

# JOINT NGO STATEMENT

## PRE-SESSION ON the ISLAMIC REPUBLIC OF IRAN



ARTICLE 19

ARTICLE 19 is an international human rights organisation with a global presence that monitors threats to freedom of expression in different regions of the world, as well as national and global trends, develops long-term strategies to address them and advocates for the implementation of the highest standards of freedom of expression, nationally and globally.



Access Now defends and extends the digital rights of people and communities at risk. As a grassroots-to-global organization, we partner with local actors to bring a human rights agenda to the use, development, and governance of digital technologies, and to intervene where technologies adversely impact our human rights.



PEN America stands at the intersection of literature and human rights to protect free expression in the United States and worldwide. We champion the freedom to write, recognizing the power of the word to transform the world.

# FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION

- 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.
- Iran did not support any recommendations on the alignment of its legislation on freedom of expression with international law.
- Human rights defenders, journalists, media workers, writers, artists, justice seeking families of victims, and others voicing dissent were arrested and detained; denied medical care in prison; prosecuted and sentenced to long prison terms, flogging, and even the death penalty.

# DIGITAL RIGHTS

Authorities implemented measures to further restrict access to information and online expression:

- The development of National Information Network (NIN) continued, facilitating internet shutdowns and censorship
- The quiet implementation of the draconian User Protection Bill
- Blocking of access to secure applications and platforms, including Signal, WhatsApp, and Instagram and to secure Virtual Private Networks (VPNs)
- Imposition of internet shutdowns and disruptions, in particular during protests, with a week-long near total internet shutdown in November 2019

# RECOMMENDATIONS

- ❖ 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.

# LETHAL STATE CRACKDOWN ON PROTESTS

- Authorities and security forces unlawfully and lethally repressed successive rounds of protests during the review period:
  - The nationwide protests of November 2019
  - 2021 protests in Khuzestan and Esfahan
  - May 2022 protests in several provinces
  - The “Woman, Life, Freedom” protests that started on 16 September 2022
- Security forces systematically fired military-grade weapons and weapons loaded with metal pellets at women, children, and men, killing and maiming them for life, including by blinding them.
- Ethnic minorities were disproportionately impacted.
- Protest-related violations and crimes were committed with absolute impunity.

# RECOMMENDATIONS

- ❖ 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.

# THE SITUATION OF WOMEN AND GIRLS

- Iran did not support recommendations to repeal discriminatory laws against women and girls including those imposing compulsory veiling.
- Laws sanctioning discrimination and violence remained in place.
- Despite growing resistance and demands for gender equality, the authorities doubled down on their crackdown:
  - Hijab and Chastity Law was adopted, mobilising the entire state machinery to enforce forced veiling
  - Countless women and girls, arrested, detained, subjected to heavy punishments, some amounting to torture, and deprived of fundamental rights and services
  - Surveillance technologies and monitoring systems, such as facial recognition were used for enforcement
- 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.

# RECOMMENDATIONS

- ❖ Identify and repeal all laws and rescind all draft legislation that discriminate 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.