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**Advance edited version**

Distr.: General  
12 March 2025

Original: English

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**Human Rights Council**

**Fifty-eighth session**

24 February–4 April 2025

Agenda item 4

**Human rights situations that require the Council's attention**

**Situation of human rights in the Islamic Republic of Iran\***

**Report of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Islamic Republic of Iran, Mai Sato**

*Summary*

In the present report, submitted pursuant to Human Rights Council resolution 55/19, the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Islamic Republic of Iran, Mai Sato, examines developments in the human rights situation in the country, emphasizing the gender-specific dimensions and impact of human rights violations.

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\* The present report was submitted to the conference services for processing after the deadline for technical reasons beyond the control of the submitting office.

## I. Introduction

1. The Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Islamic Republic of Iran, Mai Sato, assumed her mandate in August 2024 and presented her vision statement in her report to the General Assembly in November 2024.<sup>1</sup> Since then, the Special Rapporteur, jointly with other thematic mandate holders, has transmitted six communications to the Islamic Republic of Iran, receiving five responses, and issued six public statements.<sup>2</sup> The present report, which is submitted pursuant to Human Rights Council resolution 55/19, covers the period from January to December 2024.

2. The Special Rapporteur has requested a visit to the Islamic Republic of Iran and looks forward to receiving an invitation. She held formal meetings with the Permanent Mission of the Islamic Republic of Iran to the United Nations and other international organizations in Geneva, in September and December 2024, and with the Permanent Mission of the Islamic Republic of Iran to the United Nations in New York, in November 2024, and received written submissions to her public call for input for the report.

4. The Special Rapporteur is grateful to the individuals and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) that responded to the public call for input. Many submissions highlighted the pervasive lack of transparency of government institutions and the challenges of obtaining reliable information in an environment of strict media censorship, where individuals face reprisals for reporting human rights violations.

## II. Gender-specific dimensions and impact of human rights violations

5. In her report to the General Assembly, the Special Rapporteur established a thematic approach to monitoring the human rights situation in the Islamic Republic of Iran, identifying three priority areas: transparency, gender and the right to life. Building on that framework, the present report contains an assessment of the country's human rights situation through a gendered lens, with an examination of gender-related killings and discussion of the availability of official data.

6. Gender-related killings represent the most extreme manifestation of gender-based violence, violating fundamental rights, including the rights to life, equality, dignity and freedom from torture. Such killings occur in both the private and public spheres and stem from gender-based discrimination and perceived violations of societal norms. State responsibility for such arbitrary deprivation of life often indicates broader systemic failures, requiring a comprehensive analysis of interconnected civil, political, social, cultural and economic rights violations.<sup>3</sup>

7. The development indices for the country contrast starkly with its gender equality achievements. While the country is among the 48 rated "high" on the human development index,<sup>4</sup> it ranked 121st out of 193 countries on the gender inequality index of the United Nations Development Programme in 2022, the lowest ranking among all high-human development index countries.<sup>5</sup> The disparity between the two rankings suggests that the country's developmental gains have not been equitably distributed between men and women.

8. In terms of human rights, the country's engagement with international standards is mixed. Its ratification of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights demonstrates some

<sup>1</sup> [A/79/371](#).

<sup>2</sup> Public statements are available at [https://www.ohchr.org/en/latest?field\\_content\\_category\\_target\\_id%5B158%5D=158&field\\_content\\_category\\_target\\_id%5B162%5D=162&field\\_content\\_category\\_target\\_id%5B161%5D=161&field\\_content\\_category\\_target\\_id%5B159%5D=159&field\\_entity\\_target\\_id%5B1304%5D=1304](https://www.ohchr.org/en/latest?field_content_category_target_id%5B158%5D=158&field_content_category_target_id%5B162%5D=162&field_content_category_target_id%5B161%5D=161&field_content_category_target_id%5B159%5D=159&field_entity_target_id%5B1304%5D=1304).

<sup>3</sup> See [A/HRC/35/23](#).

<sup>4</sup> See <https://hdr.undp.org/data-center/human-development-index#/indicies/HDI>.

<sup>5</sup> See <https://hdr.undp.org/data-center/thematic-composite-indices/gender-inequality-index#/indicies/GII>.

commitment to gender equality, as both treaties enshrine equal rights for men and women. Its continued failure to ratify the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, however, significantly qualifies that commitment. While article 20 of the country's Constitution contains the promise that all citizens of the country, both men and women, equally enjoy the protection of the law and all human, political, economic, social and cultural rights, that guarantee is qualified by the phrase "in conformity with Islamic criteria".

### III. Right to life

#### A. Death penalty

12. The year 2024 marked a significant increase in known executions, the highest since 2015. NGOs, working with families, lawyers and others connected to executed individuals, have reported well over 900 executions, making the Islamic Republic of Iran by far the highest per capita user of the death penalty globally.<sup>6</sup>

13. The country does not publish official figures on death sentences and executions, necessitating a reliance on estimates. Observations received from the Islamic Republic of Iran categorically rejected the execution numbers presented in the present report but failed to provide official statistics. Based on the submissions received from NGOs, of the total number of executions verified for 2024, only a small proportion (10 per cent) are supported by official sources or State-sponsored media outlets.<sup>7</sup> Such lack of transparency conflicts with fundamental human rights principles. The right of access to information is enshrined in article 19 (2) of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and article 19 (2) of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.<sup>8</sup> That right is intrinsically linked to the right to truth – a principle that serves victims, their families and society.

14. States wielding the power to impose death sentences have a corresponding obligation to demonstrate transparency and accountability. When a State holds the power to take life, that authority must be balanced with the public's right to know the circumstances under which such power is exercised. A State's commitment to international human rights standards on the death penalty must, at a minimum, include the public disclosure of how investigative and prosecutorial processes lead to a capital charge and how its judiciary applies that ultimate penalty. For individuals facing the death penalty, a lack of transparency compromises several critical rights: access to timely and adequate legal defence (indispensable for those facing imminent execution); the guarantee of a fair trial; and the prohibition of torture and cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment. Opacity also makes it impossible for a State to demonstrate non-discrimination and equal treatment under the law, as there is no way to verify that the death penalty is being applied consistently and fairly.

15. To meet those obligations, the Islamic Republic of Iran should enable the reporting of all capital cases, make individual judgments publicly available, regularly release statistics of death sentences handed down at trial or on appeal and provide execution figures specifying the offence and accompanied by demographic information.<sup>9</sup> In his report on a moratorium on the use of the death penalty,<sup>10</sup> the Secretary-General urged States that retained the death penalty to make available systematically full and accurate data disaggregated by sex, age, nationality and race, as applicable, on their use of the death penalty, including data on the

<sup>6</sup> The number of executions in 2024 ranged from 938 to 975 (submissions from Abdorrahman Boroumand Center for Human Rights in Iran, Iran Human Rights and Kurdistan Human Rights Association). The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights reported at least 901 executions; see <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2025/01/iran-rise-executions-deeply-troubling-un-human-rights-chief>.

<sup>7</sup> The Abdorrahman Boroumand Center and Iran Human Rights found that 99 executions had been announced by official and semi-official sources.

<sup>8</sup> Human Rights Committee, general comment No. 34 (2011), paras. 18 and 19.

<sup>9</sup> See General Assembly resolution 75/183.

<sup>10</sup> [A/77/274](#), para. 66.

characteristics of convicted and executed persons and the crimes with which they were charged.

16. Among the offences for which the death penalty was carried out in 2024 in the Islamic Republic of Iran, half were reportedly drug offences (52 per cent), followed by homicides – with sentences of *qisas* (retribution in kind) for “premeditated murder” – (43 per cent), broadly defined national security offences (3 per cent)<sup>11</sup> and sexual offences (2 per cent).<sup>12</sup> The International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights restricts the application of the death penalty to the most serious crimes, interpreted as intentional killing.<sup>13</sup> Under the Covenant, drug, security and sexual offences do not merit the death penalty. Other offences are also subject to the death penalty in the country, including adultery, religious offences and same-sex sexual acts, in violation of the Covenant, although no executions for those offences are known to have occurred in 2024.

17. The categorization of a broad range of activities and activism as national security offences and the subsequent overturning of convictions in some cases point to arbitrary categorization as a means of suppression. For example, Mahmoud Mehrabi was sentenced to death in May 2024 on charges of “corruption on earth” (*efsad-fil-arz*) and “widespread dissemination of false information” in relation to his online political activism, including for administering an Instagram page that revealed several corruption cases linked to governmental officials.<sup>14</sup> According to information received, in October 2024, Mr. Mehrabi’s death sentence was overturned by the Supreme Court and his case was referred to the Revolutionary Court for reconsideration. Similarly, Sharifeh Mohammadi, an Azerbaijani labour activist, was sentenced to death in July 2024 on charges of “armed rebellion against the State” (*baghy*);<sup>15</sup> in October 2024, her sentence was overturned by the Supreme Court and her case was sent back to the Revolutionary Court for retrial.<sup>16</sup> Kurdish activist Pakhshan Azizi, who had previously been arrested in 2009 during student protests against political executions in Kurdistan, was arrested again on 4 August 2023 and sentenced to death in July 2024 on multiple charges, including *baghy* and “membership in opposition groups”.<sup>17</sup> Her arrest and sentence appear to have been related solely to her legitimate work as a social worker, supporting refugees in Iraq and the Syrian Arab Republic. Her death sentence was confirmed in January 2025; the Supreme Court rejected the judicial review request for her case in February 2025, placing her under imminent threat of execution. In November 2024, Varisheh Moradi, a Kurdish women’s rights activist, was also sentenced to death on charges of *baghy*.<sup>18</sup>

18. For homicide cases, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights requires both that the death penalty be restricted to “intentional killing” and that it not be mandatory,<sup>19</sup> giving judges discretion to differentiate between different types of homicide and consider individual offenders’ mitigating circumstances. Article 381 of the Islamic Penal Code, however, stipulates the mandatory punishment for intentional murder as *qisas*, contrary to the Covenant.

19. Although judges cannot exercise discretion, victims’ families may do so. *Qisas* confronts victims’ families with an agonizing dilemma: choosing between pursuing capital punishment for the accused or accepting their release. *Qisas* creates fundamental inequities. Since *diya* (blood money) amounts are discretionary, a two-tiered justice system results in which wealthy offenders can purchase their freedom while poor offenders face execution for

<sup>11</sup> For example, *moharebeh* (taking up arms to take lives or property or to create fear in public), *efsad-fil-arz* (corruption on earth) and *baghy* (armed rebellion against the State).

<sup>12</sup> Iran Human Rights estimates the number of executions at 973 in 2024.

<sup>13</sup> See Human Rights Committee, general comment No. 36 (2018).

<sup>14</sup> See communication IRN 9/2024. All communications, and replies thereto, mentioned in the present report are available at <https://spcommreports.ohchr.org/Tmsearch/TMDocuments>.

<sup>15</sup> See communication IRN 13/2024.

<sup>16</sup> See <https://www.frontlinedefenders.org/en/case/death-sentence-against-sharifeh-mohammadi-overturned>; and <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2025/01/iran-un-experts-alarmed-supreme-court-upholds-death-sentence-kurdish-woman>.

<sup>17</sup> See communication IRN 15/2024.

<sup>18</sup> See communication IRN 21/2024.

<sup>19</sup> Human Rights Committee, general comment No. 36 (2018), paras. 35 and 37.

similar offences. The system often forces families to sell their assets to raise the required blood money, effectively punishing families with financial hardship. Such socioeconomic discrimination violates article 6 (1) of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, which prohibits the arbitrary deprivation of life. Moreover, *diya* bypasses the crucial legal protections required under articles 6 (2) and 9 (3) of the Covenant, which mandate that death sentences must result from final judgments by competent courts.

20. Abbas Karimi was convicted of “intentional murder” and sentenced to *qisas* for a fight resulting in the death of an individual.<sup>20</sup> The victim’s family chose *diya* and requested 70 billion toman (€1,060,000), almost 60 times higher than the judiciary’s indicative amount and beyond the means of Mr. Karimi’s family. Although the victim’s family granted an extension and later reduced the demand to 40 billion toman, with a payment plan of 10 billion upfront and 30 billion to be paid later, the amount remained significantly above the judiciary’s prescribed amount for *diya*. Mr. Karimi’s family was unable to pay the reduced amount, resulting in his execution on 17 October 2024.<sup>21</sup>

21. The type of offence is not the only consideration for a State that retains the death penalty. Individuals must not be subjected to torture or cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment throughout the criminal justice process. Their right to a fair trial and equality before the law must be respected in all criminal proceedings. The growing consensus is that it is almost impossible to carry out the death penalty without violating international human rights standards and safeguards.<sup>22</sup> The Special Rapporteur continues to receive submissions concerning allegations of due process violations.

22. Under article 6 (5) of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and article 37 (a) of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, children are exempt from execution, regardless of the offence committed. The prohibition of the death penalty for an offence committed by someone under the age of 18 years has been recognized as a peremptory norm.<sup>23</sup> The Special Rapporteur expresses grave concern over the imposition of the death sentence on child offenders, as illustrated by the case of Mohammadreza Azizi. Mr. Azizi was sentenced to *qisas* for a fatal stabbing committed when he was 17 years old, followed by two unsuccessful appeals to the Supreme Court in November 2021. Although his execution had been scheduled for 21 October 2024, it had not been carried out as of November 2024, with ongoing efforts to persuade the victim’s parents to accept *diya* instead.<sup>24</sup> The Special Rapporteur has also received submissions concerning the execution of child offenders aged 16 years at the time of the offence.<sup>25</sup> Such cases underscore a critical issue: despite the peremptory norm that prohibits the execution of children, death sentences continue to be imposed on individuals who were under 18 years of age at the time of their offence.<sup>26</sup>

23. The Special Rapporteur has received submissions indicating that the death penalty disproportionately affects certain ethnic groups, particularly the Kurdish and Balochi minorities.<sup>27</sup> Quantitative and qualitative evidence collected through years of civil society monitoring reveals consistent patterns of minority group overrepresentation. Using the geographical distribution of residents across various regions to estimate the population of ethnic groups, it can be estimated that Balochis comprise approximately 2–4 per cent of the

<sup>20</sup> See response to communication IRN 17/2024.

<sup>21</sup> See communication IRN 17/2024.

<sup>22</sup> See, for example, [A/HRC/36/27](#) and [A/77/270](#).

<sup>23</sup> Committee on the Rights of the Child, general comment No. 24 (2019), para. 79.

<sup>24</sup> See response to communication IRN 19/2024.

<sup>25</sup> Submissions from Abdorrahman Boroumand Center and Iran Human Rights. See also <https://iranhr.net/en/articles/6936>.

<sup>26</sup> Observations received from the Islamic Republic of Iran confirm that, over the past 18 months, 21 individuals under the age of 18 years were sentenced to *qisas* but not executed after securing the consent of the victim’s family.

<sup>27</sup> Estimates include: at least 100 Balochis and 100 Kurds out of a total of 937 prisoners executed (Abdorrahman Boroumand Center); at least 108 Balochis and 84 Kurds out of a total of 975 executed (Iran Human Rights); and at least 122 Balochis and 233 Kurds out of a total of 968 executed (Kurdistan Human Rights Association).

population.<sup>28</sup> They account, however, for 11–13 per cent of total executions. Notably, in 2024, 17 per cent of drug-related executions involved Balochis, a reduction from 31 per cent in 2023.<sup>29</sup> Similarly, Kurds, who make up 9–10 per cent of the population, remain overrepresented in broadly defined security offences, accounting for 29 per cent of such cases in 2024.<sup>30</sup> Furthermore, of the 154 executions reported for affiliation with banned political and armed groups between 2010 and 2023, Kurds constituted nearly half (49 per cent), followed by Balochis (29 per cent) and Arabs (16 per cent).<sup>31</sup>

24. To date, the Islamic Republic of Iran has not provided basic official statistics, including ethnic population composition<sup>32</sup> and execution statistics by ethnic group, to address quantitatively the apparent disparity at the population level – an issue previously raised by the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination.<sup>33</sup> The burden lies with the Islamic Republic of Iran to provide transparent statistical evidence if it wishes to refute the assessments of discriminatory practices. The absence of official demographic data on executions, combined with documented patterns of discrimination within the criminal justice system,<sup>34</sup> raises serious concerns regarding the use of the death penalty against those minority groups.

25. The Special Rapporteur is also concerned about the rapid rise in executions of nationals of Afghanistan in the Islamic Republic of Iran. In 2024, 80 Afghans were reportedly executed, compared with 25 in 2023 and 16 in 2022.<sup>35</sup> Most executions were related to drug crimes and have increased sharply since the Taliban's return to power in Afghanistan.

#### **Gendered analysis of the death penalty**

26. Between January 2010 and January 2024, at least 241 women were executed.<sup>36</sup> A small proportion of executions (26 per cent) were announced by official sources during that period, with the rate of announcement falling to an average of 12 per cent during the period 2021–2024.<sup>37</sup> In 2024, between 29 and 31 women were estimated to have been executed, the highest number in the past 10 years,<sup>38</sup> of which at least 8 were Kurdish.<sup>39</sup> Those figures may be underestimates. Additional barriers exist to the accurate reporting of the execution of women compared to men. The small number of women on death row compared to men results in fewer inmates and staff members to bring concerning situations to light and fewer external advocates to report issues. Societal stigma against women offenders can lead families to maintain silence. Women account for a small proportion of executions compared to men in the Islamic Republic of Iran and globally. That numerical disparity has led to women's experiences being largely overlooked in research and advocacy. The non-derogable nature of the right to life, however, demands that the experiences of all genders, including and beyond the male-female binary, be examined. The gendered dimensions of the death penalty merit specific attention and comprehensive analysis.

27. Of the 241 women executed between 2010 and 2024, 114 were sentenced to *qisas* for homicide, resulting in execution, 107 were executed for drug-related offences and 4 for

<sup>28</sup> See <https://minorityrights.org/country/iran>; and <https://kameelahmady.com/wp-content/uploads/1687/83/marz-ta-marz.pdf> (in Persian).

<sup>29</sup> Submission from Iran Human Rights.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> The most recent census (2016) does not contain detailed ethnic demographic data.

<sup>33</sup> CERD/C/IRN/CO/20-27, para. 4.

<sup>34</sup> See CERD/C/IRN/CO/20-27, A/78/511 and A/76/160.

<sup>35</sup> Submission from Iran Human Rights.

<sup>36</sup> Submissions from Abdorrahman Boroumand Center and Iran Human Rights.

<sup>37</sup> Submission from Advocates for Human Rights, Iran Human Rights and World Coalition Against the Death Penalty. See also [https://iranhr.net/media/files/En\\_Gender\\_Perspective\\_of\\_the\\_Death\\_Penalty\\_in\\_Iran\\_EN.pdf](https://iranhr.net/media/files/En_Gender_Perspective_of_the_Death_Penalty_in_Iran_EN.pdf).

<sup>38</sup> Submissions from Abdorrahman Boroumand Center and Advocates for Human Rights, Iran Human Rights and World Coalition Against the Death Penalty. For the period from January to early December 2024, the Hengaw Organization for Human Rights reported 27 executions of women and the Center for Human Rights in Iran reported 29.

<sup>39</sup> Submission from Kurdistan Human Rights Network.

national security offences (*moharebeh* and *efsad-fil-arz*), with the offences for the remaining 16 cases unidentified.<sup>40</sup> Although no executions for adultery were formally identified during the period, a review of official announcements between January 2022 and January 2024 showed two death sentences for adultery.<sup>41</sup>

28. Globally, many of the women sentenced to death for homicide committed their offence in the context of gender-based violence. Similar patterns emerge in the case of the Islamic Republic of Iran. Of the cases of the 114 women executed for homicide, details were obtained for 75 of them: 69 per cent had killed their husband or intimate partner; 11 had been victims of domestic violence; 8 had been victims of child marriage; and 4 reportedly had killed in self-defence against rape.

29. Prison systems worldwide are predominantly designed for men, from the architecture and security protocols to the visiting arrangements. Male-centric design also appears to affect women facing the death penalty in the Islamic Republic of Iran, where many facilities lack dedicated women's wards, forcing transfers to distant prisons that complicate family visits. In addition, the social stigma associated with women in the criminal justice system often leads to family abandonment, creating profound isolation. Detention conditions for men and women are discussed in section V.

## B. Other unlawful deaths

30. The deliberate killing of individuals outside of any legal framework is the antithesis of transparency, accountability and truth, representing a shadowy realm where State authorities or their agents circumvent legal processes to take lives without due process or the right to defence.

31. The Special Rapporteur has received reports documenting a stark human toll: between January and November 2024, at least 62 Kurdish border couriers (*kolbaran*) were killed by Iranian border officials' gunfire and landmine explosions, with an additional 223 sustaining injuries.<sup>42</sup> During the same period, in the Balochistan region, Iranian border officials killed 216 Balochi fuel porters (*sukhtbar*) and wounded 129 others, highlighting the deadly risks faced by those marginalized communities engaged in cross-border trade for economic survival.<sup>43</sup> The Special Rapporteur notes with concern the absence of official data on those incidents and of reports indicating that investigations into such deaths are infrequently conducted. Lethal force must be employed only as a last resort and solely to protect life or prevent serious injury from imminent threats, in accordance with the Basic Principles on the Use of Force and Firearms by Law Enforcement Officials and the United Nations Human Rights Guidance on Less-Lethal Weapons in Law Enforcement. It is the responsibility of the State to ensure that border officials act within the constraints established by those principles and guidance.

32. According to the Minnesota Protocol on the Investigation of Potentially Unlawful Death, State responsibility to protect the right to life extends beyond direct acts of killing to encompass both omissions and broader failures to safeguard human life. Between January and November 2024, there were at least 29 landmine casualties – 6 deaths and 23 injuries – in the border provinces of Kermashah and Ilam and the cities of Sanandaj and Urumiyeh.<sup>44</sup> Among the victims were five nationals of Afghanistan attempting to cross into Türkiye through Kurdistan. The crisis stems from the extensive mining operations in the Islamic Republic of Iran during the Iran-Iraq war (1980–1988), when over 20 million landmines were planted across the Iranian Kurdistan and Khuzestan Provinces, contaminating approximately 4.2 million ha.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid. In 2025, the Human Rights Activists News Agency reported 14 deaths and 33 injuries.

### Femicide and honour-related killings

33. The right to life includes the duty of States to take appropriate steps to protect the right to life of those within their jurisdiction and to investigate arbitrary or unlawful killings and punish offenders.

34. The United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women) defines femicide as an intentional killing with a gender-related motivation connected to its root causes, which may range from stereotyped gender roles and discrimination towards women and girls, to unequal power relations between women and men in society.<sup>45</sup>

35. Global data shows the scale of violence against women, with over 85,000 women and girls intentionally killed in 2023, including approximately 51,100 killed by intimate partners or other family members.<sup>46</sup> While men experience higher rates of homicide overall, women face disproportionate lethal violence in domestic settings, with most killings being gender motivated.

36. In the first half of 2024, the Islamic Republic of Iran saw an increase in estimated femicide cases, with at least 93 incidents compared with 55 in the first half of 2023.<sup>47</sup> That figure corresponds to a total of at least 179 cases of femicide reported between January and December 2024.<sup>48</sup> Stop Femicide Iran reports that husbands and ex-husbands (52 cases) were the primary perpetrators of femicide, followed by fathers, brothers and other male relatives and boyfriends. Many cases can be categorized as honour-related killings.<sup>49</sup> Women were also murdered for making independent marital choices, such as initiating divorce or refusing marriage proposals. In 2023, the Stop Honour Killings Campaign documented at least 186 honour-related killings in the Islamic Republic of Iran, including 1 victim killed for being in a same-sex relationship.<sup>50</sup> Most victims were reportedly under 30 years of age and, in six cases, children witnessed the killing.<sup>51</sup> The Kurdistan Human Rights Network documented 109 femicide cases involving Kurdish women between 2020 and 2024, with patterns of motives, killing methods and victim-perpetrator relationships that mirrored the broader reported trends of femicide in the Islamic Republic of Iran. The true scale of femicide and honour-related killings in the country is likely much higher than reported.

37. It is typically assumed, in reported femicide cases, that victims are heterosexual women, leaving unrecognized killings motivated by the victim's sexual orientation, gender identity or gender expression.<sup>52</sup> Indeed, in January 2024, a transgender 17 years old was killed by their father in Tabriz for wearing makeup and being in same-sex relationships.<sup>53</sup> The father confessed to murder and, in May 2024, received a three-year prison sentence – the minimum possible for the killing by a father of his child under Iranian law.

38. The Penal Code of the Islamic Republic of Iran provides several legal protections for male perpetrators of femicide. The country's legal system treats honour-related killings as premeditated murder, subjecting the perpetrators to *qisas*, unless exceptions apply. Under article 301, fathers and paternal grandfathers who kill their children or grandchildren are

<sup>45</sup> See <https://www.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/2022-11/Gender-related-killings-of-women-and-girls-improving-data-to-improve-responses-to-femicide-feminicide-en.pdf>.

<sup>46</sup> See <https://www.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/2024-11/femicides-in-2023-global-estimates-of-intimate-partner-family-member-femicides-en.pdf>.

<sup>47</sup> See <https://stopfemicideiran.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/07/SFI-Press-Release-2023-24.pdf>; and <https://iranhumanrights.org/2025/01/killed-because-you-are-a-woman-violence-against-women-in-iran-reaches-new-heights>.

<sup>48</sup> Submission from Hengaw Organization for Human Rights.

<sup>49</sup> The Center for Human Rights in Iran, the Stop Honour Killings Campaign and the Hengaw Organization for Human Rights note that State-aligned media often refer to such deaths as “family disputes” rather than honour-related killings.

<sup>50</sup> Submission from Stop Honour Killings Campaign.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

<sup>52</sup> Submission from 6Rang (Iranian Lesbian and Transgender Network).

<sup>53</sup> Ibid. See also <https://www.en-hrana.org/father-sentenced-to-three-years-for-murder-of-transgender-son>; and <https://www.rokna.net/پسرش-را-بخاطر-که-بخش-حادثه-999535/245-سال-زندانی-برای-پدری> (in Persian).



exempt from *qisas*, although they may need to pay *diya* to the victim's heirs. Article 630 exempts husbands from punishment for killing their wives for suspected adultery under certain circumstances.<sup>54</sup> In addition, article 302 exempts killers from *qisas* if their victim had allegedly committed an offence that is punishable by *hadd*.<sup>55</sup> In such circumstances, under article 612, the judge may hand down a prison sentence of between 3 and 10 years.

39. The law's differentiation between honour-related killings and other forms of murder creates a dangerous hierarchy of violence, legitimizing honour-related killings as more acceptable than other types of homicide. The distinction becomes more pernicious when coupled with gender-based disparities in punishment, where male perpetrators receive lenient treatment. The State effectively sanctions lethal violence against women, particularly in cases framed as honour-related.

40. While direct violence includes such physical acts as domestic abuse or femicide, those visible manifestations are sustained by deeper structural violence embedded in social institutions, economic inequalities and unequal access to resources that systematically disadvantage women. That structural violence is, in turn, legitimized by cultural violence: the attitudes, beliefs and social norms that justify women's subordination and normalize gender-based violence.<sup>56</sup> When a woman is killed by an intimate partner, that direct violence is typically preceded by structural barriers that prevent her from leaving (for example, financial dependence or lack of support services) and cultural factors that normalize the abuse (for example, beliefs about male dominance or family honour). In other words, the investigation into violations of the right to life of women and girls necessarily leads to a gendered examination of civil, political, social, cultural and economic rights violations – the contributing factors that culminate in lethal violence – to which the report turns.

#### IV. Freedom of expression, association and peaceful assembly

41. The Special Rapporteur expresses serious concern over the continued widespread restrictions on the right to freedom of opinion and expression and freedom of peaceful assembly and association in the Islamic Republic of Iran. The interrogation, arrest, detention and sentencing of labour organizers, cultural rights activists, human rights defenders and journalists not only directly limit the freedom of expression of those individuals but also create a chilling effect on the exercise of freedom of expression in the country.<sup>57</sup> Groups targeted by the authorities have included labour rights activists, such as teachers Mohammad Habibi, Jafar Ebrahimi and Rasoul Bodaghi, who were repeatedly arrested and convicted and dismissed from employment for their participation in peaceful protests and union activities.<sup>58</sup> Trade unionists and labour rights advocates Reza Shahabi, Davood Razavi and Hassan Saeidi were sentenced to imprisonment on charges of “gathering and collusion against the national security” and “propaganda against the State”. Conditions in prison, including the denial of adequate medical services, have resulted in the serious deterioration of their health.<sup>59</sup>

42. State authorities have also targeted cultural and human rights activists, including members of the Nozhin Sociocultural Association, an organization that raises awareness about the legal and cultural rights of the Kurdish population and other ethnic groups in the Islamic Republic of Iran. Zahra Mohammadi, Edris Menbari, Serveh Pourmohammadi, Seivan Ebrahimi and Soma Pourmohammadi were sentenced to lengthy terms of imprisonment of up to 10 years on charges of “forming a group with the intention of acting

<sup>54</sup> Certain conditions must be met, such as witnessing adultery and being certain of the wife's consent. If those conditions are not met, the husband may be punished, including with *qisas*.

<sup>55</sup> *Hudud* (singular: *hadd*) are Islamic crimes, including adultery, for which the Quran specifies the punishment.

<sup>56</sup> Liz Kelly, *Surviving Sexual Violence* (Polity Press, 1988); and Evan Stark, *Coercive Control: How Men Entrap Women in Personal Life* (New York, Oxford University Press, 2007).

<sup>57</sup> See communication IRN 12/2024; and <https://www.deffi.org/en/examination-of-press-freedom-indicators-in-the-first-100-days-of-masoud-pezeshekians-presidency>.

<sup>58</sup> See communication IRN 18/2024.

<sup>59</sup> See communication IRN 6/2024.

against national security” or “propaganda against the State”.<sup>60</sup> The State has claimed that they received significantly reduced penalties or were pardoned or that their cases are pending appeal. Nonetheless, the cases send a frightening message to persons working on similar advocacy.<sup>61</sup> Similarly, the Special Rapporteur has received reports of eight Azerbaijani Turk activists, including an artist, a lawyer, human rights defenders and mother-tongue language advocates, who were arbitrarily arrested by security forces and detained in Evin Prison.<sup>62</sup>

43. The Special Rapporteur continues to receive information concerning the arrest and detention of women’s rights advocates. Jina Modares Gorji, a human rights defender, podcaster and blogger in Kurdistan Province, was sentenced in May 2024 to 21 years in prison on various charges, including “forming groups and associations with the intention of disturbing national security”, “collaboration with hostile groups and States” and “propaganda activities against the State”.<sup>63</sup> Reports indicate that her sentence was reduced on appeal to two years and four months, after she was acquitted of collaborating with hostile groups and States.<sup>64</sup> In December 2024, Reza Khandan, who has been a vocal supporter of his wife, Nasrin Sotoudeh’s, human rights activism and a campaigner against mandatory hijab laws, was serving a sentence of three years and six months. Despite the problem of underreporting due to fear of reprisals, the Special Rapporteur has received wide-ranging reports of sexual violence used against advocates of women’s rights. The culture of impunity surrounding sexual violence persists, with survivors facing formidable barriers to justice, including social stigma, victim-blaming and fear of retribution – factors that contribute to widespread underreporting and perpetuate cycles of abuse. Such reports are consistent and come from many sources, making them impossible to dismiss as mere hearsay.

44. While the failure to wear the hijab is already punishable with heavy penalties under the existing Islamic Penal Code, the new Law on Protecting the Family through the Promotion of the Culture of Chastity and Hijab, which was set to enter into force on 13 December 2024, marked a dramatic expansion in the State regulation of personal dress codes. The legislation criminalizes hijab non-compliance for anyone over 12 years of age, both in physical spaces and online, while introducing harsh penalties, including extended prison terms of up to 15 years and possible death sentences under the offence of “corruption on earth”.<sup>65</sup> Moving beyond traditional law enforcement, the measure employs a comprehensive strategy of social control through mandatory reporting requirements for citizens and businesses, State-directed educational programmes and technological surveillance. The law, whose reach extends far beyond previous dress code regulations, is aimed at fundamentally reshaping Iranian society through three main mechanisms: (a) dramatically increasing penalties for non-compliance; (b) embedding State-approved values into education and public discourse; and (c) creating a widespread surveillance network through mandatory reporting requirements. The approach effectively transforms private citizens into enforcement agents, fostering an environment of mutual suspicion and hostility, while placing particularly harsh economic and social burdens on vulnerable groups, including young people and social media users.<sup>66</sup> There are also reports that the Iranian authorities have begun to use the label of “mental illness” to discredit or commit to psychiatric care those who violate or criticize the hijab law.<sup>67</sup>

45. Beyond the implementation of stricter dress codes, the broader pattern of State control has coincided with a concerning trend of writers being imprisoned. A total of 49 writers were

<sup>60</sup> See communication IRN 12/2024 and response.

<sup>61</sup> See communication IRN 12/2024.

<sup>62</sup> See <https://united4iran.org/blog/joint-statement-on-the-continued-detention-and-uncertain-status-of-azerbaijani-turk-activists-in-irans-evin-prison>.

<sup>63</sup> See communication IRN 12/2024.

<sup>64</sup> See <https://www.frontlinedefenders.org/en/case/jina-modares-gorji-started-serving-prison-sentence>.

<sup>65</sup> See communication IRN 4/2024; and <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2024/12/iran-un-experts-call-hijab-and-chastity-law-be-repealed>.

<sup>66</sup> See <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2024/12/iran-un-experts-call-hijab-and-chastity-law-be-repealed>.

<sup>67</sup> Fereshteh Ghazi and Kian Sharifi, “How Iran is using mental illness as a tool of repression”, Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, 21 November 2024; and Roya Maleki, “Iranian court sparks controversy by diagnosing hijab protesters with mental illness”, Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, 22 July 2023.

imprisoned in 2021, 57 in 2022 and 22 in 2023.<sup>68</sup> At least 15 women writers were imprisoned in 2023, making the Islamic Republic of Iran the top jailer of women writers in the world during that year.<sup>69</sup> A large proportion of the imprisonments of writers in late 2022 were in connection with the September 2022 protests, with known dissenters pre-emptively detained and writers and artists targeted for expressing support for protesters through their writing or art.<sup>70</sup> In some cases, women writers imprisoned prior to the 2022 protests were retaliated against for expressing support for the protests while behind bars, such as chanting “woman, life, freedom” or writing open letters. Some of the imprisoned women writers have been beaten, denied critical medical care or barred from schools and employment after their release. The poet Sepideh Rashnu was summoned on 8 January 2025 to start serving a 43-month prison sentence for her vocal activism against the compulsory hijab and for her involvement in an altercation in which she was being forced to wear the hijab.<sup>71</sup>

46. The Iranian authorities’ efforts to suppress critical voices and restrict civic engagement extend beyond national borders, affecting Iranian communities worldwide. Through patterns of repression and control mechanisms in other countries, they have effectively limited the diaspora’s freedoms of expression, association and assembly and, in extreme cases, have orchestrated the killing of Iranians abroad. A data mapping tool launched in December 2024 reveals the geographical scope and frequency of such killings, documenting both attempted assassinations and death threats that silence dissent and suppress fundamental rights within Iranian communities worldwide.<sup>72</sup> According to the mapping tool, at least 452 Iranians have been targeted outside of the Islamic Republic of Iran since 1979. In 2024, as documented in the mapping tool, two Iranian human rights activists living in Iraq were threatened with forced disappearance and murder by agents of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps. Similarly, the Special Rapporteur remains concerned by the situation of journalists and employees of BBC News Persian<sup>73</sup> and Iran International,<sup>74</sup> whose reports cover the situation of human rights in the Islamic Republic of Iran, including such incidents as the stabbing of Pouria Zeraati, an Iran International journalist, in the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland. She also notes the pattern of gendered and sexualized harassment against women journalists.<sup>75</sup>

## V. Treatment of detainees and prisoners

47. Due process concerns have been raised repeatedly in the reports of the Secretary-General and the universal periodic review and by the Human Rights Committee and the Special Rapporteur.<sup>76</sup> Indeed, many of the individuals mentioned in the present report were also reportedly subjected to physical and psychological violence during their arrest and detention, for example to extract confessions,<sup>77</sup> and the denial of access to medical care.<sup>78</sup> Based on cases submitted to the Special Rapporteur, the prisons appear to be violating both the United Nations Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners (the Nelson Mandela Rules) and the United Nations Rules for the Treatment of Women Prisoners and Non-custodial Measures for Women Offenders (the Bangkok Rules). Those international standards set basic requirements for the dignified treatment of prisoners, including proper facilities, healthcare and gender-specific necessities. The conditions in women’s prisons as described represent systematic violations of those fundamental human rights principles.

48. Prisoners have the right under international law to healthcare and urgent medical care equivalent to community standards, yet the Special Rapporteur has received multiple reports

<sup>68</sup> Submission from PEN America.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid.

<sup>72</sup> See <https://www.iranrights.org/projects/EJK/en/index.html?intro=open>.

<sup>73</sup> See communication IRN 7/2024 and response.

<sup>74</sup> See communication IRN 10/2024 and response.

<sup>75</sup> See communication IRN 10/2024 and response.

<sup>76</sup> See <https://www.ohchr.org/en/countries/iran>.

<sup>77</sup> See communications IRN 18/2024, IRN 16/2024, IRN 13/2024 and IRN 9/2024.

<sup>78</sup> See communications IRN 18/2024, IRN 16/2024, IRN 9/2024 and IRN 6/2024.

of detainees who were denied essential medical treatment in prisons across the Islamic Republic of Iran.<sup>79</sup> One case concerns Fatemeh Sepehri, a women's human rights defender, detained in Vakilabad Prison in Mashhad.<sup>80</sup> Ms. Sepehri underwent open-heart surgery and was returned to prison. The Special Rapporteur has received recent information concerning her rapidly deteriorating health and her need for urgent medical attention.<sup>81</sup> Information was also received concerning the treatment of prisoners in need of medical attention in Evin Prison. For example, Narges Mohammadi, imprisoned for more than 10 years for her human rights advocacy, was returned to prison two days after surgery, against medical advice and her legal team's request for a medical furlough. She was later granted a temporary release, in December 2024.<sup>82</sup> A lack of medical care has also been reported in Lakan Prison in Rasht.<sup>83</sup>

49. A report on Qarchak Prison in Teheran Province, based on interviews with women prisoners detained there, provides a deeply concerning depiction of detention conditions.<sup>84</sup> Qarchak Prison, originally built as a poultry farm, houses 1,500–2,000 women awaiting trial or serving sentences and prisoners on death row. The prison's infrastructure is inadequate, lacking proper ventilation, windows and sanitation. Prisoners face deplorable conditions, including contaminated water, pest infestations and severe overcrowding. Sanitary pads must be purchased from the prison shop, creating particular hardship for women abandoned by their families and who have no financial resources. Children who live with imprisoned mothers in those concerning conditions lack proper nutrition, healthcare and education. Healthcare is severely limited, with restricted medical visits and inadequate care for serious conditions. While essential medicines are scarce, the prison freely distributes sedatives.

50. Based on information received, women prisoners held in Orumiyeh, Ilam, Kermanshah and Sanandaj appear to face similar conditions to those detained in Qarchak.<sup>85</sup> The facilities lack basic amenities, particularly affecting women detained with their children. Sanitation is inadequate, with limited access to hot water and proper bathroom facilities. Healthcare is especially problematic: prison infirmaries lack doctors and typically provide only painkillers. When outside medical care is required, women political prisoners must wear handcuffs, ankle shackles and a mandatory chador, or risk being denied treatment altogether.

## VI. Equality of men and women before the law

51. The most recent official survey of domestic violence in the Islamic Republic of Iran, published in 2004, showed that 66 per cent of married women had experienced domestic violence at least once in their lives.<sup>86</sup> Despite the absence of current official data, the prolonged debate over legislation addressing violence against women underscores the persistent and unresolved nature of that important issue.

52. There is no law that criminalizes domestic violence in the Islamic Republic of Iran.<sup>87</sup> The Bill to Protect the Dignity and Security of Women against Violence was proposed in the Islamic Consultative Assembly, and its initial draft was made public in 2017.<sup>88</sup> Its general provisions were approved in April 2023 and it is awaiting another review by the Assembly.

<sup>79</sup> See communications IRN 2/2024 and IRN 6/2024.

<sup>80</sup> See communication IRN 2/2024.

<sup>81</sup> Information received in January 2025.

<sup>82</sup> Information received in November 2024. See also response to communication 20/2023.

<sup>83</sup> See <https://iranwire.com/en/women/133000-no-medical-care-in-iran-prison-reveals-jailed-womens-rights-activist>.

<sup>84</sup> See [https://iranhr.net/media/files/Qarchak\\_Prison\\_Report\\_EN-.pdf](https://iranhr.net/media/files/Qarchak_Prison_Report_EN-.pdf).

<sup>85</sup> Submission from Kurdistan Human Rights Network.

<sup>86</sup> See [https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/\\_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=INT%2FCCPR%2FCSS%2FIRN%2F55999&Lang=en](https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=INT%2FCCPR%2FCSS%2FIRN%2F55999&Lang=en); and <https://iranopendata.org/pages/71f-domestic-violence> (in Persian).

<sup>87</sup> Violence against women currently falls under the general assault and battery provisions of article 614 of the Islamic Penal Code.

<sup>88</sup> See <https://tinyurl.com/vwbj4zfx> (in Persian).

The process of revision over some four years has greatly extended the bill's timeline and deferred the potential for safeguarding women's rights.

53. The judiciary had approved the revised bill in 2019, with heavy amendments, including changing its title to "Bill for the Protection, Dignity and Security of Ladies against Violence",<sup>89</sup> and sent it to the executive branch. The use of the term "ladies" (*banu*) instead of "women and girls" (*zanan va dokhtaran*) in the title and text was criticized because it was thought to potentially exclude girls.<sup>90</sup> Other changes included removing references to violence, sexual harassment and rape and replacing the term "domestic violence" with "victimized women", which has a broader and less precise meaning, potentially weakening the focus on intimate partner violence.<sup>91</sup>

54. In January 2021, after years of deliberation between various institutions, the cabinet approved a final version of the Bill on Preserving Dignity and Protecting Women against Violence and sent it to the parliament.<sup>92</sup> After more than 40 sessions in the Government Bills Commission, the third version expanded the definition of violence to include the omissions mentioned above and recognized gender, vulnerability and relationship type as motivating factors. It added biannual monitoring and judicial oversight, potentially improving accountability and victim support, and strengthened protection with a fund for abused women and explicit protections for privacy and support programmes.

55. The current fourth version of the bill, entitled "Bill on Preventing Harm to Women and Enhancing Their Security against Misconduct", was published on 9 April 2023 and is awaiting a full vote by the parliament.<sup>93</sup> That revised version has several improvements over the original version, such as clearer definitions of terms such as "violence" and "support" and a more precise articulation of offences and penalties. Serious gaps need to be filled, however, before the legislation can effectively protect women from violence in alignment with international standards. They include expanding the scope of criminalization to include marital rape<sup>94</sup> and economic violence, clarifying ambiguous terms such as "victimized woman", which risks misinterpretation and may exclude certain groups from protection, removing provisions related to criminalizing women's dress choices (for example, violations related to hijab), reinstating stronger penalties for key offences, which were reduced in the judiciary version, and providing clearer guidance on how to support survivors, guarantee confidentiality and offer specialized services.<sup>95</sup>

56. Article 66 of the Code of Criminal Procedure of the Islamic Republic of Iran allows NGOs active in the field of women's protection to report crimes committed against women to the competent judicial authorities and to be present at all stages of the proceedings. Nonetheless, reports show that the infrastructure to protect women against violence appears to remain limited,<sup>96</sup> although the country has reported the launch of an additional 31 women's shelters.<sup>97</sup>

57. Women often hesitate to file criminal complaints against their abusers, not only because there is currently no law that criminalizes domestic violence but also because of cultural norms, according to which women are expected to make sacrifices for their family, and the attitude of police officers and judges, which not only demonstrates a lack of

<sup>89</sup> See <https://www.ekhtebare.ir/لايحه-تامين-صيانت-كرامت-وانوا-امنيت-كرامت-و-تامين-صيانت> (in Persian).

<sup>90</sup> Submission from Impact Iran Secretariat .

<sup>91</sup> Ibid.

<sup>92</sup> See <https://www.ekhtebare.ir/بر-اير-در-زنان-از-حمایت-و-كرامت-حفظ-لايحه> (in Persian).

<sup>93</sup> Ibid.

<sup>94</sup> Under article 1108 of the Civil Code, maintenance (*nafagheh*) is contingent on a wife's obedience (*tamkin*), including sexual obligations.

<sup>95</sup> Submission from Impact Iran Secretariat .

<sup>96</sup> A/HRC/WG.6/34/IRN/1, para. 53. See also <https://femena.net/wp-content/uploads/2023/09/The-Years-of-Hardship-and-Violence.pdf>.

<sup>97</sup> See A/HRC/WG.6/48/IRN/1. While the launch of new shelters is a positive development, the Special Rapporteur has received reports of private shelters facing shutdowns, often accused of non-compliance with restrictive regulations on women's rights. One such case was the reported closure of the Mehr-e Shams Afarid Shelter in Urmia in April 2024.

compassion and sympathy but also explicitly discourages the filing of cases.<sup>98</sup> A recent study on the experiences of victims of domestic violence in the Islamic Republic of Iran found that the police and the judiciary played a significant role in legitimizing and perpetuating violence against women by rationalizing violence as inevitable parts of family life and blaming women for bringing a private matter to public scrutiny.<sup>99</sup> Judges also tend to question the credibility of women's claims of abuse.<sup>100</sup> In the trials of women accused of killing their husbands, the reported misogynistic culture in the judiciary is compounded by laws that allow very little discretion for judges to consider domestic violence as a possible mitigating factor for sentencing.

58. The law on divorce is also gendered, with a man able to divorce his wife unilaterally. If a woman wishes to divorce and her husband is unwilling, however, she has to satisfy cumbersome evidentiary requirements.<sup>101</sup> While the law includes wife battery or any kind of mistreatment of the wife as grounds for divorce, judges may still refuse to grant divorce, even in the most severe cases of domestic violence.<sup>102</sup> It is extremely difficult to obtain a divorce in a court system in which judges tend to discredit women's claims or normalize and legitimize violence. The lack of representation of women in judicial decision-making positions may affect how domestic violence cases are evaluated and understood in divorce proceedings, potentially creating additional challenges for women seeking to leave abusive marriages.

59. In the Islamic Republic of Iran, women's judicial participation has been heavily restricted since 1982, when legislation explicitly limited judgeships to men, based on a constitutional requirement for sharia-compliant judicial criteria.<sup>103</sup> While subsequent reforms have allowed women to serve in limited judicial roles, for example as legal advisers, investigators and family court consultants, they remain unable to independently issue verdicts.<sup>104</sup> Despite the mandatory inclusion of "female advisory judges" (*qazi-ye moshaver*) on family court panels since 2013, their role is advisory only, requiring male judges to consider but not necessarily follow their opinions.<sup>105</sup>

60. In sum, women face multiple layers of barriers to justice due to discriminatory laws, institutional bias and societal constraints. The Civil Code and the Islamic Penal Code grant men disproportionate legal authority in marriage, divorce and child custody,<sup>106</sup> while women's testimony is valued at half that of men.<sup>107</sup> Similarly, women's freedom of movement in the Islamic Republic of Iran remains constrained by the 1973 Passport Law, which requires a husband's written permission for a wife to obtain a passport.<sup>108</sup> The Civil Code further entrenches gender discrimination through inheritance laws that systematically favour male heirs: sons inherit twice the share of daughters from their parents' estates,<sup>109</sup> while surviving wives receive significantly smaller proportions of their deceased husband's property (one quarter without children, one eighth with children) compared to widowers, who receive one half or one quarter of their deceased wife's property under the same circumstances.<sup>110</sup> Against that backdrop, survivors of domestic violence face significant legal obstacles, as no specific law criminalizes it, and a male-dominated judiciary lacking gender-sensitive procedures often disregards women's claims, particularly in divorce and self-defence in homicide cases and in adultery and sex work-related offences. *Qisas* and *diya*

<sup>98</sup> Atieh Babakhani and Susan L. Miller, "'I felt I was screaming under the water': domestic violence victims' experiences in Iran's police departments and criminal courts", *Violence Against Women*, vol. 28, No. 10 (2022).

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>101</sup> Civil Code, art. 1,133.

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>103</sup> Law regarding the conditions for the selection of judges.

<sup>104</sup> See <https://web.archive.org/web/20210501054644/https://rc.majlis.ir/fa/law/show/91044> (in Persian).

<sup>105</sup> Submission by the Islamic Republic of Iran ("Women in the Islamic Republic of Iran, February 2023"); and Family Protection Act, art. 2.

<sup>106</sup> Civil Code, arts. 1,105, 1,133 and 1,169.

<sup>107</sup> Islamic Penal Code, art. 199.

<sup>108</sup> Passport Law 1973, art. 18.

<sup>109</sup> Civil Code, art. 907.

<sup>110</sup> *Ibid.*, art. 913.

laws further result in unequal penalties, disproportionately affecting women prosecuted under morality laws, who face harsher legal consequences, with limited access to justice.

## VII. Child marriage

61. Early, child and forced marriages in the Islamic Republic of Iran exemplify gender discrimination through legal frameworks that endanger women and limit their opportunities. Article 1,041 of the Civil Code establishes problematic marriage age limits of 13 years for girls and 15 years for boys, while allowing those thresholds to be further lowered with guardian and judicial approval, potentially permitting marriages of girls as young as 9 years of age. The marriage age limits mark a regression from the country's 1926 Criminal Code, its first, which defined anyone under 18 years of age as a child, regardless of gender.<sup>111</sup> Despite the country's ratification of the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Committee's urgent 2016 recommendations to raise the minimum age of marriage to 18 years for both genders,<sup>112</sup> reform efforts appear to have stalled, as evidenced by the 2018 rejection of the Prohibition of Child Marriage Bill by the parliamentary Committee for Judicial and Legal Affairs.

62. Article 1,041 of the Civil Code stands in conflict with international human rights standards, particularly the prohibition of marriage without the free and full consent of the intending spouses, as set out in article 23 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. The law's failure to prioritize the best interests of the child, coupled with the absence of any requirement for the child's consent, creates concerning vulnerabilities for abuse. In its resolution 53/23 on child, early and forced marriage, the Human Rights Council further emphasized the need to abolish or modify laws that enabled child marriage, highlighting the growing disconnect between the domestic legislation of the Islamic Republic of Iran and international human rights obligations.

63. The Special Rapporteur welcomes the reported 25 per cent reduction in underage marriages (girls under 18 years) from 2021 to 2023 in the Islamic Republic of Iran,<sup>113</sup> while noting the absence of absolute numbers in the reporting. The most recent official statistics from 2021/22 indicate concerning figures: 26,974 girls compared to just 15 boys under the age of 15 years were married and 138,151 women and girls aged 15–19 years compared to 23,138 boys and men in the same age group.<sup>114</sup> The numbers suggest a persistent and significant gender disparity in child marriage, even with the claimed reduction. The Special Rapporteur highlights important gaps and changes in the country's statistical reporting practices. Since 2017, the Statistical Centre of Iran has altered its data presentation by merging previously separate categories of "below 10 years" and "age 10–14 years" into a single "under 15 years" category. Furthermore, the Centre does not specifically report marriages of girls under 18 years, instead using age brackets of "under 15 years" and "15–19 years", making it difficult to assess the full scope of underage marriages. The absence of published figures for 2022/23 and 2023/24 further complicates efforts to verify the reported reduction in child marriage.<sup>115</sup>

64. Data for 2021/22 from the Statistical Centre of Iran show 1,392 births to mothers under the age of 15 years (compared to six fathers) and 64,632 births to mothers aged 15–19 years (compared to 3,282 fathers).<sup>116</sup> Such early pregnancies pose significant risks to maternal and infant health, while disrupting girls' and boys' education and future economic independence. The situation is further exacerbated by the Population Rejuvenation and Family Support Act, ratified by the Guardian Council in November 2021, which severely restricts reproductive healthcare access by limiting safe abortion, banning voluntary sterilization and prohibiting free contraceptive distribution in public healthcare, except when pregnancy would threaten the woman's health (art. 51). The law imposes particularly harsh

<sup>111</sup> See <https://www.iranrights.org/library/document/3629>.

<sup>112</sup> See [CRC/C/IRN/CO/3-4](#).

<sup>113</sup> [A/HRC/WG.6/48/IRN/1](#), para. 81.

<sup>114</sup> Statistical Centre of Iran, *Annual Statistical Book* (2023).

<sup>115</sup> Submission from Impact Iran Secretariat.

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid.*, and submission from Azadi Network.

penalties, with article 61 classifying large-scale abortion provision as *efsad-fil-arz* (corruption on earth), a crime punishable by death. That restrictive legal framework, combined with the high rates of adolescent pregnancy, creates a complex web of health and social challenges that disproportionately affect young women and girls, limiting their access to both educational opportunities and essential reproductive healthcare services.

## VIII. Access to education and employment

65. The Special Rapporteur notes that the Islamic Republic of Iran has achieved significant progress in educational access, with enrolment rates reaching 98 per cent in primary education and 94 per cent in lower secondary education.<sup>117</sup> Women outnumber men in colleges and universities.<sup>118</sup> That advancement has not translated into equal economic opportunities, however. As of 2023, women's labour force participation rate remained low (14 per cent) compared to men's (71 per cent).<sup>119</sup> The disparity is reinforced by legal barriers: under article 1,117 of the Civil Code, a husband, as head of the family, can prevent his wife from pursuing a profession if he considers it to be incompatible with family interests or dignity.<sup>120</sup> While the country has made efforts to improve literacy rates,<sup>121</sup> a gender gap persists, with women's literacy rate at 85 per cent compared with men's at 93 per cent.<sup>122</sup>

66. The Special Rapporteur acknowledges the reported progress of the country in women's political and judicial representation, including 4 women in government positions, 14 female parliamentary representatives, several female ambassadors and appointments across various levels of governance (15 female deputy provincial governors, 4 female city governors, 60 female deputy city governors, 53 female county mayors and 2,955 female village mayors) and 1,006 female advisory judges (see para. 58 on women judges).<sup>123</sup> The Special Rapporteur notes, however, that those figures require additional context to assess meaningfully women's representation, particularly the total number of positions available at each level and their role.

67. Access to higher education and employment remains severely restricted for members of certain religions in the Islamic Republic of Iran, particularly the Baha'i community. Universities are instructed to expel Baha'i students upon their identification, while mandatory religious declarations on enrolment forms and restrictions on university entrance exams effectively bar Baha'is from higher education, limiting participation to adherents of constitutionally recognized religions (Islam, Judaism, Christianity and Zoroastrianism).<sup>124</sup> The systematic exclusion extends to employment, where legal frameworks, including the Law on Restructuring Human Resources and the Law on Administrative Offences, restrict Baha'is from public-sector employment, professional licensing and business operations, often accompanied by property confiscation and forced evictions.<sup>125</sup> Baha'i women face intersectional discrimination, as their religious identity compounds existing gender-based barriers to intellectual, social and economic advancement.<sup>126</sup>

<sup>117</sup> See [https://www.unicef.org/media/152571/file/Iran-\(Islamic-Republic-of\)-2023-COAR.pdf](https://www.unicef.org/media/152571/file/Iran-(Islamic-Republic-of)-2023-COAR.pdf).

<sup>118</sup> [A/HRC/WG.6/48/IRN/1](#), para. 64.

<sup>119</sup> See <https://genderdata.worldbank.org/en/economies/iran-islamic-rep#:~:text=In%20the%20Islamic%20Republic%20of%20Iran%2C%20the%20labor%20force%20participation,labor%20force%20participation%20has%20increased>.

<sup>120</sup> Civil Code, art. 1117.

<sup>121</sup> [A/HRC/WG.6/48/IRN/1](#), para. 59.

<sup>122</sup> See <https://genderdata.worldbank.org/en/economies/iran-islamic-rep>.

<sup>123</sup> [A/HRC/WG.6/48/IRN/1](#), para. 75.

<sup>124</sup> Submission from Baha'i International Community.

<sup>125</sup> Law on Restructuring the Human Resources of Government and Government-affiliated Ministries and Institutions (11 October 1981), arts. 19 and 29; Law on Administrative Offences of 1993, sec. 34, art. 8; Baha'i International Community, "Review of the eligibility of individuals belonging to small groups and the perverse Bahaist sect"; and Human Rights Watch, "'The boot on my neck': Iranian authorities' crime of persecution against Baha'is in Iran" (2024).

<sup>126</sup> Submission from Baha'i International Community.



## IX. Minorities

68. While a gendered perspective has been applied in the present report, the intersection of that perspective with ethnic and religious minority status has also been highlighted throughout. Religious and ethnic minorities face systemic discrimination, including arbitrary detention, unfair trials and the disproportionate application of the death penalty, often carried out in secret. Members of the Baha'i faith, Christian converts, Sunni Muslims and ethnic groups such as Azerbaijanis, Ahwazi Arabs, Balochis and Kurds, experience restrictions on their cultural practices, language rights and religious freedom, along with limited access to education, employment and economic opportunities.<sup>127</sup>

69. Women from those communities face particularly acute challenges, experiencing multiple forms of discrimination based on their ethnic origin, religion, age and gender, which are further compounded by discriminatory provisions in domestic legislation. Those intersecting forms of discrimination create systemic barriers to their fundamental rights and heighten their risks of violence, particularly by law enforcement officials. As noted in section III, during the reporting period, women minority activists faced politically motivated charges and prosecution aimed at silencing women minority activists.

70. The Special Rapporteur is also alarmed at the intensifying persecution of Baha'i women in the Islamic Republic of Iran, which highlights a systematic pattern of targeting that combines religious discrimination with gender-based oppression.<sup>128</sup> Baha'i women appear to comprise two thirds of all Baha'i prisoners in the country, with many held without due process or in unknown locations. In March 2024 alone, 72 of 93 Baha'is summoned to court or imprisoned were women. The women, some with young children, have been separated from their families. The persecution includes arrests, interrogations, enforced disappearances, home raids and restrictions on movement occurring against a backdrop of broader discriminatory practices that deny Baha'is access to higher education, public employment and basic economic rights. While the Islamic Republic of Iran has said that Baha'is enjoy full citizenship rights and face no restrictions,<sup>129</sup> the authorities sentenced 10 Baha'i women in Isfahan to a combined 90 years in prison, accompanied by fines, travel bans and asset confiscations. The Special Rapporteur remains concerned about the use of vague charges such as "threat to national security" and "propaganda against the State" to justify such persecution, warning that such actions could have a chilling effect on the entire Baha'i community and their exercise of fundamental human rights.

71. Environmental degradation from unsustainable resource exploitation and mismanagement and the effects of climate change continue to have a disproportionate impact on minority-populated areas in the country. The Ahwazi Arabs in Khuzestan Province and Azerbaijani Turks near Lake Urmia live with harmful water diversion, pollution and resource exploitation. In Sistan and Balochestan Province, residents face worsening conditions, including extreme floods and droughts. The environmental issues have severely affected local livelihoods, leading to displacement, health crises and diminished access to necessities, disrupting traditional ways of life and worsening socioeconomic challenges. Activists who protest for environmental justice often face indifference, detention and harassment.<sup>130</sup>

## X. Impact of sanctions

72. The Special Rapporteur acknowledges the complex interplay of factors affecting the economy of the Islamic Republic of Iran and the impact of economic sanctions on its citizens. While sanctions have been cited as influencing economic conditions, the full scope of their effects remains difficult to assess, given that economic difficulties stem from multiple factors, including structural issues, resource allocation decisions and government practices. The

<sup>127</sup> See [CERD/C/IRN/CO/20-27](#).

<sup>128</sup> See communication IRN 14/2024; and submissions from Baha'i International Community and Partners for Transparency.

<sup>129</sup> See response to communication IRN 14/2024.

<sup>130</sup> Submissions from Association for the Human Rights of the Azerbaijani People, Unrepresented Nations and Peoples Organization and Ahwaz Human Rights Organization.

country experienced significant economic hardship in 2019, when poverty increased by almost five percentage points compared to 2018 amid economic recession and tightened sanctions.<sup>131</sup> Recent data show some recovery, however, with poverty rates declining from 29 per cent to 22 per cent between 2020 and 2022, lifting approximately 6.1 million people out of poverty.<sup>132</sup> The gains remain precarious though, with an estimated 40 per cent of the population vulnerable to falling into poverty due to climate shocks or economic downturns.<sup>133</sup> Women face particular vulnerabilities in this economic context, as they are often employed in precarious positions within small and home-based enterprises. Such gender-specific vulnerability is amplified by the country's ongoing economic crisis, marked by persistent high inflation, with consumer price inflation remaining above 40 per cent for five consecutive years through 2023/24.<sup>134</sup> The sustained inflation has had a severe impact on the affordability of basic goods, with women bearing heightened burdens due to their marginalized position in the workforce and existing structural inequalities.

73. The Special Rapporteur notes that the submissions highlighted the diminished access to essential medical supplies and medications that cannot be produced domestically, affecting a broad spectrum of healthcare needs, from basic menstrual hygiene products to treatments for serious conditions, such as cancer, multiple sclerosis and epidermolysis bullosa.<sup>135</sup> While urging States imposing sanctions to implement effective humanitarian exemptions to minimize human rights impacts, the Special Rapporteur cautions against attributing the country's economic challenges solely to sanctions. Sanctions have affected the economy; they do not, however, absolve the State from the responsibility to protect women's economic rights and opportunities. The low employment rate for women, discriminatory family laws, child marriage and inadequate domestic violence protections reflect domestic policy decisions independent of international restrictions.

## XI. Conclusion

74. **The extraordinary rise in executions in 2024 in the Islamic Republic of Iran, with over 900 recorded cases, alongside the highest number of women executed in the past decade, creates serious concerns about the application of the death penalty. Widespread discrimination against women through legal frameworks limit various aspects of women's lives, from marriage, divorce and inheritance to access to justice. Intersectional discrimination particularly affects ethnic and religious groups. Despite intense State repression and the new Law on Protecting the Family through the Promotion of the Culture of Chastity and Hijab, Iranian women continue to demonstrate remarkable resilience and activism in defending their rights. From protests against compulsory veiling to advocacy for equal rights, Iranian people are increasingly vocal and organized in challenging discriminatory practices, reflecting their growing awareness of their rights and their determination to achieve change. While the country has made progress in such areas as educational access, those advances have not translated into meaningful economic and political participation for women, underscoring the need for the comprehensive reform of discriminatory laws and practices.**

<sup>131</sup> See [https://databankfiles.worldbank.org/public/ddpext\\_download/poverty/987B9C90-CB9F-4D93-AE8C-750588BF00QA/current/Global\\_POVEQ\\_IRN.pdf](https://databankfiles.worldbank.org/public/ddpext_download/poverty/987B9C90-CB9F-4D93-AE8C-750588BF00QA/current/Global_POVEQ_IRN.pdf).

<sup>132</sup> See <https://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/099126301062574458/pdf/IDU1184663f717fdd144cd18e401eae9b5866789.pdf>.

<sup>133</sup> Ibid.

<sup>134</sup> See World Bank, "Iran Economic Monitor: sustaining growth amid rising geopolitical tensions" (Washington, D.C., 2024).

<sup>135</sup> Submissions from individuals without organizational affiliation.

## **XII. Recommendations**

75. **The Special Rapporteur appeals to the Islamic Republic of Iran:**
- (a) **To continue to engage with the Special Rapporteur, including by granting her unhindered access to the country;**
  - (b) **Data and transparency:**
    - (i) **To make publicly available data disaggregated by sex, age, nationality and race on the use of the death penalty, including data on the characteristics of convicted and executed persons and on the offences with which they were charged;**
    - (ii) **To make judgments publicly available, in line with article 14 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights;**
    - (iii) **To collect and provide reliable, updated and comprehensive statistics on the demographic composition of the population, including data on ethnic and ethnoreligious minorities;**
    - (iv) **To resume publishing child marriage statistics for girls and boys below the age of 10 years and aged 10–14 years;**
  - (c) **Death penalty:**
    - (i) **To establish a moratorium on the death penalty with a view to complete abolition;**
    - (ii) **To urgently abolish the death penalty for individuals who were below the age of 18 years at the time of the offence;**
    - (iii) **To abolish the death penalty for offences that do not meet the most serious crimes threshold under the Covenant, namely, drug-related offences, broadly defined national security offences, blasphemy, adultery and consensual sexual conduct between people of the same sex;**
    - (iv) **To review the abolition of *diya*, in line with article 6 (2) of the Covenant and, pending abolition, set an upper limit for *diya*;**
    - (v) **To remove all mandatory sentencing to give judges discretion in sentencing and allow them to consider mitigating factors, including trauma, gender-based violence and child marriage;**
  - (d) **Landmines and excessive lethal force:**
    - (i) **To clear the entire territory of landmines and all remnants of war, with international support;**
    - (ii) **To ensure that the use of lethal force by law enforcement and border officials is fully compliant with international standards, including the Code of Conduct for Law Enforcement Officials and the Basic Principles on the Use of Force and Firearms by Law Enforcement Officials;**
  - (e) **Due process and detention conditions:**
    - (i) **To ensure that all accused have the right to a fair trial and due process, in accordance with article 14 of the Covenant, including access to a lawyer of their choosing during all stages of the judicial process;**
    - (ii) **To ensure that prisoners and detainees are protected from all forms of torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment, ensure that confessions obtained through torture or ill-treatment are never admitted as evidence in court and establish mechanisms for investigating claims of torture and deaths in detention, consistent with international standards in line with the Manual on the Effective Investigation and Documentation of Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (Istanbul Protocol) and the Minnesota Protocol on the Investigation of Potentially Unlawful Death;**

- (iii) To provide prisoners with access to timely and appropriate healthcare;
- (iv) To ensure that conditions of detention are compatible with the Nelson Mandela Rules and the Bangkok Rules;
- (f) Civic space:
  - (i) To ensure the protection of human rights defenders, activists, journalists, lawyers and their families from threats, intimidation, arbitrary arrest, detention or other sanctions and immediately release those detained for exercising their fundamental rights;
  - (ii) To end all forms of transnational repression, including violence, harassment, kidnapping and extra-judicial executions;
  - (iii) To treat dissent as a vital force for growth and progress, rather than a threat that must be suppressed, create an enabling environment for civil society organizations and remove restrictions on their operations;
- (g) Bodily autonomy and violence against women:
  - (i) To repeal all laws that impose mandatory dress codes and ensure that women can participate freely in the community and have their safety and autonomy preserved, whether or not the hijab is worn;
  - (ii) To enact and strengthen laws criminalizing all forms of gender-based violence, including domestic violence, harassment, sexual violence and economic violence, with clear penalties for perpetrators;
  - (iii) To implement systematic training for judges, prosecutors, lawyers, police and other officials on gender-based discrimination, domestic and family violence and coercive control;
  - (iv) To increase support services for victims of gender-based violence, including by providing more shelters and financial assistance;
  - (v) To engage with civil society and gender experts in an extensive review of current laws and policies and address the heightened vulnerability to gender-based violence faced by women from diverse backgrounds, including religious and ethnic groups, refugees, migrants, girls and widows, recognizing multiple and overlapping forms of discrimination;
- (h) Equal protection under the law:
  - (i) To implement comprehensive legal reforms to achieve gender equality;
  - (ii) To end the legal distinction between honour-related killings and other murders and repeal all laws that mitigate penalties for or excuse perpetrators of honour-related killings;
  - (iii) To revise legislation to eliminate child marriage, including by increasing the minimum age of marriage to 18 years;
  - (iv) To ensure equal rights for women in marriage, divorce and inheritance, increase the age of criminal responsibility to 18 years for all and ensure equal testimony rights for women;
  - (v) To enact laws and policies that explicitly ensure the equal eligibility of women and men for all political and judicial positions;
- (i) Minorities:
  - (i) To ensure that all individuals within its territory and subject to its jurisdiction are treated equally before the law, without distinction of any kind, including ethnicity, sex, language, religion, sexual orientation and political or other opinion;

- (ii) To ensure equal treatment in the criminal justice system and equal opportunities in education and employment for all ethnic and recognized and non-recognized religious groups;
- (iii) To ensure that gender-related policies and strategies explicitly address and include the unique experiences and needs of women from minority groups.

76. The Special Rapporteur invites States:

- (a) To support journalists, human rights defenders and others in exile and provide appropriate protection mechanisms to those facing serious threats to their security;
  - (b) To increase financial and technical support to civil society organizations, particularly in the light of recent funding gaps, to ensure their continued work to defend the rights of Iranians;
  - (c) To support and call for reports and public statements by the Special Rapporteur to be translated into Persian and other languages used in the Islamic Republic of Iran;
  - (d) To ensure that measures, such as humanitarian exemptions, are given broad and practical effect and promptly and effectively implemented to minimize the adverse consequences on human rights of sanctions.
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