



Statement - the UPR Pre-Session on the Islamic Republic of Iran

November 2024, Geneva

(Slide 1)

This statement is delivered on behalf of ARTICLE 19, Access Now, and PEN America, international human rights organisations that work globally to protect and promote freedom of expression, access to information, and digital rights.

In this statement, we focus on addressing issues pertaining to online and offline freedom of expression and digital rights, violent State crackdown on protests, and the situation of women and girls.

The organisations' joint UPR submissions also cover other issues pertaining the use of the death penalty as a tool of political repression, the situation of writers, impunity, and freedom of religion and belief.

Issue 1: Freedom of expression and digital rights (slide 2)

Iran remains one of the most restrictive countries in the world regarding freedom of expression and one of the biggest jailers of journalists and writers globally.ⁱ During the last UPR, Iran did not support any recommendations on the alignment of its legislation on freedom of expression with international law.ⁱⁱ Instead, authorities have introduced and/or passed laws that instead of protecting human rights, further enable their violation.

State authorities have also systematically arrested and detained human rights defenders, journalists, media workers, writers, artists, justice seeking families of victims, LGBTQI activists, and others voicing dissent; denied them medical care in prison; and prosecuted and sentenced them to long prison terms, flogging, and even the death penalty.ⁱⁱⁱ According to the authorities' own figures, criminal cases were opened against at least 34,000 individuals in connection with the "Woman, Life, Freedom" protests.

(slide 3)

The past years have also seen the adoption and implementation of measures aimed at further restricting access to information and online expression, in particular during protests. This includes the continued development of the National Information Network (NIN), which facilitates internet shutdowns and censorship;^{iv} the quiet enforcement of the draconian User Protection Bill;^v and the blocking of access to secure applications and platforms, including Signal, WhatsApp, and Instagram and to secure Virtual Private

Networks (VPNs).^{vi} Authorities have routinely imposed internet shutdowns and disruptions. In November 2019, a near total internet shutdown was implemented for a week.^{vii} During the Woman, Life, Freedom protests, internet disruptions and mobile curfews were imposed through severe disruption of mobile internet connections.^{viii}

In this light, we propose the following recommendations: (slide 4)

- Immediately and unconditionally release all persons detained for exercising their rights to freedom of expression, assembly, and association, including online;
- Urgently repeal laws which, in contravention of international law restrict and/or criminalise the right to freedom of expression;
- Ensure full access to the internet and all communication services particularly during protests, including blocked social media and messaging applications.

Issue 2: Lethal protest crackdown (slide 5)

Authorities have brutally repressed successive rounds of protests since the last review. Merely a week following its UPR review on 8 November 2019, Iran witnessed a lethal State crackdown on the nationwide protests. Security forces used unlawful force, including lethal force and firearms and unlawfully killed and injured protesters during protests in November 2019;^{ix} 2021 protests in Khuzestan^x and Esfahan^{xi}; in May 2022^{xii} and the Woman, Life, Freedom protests that started on 16 September 2022.^{xiii} Just in the case of the latest protests, security forces unlawfully killed hundreds of women, children, and men and injured and blinded many more by firing military-grade weapons such as assault rifles and submachine guns as well as weapons loaded with metal pellets. Ethnic minorities were disproportionately impacted. The UN Fact-Finding Mission on Iran concluded that the authorities committed the crimes against humanity, including of murder, in the context of the Woman, Life, Freedom protests.^{xiv}

Authorities committed protest-related violations and crimes with absolute impunity, shielded and emboldened by laws and structures that, instead of tackling impunity, perpetuate it.^{xv}

In this regard, we recommend the following: (slide 6)

- Immediately cease the use of lethal force, including birdshot and other metal pellets against protesters;
- Urgently overhaul all laws and institutions that enable impunity and prevent independent, impartial, transparent, and effective investigations into human rights violations and crimes under international law.

Issue 3: The situation of women and girls (slide 7)

Iran did not support recommendations to repeal discriminatory laws against women and girls^{xvi} including those imposing compulsory veiling,^{xvii} which violate the rights of millions of women and girls. Women and girls continued to be subjected to extreme forms of discrimination and violence.^{xviii} Law and policies relegating them to second-class citizens and sanctioning violence and discrimination remained in place. These included laws sanctioning marital rape and granting unequal rights to marriage, divorce, inheritance, and child custody.

In the face of growing demands for gender equality, including in the context of recent protests, the authorities doubled down on the crackdown on women, including by passing the “Hijab and Chastity Law”. Amid an ongoing full-on assault on women, the law further mobilises the entire State machinery to enforce compulsory veiling, including through even heavier punishments and depriving those found in defiance of basic rights and services. Surveillance technologies and monitoring systems, such as facial recognition, which were already in use by the State, have been further provided for under the law.^{xix} According to police officials, between April and June 2023 alone, almost one million text messages were sent warning women captured without a headscarf in their cars and more than 4,000 women were referred to the judiciary.

In its report, the UN Fact-Finding Mission on Iran concluded that the authorities committed the crime against humanity, inter alia, of persecution on the ground of gender.^{xx}

We propose the following recommendation (slide 8)

- Identify and repeal all laws and rescind all draft legislation that discriminates against or has a discriminatory impact on women and girls, including those that impose compulsory veiling;
- Disband the “morality police” and end all repressive policy and institutional measures aimed at repressing women and girls exercising their fundamental human rights.

ⁱ See <https://pen.org/report/freedom-to-write-index-2023/>. Also: Reporters Without Borders, Iran country page. Available online: <https://rsf.org/en/country/iran>

ⁱⁱ [A/HRC/43/12](#), paras. 26.155, 26.156, 26.158, 26.159, 26.160, 26.166, 26.179.

ⁱⁱⁱ See: <https://pen.org/report/freedom-to-write-index-2023/>; Iran Human Rights, *Report: Human Rights Defenders in Iran 2023*, 15 December 2023. Available online: <https://www.iranhr.net/en/reports/36/>; United Nations Independent International Fact-Finding Mission on the Islamic Republic of Iran, Update on the situation of women and girls in the context of the September 2022 protests and the “Woman, Life, Freedom” movement in the Islamic Republic of Iran, <https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/documents/hrbodies/hrcouncil/ffmi-iran/FFM-Iran-Update-13-September-2024.pdf>; OHCHR, *Iran must end harassment of Narges Mohammadi and release all women human rights defenders: Independent Experts*, 27 June 2024. Available online: <https://www.article19.org/resources/iran-security-forces-arrests-son-brother-of-baluch-activist-to-silence-her/>; Center for Human Rights in Iran, *Death Sentence for Female Labor Activist Highlights Lethal Repression in Iran*, 8 July 2024. Available online: <https://iranhumanrights.org/2024/07/death-sentence-for-female-labor-activist-highlights-lethal-repression-in-iran/>; OHCHR, *Iran: UN experts condemn execution of Ruhollah Zam*, 14 December 2020. Available online: <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2020/12/iran-un-experts-condemn-execution-ruhollah-zam>

Amnesty International, *Iran: Execution of journalist Rouhollah Zam a ‘deadly blow’ to freedom of expression*, 12 December 2020. Available online: <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2020/12/iran-execution-of-journalist-rouhollah-zam-a-deadly-blow-to-freedom-of-expression-2/>; Iran Human Rights, *Targeted Crackdown on Human Rights Defenders in 2022 Iran Nationwide Protests*, 22 December 2022. Available online: <https://www.iranhr.net/en/reports/30/>; PEN America, *PEN America Strongly Denounces Imprisonment of Sepideh Rashno*, 16 February 2024, <https://pen.org/press-release/pen-america-strongly-denounces-imprisonment-of-sepideh-rashno/>; Amnesty International, *Iran: Execution Risk for Tortured Dissident Rapper: Toomaj Salehi*, 16 May 2024. Available online: <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/mde13/8055/2024/en/>;

^{iv} ARTICLE 19, *Iran: Cyberspace authorities ‘silently’ usher in draconian internet bill*, 9 September 2022. Available online: <https://www.article19.org/resources/iran-draconian-internet-bill/>

^v ARTICLE 19, *Iran: Cyberspace authorities ‘silently’ usher in draconian internet bill*, 9 September 2022. Available online: <https://www.article19.org/resources/iran-draconian-internet-bill/>

^{vi} Al-Jazeera, *Iran Blocks Signal Messaging App after WhatsApp Exodus*, 26 January 2021. Available online: <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/1/26/iran-blocks-signal-messaging-app-after-whatsapp-exodus>; Entekhab News, *The filtering of Clubhouse on MCI, Irancell, and Iran’s ISPs*, 9 April 2021. Available online:

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<https://itiran.com/2022/09/27/%D8%AF%D8%B1%D8%AE%D9%88%D8%A7%D8%B3%D8%AA-%D8%A8%D8%B1%D8%A7%D8%8C-%D8%AF%D8%A7%D8%A6%D9%85%DB%8C-%D8%B4%D8%AF%D9%86-%D9%81%DB%8C%D9%84%D8%AA%D8%B1%DB%8C%D9%86%DA%AF-%D8%A7%DB%8C%D9%86%D8%B3%D8%AA/>;

^{vii} Amnesty International, *A web of impunity: the killings Iran's internet shutdowns hid*, November 2020. Available online: <https://iran-shutdown.amnesty.org/>

ARTICLE19, *Tightening the Net: After Blood and Shutdowns*, October 2020. Available online: <https://www.article19.org/ttn-iran-november-shutdown/>

^{viii} ARTICLE19, *Iran: New tactics for digital repression as protests continue*, 17 November 2022. Available online: <https://www.article19.org/resources/iran-new-tactics-for-digital-repression-as-protests-continue/>

^{ix} International People's Tribunal on Iran's Atrocities (ABAN TRIBUNAL) /Full Judgement, 1 November 2022. Available online: <https://abantribunal.com/wp-content/uploads/2023/07/Aban-Tribunal-Final-Judgment.pdf>;

^x ARTICLE 19, *Iran: Bullets, detention and shutdowns: the authorities' response to protests in Khuzestan*, 28 July 2021.

Available online: <https://www.article19.org/resources/iran-bullets-detention-and-shutdowns-the-authorities-response-to-protests-in-khuzestan/>; Amnesty International, *Iran: Security forces use live ammunition and birdshot to crush Khuzestan protests*, 23 July 2021;

^{xi} Center for Human Rights in Iran, *Isfahan: Instead of Crushing Protests, the Iranian Government Should Solve Its Water Crisis*, 29 November 2021. Available online: <https://iranhumanrights.org/2021/11/isfahan-instead-of-crushing-protests-the-iranian-government-should-solve-its-water-crisis/>;

^{xii} Amnesty International, *Iran: They are shooting brazenly: Iran's militarized response to May 2022 protests*, 3 August 2022. Available online: <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/mde13/5789/2022/en/>

^{xiii} Report of the independent international fact-finding mission on the Islamic Republic of Iran, A/HRC/55/67; Detailed findings of the independent international fact-finding mission on the Islamic Republic of Iran, A/HRC/55/CRP.1, Section V.1.

^{xiv} Report of the independent international fact-finding mission on the Islamic Republic of Iran, A/HRC/55/67. Available online: <https://undocs.org/Home/Mobile?FinalSymbol=A%2FHRC%2F55%2F67&Language=E&DeviceType=Desktop&LangRequeste d=False>; Detailed findings of the independent international fact-finding mission on the Islamic Republic of Iran, A/HRC/55/CRP.1.

^{xv} Iran did not accept recommendations to investigate human rights violations and crimes under international law including those committed in the context of protests. See also: Report of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Islamic Republic of Iran, Javaid Rehman, A/HRC/49/74, 13 January 2022, Para 58; Report of the independent international fact-finding mission on the Islamic Republic of Iran, A/HRC/55/67, Para 116; Joint Civil Society Statement, *Iran: Authorities violate prohibition of torture by harassing witnesses*, 7 April 2022. Available online at: <https://www.article19.org/resources/iran-authorities-torture-harassment-witnesses/>;

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<https://undocs.org/Home/Mobile?FinalSymbol=A%2FHRC%2F55%2F67&Language=E&DeviceType=Desktop&LangRequeste d=False>

Detailed findings of the independent international fact-finding mission on the Islamic Republic of Iran, A/HRC/55/CRP.1.

^{xvi} Rec 26.247 Review and repeal discriminatory laws and policies against women and girls, particularly those related to employment and education respectively, and ensure that all children and girls enjoy the same rights provided by the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and the Convention on the Rights of the Child (Mexico).

^{xvii} Rec 26.240, Abolish laws requiring women to wear hijabs in public, end legal prohibitions on women's full participation in society, and stop criminalizing women's calls for reform, United States of America. (Noted)

^{xviii} ARTICLE 19, *Iran: Protest against Hijab Day as Morality Police intensify crackdown*, 12 July 2022. Available online: <https://www.article19.org/resources/iran-protest-against-mandatory-hijab/>

^{xix} Report of the independent international fact-finding mission on the Islamic Republic of Iran, A/HRC/55/67. Available online: <https://undocs.org/Home/Mobile?FinalSymbol=A%2FHRC%2F55%2F67&Language=E&DeviceType=Desktop&LangRequeste d=False>

Detailed findings of the independent international fact-finding mission on the Islamic Republic of Iran, A/HRC/55/CRP.1.

Available online: <https://www.ohchr.org/en/hr-bodies/hrc/ffm-iran/index>; United Nations Independent International Fact-Finding Mission on the Islamic Republic of Iran, *Update on the situation of women and girls in the context of the September 2022 protests and the "Woman, Life, Freedom" movement in the Islamic Republic of Iran*, <https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/documents/hrbodies/hrcouncil/ffmi-iran/FFM-Iran-Update-13-September-2024.pdf>;

Amnesty International, *Iran: Draconian campaign to enforce compulsory veiling laws through surveillance and mass car confiscations*, 6 March 2024. Available online: <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2024/03/iran-draconian-campaign-to-enforce-compulsory-veiling-laws-through-surveillance-and-mass-car-confiscations/>; ARTICLE19, *Tightening the Net: Iran's New Phase of Digital Repression*, July 2024; ARTICLE 19, *Iran: Siege on women and girls intensifies as authorities deceive the*

world, 12 April 2023. Available online: <https://www.article19.org/resources/iran-siege-on-women-and-girls-intensifies-as-authorities-deceive-the-world/>; Amnesty International, *Iran: International community must stand with women and girls suffering intensifying oppression*, 26 June 2023. Available online: <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2023/07/iran-international-community-must-stand-with-women-and-girls-suffering-intensifying-oppression/>;

^{xx} Report of the independent international fact-finding mission on the Islamic Republic of Iran, A/HRC/55/67; Detailed findings of the independent international fact-finding mission on the Islamic Republic of Iran, A/HRC/55/CRP.1