

Uproar is a programme championing digital rights in over 36 countries across Africa, MENA region and Central Asia through the Universal Periodic Review, a mechanism of the UN Human Rights Council. **Transparency Lab** is a research and advocacy project focusing on state-related transparency, corruption and accountability in Iran.

Issue 1: Executions Related to Freedom of Expression Online and Offline

Follow-up from the previous cycle: Iran received 20 recommendations to enhance freedom of expression but noted and supported just five of them. Iran dismissed recommendations to reform legislation in favour of fundamental freedoms such as expression, peaceful assembly, and association.

Current Situation: Since the previous cycle, Iran has enacted further restrictive measures, expanding the Islamic Penal Code (IPC) to curb freedom of expression and belief. In May 2023, two individuals were executed on charges of ‘blasphemy’ over statements shared on Telegram, exemplifying a repressive approach that has also targeted artists, labour activists, and civil society members for lawful expression. Those from lower socio-economic backgrounds who often lack media or legal representation face a heightened risk of execution, underscoring stark inequities within the legal system. This worsening climate reveals Iran’s disregard for legal reforms and protection of free expression.

Recommendations:

1. Impose a moratorium on the death penalty and release all individuals detained solely for exercising their right to free expression.
 - a. In the meantime, publish the names of all detainees sentenced to death for blasphemy, corruption on earth, or similar charges linked to expression. Permit independent legal representation in line with Article 35 of the Constitution.
2. Repeal or amend legislation that infringes upon Iranians' rights to freely express themselves online and offline, ensuring that the approach is aligned with Iran’s international human rights obligations. Amend Article 13 and Article 24 of the Constitution.

Issue 2: Internet Shutdowns, Censorship, and Filtering

Current Situation: Iran frequently enforces national and localized internet shutdowns during periods of unrest. The most notable among these was the nationwide blackout during the 2019 protests and targeted shutdowns during the 2022 “Women, Life, Freedom” protests. These shutdowns disproportionately affect ethnic minority regions, restrict the right to information, and often coincide with the state’s use of unlawful lethal force.

Beyond shutdowns, restrictive internet policies continue to stifle online freedom. Imposed by the state, Filtering is a process that limits citizens’ rightful access to certain websites and

applications. Social media platforms (Instagram, Facebook, YouTube, Reddit, X (formerly Twitter)) are other sites and apps (Telegram, Twitch) are blocked. International and independent diaspora media outlets and other critical information on human rights are also censored.

Recent resolutions by the SCC (February 2024) banning anti-filtering tools including VPNs.

Furthermore, the 2023 “Chastity and Hijab” Bill empowers the government to penalize online anti-hijab content with consequences that include site deactivations, internet suspensions, and imprisonment. These policies severely limit Iranians’ rights to information and expression.

Recommendations:

- 1. Halt the practice of shutting down the internet, blocking social media platforms and media outlets and implementing digital curfews, particularly during protests, in- line with international standards.**
2. Amend sections of the Computer Crimes Law that undermine citizens’ rights to free expression and privacy. Fully repeal the “Chastity and Hijab” Bill.

Issue 3: Developing a Closed National ‘Intranet’ Infrastructure

Follow-up from the previous cycle: Iran received only one recommendation on freedom of internet access, which it did not support. Restricting access to the open internet has remained a key area of concern.

Current Situation: During this cycle, Iran accelerated the development of its National Information Network (NIN), a domestic ‘intranet’ that enables extensive control over online traffic within Iran’s borders. Managed by the Supreme Council for Cyberspace (SCC), the NIN is designed to isolate internet access across layers of infrastructure, services, and content, thus allowing for comprehensive government surveillance and information restrictions. Iran’s 7th National Development Plan aims to connect millions of households to the NIN by 2026, significantly amplifying the capacity for surveillance. A recent proposal to transfer control of internet gateways to the military raises additional privacy risks, granting near-total government oversight of internet use.

Recommendations:

1. Halt the development of the National Information Network (NIN) and any initiatives that disconnect Iran’s domestic network from the global web by revoking the quasi-judicial powers and accountability exemptions currently granted to the SCC to ensure public access to information regarding these proceedings.