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Joint Submission to the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights; 4th Cycle of Universal Periodic Review: Iran (Islamic Republic Of)

Submitting stakeholders: [Unrepresented Nations and Peoples Organization \(UNPO\)](#), [Ahwaz Human Rights Organization \(AHRO\)](#), [Balochistan Human Rights Group \(BHRG\)](#), and [Association of Human Rights in Kurdistan – Geneva \(KMMK-G\)](#)

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The **Unrepresented Nations and Peoples Organization (UNPO)** is an international, nonviolent, and democratic membership-based organization. Our members include indigenous peoples, minorities, unrecognized States, and occupied territories that have joined together to defend their political, social, and cultural rights, as well as their right to self-determination.

The **Ahwaz Human Rights Organization (AHRO)** is dedicated to the defense of human rights of the Ahwazi Arab minority people in Iran, raising awareness on their history, culture, socioeconomic conditions and the political climate.

The **Association of Human Rights in Kurdistan – Geneva (KMMK-G)** promotes democracy, respect for human rights and social development in and beyond Kurdistan of Iran, promoting the rights and integration of Kurds, wherever they live.

The **Balochistan Human Rights Group (BHRG)** is a non-partisan, independent human rights non-profit organization that works to fill the gaps in information and knowledge caused by lack of access to Balochistan.

1. Ahead of the upcoming OHCHR UPR of the Islamic Republic of Iran, the UNPO, jointly with

BHRG, AHRO and KMMK-G wishes to report and draw your attention to the ongoing human rights violations against ethnic minorities and vulnerable groups in the country, especially the

Kurdish, Baloch and Ahwazi Arab communities. We are particularly concerned by the persisting issue of extrajudicial killings, arbitrary arrests, detentions, and enforced disappearances of political actors and activists perceived as a threat by the Government and State authorities, tools used to curb the already limited freedom of expression, association, and assembly that people in Iran currently enjoy. The state of women's rights is also quickly deteriorating under the current regime, with threats to women's safety, freedom of expression, and political activism being especially undermined since the 2022 Jina Revolution.

2. The UNPO, along with our colleagues and member organizations on the ground, have identified a series of issues that we feel merit special attention during Iran's upcoming UPR in the January 2025 48th session. These are: **(1) extrajudicial killings & death penalties; (2) freedom of expression, association, and assembly; (3) arbitrary detentions, arrests, and enforced disappearances; (4) women's rights; (5) language and cultural rights.**

Relevant Historical & Political Context

3. The human rights situation in the Islamic Republic of Iran has repeatedly been condemned by the international community, human rights NGOs, and activists. It is well documented that the standards of the country in terms of the right to life, freedom from torture, freedom of expression, freedom of association, religious freedoms, women's rights, and minority rights are very low. This is true for all citizens in Iran, but ethnic groups such as the Kurdish, Baluch and Ahwazi Arab populations are disproportionately affected compared to ethnic Persians.
4. Persian groups make up the majority of Iran's population, which in turn is part of the explanation for why minority groups have been disproportionately affected by worsening state-sponsored violence and repression in recent years. The 1% of the population belonging to recognized non-Muslim religious minorities are second-class citizens, and non-recognized religious minorities are afforded no constitutional rights¹. They are subject to repression, discrimination, unequal access to education, execution, detention, torture, arbitrary killings and major violations of freedom of association and assembly. It is reported that since the beginning of President Rouhani's mandate, repression, executions and arbitrary arrests in the country and in the Kurdish region in particular have plummeted.
5. The human rights situation in the Baluchistan region, in southeastern Iran, predominantly inhabited by the Baluch ethnic minority, is deeply intertwined with systemic racial discrimination by the Iranian regime. The Baluch people, who are Sunni Muslims in a predominantly Shia country, face severe marginalization and oppression rooted in both ethnic and religious differences. The Iranian government has been criticized for deliberately underinvesting in the region, leading to poor infrastructure and inadequate access to essential services such as healthcare, education, and transportation. This economic marginalization is a direct consequence of the racial discrimination that prioritizes development in Persian-majority areas while neglecting minority regions like Baluchistan. Recent data indicate that the Sistan and Baluchestan provinces in Iran have the lowest annual income in the country. The region suffers from severe poverty, evidenced by bread and fuel shortages, limited access to drinking water, severe droughts, and widespread unemployment.

¹ See <https://unpo.org/article/21913>, UNPO 2020.

6. Similar issues of discrimination and marginalization are faced by the Kurdish groups primarily inhabiting Western Iran. The UNPO has for years been condemning and raising awareness against the widespread human rights abuses against Iranian Kurds who are regularly subjected to systematic discrimination in employment, education, and housing and are consistently excluded from political participation. There are severe restrictions on their civil liberties such as the right to life, freedom of expression and the press, of religion, and of assembly. Indeed, the political atmosphere is extremely repressive concerning Kurds, who cannot form political parties or organizations advocating for their rights.
7. Another minority group suffering widespread abuse and discrimination by the Iranian authorities, is Ahwazi Arabs; one of the largest minority groups living in Iran and are predominantly settled in the Al-Ahwaz province. Since the 1980s the Iranian government has imposed several discriminatory ethnic and religious policies that have prevented Ahwazi Arabs from participating in government, limited their access to education and resources, and drove them into abject poverty. Iranian authorities often resort to arbitrary arrests, torture, deportation and the destruction of property as tools to intimidate Ahwazi Arabs and silence opposition.
8. In September 2022, the death of Jina Mahsa Amini, an Iranian Kurdish woman, while in custody of the Iranian ‘morality police’, sparked a series of protests (referenced throughout this document as the ‘Jina Revolution’) amongst the Kurdish community that soon spread throughout the country against the Iranian regime’s suppression of women’s rights, though the protests soon grew to encompass claims for other rights and freedoms that the Government had been violently suppressing for a long time. Since 2022, the security forces’ response to the protests has been brutal and the country has seen a further increase in the suppression of the rights to freedom of expression, association, and peaceful assembly.
9. The lack of accountability for the numerous human rights and sociopolitical rights violations perpetrated by the Iranian regime are indicative of a broader policy of racial discrimination that devalues ethnic minority lives and rights. The international community has frequently called on the Iranian government to address the human rights abuses in the Baluch and Kurdish regions of the country and engage in meaningful dialogue with the people from there. Regrettably, little progress has been made on that front as the regime's policies of racial discrimination continue to perpetuate the cycle of marginalization and repression. The UNPO, our members, as well as our partner organizations on the ground have submitted several reports, letters, and fact-sheets to international organizations and institutions such as the UN, and have raised the attention of the international community of these issues.

Extrajudicial Killings & Death Penalties

10. Politically, the regime employs severe repression to stifle any form of dissent or demand for greater autonomy, using arbitrary arrests, torture, and extrajudicial killings to intimidate and silence activists, political dissidents, and ordinary citizens alike. The Islamic Republic of Iran, executes most people than any country in the world, save China. In 2023, executions hit the highest number since 2015.
11. Iranian authorities have killed hundreds of protesters, arrested thousands of people, and tortured countless detainees. During the ‘Women, Life, Freedom’ protests, it is estimated that the government

security forces killed more than 500 people, including 69 children.² One of our partner organizations, the [Association of Human Rights in Kurdistan – Geneva](#) (KMMK-G), has identified the names of three hundred nineteen (319) prisoners, including 8 women, who have been executed in Iran between 1 January and 23 May 2023. More than 50% of these executions were carried out against Kurdish and Baluch citizens, despite Kurds and Baluchis comprising only 20% of Iran's 85 million population.³

12. The authorities have refused to open transparent investigations into the security forces' use of excessive and lethal force, torture, sexual assault, and other serious abuses, and have instead pressured families of victims to not hold public memorial services and threatened them into silence. The UNPO is especially concerned about the risk of reprisals against anyone who speaks out against the regime within the country or abroad, and in the past, we have noted incidents of Iranians abroad being murdered for raising awareness about what is happening in the country.
13. In March 2024, the UNPO formally presented a submission the Special Rapporteur on Extrajudicial, Summary, or Arbitrary Executions to investigate one such assassination. UNPO's submission highlights a concerning surge in transnational repression, exemplifying targeted reprisals against activists, human rights defenders, and opposition figures by foreign authorities, though particularly those from Iran. UNPO has been documenting transnational repression for years through our [Compromised Spaces](#) campaign.
14. Ethnic minorities, marginalised communities, and any group perceived to be a sociopolitical threat to the regime, is under particular risk. The country's security forces disproportionately target Baloch citizens, resulting in arbitrary arrests and extrajudicial killings, particularly impacting fuel carriers and protestors.
15. BHRG reports that, between 2019 and 2024, there have been 203 state-sanctioned executions, primarily relating to criminalized political activities or drug-related offences. Additionally, both BHRG and UNPO have been expressing concerns over the heightened risks and hazardous conditions faced by Baloch fuel-carriers. Specifically, between 2019 and 2023, BHRG documented 140 fatalities and 62 injuries among Baloch fuel carriers due to shootings following government ambushes and accidents.

Freedom of Expression, Association, and Assembly

16. Restrictions on freedom of expression in Iran are both broad and arbitrary. While the characteristics of censorship and governmental controls on speech have undergone some changes over time, the Islamic Republic has shown that it is not willing to significantly soften its position with respect to political opinion and cultural expression, which it appears to consider as challenges to its political or religious authority.
17. At least in theory, the country's constitution recognizes freedom of expression with the exception of forms of expression considered detrimental to the fundamental principles of Islam or the public interest. However, what types of expression fall under this category rests solely on the regime's arbitrary criteria resulting in excessive suppression of any form of political, social, or cultural dissent, particularly from minority groups and marginalized communities.

² See: <https://www.hrw.org/news/2023/09/15/iran-crackdown-dissent-ahead-protest-anniversary>, HRW 2023.

³ See <https://unpo.org/article/22095>, UNPO 2023.

18. In effect, the press is strictly monitored in the country. Non-government-sanctioned news outlets are banned. Newspapers and magazines face censorship and warnings from authorities about which topics to cover and how. Tens of thousands of foreign-based websites are filtered, including news sites and major social media services. Satellite dishes are banned, and Persian-language broadcasts from outside the country are regularly jammed. Police periodically raid private homes and confiscate satellite dishes. Iranian authorities have intimidated journalists working for Persian-language media outside the country, in part by summoning and threatening their families in Iran.⁴
19. There is a unique set of consequences for minorities who speak out their grievances with the state, for anything said can be treated with the gravity of a “national security threat.” Any form of supposed connection to a “militant” group in Iran becomes grounds for execution.
20. Without truly free freedom of expression and press, there is limited possibility to hold the government to account and push for meaningful change. The tight suppression of expression and press freedom also means that international organizations face difficulties in receiving information from the ground and monitoring updates about the country.
21. With regards to freedom of association, the UNPO notes with concern that several individuals, particularly from the Kurdish community, and their families, have been targeted by the authorities and even arbitrarily arrested and detained simply for participating in peaceful, non-political organizations promoting Kurdish language and culture. Mere association with members of such organizations or initiatives is enough to put individuals at risk of arrest and trial.

Arbitrary Detentions, Arrests, and Enforced Disappearances

22. Political repression across Iran is severe and often racially motivated. The Iranian government has a history of cracking down on any form of dissent or calls for greater autonomy in the region. Activists, journalists, and ordinary citizens who speak out against the government's policies or advocate for rights Baluch, Kurdish, or other minority rights, frequently face arbitrary arrests, detentions, and even execution. The judicial process for these individuals is often criticized for its lack of transparency and fairness, with many trials conducted without proper legal representation or due process.
23. This repression is not only a means of silencing dissent but also a tool to maintain racial hierarchies and suppress the any efforts by minoritized communities for equality and recognition. As part of a strategy to silence human rights activists, Iran's judicial and security bodies have waged a vicious crackdown against ethnic minorities by conducting enforced disappearances.
24. Earlier this year, the UNPO submitted a report to the UN OHCHR’s Working Group against Arbitrary Detention relating to several individuals being arrested and put on trial as ‘terrorists’ and threats to the regime, simply for being members of a pacifist cultural association aiming to preserve the Kurdish language and traditions. More information on the submission itself, the association, or the individuals concerned can be made available upon request.
25. Human rights activists in Iran, especially those who campaign for the rights of minorities, including the Ahwazis, face constant oppression from the government, including arbitrary arrests, imprisonment, torture, and ill-treatment. Their demands for basic, fundamental rights are also often labeled as secessionist and ignored by the authorities.

⁴ <https://freedomhouse.org/country/iran/freedom-world/2023>.

Women's Rights

26. Iranian women experience discrimination in law and in practice in ways that deeply impact their lives, particularly with regard to marriage, divorce and custody issues. Women's rights in Iran are constantly undermined and women and girls face added scrutiny and repression especially following the 2022 Jina Revolution and the 'Women, Life, Freedom' movement.
27. In September 2023, the Iranian parliament passed the Hijab and Chastity 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 following hijab-related violations. The law also expands the authority of intelligence and law enforcement agencies in enforcing the compulsory hijab.
28. Ethnic minority women face added pressures and systemic discrimination and gender-based violence. Baloch women for example, encounter systemic barriers, such as unrecognized marriages, lack of citizenship rights for their children, and inadequate access to shelter and healthcare services.
29. In October 2022, a protest started against the assault a 15-year-old girl in Chabahar with people gathering outside Police Station 16 until the protest escalated into violence and was followed by a harsh crackdown. Baloch activists documented 95 fatalities related to the incident. Later, the BHRG, reported at least 123 deaths from this "Bloody Friday" incident. Among the casualties were women and children, with many others left injured, disabled, or suffering loss of limbs and eyes.
30. Moreover, regarding sexual and gender-based violence, women in Iran can face charges for reporting rape or sexual violence. Harassment in public places, child marriages, and general gender-based violence are still widespread in the country though recent years have seen women pushing back against this status-quo by protesting on the streets and online to raise awareness against all the issues they are facing.
31. According to Amnesty International, up until 2023, not a single Iranian official had been held accountable for ordering, planning, and committing widespread and systematic human rights violations against women and girls through the implementation of compulsory veiling. Iranian officials, emboldened by impunity, have ruthlessly crushed protests and targeted those who attempted to mark the anniversary of the Jina revolution.⁵

Language and Cultural Rights

32. In addition to Farsi, Iran consists of five other large linguistic communities including Baluchi, Kurdish, Arabic, Turkish and Turkmen, as well as other smaller language groups such as Gilak, Mazandarani, and Luri. However, Farsi is the only official language in the country and the sole language of instruction in schools. This issue has a detrimental impact on non-Persian students, including harming student self-confidence and attainment, as well as causing high rates of school drop-outs, something witnessed among, for example, Ahwazi Arab students.⁶
33. Even though the Iranian Constitution allows the use of minority languages in public, this is not

⁵ <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2023/10/iranian-women-and-girls-face-further-violations-of-their-rights-under-compulsory-veiling-bill/>.

⁶ See <https://unpo.org/article/22149>, UNPO 2023.

respected in practice. The Iranian regime enforces a totalitarian system that prioritizes the Farsi language and Persian culture, despite Iran's rich multinational tapestry. This approach marginalizes the nation's diverse ethnic and religious groups, including Baluchis and Kurds. These minorities face systematic suppression in various spheres: economically, educationally, agriculturally, and culturally. The government's deliberate neglect and active obstruction in regions like Baluchistan and Kurdistan undermine the development of infrastructure and opportunities, perpetuating inequality and stifling the unique identities of these communities.

34. One example is the prevention and punishment of the use of mother tongue in schools. Baluch and Kurdish children are prevented from having an education in their mother tongue and are forced to use Farsi in schools. They are systematically prevented and even physically punished for even speaking Baluchi or Kurdish. Over 300,000 Baluch children are not able to attend secondary education due to lack of schools or access to transport. The regime does not build enough schools for children and at times multiple grades are taught in the same class with the same teacher. This is a way to prevent educational progress and access to higher paying jobs. This then continues the cycle of unemployment and doing dangerous jobs such as fuel carrying.
35. Baloch children continue to endure discrimination, which obstructs their access to education in their native language and essential social services due to citizenship issues. The Baluch community face continued difficulties in obtaining birth certificates, which exacerbates their marginalization and hinders their inclusion to Iranian society. This lack of documentation extends into education, where children without birth certificates are barred from attending school. In 2023 alone, Government estimates indicate that approximately 40,000 children, both of whose parents are Baluch, lack national identity cards. However, local sources suggest that the actual number may be much higher, ranging from 80,000 to 100,000.⁷
36. Consequently, these children grow up unable to secure formal employment or open a bank account, perpetuating a cycle of poverty and disenfranchisement. As they reach adulthood, many Baluch are forced into dangerous jobs, such as fuel carrying, to make ends meet. These jobs are not only perilous but also criminalized by the state, leading to frequent incidents where security forces shoot and kill these workers. The regime often denies these deaths, justifies them as necessary due to the illegal nature of the work, or simply hides the incidents from public view.
37. The Iranian government has intentionally created and perpetuated an image of the Baluch as uneducated, backward, and barbaric to justify their oppression. This portrayal is entirely false and serves to rationalize the systemic discrimination and violence inflicted upon them. They are also barred from fully and officially integrating in Iranian society, through their marginalization and deprivation of official identification documents.
38. Ahwazi Arabs face similar levels of marginalization and social exclusion. Although the region inhabited by the Ahwazi is rich in natural resources and produces up to 95% of Iran's oil and gas, the disproportion of wealth and the social inequality existing between Arabs and the ethnic majority Persians is clear, as the former live in abject poverty. Discrimination policies towards the minorities and indigenous groups as well as 'Persianization' policies through legal provisions in the Khuzestan province leads to high unemployment rates in the region, where over 70% of the workforce are non-locals. Besides the severe socio-economic deprivation, indigenous Arabs suffer from one of the highest rates of poverty in Iran, as well as high levels of water and air pollution due to oil exploitation.

⁷ [UNPO: West Balochistan: Iran's Invisible Children.](#)

39. Between July and August 2021 protests took place in more than a dozen cities in the Khuzestan province of the Islamic Republic of Iran over an ever-rising water crisis. These protests were suppressed by the government, with over 300 people, including children, being arbitrarily arrested and detained. The protests highlight both an urgent environmental disaster in the province and the systemic marginalization of Iran's Ahwazi Arab minority, who are indigenous to the region.

Joint Appeal by UNPO and submitting organizations

40. We ask the OHCHR to make recommendations to the Islamic Republic of Iran to:

- Bring the country's laws and policies in line with international human rights instruments and take active steps to respect the rights guaranteed in the country's Constitution, such as freedom of expression and the right to speak one's own language in public.
- Take practical steps to halt all forms of discrimination, oppression, and human rights violations against the Ahwazi Arabs, Kurds, and Baluch minorities. Specifically, to establish monitoring mechanisms regularly assessing and reporting on the human rights situation of marginalized communities in Iran, paying particular attention to the Ahwazi Arabs, Baluch, and Kurdish minorities.
- Engage in meaningful dialogue with representatives of marginalized communities to address their concerns, grievances, and aspirations, and promote inclusive and participatory decision-making processes.
- Take immediate steps to release arbitrarily detained individuals and ensure that their cases are reviewed in accordance with international standards of due process and fair trial.
- Impose transparent judicial mechanisms that will prevent 'show' trials and arbitrary detentions and sentences in the future.
- Make improvements in the country's prisons to meet international standards, ensuring access to basic necessities and effective legal representation.
- Immediately stop all use of violence and force against peaceful protesters. Conduct an independent and impartial investigation into the excessive use of force by Iranian security forces against protesters, including women and girls participating in the Jina revolution and its aftermath, as well as individuals and civil rights activists from the Kurdish and Baluch communities advocating for their rights and entitlements in the Iranian state.
- Implement the necessary legal and social reforms to uplift women and girls rights and put an end to sexual and gender-based violence across Iranian society.
- Allow an international fact-finding mission in relation to extrajudicial killings and enforced disappearances. Iran must put in place and accept accountability measures in relation to how law and order are enforced in the country.
- Put in place urgent reforms amongst the security forces' mandate, operation, and impunity.

- Implement comprehensive legal reforms that guarantee the rights of minorities, including the right to freedom of expression, assembly, and association, as well as cultural and linguistic rights.
- Cooperate with the international community to set standards and oversight mechanisms to combat the stifling of the voices of unrepresented minorities.
- Provide technical assistance and capacity-building support to civil society organizations working on human rights and minority issues concerning Iran, to strengthen their efforts in documenting violations, providing support to victims, and advocating for change.
- Increase investment in educational infrastructure and healthcare services in underprivileged regions to bridge disparities and enhance access for all residents.
- Engage in reforms to better protect minorities and indigenous communities guaranteeing their equal inclusion and an active role in water management in Al Ahwaz, as well as implement policies to remediate the urgent environmental disasters in the region.