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7 January 2025

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David Gritten
BBC News



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At least 901 people were reportedly executed in Iran last year, including about 40 in a single week in December, according to the UN human rights chief.

"It is deeply disturbing that yet again we see an increase in the number of people subjected to the death penalty in Iran year-on-year," Volker Türk said. "It is high time Iran stemmed this ever-swelling tide of executions."

The total is the highest recorded in nine years and marks a 6% increase from 2023, when 853 people were executed.

Most of the executions were for drug-related offences, but dissidents and people connected to the 2022 protests were also executed, according to the UN. There was also a rise in the number of women executed.

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Türk urged Iranian authorities to halt all further executions and to place a moratorium on the use of the death penalty with a view to ultimately abolishing it.

"The death penalty is incompatible with the fundamental right to life and raises the unacceptable risk of executing innocent people. And, to be clear, it can never be imposed for conduct that is protected under international human rights law," he warned.

A spokeswoman for the UN human rights office told reporters that its figures had come from several organisations which it considered reliable, including Iran's Human Rights Activists News Agency (HRANA), Iran Human Rights (IHR) and Hengaw.

On Monday, **Norway-based IHR said in a report** that in at least 31 women were executed during 2024 - the highest number since it began monitoring the death penalty 17 years ago.

Nineteen of them were sentenced to death after being convicted of murder, according to the report. They included, Leila Ghaemi, who IHR said had strangled her husband after she came home one day to find him and his friends raping her young daughter.

The other 12 women were convicted of drug-related offences. Among them was Parvin Mousavi, who IHR said had been her family's breadwinner and had been paid about €15 (\$15.60) to transport what she was told was medicine, but turned out to be 5kg of morphine.

Activists say drugs offences do not meet the threshold of "most serious crimes" to which the death penalty must be restricted under international law,

A separate report from Hengaw, a Kurdish human rights group, said that more than half of those executed last year were from Iran's ethnic minorities, including 183 Kurds.

The UN's fact-finding mission on Iran said in August that ethnic and religious minorities had been disproportionately impacted by the government's crackdown on dissent since 2022, when the nationwide "Woman, Life, Freedom" protests erupted in response to the death in custody of a young Kurdish woman detained by morality police for not wearing a "proper" hijab.

HRANA, meanwhile, reported that it had documented the execution of five juvenile offenders. International law prohibits the use of capital punishment in all cases in which the accused was under 18 at the time of their alleged offence.

Iran accounted for 74% of all recorded executions worldwide in 2023, according to the human rights group Amnesty International.

Those figures excluded China, which Amnesty said was thought to execute thousands of people each year, but where data on the death penalty was classified.

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