

Flygtningenævnets baggrundsmateriale

Bilagsnr.:	639
Land:	Iran
Kilde:	UK Foreign and Commonwealth Office
Titel:	Human Rights and Democracy Report 2015 - Chapter IV: Human Rights Priority Countries – Iran
Udgivet:	21. april 2016
Optaget på baggrundsmaterialet:	13. juni.2016

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- **Source:**
FCO - UK Foreign and Commonwealth Office
- **Title:**
Human Rights and Democracy Report 2015 - Chapter IV: Human Rights Priority Countries - Iran
- **Publication date:**
21 April 2016
- **ecoi.net summary:** Annual report on human rights situation in 2015 (developments and concerns) [ID 322987]
- **Countries:**
Iran
- **Original link** <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/iran-human-rights-priority-country/iran-human-rights-priority-country>

Recommended citation:

FCO - UK Foreign and Commonwealth Office: Human Rights and Democracy Report 2015 - Chapter IV: Human Rights Priority Countries - Iran, 21 April 2016 (available at [ecoi.net](http://www.ecoi.net))
http://www.ecoi.net/local_link/322987/448809_en.html (accessed 29 April 2016)



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Published 21 April 2016

2015 saw the welcome engagement of Iran with the rules-based international system, reaching a potentially historic agreement that will impose strict limits and inspections on Iran's nuclear programme. However, Iran's human rights record continued to cause great concern. President Rouhani pledged to improve the rights and freedoms of the citizens of Iran when he was elected in 2013. He also promised reforms on discrimination against women and members of ethnic minorities, and on greater space for freedom of expression and opinion. However, there has been little evidence of positive change.

In some cases, the situation in Iran appears to have worsened. The high number of executions is of particular concern. The UN Special Rapporteur for Human Rights in Iran believes that between 966 and 1,025 people were executed in Iran in 2015, a substantial increase on 2014 and the highest number in over a decade. The majority of those executed were convicted of drug-related offences. The majority of newspapers, TV and radio are government-controlled, and the internet and social media sites are heavily restricted. Journalists, bloggers and human rights activists are regularly arrested and detained. In November, over 170 individuals were arrested for messages they published on social media apps.

Women do not enjoy the same rights and privileges as men in Iran and continue to face discrimination. For example, married women need the consent of their husbands to leave the country and can be banned from travelling abroad if their spouses do not sign the paperwork needed to obtain or renew a passport. In September, one of Iran's best female football players, Niloufar Ardalan, was refused permission by her husband to travel to Malaysia for a tournament.

While some religious minorities are formally protected in the constitution, the reality is that many non-Muslims face discrimination and attempts by Muslims to change their faith may lead to criminal prosecution. For example, there are regular reports of the arrest of members of Christian "house churches" and in 2015 a number of Baha'i-owned businesses were reportedly closed by the authorities for observing non-sanctioned holy days.

The UK continues to lead international efforts to encourage Iran to improve its human rights record. We continue to raise individual cases with the Iranian government, in addition to concerning trends such as the

increase in use of the death penalty, juvenile executions, and continued persecution of religious minorities. The UK has also helped to maintain the listing of over 70 individuals under the Iran human rights sanctions regime.

The UK helped secure adoption of the UN General Assembly Third Committee Resolution on the human rights situation in Iran. The UK co-sponsored the Canadian-led resolution, assisting in drafting and agreeing the text. The resolution was passed by 76 votes.

FCO Human Rights and Democracy Programme projects supporting HRDs and creating platforms to support freedom of expression helped strengthen the foundations for change in country. We welcome the renewal of the mandate for the UN Special Rapporteur in Iran. We will continue to support this mandate and hope that Iran uses the opportunity to engage with the UN.

published on  European Country of Origin Information Network