' access to critical information regarding protests.

Internet access restrictions were similarly imposed during the 2022 - 2023 Woman, Life, Freedom protests following the murder of Mahsa Amini. International monitoring groups reported that mobile and internet access to social media and messaging applications were repeatedly being disrupted by security forces. In addition to disrupting protesters and journalists, the internet access restrictions introduced havoc for students, businesses, healthcare providers, and ordinary citizens who use digital services to perform daily activities. The United Nations and various human rights organizations condemned the restrictions on internet access, emphasizing that internet access tends to be a greater enabling factor for exercising freedom of expression, peacefully assembling, and for enabling civic participation.

As well as shutting down the internet, there are growing concerns around digital surveillance. Human rights groups say that the authorities have monitored activity online, tracked activists' digital communications and used social media to provide evidence of criminal activity. Protesters and journalists had also been identified through online content, visual imagery and digital communications. Critics that say these practices create an environment where people censor themselves and do not feel comfortable expressing their political beliefs through digital means.

The development of digital technologies continues to have an impact on how we conduct our political and social activities, and discussions around the right to free access to the internet and digital surveillance systems have become increasingly central to larger issues

about human rights in Iran. International bodies are now increasingly seeing unrestricted access to information and access to secure digital communication as the two most important elements of modern civil liberties.

7.4. Arbitrary Detention, Torture, and Forced Confessions

Numerous international organisations have highlighted serious human rights violations in Iran, including detention without due process, torture allegation and forced confession. For decades, various bodies have reported on the violations of the human rights of protesters, journalists, lawyers, students, political opposition, human rights defenders and members of minority groups against whom adequate process protections have not been provided in relation to arbitrary trials.

Another significant issue is that the security forces have far-reaching authority to investigate both offences of national security as well as any offence which could be determined to be against national security. An accused person may be detained for a lengthy period of time while security forces investigate offences categorised such as "propaganda against the state", "assembly or colluding against national security" or "enmity towards God" (moharebeh). Numerous international organisations have documented that detainees have not received adequate access to legal representation in a timely manner, that detainees have been held in custody for excessive periods of time prior to their trial and that detainees have not been able to contact family members while in custody. Critics of these practices allege that these practices violate rights to a fair trial and increase the potential for abuse while in detention.

Torture and ill-treatment are reported to have occurred consistently throughout multiple protest movements (for instance, after both the 1999 student protests, 2009 Green Movement, November 2019 protests and 2022-2023 Woman, Life, Freedom protest). Former detainees describe being subject to physical violence, deprivation of sleep, prolonged isolation from others, pressure on them psychologically, threats against family members, and harsh interrogation methods. Iran's authorities have generally denied the existence of systematic torture; however, various international bodies have continued to compile investigations into the allegations of torture by large numbers of former prisoners and detainees.

Another issue that has generated controversy is the use of confessions given by detainees appearing on broadcast television. After the 2009 and 2022 major protest waves and associated arrests/detentions, Iranian state media continuously broadcast statements made by individuals who have been detained, whether the individuals' have been charged with political crimes, or spying, or taking part in protests. Many human rights organisations believe that the majority of these statements were obtained under pressure from the detainee and therefore cannot be viewed as a reliable piece of evidence. Such broadcasts have been condemned for violating principles of presumption of innocence, fairness in the judicial process.

In recent years, much attention has been drawn to prisons used for detention purposes like the Evin Prison. A large number of political prisoners, including journalists, academics, lawyers, and activists, have been held there. The conditions within the prison and the treatment of prisoners during their interrogation have been reported by many human rights organizations and ex-prisoners. In their report concerning the protests in 2022, the UN Fact Finding Mission on Iran found evidence that detainees had been subjected to widespread human rights violations, including reported cases of torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment.

Arbitrary detention and torture will continue to be central issues in discussions at a global level with respect to Iran's compliance with its international human rights obligations, as detention practices have a direct impact on an individual's ability to exercise his/her rights to free expression, peaceful assembly, and political participation.

7.5. Capital Punishment

Capital punishment has been one of the most highly debated issues regarding human rights in the Islamic Republic of Iran, and has drawn a significant amount of criticism from the United Nations, Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch and many other international organizations. Along with a large number of actual executions each year Iran is also in the top rankings of executions per capita in the world, as well.

The government continues to argue that capital punishment is an effective deterrent to committing serious crimes, that it is implemented under Sharia Law and that it is approved by domestic authorities. Many human rights groups however argue that the extensive use of capital punishment in Iran raises so many issues regarding human rights that its use should be minimized.

The laws allow for capital punishment for many different types of crime including intentional murder, certain drug crimes, rape and many of the crimes under Islamic Law including, Moharebeh (which is to act against God) and Efsad fel Arz (which is to act against the earth). It is the broad definition of some of these crimes that has led to international concerns of violations of human rights for individuals who have participated in political activities, who have protested or who are thought to threaten national security.

The global criticism of Iran increased due to multiple rounds of protests against the government. Many protesters were sentenced to death by Iranian courts during and after the Woman, Life, Freedom movement between 2022 and 2023. According to human rights organizations, some of these trials were conducted very quickly and did not appear to provide their defendants with the minimum amount of due process necessary, such as having sufficient access to legal representation or opportunities to contest the evidence presented against them. The case of *Majidreza Rahnava* is perhaps one of the most well-known instances of this type of violation of basic due process rights, as he was executed for his alleged connection to the protests in December 2022, resulting in international condemnation.

Another long-standing concern regarding human rights violations in Iran relates to the death penalty for persons who committed crimes when they were juveniles under 18 years old. Iran has ratified the CRC, which prohibits the execution of juveniles for criminal acts. Although there have been some amendments that now prohibit certain criminal practices and provide more review procedures, human rights organizations continue to report cases of persons who have been convicted of committing criminal acts while a child and now face execution. Several UN treaty bodies and Special Rapporteurs have also raised this issue repeatedly.

Human rights organisations have raised concern about transparency in the execution process in Iran; for example, executions are sometimes announced only after they happen, and obtaining information about the legal process can be difficult. Other concerns include claims of coerced confessions, an inability of defence Lawyers to attend court hearings, and being given capital punishment after being convicted of an offence that the critics contend did not meet international fair trial standards.

The United Nations General Assembly has passed several Resolutions expressing concern over the death penalty employed by Iran, and has called for greater compliance with international human rights standards. Due to this, capital punishment continues as one of the most talked about items in the world when considering the state of human rights in Iran, and continues to play a key role in discussions and debates that are taking place in the human rights council of the United Nations.

7.6. Minority Rights

In the Middle East, Iran has one of the greatest varieties of ethnicity, language, and religion among all of the countries found there. Ethnic Persians compose the bulk of this country; however, millions of people identified as Iranian are members of ethnic minorities such as Azeris, Kurds, Baluchis, Arabs, Turkmen, Armenians, Assyrians, and many others. There are also numerous religious minorities living in Iran such as Christians, Jews, Zoroastrians, Sunni Muslims, Baha'is, Yarsanis (Ahl-e Haqq), and Sufi groups. While certain rights of ethnic/religious minorities are granted under the Constitution of Iran, and some minority religious groups are officially recognized, there have been numerous reports from international human rights organizations pointing out ongoing issues with discrimination, unequal treatment, and restrictive practices towards ethnic and religious minority groups by the Islamic Government.

Discrimination against ethnic minorities has been frequently cited in regard to education, employment, political representation, and economic development. Ethnic minorities living in Kurdish, Baluchi and Arab-majority regions have tended to live at an increased rate of poverty, have lower levels of investment and be subject to a larger-security presence compared to other areas of the country. Human rights groups have reported that these discrepancies have increased tensions and resulted in periodic demonstrations taking place in minority populated areas. The Islamic Government typically denies the occurrence of

systemic discrimination in its society and maintains that all people are equal under the law regardless of ethnicity or religion.

Another important issue is religious freedom. Article 13 of Iran's constitution establishes Christianity, Judaism, and Zoroastrianism as officially recognized religions (protected minority religions) and provides them with designated parliamentary representatives. The Baha'i Faith does not have official status, and members of this religion have endured decades of censorship, restrictions, and limitations on education, housing, job opportunities, and religious practices. The United Nations and other independent organizations have reported multiple instances of Baha'i leaders being arrested, businesses being shut down, property being taken away, and members being prevented from pursuing higher education, blocked from accessing their birthright properties, or experiencing intimidation.

Additionally, although Sunnis are able to practice their religion, some places in Iran have documented instances of discrimination. For instance, while Sunnis can practice their religion, human rights organizations report that there are issues regarding limited access to religious institutions and under-representation in government. Similar issues are experienced by members of the Kurdish and Baluchi communities, as both groups predominantly practice Sunni Islam and are subject to the same type of challenges because of their ethnicity and religion.

Particularly during times of civil disorder, such as the 2022–23 Woman, Life, Freedom movement, minority rights have received increased attention from organizations caring for human rights. Law enforcement has been especially harsh toward Kurds and Baluchis during the period since violence happened because of the deaths of Mahsa Amini (a Kurd) and many of the protestors after Mahsa's death came from minority groups, which attracted more intense global scrutiny regarding the treatment of these groups historically. Reports from both the Fact-Finding Mission through the UN and elsewhere indicated that protests in some of Iran's minority areas resulted in disproportionate levels of violence compared with the majority of cities across the country.

As a result, global discussions regarding human rights in Iran focus heavily on minority rights issues. The governmental position on potentially differentiating between nationality and religion within their government is to promote national unity through the use of constitutional protection; however, there is widespread criticism of the Islamic Government because they have consistently created or allowed to exist considerable inequalities and restrictions toward different ethnic and/or religious groups throughout Iran.

7.7. Children's Rights

Children's rights in Iran shape domestic law and international obligations (e.g. Convention on the Rights of the Child), most notably regarding educational opportunities and healthcare for children as they comply with Iran's state party obligations to the CRC. However, International Human Rights Organisations continue to express concern over the

treatment of children in the criminal justice system, during political upheaval, and in some areas of family and social policy.

One of the most documented forms of concern for children relates to minors who participate in political protests, and Iran's government response to them via the intervention of security forces. During periods of Civil Unrest ("major protests") from 2009 (Green Movement), 2019 (November Protests) and particularly the current 2022-2023 Women's, Life, Freedom Movement, Children and teenagers were killed/injured/arrested as indicated by several reports, including International Investigations into their deaths due to excessive use of force used against them while they were present at political demonstrations. The most well-known case is that of *Kian Pirfalak*, who at 9 years old was killed during the 2022 protests and has become the representative image of the human cost of the protests.

The human rights groups raised concern over the detention of minors. Reports show that minors under the age of 18 years old were detained after they protested and that they were interrogated. Some children who were detained were held in the same facility as the adults or were subjected to extreme interrogation without the safeguards of having adequate legal guidance. Critics assert that these practices are contrary to international standards, which require special rights for children who are in conflict with the law; These rights include access to legal representation, separation from the adults who were detained with them, and emphasis placed on rehabilitation over punishment.

The other continuing problem is that of juvenile justice and the use of the death penalty on minors under the age of 18 who committed crimes as minors. In spite of the fact that Iranian law has been revised and greater judicial discretion has been given to judges in a limited number of circumstances, international organizations continue to find that minors who have been found guilty of committing crimes while they were minors have either received or are under the sentence of death. United Nations treaty bodies have repeatedly condemned these practices as violations of Iran's obligations pursuant to Article 37 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Concerns regarding child labour and economic vulnerability extend well beyond issues related to the legal system. Many children from poor households are known to be engaged in the informal labour market, and many do so in conditions that jeopardise their health and development. An effective child protection framework exists in Iran, but enforcement and compliance issues associated with the economy are the leading causes of violations.

When compared to other countries in the region, Iran enjoys a high level of educational access, both at the primary and secondary level. However, there is still a disparity in access for children living in disadvantaged communities, such as ethnic minorities and those living in rural areas, who may not have access to the same level of educational resources or infrastructure.

8. Case Studies: Victims and Symbols of Repression

8.1. Neda Agha-Soltan



Neda Agha-Soltan is one of the most notorious victims of the Green movement and is now one of the world's more recognized victims. She was an Iranian woman shot in the head during protests that took place in Tehran following the disputed Iranian presidential elections of 2009 and her death was strongly tied to post-election protests against the disputed election.

The protests began with complaints about election fraud, but rapidly evolved into national protests involving millions of people. On June 20th, 2009, Neda Agha-Soltan attended an anti-government protest in Tehran and was shot by security forces during the violence that occurred that day. A bystander captured her final moments on video and posted it on YouTube, where it received millions of views and became one of the most influential visual records of the 2009 Iranian protests, shaping global public perceptions of the Islamic regime's violent response to these protests.

While the Islamic Government did not release an official account detailing her death, there were conflicting accounts of her responsibility and the circumstances of her being shot. Human rights groups and other international monitors raised serious concerns regarding the use of live ammunition during protests and the total lack of any independent or transparent investigations into the civilian deaths that occurred during the crackdown following the election.

The case of Neda Agha-Soltan transcended the specifics of her individual situation and became emblematic of larger issues. These include how governments respond to non-violent demonstrations, how the media document human rights abuses and how through the use of social media, the global community is made aware of domestic political events.

8.2. Mahsa Amini



A young Kurdish Iranian woman named Mahsa Amini, 22 years old, was murdered by security forces in September 2022. Her murder led to the formation of a nationwide movement called “Woman, Life, Freedom.” The Guidance Patrol was the Iranian morality police that arrested Amini due to not finding her hijab sufficient.

Following multiple baton hits to the head, Amini became unconscious soon after her arrest. She was taken to a hospital, where she passed away. In their official reports, Iranian authorities stated that she died from medical problems. However, there were serious concerns from Amini’s family and many witnesses regarding her treatment while in custody. Many groups called for an independent investigation into Amini's death due to the disputed nature of how she died.

Soon after Amini’s murder, there were protests in Tehran and cities across Iran. The size and breadth of the protests, along with the high levels of participation from women and young people, are what stand out about them. One of the distinguishing features of the movement was the widespread and visible opposition to the compulsory hijab laws. This has been considered to be one of the largest women-led movements in Iran's history.

According to the United Nations Fact-Finding Mission on Iran, they found that Amini's murder occurred in the wider context of a systematic enforcement of restrictive dress codes and a documented pattern of human rights violations that occurred during the manner in which protests were responded to after her death. Amini's case became an example in international debates over women's rights, freedom of expression, and state power.

The murder of Amini is viewed by most observers as a significant shift in the political landscape of Iran; as there has been an increase in global scrutiny on Iran's human rights issues as a result.

8.3. Nika Shakarami



Nika Shakarami was a teenage Iranian demonstrator who died in 2022 during the major protests that erupted in Iran after the murder of Mahsa Amini. She had gone missing on September 21st after taking part in demonstrations in Tehran, and her body was later found in haunting circumstances. She was raped, her bones broken and thrown off a building. Her case received a great deal of attention from both the internet and the media, as numerous images circulated showing her and her family before and after she went missing, along with reports of her disappearance.

The government responded by stating that she was mentally ill, suicidal and a whore, and that she had committed suicide by jumping off a building.

A symbol of the “Woman, Life, Freedom” movement was Nika Shakarami, particularly due to her age, 16 at the time she was sexually abused and murdered, and the visibility of youth participating in protests. Her case has been referenced by the UN and other NGOs as documentation of the risks to minors during political unrest in Iran.

8.4. Kian Pirfalak



The government murdered a nine-year-old boy named Kian Pirfalak. Some of the bullets found him, while the others resulted in his father getting paralysed. His father had said “I may have been injured and my mobility is impaired, I am still grateful. I thank God that my children are safe. What would I do if Kian was shot?” when he regained consciousness. He did not know yet that Kian had passed away.

Her mother had to gather ice cubes from her neighbours to preserve his body until the morning and in her words: “I kept my son's bullet-ridden body in ice at home so that I wouldn't have to beg his killer to get it back, and I stayed by his side until they allowed me to bury him, after threatening me with a thousand different things. I told them to take the last photo of him. I left my son alone in a cold, black hole and went, ‘My dear son! I will take your revenge! I will not turn my back on this war for a moment!’”

Because of Kian’s youth, his murder attracted the world’s attention as it pointed to the notion that no child should die in the name of politics. Human Rights Groups and UN bodies reported on Kian’s death and reported incidents involving police violence during protests toward civilians, particularly children, and the risks associated with using violence in heavily populated areas.

The incident involving civilian casualties occurred in his years of experience (2022-2023) and has resulted in even more support for independent investigations into the death of protesters and for people to be held accountable around the world.

8.5. Majidreza Rahnavard



In December 2022, Majidreza Rahnavard, an Iranian protester, was executed due to his involvement with protests following Mahsa Amini's death. His case gained international condemnation and was amongst the first executions related to the "Woman, Life, Freedom" protests.

Rahnavard was found guilty by an Iranian court of charges related to his involvement in the protests. One of his arms was skinned and broken due to him having a tattoo of the Lion and Sun and he was forced to confess on national broadcast before his execution.

The Islamic Government notified the public about his execution, and state-run media provided information and pictures about the execution as well. International organizations, including UN Human Rights experts, condemned Iran's use of capital punishment in cases connected to protests and questioned whether Rahnavard's execution met necessary due process standards.

Rahnavard's execution has broader implications globally, especially concerning the death penalty's impact on protesting during periods of political unrest as well as the resultant climate of fear amongst civil society during periods of mass movement mobilization.

These are only a few examples of the tremendous amount of lost souls.

8.6. Flight PS752 and the Pursuit of Accountability



On January 8th, 2020, Ukraine International Airlines Flight PS752 was a passenger plane shot down shortly after takeoff from Tehran, killing all 176 individuals on board. The majority of its passengers were Iranian and Canadian nationals and other citizens from varying nations.

In the beginning, Iranian authorities denied responsibility for the incident. A few days later, after international pressure and evidence presented by foreign governments and open-source investigators, the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps acknowledged that they had mistakenly fired missiles at the airplane. The authorities stated that the incident occurred during intense military heightening amid rising regional tensions, and called killing 176 souls a “human mistake” with absolutely zero compensation for the affected.

The downing of Flight PS752 caused widespread international condemnation demanding transparency, accountability, and an independent investigation. With the support of international legal experts and human rights groups, the families of victims continue to demand justice, compensation, and criminal accountability for those responsible.

Multinational investigations and aviation bodies have exposed concerns about operational practices, transparency in initial reporting, and management of the incident. This case remains one of the saddest recent aviation catastrophes involving the shooting down of a civilian aircraft in a conflict-adjacent state.

According to organizations focused on human rights and victim's rights, the case illustrates the broader issue of being accountable for civilian use of state military activity, as well as transparency regarding military actions taken by the state against civilians. The attempt to seek justice for victims of flight PS752 is still being pursued in international legal and diplomatic arenas.

9. Current Situation and Future Outlook

Iran's human rights landscape continues to be complex after events associated with the protests, particularly during the "Woman, Life, Freedom" movement in 2022-2023. As such, protests are much less common now than at their low point (around 2022–2023), although a range of political, economic, and social grievances remain unresolved.

International organizations such as the United Nations Fact-Finding Mission on Iran, Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch continue to report ongoing human rights violations that relate to freedom of expression, the treatment of detainees and limitations on civil rights.

In the period following the 2022 protests in Iran, authorities have increased security measures in multiple areas, including enforcement of public morality regulations, increased monitoring of all online content, and prosecution of all individuals accused of protest or dissent-related activities. Continued reports from numerous organizations indicate that legal cases tied to protest activity continue long after the immediate period of unrest, with significant prison sentences being issued, as well as capital punishment in some instances. Conversely, visible forms of protest have significantly diminished due in part to the increased presence of state security officials, the belief that legal consequences will result from participation in protests, and overall social fatigue after a prolonged period of unrest.

Although the scale of mass protests has decreased, human rights groups state that the structural issues have not changed. There are still concerns about the independence of the judiciary, the scope of national security laws, limitations on political participation, and restrictions on the right to assemble and freedom of expression. The enforcement of mandatory hijab laws remains a major issue of both domestic and international debate, with sporadic enforcement occurring throughout the country, creating considerable public opposition.

Iran's human rights record continues to be an ongoing topic of discussion within the UN Human Rights Council. Resolutions condemning violations of human rights in Iran are routinely re-adopted, and the mandate of the UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Iran has been repeatedly extended. In addition, the creation of a UN Independent International Fact-Finding Mission on Iran is a significant step forward for international monitoring, and the findings of this mission have added to the ongoing efforts to document alleged violations and call for accountability.

Depending on the trajectories discussed by human rights organisations and analysts now, as well as internally driven reform through pressure from civil society actors and those of younger generations and women, all of whom have been key in recent protests, the possible paths may take several directions. One potential path could be non-linear reform through internal pathways over time, including reform of laws and society. Another option could be continued cycles of unrest where protests are followed by an exacerbation of state control, with no change to the structural nature of the country. Alternatively, an incremental

path toward deeper political reform or international engagement could occur, though this depends on many broader general geopolitical issues, changes in internal politics etc.

Another important aspect that will affect how things develop is Iran's younger population, who make up a considerable portion of Iran's overall population and have been very vocal participants in the more recent social movements. The availability of digital tools to communicate and share information, despite government-imposed restrictions, continues to facilitate mobilization against regimes and continues to provide the government less opportunity to suppress dissent entirely. Nevertheless, the Iranian states' ability to enforce public order and maintain public space through capacity should also be considered as integral to this ongoing struggle between control and resistance.

Lastly, the future of human rights in Iran is very much uncertain and will depend greatly on how the various domestic political systems interact with one another, as well as how civil society rates the political system, the economy, and international commitment to human rights. There are still many challenges to face; however, the growth of human rights discussion within and outside of Iran indicates that issues related to human rights will continue to play an important role in Iran's political evolution and in the United Nations Human Rights Council.

10. Major Parties Involved

Countries involved over time in discussions on Iranian human rights at the UN Human Rights Council have played significant roles by engaging in discussions, draft proposals, and vote-counting. The three types of factors affecting their level of participation/influence are:

- (1) their actual "claims" regarding the country and its behaviour,
- (2) the geopolitical dynamic between the countries involved
- (3) the overall economic and strategic relationship between the two nations and their interactions with, for example, the U.S., members of the European Union, and other members of the international community.

The U.S. has consistently expressed its displeasure regarding human rights in Iran, often taking a lead role in bringing resolutions before the UN, promoting mechanisms of accountability such as independent investigations and targeted sanctions against those perpetrating violations of human rights in Iran. The U.S. rationale for its level of participation in the discussions is usually related to broader matters, such as the deterioration of diplomatic relations between it and Iran related to nuclear proliferation and broader regional security issues.

European Union countries such as *Germany, France, and the UK* (although they are not currently members of the EU) generally take a similar position regarding the Islamic

Government's regard for human rights, however there is typically a less aggressive approach taken by many EU states (e.g., France, Germany, Spain) regarding this issue than taken by countries not affiliated with the EU. EU member states often attend and express support for resolutions at the UNHRC, especially following large-scale protests where demonstrators called for greater political and social freedoms (e.g., protests in 2009, 2019, and 2022). Generally speaking, however, several EU member states continue to prefer diplomatic engagement and continued dialogue while also advocating for greater compliance with international law and norms through a combination of international sanctions as a means of providing an incentive to the Islamic Government to comply with international law while negotiating a more permanent political resolution through diplomatic continued dialogue.

International accountability and measures in relation to Iran have been consistently and strongly supported by *Canada*. Canada is one of the strongest supporters of United Nations investigations into human rights violations against Iranians as well as taking a lead role on behalf of the victims of significant tragedies such as Flight PS752. Canada also votes frequently in concert with both the European Union and United States' positions regarding United Nations Human Rights Council votes.

The *United Kingdom* and *Australia* regularly support UN resolutions that criticize Iran regarding issues of human rights. The UK and Australia usually concentrate on issues such as freedom of expression, treatment of demonstrators and the rights of women and ethnic minorities. In addition to supporting United Nations resolutions against Iran, the UK and Australia often participate in joint declarations at the UN and cooperate with other western nations in developing joint positions.

On the contrary, the key political supporters of Iran in multilateral forums are *China* and *Russia*. Typically, both countries will not support Israel and abide by the political philosophy that country-specific human rights resolutions in the UNHRC should not be used as tools of coercion or to further political gain. China and Russia believe that the principle of sovereignty must guide any approach to human rights violations and will generally abstain or vote in opposition to UN resolutions that establish an investigative mechanism regarding Iran.

Middle Eastern nations also influence the current dynamic, but their role tends to be a bit more fluid. Although Saudi Arabia and the UAE will often back significant stances against Iran in international venues, they may reflect greater competition with surrounding nations rather than a consistent preference towards a particular position.

Several members of the *Non-Aligned Movement (NAM)*, which includes nations from Africa, Latin America and parts of Asia, typically have a major impact on the results before the UNHRC. These NAM members often have different voting patterns depending on how a resolution is worded and may abstain/vote based on concepts associated with non-interference, dialogue, and development-oriented human rights.

11. Questions to be Answered

- How can the international community ensure accountability for alleged human rights violations in Iran, including protest-related deaths, while respecting state sovereignty?
- What mechanisms can be established to guarantee independent, transparent, and credible investigations into deaths in custody and during protests?
- How should the UNHRC respond to allegations of excessive use of force against peaceful protesters without escalating geopolitical tensions?
- What international legal tools can be used to address arbitrary detention, torture allegations, and forced confessions in Iran?
- How can freedom of expression and press freedom be protected in environments where journalists and activists face arrest under national security charges?
- What role should the UNHRC play in addressing internet shutdowns and digital surveillance during periods of political unrest?
- How can the international community respond to the use of capital punishment in protest-related cases and alleged violations involving due process?
- What measures can effectively improve women's rights in Iran, particularly regarding compulsory dress codes and legal inequality, through international frameworks?
- How can minority rights be protected in states where ethnic and religious groups report systemic discrimination and unequal treatment?
- What long-term reforms are necessary to align Iran's judicial and law enforcement systems with international human rights standards under the ICCPR (International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights)?

12. Further Reading and Bibliography

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