



IRAN HUMAN RIGHTS AND MINORITY RIGHTS DEFENDERS CALL FOR INTERNATIONAL ACCOUNTABILITY FOR IRAN

29 September 2022

In the wake of the murder of Mahsa (Jina) Amini and the violent crackdown occurring across Iran attempting to quell the wellspring of solidarity and unified pressure for reform across all communities in Iran that her murder has awakened, a cross-section of the Iran civil society community, representing human rights and minority rights defenders across the country, are jointly calling is calling on the international community to establish a comprehensive accountability programme for Iran.

Precedent exists for such an initiative, most recently in the establishment of the International Accountability Platform for Belarus, a civil society platform established after the state violence around the 2020 Belarusian presidential election and supported by the United States of America (USA), European Union (EU) and 19 European states. Much responsibility, in this regard, rests with the European Union and its member states who are best positioned to exert international pressure given their critical role within the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), the negotiating framework relating to Iran’s nuclear programme, and in light of the lack of formal diplomatic relations between the USA and Iran.

This statement is made jointly by the following organizations, representing a clear consensus across Iran’s human rights and minority rights communities for such a programme:

- [Association for the Human Rights of Azerbaijani People in Iran](#) (AHRAZ), a civil society organization working on the human rights of minority populations in Iran, with a focus on the Azerbaijani Turks.
- [Ahwaz Human Rights Organization](#) (AHRO), a human rights organizations working to support and to advocate for the Ahwazi Arabs in the Southwestern Iranian province of Khuzestan (also called Al-Ahwaz or Arabistan).
- [Balochistan Human Rights Group](#) (BHRG), a human rights organization working for the rights of the Baluch people of Iran.
- [Association for Human Rights in Kurdistan - Geneva](#) (KMMK-G), an independent, non-partisan organization, established to serve as a bridge between the Kurdish people and the United Nations and Iranian civil society.

- [Hengaw Organization for Human Rights](#), a collective of human rights activists working to report about the extensive human rights violations that are occurring in the Kurdish areas in the west of Iran.
- [Justice for Iran](#), a human rights organization that aims to hold the perpetrators of serious human rights violations, including but not limited to crimes against humanity, torture, enforced disappearances, war crime and genocide which have been committed in Iran or by the Iranian officials, accountable.
- [Turkmen Sahra Human Rights Defenders](#), a human rights organization working for the rights of the Turkmen people of Iran.
- [United for Iran](#), an independent nonprofit organization working for civil liberties in Iran.
- The [Unrepresented Nations and Peoples Organization](#), the global movement for self-determination, whose members include political parties and civil society movements representing the cross-section of Iran's minority communities.
- [Xaxuran](#), a queer feminist collective working to make visible the link between the Gilak/Gilani people and gender rights in Iran.

The death of Mahsa (Jina) Amini has sparked a protest movement across Iran

On 13 September 2022, Mahsa (Jina) Amini, a Kurdish Iranian [was arrested](#) by Iran's Morality Police for "violating Iran's hijab and modesty law" for allegedly failing to wear appropriate head covering. [She died in custody](#) on September 16. Authorities claimed she died after falling ill from chronic medical conditions, sought to underplay her Kurdish origins by suppressing her Kurdish name, "Jina", and [pressured her family](#) to give an interview stating that she died because of underlying diseases for which she had undergone surgery in the past. Bravely, her family denied the existence of any such medical conditions, witnesses came forward stating that she was beaten up by the morality police, her brother stated that he noticed bruises on her head and legs, and [activists released medical scans](#) of her skull, showing brain edema and hemorrhage caused by severe blows to the head.

The circumstances of Amini's death have since sparked protests across Iran. Iranian women have for long fought against the compulsory hijab law, the Morality Police and the dress code imposed by the state. And Amini's death has served as a catalyst for a reform and protest movement across Iran. The protests have reportedly [spread to over 80 cities across Iran](#). Javid Rehman, UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Iran, [has stated](#) that "[t]his [hijab] law violates fundamental human rights and violates women's inherent dignity. There are a number of reasons why people are coming out to protest. Iranian authorities have used excessive force against innocent protesters who are simply asking for their rights to be recognized."

The government of Iran has responded with an internet shutdown across Iran greatly limiting the amount of information being reported. Yet, despite this shutdown, what information is coming to light shows violent suppression and gross human rights violations on a mass scale.

Iran's violent crackdown is impacting minorities, women and children in particular

Arrests are occurring everywhere, with 1,200 protesters [reported to have been arrested](#). [Radio Zamaneh](#), a leading independent media organization focused on Iran, has [compiled a list of names](#) of some 149 of those who have been arrested.

According to Iran Human Rights (IHRNGO), a prominent human rights organization, the death toll of the recent protests in Iran [has reached 76](#). Deaths have been recorded in 14 provinces: Mazandaran: 25 people; Gilan: 10 people; Western Azerbaijan: 11 people; Kermanshah: 6 people; Kurdistan: 6 people; Alborz: 4 people; Tehran: 3 people; Kohgiluyeh and Boyer Ahmad: 2 people; Isfahan: 2 person; Khorasan-Razavi: 2 person; Zanjan: 2 people; Semnan: 1 person; Qazvin: 1 person; Ilam: 1 person; East Azerbaijan: 1 person. Among those killed include Javad [Heydari](#), [Milan Haghigi](#), [Hadis Najafi](#), [Hananeh Kia](#), [Mohsen Mohammadi](#), [Nechirvan Maroufi](#), [Mohammad Parsa Sehat](#) and [Kian Derakhshan](#).

Journalists are being targeted. For example, Niloufar Hamedi, a journalist who reported on Amini's initial arrest is being [held in solitary confinement](#). Others include [Elaheh Mohammadi](#), a reporter, [Mohammad Samaknia](#), a filmmaker, and [Golrokh Iraee](#), a blogger.

A widescale militarization appears to be occurring. [Reports indicate](#) that ambulances have been commandeered in at least three cities, Tehran, Shiraz and Sanandaj, in order to attack protests by surprise. Schools have [reportedly](#) been taken over in West Azerbaijan and Iranian Kurdistan in order to serve as staging bases for attacks in those regions [including locating heavy artillery](#).

Children and youth are not only suffering from the violent crackdown, but there is evidence that they are also being used by the authorities as part of the suppression. At least four children are [reported](#) by IHRNGO to be amongst those killed. Iran Wire [notes](#) that “[h]undreds of activists in the field of children and youth in Iran published a statement on Thursday condemning the arrest of protesting teenagers and the presence of children in special units to suppress protests.” Many students are [reportedly](#) being arrested.

Moreover, while the authorities are cracking down across Iran against all who voice dissent, in keeping with standard practice in Iran, minority communities are being particularly targeted. In Balochistan, for instance, a [particularly violent crackdown](#) has been imposed against protests sparked not only by Amini's death, but also by [revelations](#) from the Imam of a town near to the provincial capital, Chabahar, that a 15 year-old girl had been raped by the local police chief. Baluch songwriter, Mona Burozei, and Baluch activist, Mobeen Baloch, [are among those arrested](#).

Similarly, widespread protests of the Azerbaijani Turkish community have been met with mass arrests in Iranian Azerbaijan and violence against members of the community. [Hadis Najafi](#), a 20 year-old young woman, was shot dead in protests, [reportedly](#) having been shot in the chest, face and neck by indiscriminate fire by security authorities. The [state response](#) to Najafi's death has [mirrored](#) that of its response to Amini, [pressuring the family](#) to state that Najafi died of natural causes.

The Kurdish community have come in for [particular attack and repression by the government](#). The Statistics and Documents Center of the Hengaw Human Rights Organization [reports](#) that since the beginning of the protests in Kurdistan more than 70 Kurdish women have been arrested in different cities of Kurdistan. Four teachers and teacher union activists, Hossam Mehdizadeh, Idris Mehdizadeh, Farzin Mowafaki, and Khabat Mozafari, [have been arrested](#). Overall, some 900 people are [reported](#) by UNPO member, Democratic Party of Iranian Kurdistan, to have been injured, 225 arrested, and 25 killed. UNPO's members, the Democratic Party of Iranian Kurdistan (PDKI) and the Komala Party of Iranian Kurdistan (Komala), have further reported that on 28 September 2022, the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) attacked both of their headquarters. Moreover, they have stated that rockets have

been fired across international borders, into Iraqi Kurdistan, similarly seeking to kill those affiliated with these movements.

Yet, in the face of the horrors being meted out across Iran, the protests bravely continue. And the events appear to be catalyzing solidarity amongst communities in Iran, including between the majority Persian community and Iran's many minority communities. For instance, UNPO's members report that efforts are underway, via the Cooperation Center of Iranian Kurdistan's Political Parties, to bring together all political parties and organizations in opposition to the regime's brutality in order to speak with one voice to the people of Iran in a united opposition movement. Because of this, true and lasting change in Iran appears possible. But this movement needs significant support from the international community.

International support for accountability in Iran is needed

There is much that the international community can do in support beyond mere condemnation of the Iranian government's actions. Specifically, in light of the efforts by the government of Iran to shield itself from any efforts domestically to seek responsibility for Mahsa (Jina) Amini's death – including its internet shutdown, violent crackdown and efforts to pressure victims and their families – a comprehensive accountability framework for Iran is needed.

Such a framework is not merely needed to uphold the rights of the people of Iran. The government of Iran's actions – from its nuclear programme, to its willingness to carry out attacks in Iraqi Kurdistan, to its long-standing programme of attacks against Iranian activists outside of Iran – present a clear threat to international peace and security.

Much responsibility rests with the European Union and European member states, in light of their leading role in diplomatic engagement with the government of Iran, including over the nuclear deal. Accordingly, the above-referenced organizations are calling on the international community, the European Union in particular, to enact a comprehensive programme of support to push for accountability in Iran, with the following features at a minimum:

1. **Establishment of an International Accountability Platform:** In the wake of the violent crackdown surrounding the 2020 Belarussian elections, the international community, including the United States of America (USA), European Union (EU) and 19 European states (Austria, Belgium, Canada, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Iceland, Latvia, Lithuania, the Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, Switzerland, Lichtenstein, the United Kingdom), [supported the establishment of an International Accountability Platform for Belarus](#). This [consists](#) of a consortium of independent Belarussian and international human rights organizations and a secretariat of legal and medical practitioners aimed at gathering evidence of violations of international human rights law being committed by the regime. A similar platform is urgently needed for Iran. This could build off of the good work of the [Aban Tribunal](#), a mechanism into the crimes committed by the regime during the 2019 fuel protests.
2. **Visa Sanctions and Arrest Warrants:** While individual financial sanctions against perpetrators will have limited impact in Iran, not least because of the pre-existing sanctions regime, there is much that the international community can do to take immediate action against perpetrators. Visa sanctions can be imposed against perpetrators, including members of the morality police and the IRGC, and their families, limiting their ability to travel or make use of international education opportunities. [Similar](#)

[measures](#) are being undertaken, for instance, within the EU as it relates to Russia and the Ukraine conflict. Similarly, arrest warrants and Interpol Red Notices can be issued against any perpetrators. Eurojust, the EU's judicial cooperation agency, is often used as a [hub to coordinate criminal cooperation](#) for serious crimes, not only within the EU but with other states, including the USA, and could readily serve as a locus for such cooperation on Iran and the current crackdown.

3. **Prosecution of Crimes Committed Against Diaspora Communities:** The UNPO [has long been working](#) to highlight the extent of threat posed by countries such as Iran, China and Russia to people living in Europe and North America or engaged at the United Nations. This threat is [particularly alive within Europe](#). With increased repression at home, governments, such as Iran, know that diaspora communities present one of the few ways in which evidence of gross human rights violations can be brought to light. Such communities need to be protected and perpetrators prosecuted accordingly. As a result, the European Union, which has a mandate covering criminal cooperation across Europe and with third countries, should [urgently initiate a programme of reform](#) to ensure that such crimes are prosecuted when they occur within its own borders.
4. **Supporting Human Rights Defenders:** Fast-track procedures should be created for victims, focused in particular on women and girls, journalists, and minority community members (particularly members of the Kurdish community) who are bearing the brunt of the current crackdown. Moreover, human rights defenders programmes, such as the EU's [ProtectDefenders.eu](#) platform, should be strengthened with direct and targeted support for human rights defenders impacted by the current crackdown.
5. **Supporting Growing Solidarity in Iran:** Greater support is needed for movements seeking change in Iran. The European Union, in particular, provides very limited support to Iranian civil society, particularly diaspora communities and minority rights organizations. Increased financial support to such human rights defenders is needed. Similarly, support should be provided to convenings of the cross section of Iran's opposition community, Persian and non-Persian alike, to foster the growing solidarity among them engendered by the current crisis and to chart a future course for a stable, multi-ethnic, rights-respecting Iran. Models already exist that could be supported, such as the [Congress of Nationalities for a Federal Iran](#), for political parties, and [Impact Iran](#), for civil society.
6. **Human Rights Conditionality in the JCPOA:** Human rights are [notably absent](#) in the Iran nuclear deal, through which the international community, led by the European Union and its member states, is negotiating with Iran for sanctions relief tied to Iran's nuclear programme. Yet the current crisis shows how interlinked human rights compliance and Iran's nuclear programme are. Without comprehensive reform to uphold human rights in Iran, the regime will continue to lurch towards militarization as it seeks to suppress the groundswell of pressure for reform. Thus, JCPOA negotiations should be frozen until a framework for human rights dialogue, in particular related to the current crisis, is included in it.