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World Report 2024



Iranian authorities brutally cracked down on the “woman, life, freedom” protests sparked after the September 2022 death in morality police custody of Mahsa Jina Amini, an Iranian-Kurdish woman, killing hundreds and arresting thousands of protestors. Scores of activists, including human rights defenders, members of ethnic and religious minorities, and dissidents, remain in prison on vague national security charges or are serving sentences after grossly unfair trials. Security forces’ impunity is rampant, with no government investigations into their use of excessive and lethal force, torture, sexual assault, and other serious abuses. Authorities have expanded their efforts in enforcing abusive compulsory hijab laws. Security agencies have also targeted family members of those killed during the protests.

President Ebrahim Raeesi is accused of overseeing the mass extrajudicial executions of political prisoners in 1988.

Excessive and Lethal Force, Torture, and Sexual Assault

Security forces repressed widespread protests that erupted across the country in September 2022 with unlawful killing, torture, sexually assault, and enforced disappearances of protestors, including women and children, as part of a pattern of serious violations. Human rights groups [are investigating](#) the reported deaths of approximately 500 protestors, including at least 68 children. In the majority of cases, security forces reportedly shot the victims using various types of bullets.

Cases Human Rights Watch [documented](#) included security forces sexually assaulting a 17-year-old boy, security forces pushing a high school student onto a lit gas range during the arrest and beating and whipping her during interrogation, and interrogators torturing a boy by shoving needles under his nails.

Executions

Iran remains one of the world's top practitioners of the death penalty, applying it to individuals convicted of crimes committed as children and under vague national security charges; occasionally, it is also used for non-violent offenses. Iranian law deems actions like “insulting the prophet,” “apostasy,” same-sex relations, adultery, alcohol consumption, and certain non-violent drug-related offenses to be punishable by death.

Based on a [report](#) from the Iran Human Rights Organization, more than 700 executions took place in Iran during the period between January and November 2023. This marks a substantial increase compared to the same period in 2022. Among those executed, 238 were charged with “intentional murder,” and 390 with “drug-related offenses.” Furthermore, 10 individuals received death sentences for political or security-related charges or blasphemy, and 1 person was sentenced to death on espionage charges.

Judicial authorities drastically increased the use of vaguely defined national security charges that could carry the death penalty against protestors, including for allegedly injuring others and destroying public property. Following grossly unfair trials where many of defendants did not have access to the lawyer of their choice, authorities issued 25 death sentences in connection to the protests. As of September 20, authorities executed 7 people, and 11 cases were overturned by the supreme court.

On February 21, Branch 15 of Tehran's Revolutionary Court [sentenced](#) Jamshid Sharmahd, 67, a German-Iranian citizen with United States residency, to death on the charge of “corruption on earth,” according to Mizan news agency. The Iranian authorities allege that he was a leader of an opposition group, the “Kingdom Assembly of Iran”—which was connected to multiple terror attacks, including the 2008 bombing of a mosque in Shiraz—a claim that Sharmahd denies. On May 6, authorities [executed](#) Swedish-Iranian national Habibollah Asivad (Chaab) on alleged terrorism charges after abducting him in Turkey.

Freedoms of Assembly and Expression

Iranian authorities severely restricted the freedoms of assembly and expression, arresting hundreds of activists, lawyers, journalists, students, and artists. The authorities also targeted outspoken family members of those killed or families of protesters executed after unfair trials, pressuring them to avoid holding memorial services around the anniversaries of their deaths.

The crackdown extended to universities. Since late July, at least 29 university [instructors](#) critical of government policies were dismissed, suspended, or forced to retire or their contracts were not renewed. The actual number is most likely higher. According to the Volunteer Committee tracking detainees, since September, at least 161 students faced disciplinary actions due to protest-related activities. The number of those who were summoned by disciplinary committees was much higher. On August 8, Branch 26 of Tehran's Revolutionary Court sentenced Allameh University student activists Zia Nabavi and Hasti Amiri to one year in prison on the charge of “propaganda against the state,” which stemmed from their participation in the protests against the alleged poisoning of schoolgirls in the country.

[Artists](#) who vocally supported the protest movement faced reprisals, arrests, and prosecution. Authorities have targeted dozens of high-profile actors supportive of the protests, including Taraneh Alidoosti, who was released from prison on January 4.

On July 12, Isfahan's judiciary chief, Assadollah Jafari, announced that rapper Toumaj Salehi, detained during the protests, [received](#) a six-year-and-three-month prison sentence for “corruption on earth.” On August 28, authorities arrested a singer and composer, Mehdi Yarahi, after he released a song in support of the protest movement. Mizan News, the judiciary's news outlet, [reported](#) that Yarahi was charged with “releasing an illegal song.” Kurdish-Iranian rapper Saman Seyedi, known as “Yasin,” [arrested](#) during the protests, faced “enmity against the state” charges, including weapon possession and conspiracy to threaten national security. He remained

imprisoned and [reportedly](#) suffered physical and psychological torture, including solitary confinement and severe beatings.

Over the past year, people with disabilities staged several protests over inadequate pension and poor living conditions. On several occasions, security forces attempted to break up their protests, including with tear gas.

Authorities imposed several localized internet shutdowns during protests, particularly in Sistan and Baluchistan province.

Attacks on Human Rights Defenders and Civil Society Activists

Scores of human rights defenders, labor rights activists, and other civil society activists—including Narges Mohammadi, Bahareh Hedayat, Niloufar Bayani, Sepideh Kashani, Houman Jokar, Taher Ghadirian, Keyvan Samimi, Reza Shahabi, Anisha Assadolahi, Mehdi Mahmoudian, and Sepideh Gholian—remain behind bars while authorities continued to harass, arrest, and prosecute those seeking accountability and justice.

In February, Iranian authorities announced a broad amnesty purportedly covering those arrested, charged, or detained during widespread protests. On March 13, Hojatollah Eslam Ejeyi, the head of Iran’s judiciary, [stated](#) that 22,000 people were included in the amnesty orders related to the protests.

However, the amnesty excluded many human rights defenders with lengthy sentences and protesters facing capital charges. Since April, the authorities [arrested](#), sentenced, or summoned dozens of activists, some of whom had been recently released and granted amnesty.

On April 28, Iran’s security forces [raided](#) the house of Mohammad Habibi, the imprisoned spokesman of the Tehran Teachers’ Union, and arrested nine activists visiting his family. Most of these activists had previously been wrongfully imprisoned.

In July, the [Kurdistan Human Rights Network](#) reported that 55 lawyers were summoned to the Prosecutor’s Office in Bukan, Kurdistan province. They were accused of supporting Mahsa Jina Amini’s family by signing a statement offering legal assistance. On August 30, Saleh Nikbakht, the lawyer who represents Amini’s family, appeared before Branch 28 of Tehran’s Revolutionary Court on charges of “propaganda against the state,” which stemmed from his media interviews about Amini’s case.

On August 16, authorities in Gilan province raided homes and detained 12 individuals, including 11 women’s rights defenders and a political activist.

Niloufar Hamed and Elaheh Mohammadi, two journalists from the *Shargh* and *Ham-Mihan* Iranian newspapers who were among the first journalists who [reported](#) on Amini’s death, were arrested in September 2022. On October 22, branch 15 of Tehran’s revolutionary court convicted them on charges of “collaborating with the hostile American government,” “colluding against national security,” and “engaging in propaganda activity against the regime,” sentencing them to seven and six years in prison respectively.

Due Process Rights, Fair Trial Standards, and Prison Conditions

Iranian courts, particularly revolutionary courts, regularly fall far short of providing fair trials and use confessions likely obtained under torture as evidence in court. Authorities have failed to

meaningfully investigate numerous allegations of torture against detainees and routinely restrict detainees' access to legal counsel, particularly during the initial investigation period.

Iranian authorities' violations of due process [rights](#) and fair trial standards as well as [torture](#) and ill-treatment of detainees have been systemic features of the government's crackdown on anti-government protests. Revolutionary court judges have persistently failed to consider allegations of torture and ill-treatment, including in trials where defendants were sentenced to the death penalty.

On August 31, [Javad Rouhi](#), a 31-year-old imprisoned Iranian protester, died under suspicious circumstances in northern Iran, sparking concerns about his treatment. Rouhi had endured severe torture after his arrest during the September 2022 protests and was subsequently convicted after an unfair trial. Nowshahr prison in Mazandaran province [announced](#) that he had been transferred to a hospital due to a "concussion" and died there despite medical assistance. His death is under investigation by the Prosecutor's Office, as confirmed by his [lawyer](#).

In recent years, Iran's security apparatus has [escalated](#) its targeting of dual citizens and foreign nationals whom they perceive have links to Western academic, economic, and cultural institutions, using them as bargaining chips in disputes with western states.

Women's and Girls' Rights

Women face discrimination in personal status matters related to marriage, divorce, inheritance, and decisions relating to children. Under the [civil code](#), a husband has the right to choose the place of living and can prevent his wife from having certain occupations if he deems them against "family values." Under the [Passports Law](#), a married woman may not obtain a passport or travel outside the country without the written permission of her husband, who can revoke such permission at any time.

The civil code allows girls to marry at age 13 and boys at age 15 and at younger ages if authorized by a judge.

Cases of [femicide](#) are increasingly reported in media and social media, but Iran has no law on domestic violence to prevent abuse and protect survivors. As [reported](#) by *Shargh* newspaper, based on official statistics, at least 165 women in Iran were killed by male family members between March 2021 and the end of June 2023, an average of 1 such killing every 4 days. From mid-March to mid-May 2023 alone, 27 women were reported murdered in so-called "honor killings," which are killings of women and girls perpetrated by family members.

In March, Iranian media outlets reported on the apparently deliberate poisoning of girls at least 58 schools in 10 provinces across the country since January 2023. Authorities promised to investigate but have yet to provide any concrete explanation for the incidents.

Since August, the authorities have allowed a limited number of tickets to be sold to women and girls to attend the national football league's games in some cities, including Tehran and Isfahan.

On October 28, [Armita Garavand](#), a 17-year-old student, died after 28 days in a coma. Media reports indicated that she [fell](#) unconscious after she was assaulted by an enforcer of compulsory hijab law at the metro station. Authorities said she fell due to a "sudden drop in blood pressure" and have severely restricted the independent media's access to her family and friends.

Iranian authorities have intensified efforts to enforce compulsory hijab laws. They prosecute women and girls, including celebrities, for not wearing the hijab in public; issue traffic citations to passengers without the hijab; and close businesses that do not comply with hijab laws. In recent cases, the judiciary has mandated psychological treatment for at least two actresses convicted of hijab non-compliance, a move protested by Iranian mental health associations.

On September 21, the Iranian parliament approved a draft Hijab and Chastity Bill with 70 articles proposing additional penalties, such as fines, increased prison terms up to 10 years for expressing opposition to hijab regulations, and restrictions on job and educational opportunities for hijab violations. The law also expands the authority of intelligence and law enforcement agencies in enforcing compulsory hijab. On December 13, the Expediency Council upheld the draft bill.

Iran's strict anti-abortion laws have introduced additional measures to limit women's access to abortion. The Ministry of Health has halted the issuance of licenses for the production and import of first-trimester prenatal screening kits.

Pregnant people who choose to undergo prenatal genetic screening tests must cover the associated costs themselves.

Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity

Under Iranian law, same-sex conduct is punishable by flogging and, for men, the death penalty. Although Iran permits and subsidizes sex reassignment surgery for transgender people, no law prohibits discrimination against them.

Treatment of Minorities

Iranian law denies freedom of religion to Baha'is and discriminates against them. Authorities continue to arrest and prosecute members of the Baha'i faith on vague national security charges and to close businesses owned by them. Iranian authorities also systematically refuse to allow Baha'is to register at public universities because of their faith.

The government also discriminates against other religious minorities, including Sunni Muslims, and restricts cultural and political activities among the country's Azeri, Kurdish, Arab, and Baluch ethnic minorities. Minority activists are regularly arrested and prosecuted on vaguely defined national security charges in trials that fall grossly short of international standards.

On August 28, the Kurdistan Human Rights Network [reported](#) that in July alone, at least 100 individuals had been apprehended for political reasons by security forces in Kurdish areas. A larger number of citizens have been summoned to security and judicial authorities in various cities, including West Azerbaijan, Kurdistan, Kermanshah, Ilam, and Tehran.

On the anniversary of the death in custody of Mahsa Jina Amini, Iran's authorities [dispatched](#) thousands of its military-security personnel, along with vehicles and equipment, to Kurdish-majority areas in the western provinces, where protests had been widespread over the past year.

Climate Change Policies and Impacts

As one of the world's top 10 greenhouse gas emitters, Iran's significant contribution to the climate crisis has global human rights implications. The majority of its emissions originate from the energy sector, with 94 percent of electricity generated from fossil fuels. Iran ranks eighth in world crude oil production and third in natural gas production, yet it also possesses substantial renewable energy potential. Energy is heavily subsidized, resulting in high per capita energy consumption. Iran has made limited efforts to reduce fossil fuel dependency, often citing international sanctions as a hindrance to adopting cleaner energy solutions. Notably, Iran remains one of three countries that have yet to ratify the Paris Agreement.

There are longstanding concerns across Iran, particularly Khuzestan province, about the mismanagement of water resources and pollution from oil development.

Key International Actors

The Norwegian Nobel Committee awarded the 2023 Nobel Peace Prize to Narges Mohammadi for “her fight against the oppression of women in Iran and her fight to promote human rights and freedom for all.”

The European Parliament awarded the 2023 Sakharov Prize for Freedom of Thought to Mahsa Jina Amini and the Woman, Life, Freedom Movement in Iran.

A Special Session of the UN Human Rights Council in November 2022 created an international fact-finding mission on Iran, mandated to “thoroughly and independently investigate alleged human rights violations in the Islamic Republic of Iran related to the protests that began on 16 September 2022, especially with respect to women and children.” The fact-finding mission presented an oral update in June 2023 and is scheduled to present its final report in March 2024.