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The State of the World's Human Rights; Iran 2025

The 12-day armed conflict between Iran and Israel led to civilian deaths and involved violations of international humanitarian law. Iranian authorities used the conflict to intensify internal repression. Thousands were arbitrarily detained, interrogated, harassed and/or unjustly prosecuted for exercising their human rights. Authorities used unlawful force and firearms to disperse protests, leading to deaths. Women and girls, LGBTI people, and ethnic and religious minorities suffered systemic discrimination and violence. Compulsory veiling was enforced. More than 1.8 million Afghans were unlawfully expelled or forced to return to Afghanistan. Enforced disappearances and torture and other ill-treatment were widespread and systematic. Corporal punishments amounting to torture, including flogging and amputation, were implemented. Trials remained systematically unfair. The death penalty was applied arbitrarily and was used disproportionately against minorities. The highest number of executions since 1989 was recorded. Systemic impunity prevailed for past and ongoing crimes against humanity and other crimes under international law. Authorities failed to address environmental degradation which contributed to thousands of deaths.

Background

In April the UN Human Rights Council renewed the mandates of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Iran and the Independent International Fact-Finding Mission on Iran and broadened the latter's mandate. They and other independent UN experts and international human rights monitors were denied entry to Iran.

In September, nuclear-related UN sanctions were re-imposed on Iran.

Authorities continued to provide political, ideological, financial, logistical and military support to armed groups across the Middle East.

Authorities provided drones and ballistic missiles to Russia, which were used against civilian infrastructure in Ukraine.

Violations of international humanitarian law

On 13 June, Israel launched air strikes on Iranian territory, damaging civilian infrastructure and killing more than 1,100 people, including 45 children.¹

Israeli forces deliberately carried out air strikes on Evin prison complex in the capital, Tehran, causing damage and destruction. The strikes killed at least 80 civilians, including prisoners and their families, social workers and other prison staff.² The attack constituted a serious violation of international humanitarian law, requiring criminal investigation as a war crime.

Iranian forces launched retaliatory missiles and drones at Israel, unlawfully using cluster munitions in residential areas and killing at least 29 people, including children.

Freedom of expression, association and assembly

Authorities criminalized speech critical of the Islamic Republic's political system.

Security and intelligence bodies and judicial authorities perpetrated widespread and systematic violations against those exercising their rights to freedom of expression, association and peaceful assembly.

Among those targeted were protesters, dissidents, women and girls defying compulsory veiling, journalists, lawyers, human rights defenders, labour rights activists, environmental activists, social media users, artists, musicians, writers, academics, university students, LGBTI people, members of oppressed ethnic and religious minorities, families of those killed during protests, and workers including nurses, teachers and truck drivers. Violations included: arbitrary detention; enforced disappearance; torture and other ill-treatment; death threats; unfair trials leading to prison sentences, flogging, fines and/or the death penalty; surveillance; harassment; interrogations; travel bans; asset freezes; confiscation of property; and suspension or expulsion from education or employment.

Authorities took punitive measures against the families of journalists, dissidents, protesters and human rights defenders based outside Iran, subjecting their relatives in Iran to interrogation, travel bans, arbitrary detention, and torture and other ill-treatment.

Platforms including Clubhouse, Facebook, Snapchat, Signal, Telegram, TikTok, X and YouTube remained blocked.

All independent political parties, civil society organizations, trades unions and newspapers remained banned.

Between March and August, security forces in cities including Esfahan, Mashhad and Sabzevar used unlawful force to quash peaceful protests over water and electricity cuts and inflation using tear gas, pepper spray, beatings and arbitrary arrests.

Repression intensified during and after the conflict with Israel. Authorities deliberately disrupted internet and mobile networks during the conflict, hindering access to life-saving information. Security forces established checkpoints, conducting invasive searches of mobile phones and arresting individuals for alleged "collaboration" with Israel based on social media posts and/or contact with journalists abroad.

In October a new Law on Intensifying the Punishment for Espionage and Collaboration with the Zionist Regime and Hostile States Against National Security and Interests (Espionage Law) took effect, prescribing the death penalty for peaceful activities, including sending information to journalists abroad, under the charge of “corruption on earth” (*efsad fel-arz*). The law also criminalized the use or handling of unlicensed satellite internet tools including Starlink, permitting the death penalty where authorities deem the individual an “enemy agent” acting with intent to “oppose the state” or “for espionage”.

During protests that began on 28 December in Tehran and quickly spread nationwide, security forces unlawfully used rifles, shotguns loaded with metal pellets, tear gas and beatings to disperse largely peaceful protesters calling for the fall of the Islamic Republic system, leading to killings and injuries.

Enforced disappearances and torture and other ill-treatment

Torture and other ill-treatment, enforced disappearance and incommunicado detention were widespread and systematic.

Following Israeli air strikes on Evin prison, dozens of prisoners detained for political reasons were forcibly disappeared for weeks or months.³ Authorities transferred hundreds of other Evin prisoners to other prisons where conditions were cruel and inhumane and included overcrowding, insanitary conditions, poor ventilation, infestations of mice or insects, and insufficient access to potable water, edible food, bedding, toilets or washing facilities. Authorities continued to deny prisoners adequate healthcare. Several individuals died in custody in suspicious circumstances following credible reports of torture and other ill-treatment, including denial of healthcare.

Punishments amounting to torture – including flogging, blinding, amputation, crucifixion and stoning – were retained in law. Floggings and amputations were carried out.⁴

Arbitrary detention and unfair trials

Trials were systematically unfair, rendering detentions and executions arbitrary. Authorities routinely denied detainees access to lawyers during investigations and based convictions on torture-tainted “confessions” that were frequently broadcast by state television.

The judiciary lacked independence and was complicit in torture and other crimes under international law.

In August, authorities announced the arrests of 21,000 people in relation to the conflict with Israel.

The Espionage Law further eroded fair trial rights by establishing special Revolutionary Court branches, expediting criminal proceedings, limiting appeals to 10 days, and allowing courts to complete investigations, thereby eroding the separation of prosecutorial and judicial functions.

Authorities continued to arbitrarily detain foreign and dual nationals for leverage and committed hostage-taking with impunity.

In April, dissident Mehdi Karroubi's arbitrary house arrest ended after 14 years, while that of Mir Hossein Mousavi and Zahra Rahnava entered its 15th year.

Women's and girls' rights

Authorities continued to discriminate against women and girls, denying them equal rights in marriage, divorce, child nationality and custody, employment, inheritance and political office.

The legal marriage age for girls remained 13, but fathers could obtain judicial permission for forced marriage at a younger age.

The minimum age of criminal responsibility for girls remained nine lunar years (approximately eight years and nine months) and 15 lunar years for boys (approximately 14 years and seven months).

Authorities subjected women's rights defenders, journalists, singers and others demanding gender equality and challenging compulsory veiling to arbitrary detention, unfair trials, flogging and social media bans.⁵

In May the government withdrew a bill that had been originally presented more than a decade previously to address violence against women, but which had been repeatedly diluted and renamed.

Lack of legal protections, shelters or accountability enabled femicide, with the number of women and girls murdered by male relatives surpassing 100, according to figures from domestic newspapers and human rights organizations outside Iran. As the authorities did not publish femicide statistics, the actual figure was likely far higher.

Widespread resistance by women and girls to compulsory veiling, together with a sustained domestic and global outcry over violence against them, forced authorities to retreat from the violent mass arrests and assaults of previous years and to maintain the pause in implementation of the Law on Protecting the Family Through the Promotion of the Culture of Chastity and Hijab. However, authorities continued to use existing laws and regulations to enforce compulsory veiling in workplaces, universities and other public sector institutions, leaving women and girls who resisted facing harassment, assault, arbitrary arrest, fines and expulsion from employment and education. Perpetrators included both state agents and vigilantes acting with state endorsement.

Electronic surveillance, including facial recognition, was central to enforcing compulsory veiling. Women continued to receive threatening SMS messages based on data from International Mobile Subscriber Identity-Catchers (IMSI-Catchers), contactless card readers, surveillance cameras and reports submitted by state agents and vigilantes via apps designed for this purpose.

The arbitrary confiscation of women's cars as punishment for defying veiling laws continued.

In October the head of the Tehran Headquarters for the Promotion of Virtue and Prevention of Vice announced the creation of a "Hijab and Chastity Situation Room" and plans to deploy a trained force of 80,000 members to enhance surveillance and enforcement infrastructure.

In November and December, the Supreme Leader, the head of the judiciary and other senior officials portrayed women's and girls' widespread defiance of compulsory veiling as "social deviance" linked to foreign enemies. The head of the judiciary ordered prosecutorial, security and intelligence bodies to confront unveiling as a "flagrant crime".

Scores of businesses including restaurants were forcibly shut for serving unveiled women, with owners facing arrest and prosecution.

Discrimination

Ethnic minorities

Ethnic minorities including Ahwazi Arabs, Azerbaijani Turks, Baluchis, Kurds and Turkmen faced widespread violations, including discrimination in access to education, employment, adequate housing and political office. Under-investment in regions home to ethnic minorities, including lack of infrastructure supplying clean water, sustained their poverty and marginalization.

Children from ethnic minorities were denied education in their mother tongue, as Persian remained the sole language of instruction. This contributed to high dropout rates and reports of humiliation, harassment and unsafe school environments for non-Persian speaking students. In February, parliament rejected a bill to introduce the teaching of literature in ethnic minority languages.

Authorities smeared minority rights activists, portraying peaceful advocacy of minority rights as a threat to territorial integrity.

Those who challenged violations or demanded decentralization or regional self-governance faced arbitrary detention, enforced disappearance, torture and other ill-treatment, unjust prison terms or the death penalty.

Authorities continued to refuse to issue birth certificates and other identity documents to tens of thousands of Baluchi men, women and children, leaving them effectively stateless and

without access to public services including education, healthcare, banking and marriage registration, and at risk of forcible removal to neighbouring countries as non-nationals.

Ethnic minorities were disproportionately affected by violations of the right to life, including unlawful shootings and the death penalty.

Religious minorities

Religious minorities, including Baha'is, Christians, Gonabadi Dervishes, Jews, Sunni Muslims and Yaresan, suffered widespread and systemic human rights violations, including discrimination in access to education, employment, adoption, political office and places of worship.

Religious minorities professing or practising their faith faced arbitrary detention, unjust prosecution, and torture and other ill-treatment.

People born to parents registered as Muslim risked arbitrary detention, torture and other ill-treatment, and the death penalty for "apostasy" if they adopted other religions or atheism.

Authorities used the securitized climate after the conflict with Israel to intensify repression of Baha'i, Christian and Jewish communities.⁶

The Baha'i community faced systemic persecution amid intensified state propaganda falsely portraying them as Israeli spies. Violations against them included arbitrary detention, home raids, expulsion from employment, bans on higher education, forcible business closures, property confiscation or destruction, travel bans, death threats, unfair trials, imprisonment, exile, desecration of Baha'i cemeteries and denial of burial rights.

Authorities subjected dozens of Jews to arbitrary summonses, interrogations and unfounded espionage charges.

Authorities smeared Christians as "Mossad mercenaries", broadcast forced "confessions" of those detained, raided house churches and arbitrarily detained Christian converts.

LGBTI people

Consensual same-sex sexual relations remained criminalized. Punishments included flogging and the death penalty. Several men were flogged following convictions for consensual same-sex sexual relations.

Criminalization fuelled violence and discrimination against LGBTI people, hindering access to education, employment, housing and healthcare and leaving victims of homophobic and transphobic attacks without legal recourse or protection services.

Gender non-conforming expressions that diverged from state-imposed notions of masculine and feminine presentation, including choice of dress and appearance, were punishable by

imprisonment, fines and flogging.

State-endorsed “conversion therapies” amounting to torture or other ill-treatment remained prevalent, including against children. Hormone therapy and surgical procedures, including sterilization, were mandatory for people changing the sex they were assigned at birth.

Teachers, principals and school security departments subjected LGBTI schoolchildren to harassment, exclusion, forced transfers to other schools and referrals for non-consensual psychiatric and medical interventions.

Hate speech by officials and state media persisted against LGBTI people.

Refugees’ and migrants’ rights

Afghans faced widespread violence and discrimination, including in education, housing, employment, healthcare, banking and freedom of movement.

More than 1.8 million Afghans, including unaccompanied and separated children, women and girls, refugees and asylum seekers were unlawfully expelled or forced to return to Afghanistan.⁷ The mass expulsions involved violent raids, stop-and-search and arbitrary arrests.

Authorities escalated racist, dehumanizing rhetoric against Afghans, scapegoating them for socio-economic ills, accusing them of being spies for Israel, and fuelling hate crimes.

Unlawful killings

The Law on the Use of Firearms by Armed Forces in Necessary Incidents continued to entrench impunity for unlawful killings by authorizing the broad use of firearms, including for dispersing protests and intercepting individuals fleeing arrest or crossing borders illegally. A bill amending this law remained pending before parliament. If approved, it would allow additional forces beyond the police, the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps and the army to carry firearms and expand the circumstances for their use.

Security forces continued to fire at people in cars with impunity, including at new checkpoints introduced in June, resulting in deaths of adults and children.

Border guards continued to kill scores of unarmed Baluchi fuel porters (*soukhtbars*) in Sistan and Baluchestan province, and Kurdish cross-border couriers (*kulbars*) between the Kurdistan regions of Iran and Iraq.

In July, Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps agents used lethal force, including AK pattern rifles and shotguns loaded with metal pellets, against a group of Baluchi women during a raid on the village of Gounich, Sistan and Baluchestan province, unlawfully killing two and injuring 10 others.

Death penalty

Authorities carried out the highest number of executions recorded since 1989.⁸ Public executions were carried out.

The escalation was driven by increased use of the death penalty as a tool of political repression and lethal anti-narcotics policies. A bill amending the Anti-Narcotics Law that would retain the death penalty for certain trafficking and distribution offences remained under parliamentary review.

Mass executions sparked unprecedented peaceful prison sit-ins and hunger strikes, with security forces threatening reprisals against prisoners.

The death penalty was retained for acts protected under the rights to privacy and freedom of expression, religion or belief, including drinking alcohol and consensual same-sex sexual relationships. "Adultery" (sexual relationships outside marriage) remained punishable by stoning to death.

At least one individual who was under 18 at the time of the crime was executed; scores of others also under 18 at the time of the crime remained on death row.

Right to truth, justice and reparation

Systemic impunity prevailed for unlawful killings, torture, enforced disappearances and other crimes under international law committed in 2025 and in previous decades.

Prosecutors routinely dismissed victims' complaints and closed investigations. In rare cases that reached trial, military courts, which hold jurisdiction over security forces' violations, exonerated perpetrators, limited redress to state-paid "blood money" (*diyeh*) and excluded commanders and superiors from liability.

In June, authorities shielded the perpetrators of the unlawful killing of nine-year-old Kian Pirfalak during the Woman Life Freedom protests in 2022 from accountability by arbitrarily executing a protester, Mojahed (Abbas) Kourkouri, for Kian Pirfalak's death following a grossly unfair trial.⁹

The trial over the shooting down in 2020 of Ukraine International Airlines flight 752 stalled after an Iranian military court delayed proceedings. Victims' families and lawyers were denied access to the case file. The 10 defendants remained released on bail.

Authorities prevented victims' families from accessing the Khavaran mass grave site, containing the remains of some of the victims of the 1988 prison massacres. They also destroyed plot 41 of Tehran's Behesht Zahra cemetery, containing individual graves of those executed in the 1980s, to build a car park.

Right to a healthy environment

Iran maintained high levels of fossil fuel production and subsidies.

Authorities failed to address Iran's environmental degradation, which exacerbated existing inequalities and disproportionately affected marginalized communities. The crisis was marked by the loss of lakes, rivers and wetlands; groundwater depletion; water pollution from discharge of wastewater into urban water sources; deforestation; land subsidence; declining water reserves and soil health; and air pollution, partly from the industrial use of substandard fuels, which contributed to thousands of deaths.

People faced severe and prolonged water and electricity cuts, resulting in school and business closures. Authorities ignored systemic failures, blaming drought and over-consumption.

Environmental rights activists faced arbitrary detention.

In July, three environmental activists died in Kurdistan province while fighting a wildfire, sparking criticism of the authorities for leaving firefighting largely to volunteers while failing to provide protective gear and safety measures.

1. ["Urgent need to protect civilians amid unprecedented escalation in hostilities between Israel and Iran", 18 June ↩](#)
2. ["Iran: Deliberate Israeli attack on Tehran's Evin prison must be investigated as a war crime", 22 July ↩](#)
3. ["Iran: Tehran prisoners at risk after Israeli strikes", 7 July ↩](#)
4. ["Iran: Officials responsible for finger-amputations must face accountability for torture", 31 July ↩](#)
5. ["Iran: Authorities target women's rights activists with arbitrary arrest, flogging and death penalty", 17 March ↩](#)
6. ["Iran: Authorities unleash wave of oppression after hostilities with Israel", 3 September ↩](#)
7. ["Millions more Afghans in Iran facing expulsion", 30 July ↩](#)
8. ["Iran: Further information: Thousands at risk of execution in Iran", 10 September ↩](#)
9. ["Iran: Arbitrary execution of Woman Life Freedom protester after sham trial and torture", 11 June ↩](#)

