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Submission by: Front Line Defenders – the International Foundation for the Protection of HRDs

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Front Line Defenders¹ is an international NGO based in Ireland with special consultative status with the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations (ECOSOC). Founded in 2001, Front Line Defenders has particular expertise on the issue of security and protection of HRDs and works to promote the implementation of the UN Declaration on the Right and Responsibility of Individuals, Groups and Organs of Society to Promote and Protect Universally Recognised Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms (UN Declaration on HRDs) adopted by General Assembly resolution 53/144 of 9 December 1998.

The following submission has been prepared by Front Line Defenders based on research carried out on Iran from November 2019 to July 2024.

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Introduction

Front Line Defenders regrets that since its last UPR review in 2019, human rights defender (HRDs), including women human rights defenders (WHRDs) in Iran continue to be subjected to severe reprisals as a result of their legitimate work. HRDs continue to face digital and physical threats, legal harassment, arbitrary arrest, detention, long and recurring prison sentences, targeting family members, denial of rights to education and work, and inhuman treatment under detention, which in some cases has ended in HRDs' deaths. They are subjected to systematic surveillance and draconian restrictions on their rights to freedom of expression, association, peaceful assembly and movement. Judicial harassment is one of the most common tactics used to silence HRDs. Vaguely worded charges on "colluding and gathering with the intention of activities against national security", "propaganda activities against the state", "forming" or "being a member of a group with the intention of acting against national security" are often used by the revolutionary courts to punish HRDs with harsh prison sentences. Many HRDs are targeted in advance or in the context of protests, held in solitary confinement for long periods of time and pressured to confess against themselves while being denied access to their lawyers, and in some cases, access to essential medical treatment.

Human rights defenders' right to life

1. From January 2021 to July 2024, Front Line Defenders has documented at least 13 killings of HRDs, including WHRDs, of whom were aged between 22 and 30 years.
2. Six HRDs were killed in custody following acts of torture and ill treatment, including medical negligence, or under suspicious circumstances. Other two WHRDs died under suspicious circumstances following their release from detention, during which they were allegedly subjected to torture and ill treatment. One of these post custody deaths was reported as a suicide by the authorities.
3. At least two HRDs were beaten to death or shot during or immediately after a protest, and at least three WHRDs active in the 2022 protests died under suspicious circumstances. Two of them were reported as suicides by the authorities.
4. The authorities deliberately compounded the grief of HRD's families, particularly those of WHRDs, after their deaths, with police consistently stating their cause of death was "suicide". The circumstances surrounding these deaths are not investigated or clarified and often families are forced to accept the "official truth" in order to have access to the bodies or even to attend their funerals.
5. On 8 January 2022, HRD Baktash Abtin died in Sasan hospital. He was put into a medically induced coma on 1 January 2022, in response to his most recent COVID-19 infection. According to the Iranian Writers Association (IWA), Baktash Abtin was not transferred from prison to a hospital for ten days, despite the rapid deterioration of his health condition. He was further denied proper medical care or access visits by his family during his initial hospitalization at Taleghani hospital.¹

Human rights defenders in "Women Life Freedom" protests

- The killing of Zahra (Jina) Amini in custody of the morality police caused nationwide protests, beginning on 18 September 2022. Over 200 HRDs working on a range of human rights issues, including labour rights, women's rights, ethnic minority rights, and the death penalty were targeted with arrests, arbitrary detentions and legal actions over the course of the first year.
- HRDs were arrested *en masse*, including in advance of protests and particularly in the [Kurdistan](#)² and [Gilan](#)³

¹ <https://www.frontlinedefenders.org/en/statement/report/demise-human-rights-defender-baktash-abtin-result-intentional-neglect-government>

² https://www.frontlinedefenders.org/sites/default/files/oint_statement_iran_protests_3_10_2022_fnl3.pdf

³ <https://www.frontlinedefenders.org/en/statement/report/iran-alarm-over-mass-arrests-human-rights-defenders-advance-anniversary-september>

provinces for their leadership roles, as in the cases of at least two HRDs whose arbitrary detentions and subsequent legal charges began with arrest warrants “under preventive measures.”

8. Throughout the protests, the authorities shut down mobile internet and disrupt telecommunication services, preventing HRDs from communicating about upcoming protests, documenting and disseminating information about human rights violations, in many provinces, particularly in Sistan and aluchistan, where weekly protests were ongoing. In the meantime, authorities continued to [target digital rights defenders and experts](#)⁴ working on internet freedom.
9. In September 2022, HRD [Golrokh Iraee](#)⁵ was arrested, immediately transferred to solitary confinement in Qarchak prison, and charged with “gathering and colluding against national security” for her social media posts about protesters who were killed or arrested. On 11 April 2023, ranch 2 of Tehran Revolutionary Court sentenced her to five executable years in prison and complementary punishment on those charges.
10. In January 2023, ranch 2 of the Tehran Revolutionary Court sentenced HRD [Arash Sadeghi](#) in absentia to five years in prison on the charge of “gathering and collusion against national security” and seven months in prison on the charge of producing “propaganda against the state.” On 19 December 2022, he was transferred to the Great Tehran Penitentiary from Evin prison and then transferred back to Evin ward 4, after reporting from prison on the case of a protester’s imminent execution on 12 December 2022.
11. In February 2023, the Iranian judiciary system announced that the Iranian Supreme Leader had pardoned over twenty thousands prisoners, including in the context of the protests. Among those released, there were a dozen HRDs. However, despite the pardon scheme, in the following weeks, many HRDs⁸ remained in prison, some were re-arrested after being released, and hefty new sentences have been given to several HRDs including Narges Mohammadi⁹ and Sepideh Gholian¹⁰. At least five HRDs, including Sarvena Ahmadi and Kamyar Fakour¹¹ were arbitrarily denied amnesty.
12. In May 2023, protests also broke out against a series of deliberate poisonings of school girls across the country. The poisonings were reprisals against women and young girls advocating their rights not to conform to Iran’s discriminatory veiling rules, and participating in protests.
13. University professors, teachers, students, trade unionists, and other HRDs who denounced this attack as well as the repression of protests were targeted by authorities through termination of employment, forced retirement, or expulsion from university.
14. In November 2022, [Atekeh Raabi](#)¹² was terminated from her job as a primary school teacher because of her involvement in the September 2022 protests. On 24 September 2022, the HRD had initiated a strike, refusing to go to school, to demand justice and the release of detained teachers’ rights defenders.
15. In October 2023, the Iranian United Students Associations announced that Lia Nabavi and Hasti Amiri¹³ had been handed one year prison sentences on the charge of “propaganda activities against state” were confirmed by ranch 3 of Tehran Revolutionary Court of Appeals. The HRDs had been tried in June 2023 on the charge of

4 <https://www.frontlinedefenders.org/en/statement-report/oint-statement-iranian-authorities-must-immediately-release-technologists-and-digital-rights-defenders>

5 <https://www.frontlinedefenders.org/en/case/golrokh-iraei-refused-ask-pardon-or-appear-court-appeal>
<https://www.frontlinedefenders.org/en/profile/arash-sadeghi>

<https://www.mehrnews.com/news/532109/D8AA-D8A-DA-A9-D98-D988-D98-D8-D98-D8-2-D8A-D8-1-D98-D981-D8-1-D985-D84-D985-D988-D984-D89-D981-D988-D84-D8AF-D98-D8A-D98-D8AF>

8 <https://www.frontlinedefenders.org/sites/default/files/iran-call-on-hrd-release-150223-fnl.pdf>

9 <https://www.frontlinedefenders.org/sites/default/files/iran-narges-mohammadi-180-2024-oi-final.pdf>

10 <https://www.frontlinedefenders.org/en/case/sepideh-gholians-two-year-prison-sentence-confirmed-and-dormant-case-reopened-against-her>

11 <https://www.frontlinedefenders.org/sites/default/files/iran-ua-sarvena-and-kamyar-240823-fv.pdf>

12 <https://www.frontlinedefenders.org/en/case/atekeh-raabi-released-prison>

13 <https://www.frontlinedefenders.org/sites/default/files/ua-iran-nha-2-1023-eng.pdf>

“propaganda activities against state.”

- 1 . In June 2023, Shahriyar Shams¹⁴ announced that he has been expelled from his undergraduate studies at the Alad University of Tehran based on a decision by the university’s disciplinary committee due his human rights work during the protests.
- 1 . According to Coordinating Council of Iranian Teachers Trade Associations (CCITTA), from September 2022 2023, at least ten teachers’ rights defenders were terminated from their work and over twenty were forced to retire, while over 200 have reported losing professional benefits such as grades, which could impact their salary scale and pensions upon retirement.

C ID 1 pandemic and impact on detained HRDs’ health

18. While at the beginning of the pandemic, up to 100,000 prisoners were temporarily released by 19 April 2020 to combat the spread of COVID-19 in jail, HRDs¹⁵ were largely excluded.
19. HRD Arash Sadeghi¹ was suffering a rare form of bone cancer and had to postpone his medical check ups until late August 2020 as a result of the inefficient and ineffective response to COVID-19 by the authorities in Raaee Shahr prison while he was denied medical leave.
20. A number of imprisoned HRDs contracted the virus, including Nasrin Sotoudeh and Narges Mohammadi. The prisoners were not shown the result of their tests but verbally informed by prison staff, leading some to question whether or not they had actually contracted COVID-19.
21. In the second year of the pandemic, the imprisoned HRDs already enduring inhumane treatment were denied medical care when they contracted COVID-19 in prison. HRDs who documented poor sanitary conditions, denial of medical care, and abuse of power by prison authorities under the guise of COVID-19 regulations were charged with propaganda activities against state.
22. Detained HRDs were transferred without notice to prisons in provinces with high rates of COVID-19, despite official recommendations not to travel to those provinces.
23. In March 2021, Sepideh Gholian was transferred¹ from the women’s ward of Evin Prison to Eushehr Prison in the south of Iran where she reported on the poor conditions she experienced and abuse of women inmates. This resulted in new charges against her on “spreading virtual disinformation” and “propaganda activity against the state.”¹⁸

Women’s rights and WHRDs under attack

24. The Iranian authorities intensified their discrimination and violent repression of women and girls through “morality” policing, surveillance, and legislative measures¹⁹ to further curtail women’s rights and freedoms during the “woman, life, freedom” protests.
25. In May 2024, Branch 11 of the Rasht Revolutionary Court of appeals confirmed the verdict of Branch 3 of the

14 https://www.frontlinedefenders.org/sites/default/files/ua_iran_shahriyar_shams_en_int_1_0_23_0.pdf

15 <https://www.frontlinedefenders.org/en/statement-report/imprisoned-iranian-human-rights-defenders-should-be-freed-amidst-covid-19-outbreak>

1 <https://www.frontlinedefenders.org/en/case/arash-sadeghi-released-prison-case-update-id-1223>

1 https://www.frontlinedefenders.org/en/case/sepideh-gholians-two-year-prison-sentence-confirmed-and-dormant-case-reopened-against-her-case-update-id-3_39

18 https://www.frontlinedefenders.org/sites/default/files/iran_ua_sepideh_gholian_10_11_21_fnl_eng.pdf

19

https://www.mianonline.ir/fa/news/43521/D9_85_D8_AA_D9_8_DA_A9_D8_A_D9_85_D9_84_D9_84_D8_A_D_8C_D8_AD_D9_8_D8_9_D9_81_D8_A_D9_81_D9_88_D8_AD_D8_A_C_D8_A_D8_A8_D8_AC_D8_2_D_8C_D_8C_D8_A_D8_AA_D9_88_D9_82_D9_88_D8_A_D9_8_D_8C_D9_8

Rasht Revolutionary Court regarding a group of HRDs in the Gilan province without convening a session. Based on this verdict, Zahra Dadres, Forough Samienia, Sara Jahani, Farzaneh Adani, Asaman Hashdari, Shiva Shahsiah, Negin Rezaei, Afsaneh Chavoshian, Zahra Dadres, Jelveh Javaheri and Houman Taheri were sentenced altogether to over sixty years in total of prison time due to their women's rights work²⁰.

20. In 2024, Jina Gorji was sentenced by Branch 1 of the Sananda Revolutionary Court to a total of twenty one years in prison²¹ due to her women's rights work in Sanandaj, Kurdistan province in Iran.
21. In July 2023, Branch 2 of the Tehran Revolutionary Court sentenced Nasim Soltanbeygi to three years and seven months in prison²² in the context of the "Woman, Life, Freedom" protests.
22. In October 2022, Branch 15 of the Tehran Revolutionary Court sentenced Sarvena Ahmadi to five years in prison²³ on the charge of "gathering and colluding with the intention of acting against national security" and one year in prison on the charge of "propaganda activities against state" due to her work on women and children's rights.
23. The persecution of HRDs who campaigned against obligatory veiling rules or seeking justice for the victims of the protests was ongoing before women, life, freedom protests.
24. In November 2023, Branch 2 of the Tehran Revolutionary Court sentenced Sepideh Rashnu to three years and seven months on the charge of gathering and colluding against the national security, in addition to another four months, on the charge of propaganda against state."²⁴
25. In August 2022, Maryam Karimbeigi, who has peacefully sought justice for the killing of peaceful protesters, was sentenced to three years and seven months in prison on the charge of "gathering and colluding against national security;" one year in prison on the charge of "propaganda activities against the state;" and one year in prison by Branch 2 of Tehran Revolutionary Court²⁵.
26. In December 2022, Vida Rabbani was sentenced to seven years and three months in prison, six years on the charge of "gathering and colluding against national security" and fifteen months on the charge of "propaganda against the state" by Branch 26 of the Tehran Revolutionary Court.²
27. In October 2020, Branch 15 of the Revolutionary Court of Tehran sentenced Hoda Amid to eight years in prison, and Na-meh Vahedi to seven years imprisonment, and complementary punishments due to their work on women's reproductive rights.²
28. In December 2019, the Branch 2 of Tehran Revolutionary Court sentenced Nahid Shaghaghi, Akram Nasirian, Maryam Mohammadi and Esrin Derkale each to three years in prison on the charge of "gathering and colluding against national security;" six months in prison for "propaganda against the state;" and eight months in prison for "not wearing a hijab in public."²⁸

Labour rights right to freedom of assembly and association

29. In July 2024, the labour rights defender Sharifeh Mohammadi was sentenced to death on the charge of "membership in a group with the intention of overthrowing the state of the Islamic Republic of Iran," issued by Branch I of the Rasht Revolutionary Court²⁹. The charge has been interpreted to "Baghi," a vaguely defined

20 https://www.frontlinedefenders.org/sites/default/files/iran_ua_gilam_050424_fnl_1.pdf

21 https://www.frontlinedefenders.org/sites/default/files/iran-ua-jina_gorji_final.pdf

22 https://www.frontlinedefenders.org/sites/default/files/ua_iran_nasim_soltanbeygi_310823_fv.pdf

23 https://www.frontlinedefenders.org/sites/default/files/iran_ua_sarvena_and_kamyar_240823_fv.pdf

24 https://www.frontlinedefenders.org/sites/default/files/iran_ua_sepideh_rashnu_190224_eng.pdf

25 https://www.frontlinedefenders.org/en/case/woman_human_rights_defender_maryam_karimbeigi_travel_ban

26 https://www.frontlinedefenders.org/en/profile/vida_vahideh_rabbani

27 https://www.frontlinedefenders.org/sites/default/files/iran_ua_na_meh_vahedi_hoda_amid_1_feb_2021_en.pdf

28 https://www.frontlinedefenders.org/sites/default/files/iran_appeal_voice_of_the_iranian_women_int_en.pdf

29 https://www.frontlinedefenders.org/sites/default/files/iran_ua_sharifeh_mohammadi_090_24.pdf

crime of “rebellling against the just Islamic ruler(s).”

- 30 . Teachers rights defenders faced relentless judicial persecution for their work promoting teachers’ rights. On 10 January 2024, the teachers rights defender Mohammad Habibi was charged by the Shahryar Revolutionary Court with “gathering and colluding against the national security” after publishing social media posts protesting against the poisoning of school children in Iran.³⁰
- 31 . In January and April 2022, Jafar Ebrahimi³¹ and Rasoul Bodaghi³², both involved in the Coordinating Council of the Iranian Teachers’ Trade Association were sentenced to five and four and a half years prison sentences respectively.
38. In November 2022, Reza Shahabi and Hassan Saidi, the prominent members of the Syndicate of Workers of Tehran and Suburbs Sugar Company (SWTSC) were sentenced each to six year prison sentence by Branch 2 of Tehran Revolutionary.³³
39. In February 2021, Branch 54 of the Court of Appeals of the Revolutionary Court upheld the verdict issued by Branch 15 of the Revolutionary Court, which had sentenced the students rights defender Soha Mortezaie to six years in prison on charges of “gathering and collusion against national security.”³⁴
40. In 2021, the Imam Ali’s Popular Student Relief Society (IAPSRs) announced that the Iranian Ministry of Interior had given the NGO until 12 March 2021 to dissolve the organisation according to a verdict granted by Branch 55 of Shahid Beheshti Judicial Complex in Tehran on 3 March 2021. IAPSRs appealed the court decision and on 24 May 2022 Branch 28 of the Appeals Court upheld the ruling to dissolve the organisation.³⁵
41. In June 2021, Esmail Gerami, the founding member of the Social Security’s Retired Workers Council was sentenced to five of years imprisonment, 74 lashes and a 20 million IRR fine on charges of “gathering and colluding with intent to commit a crime against national security.”³
42. In September 2021, Farzaneh Gilabi was sentenced to one year in prison and a two year travel ban, charged with “propaganda activities against the state.” The charges were brought after she spoke to media about the long anti corruption campaign of Syndicate of Workers of Haft Tappeh Cane Sugar Company (SWHTCSC) and workers she represented.³
43. In May 2020, Esmail Abdi was serving the last few months remaining of a five year sentence on the charges of “gathering information with the intention to disrupt national security” and “propaganda against the state” when he was subsequently handed a new ten year sentence based on an old case for his trade union activities, namely acting as the director of Iran’s Teachers’ Trade Association (ITTA).³⁸
44. In July 2020, Bahareh Hedayat was sentenced to four years in prison on the charges of “gathering and collusion against national security” because of her involvement in the protests condemning the killing of civilians onboard Ukraine International Airlines Flight 52.³⁹
45. In August 2019, Nasrin Javadi, the founding member of the Social Security’s Retired Workers Council was sentenced to seven years in prison and 4 lashes by the Revolutionary Court in Tehran.⁴⁰

HRDs working on minority rights under attack

30 https://www.frontlinedefenders.org/sites/default/files/iran_ua_mohammad_habibi_en_int_120124.pdf

31 https://www.frontlinedefenders.org/en/profile/afar_ebrahimi

32 https://www.frontlinedefenders.org/en/profile/rasoul_bodaghi

33 https://www.frontlinedefenders.org/sites/default/files/ua_swtsbc_shahbi_saidi_130123_fnl.pdf

34 https://www.frontlinedefenders.org/en/case/soha_mortezaie_released_evin_prison_conditionally

35 https://www.frontlinedefenders.org/sites/default/files/ua_iran_iapsrs_090_22_fv.pdf

3 https://www.frontlinedefenders.org/en/case/esmail_gerami_was_released_from_shahr_prison

3 https://www.frontlinedefenders.org/en/profile/farzaneh_gilabi

38 https://www.frontlinedefenders.org/en/case/esmail_abdi_released_bail_1

39 https://www.frontlinedefenders.org/en/case/bahareh_hedayats_sentence_put_hold_medical_grounds

40 https://www.frontlinedefenders.org/en/case/nasrin_javadi_started_five_year_prison_sentence_despite_health_deterioration

- 4 . In April 2024, Soma Pourmohammadi was sentenced to ten years in Dizel Abad prison on the charge of “forming groups and association with the intention of disturbing the national security” based on her peaceful human rights activities to promote socio cultural rights of the urdish ethnic groups.⁴¹
- 4 . In February 2024, Taher Naghavi, an advocate for Turkish ethnic groups was arrested and his arbitrary detention extended [until the time of this report] on the charges of “propaganda activities against state” and “gathering and collusion against the national security.”⁴²
48. In October 2023, ranch 1 of the Sananda Revolutionary Court sentenced Serveh Pourmohammadi and Edris Manbari (Soma Pourmohammadi’s sister and husband) to ten years in prison on the charge of “forming groups and association with the intention of disturbing the national security”, based on their peaceful human rights activities to promote socio cultural rights of the urdish ethnic groups.⁴³
49. In September 2023, a case was opened against the Leila Hossein Zadeh on charges of “gathering and collusion with the intention of acting against national and external security” based on her viva session for masters in Anthropology using the case study of an ethnic minority. ⁴⁴
50. In February 2021, ahra ohammadi was informed that ranch 4 of the Court of Appeal of the urdistan Province sentenced her to five years in prison for her human rights and cultural activities via No hin socio cultural association.⁴⁵

41 <https://www.frontlinedefenders.org/en/statement-report/four-members-no-hin-socio-cultural-association-sentenced-eleven-years-prison>

42 https://www.frontlinedefenders.org/sites/default/files/iran_ua_taher_naghavi_200_24.pdf

43 <https://www.frontlinedefenders.org/en/statement-report/four-members-no-hin-socio-cultural-association-sentenced-eleven-years-prison>

44 https://www.frontlinedefenders.org/sites/default/files/ua_iran_leila_hossein_adeh_25.10.23_fnl.pdf

45 <https://www.frontlinedefenders.org/en/case/ahra-mohammadi-was-released-sananda-prison>