

16 January 2025

To: Member states of the United Nations Human Rights Council

Your Excellencies,

We, the undersigned civil society organizations, urge the UN Human Rights Council to urgently convene a special session to address an **unprecedented escalation in mass unlawful killings of protesters**, amidst an ongoing internet shutdown imposed since 8 January to conceal grave human rights violations and crimes under international law by Iranian authorities.

Since 28 December 2025, an escalating campaign of lethal repression aimed at crushing a mostly peaceful uprising has led to the massacres of protesters during protest dispersals, with the death toll rising to thousands, including [by official admission](#). Establishing the real death toll is not possible at the time of writing, given the unprecedented scale of mass killings since 8 January and amidst an ongoing internet blackout, which has severely impeded communication with the outside world and the ability of human rights organizations to gather and corroborate information.

Verified videos and credible information received by our organizations from individuals in Iran, including journalists, medical workers, protesters, eyewitnesses and victims' relatives, reveal widespread patterns of security forces positioned on the streets and rooftops, repeatedly firing rifles and shotguns loaded with metal pellets, targeting unarmed protesters frequently in their heads and torsos. According to eyewitness accounts and verified audiovisual evidence, medical facilities are overwhelmed with the injured while distraught families have been searching for their missing loved ones among body bags near overflowing morgues and witnessed bodies piled up in pick-up trucks, freight containers or warehouses.

The evidence gathered indicates a coordinated nationwide escalation in the security forces' unlawful use of force, firearms and other prohibited weapons against mostly peaceful protesters and bystanders since the evening of 8 January when protests grew in size nationwide. Human rights monitors previously documented that even before the escalating repression on 8 January, security forces unlawfully used rifles, shotguns loaded with metal pellets, water cannon, tear gas, as well as physical beatings, killing dozens. Raids on hospitals, involving the use of tear gas, shotguns and beatings of patients, their relatives and medical workers and arrests of injured protesters in medical facilities have also been documented.

As part of their violent crackdown, security forces have also arbitrarily arrested thousands of protesters, including children, and subjected many to enforced disappearance and incommunicado detention. Given well-documented patterns during previous protests, we are gravely concerned that detainees are at grave risk of torture and other ill-treatment as well as arbitrary executions.

The undersigned civil society organizations are gravely concerned that authorities will once again resort to swift trials that bear no resemblance to judicial proceedings and arbitrary executions to crush and deter dissent. State authorities have labelled demonstrators as “rioters” and “terrorists”, calling for a harsh response by the security forces. The Head of the Judiciary, Gholamhossein Mohseni Eje’i, has ordered provincial prosecutors to show “no leniency” to protesters and expedite their trials. Officials have also called for protesters to face capital offences, including “enmity against God” (*moharabeh*), raising fears that those arbitrarily detained may face the death penalty.

In a [statement](#) from 13 January, High Commissioner Volker Türk said he was “*horrified by the mounting violence directed by security forces at protesters across Iran*”, adding “*this cycle of horrific violence cannot continue... The killing of peaceful demonstrators must stop, and the labelling of protesters as ‘terrorists’ to justify violence against them is unacceptable*”.

Tragically for the people of Iran, the latest wave of massacres is the culmination of a long-standing pattern of lethal crackdowns on nationwide protests, including during the November 2019 protests and the Woman Life Freedom uprising of September-December 2022. In-depth investigations of the latter led the Independent International Fact-Finding Mission on the Islamic Republic of Iran to conclude that Iranian authorities committed the crimes against humanity of murder, imprisonment, torture, rape and other forms of sexual violence, persecution, enforced disappearance and other inhumane acts.

We urge UN member states to acknowledge that the repeated commission of grave human rights violations and crimes under international law, including during successive waves of protests in Iran, has been made possible by the entrenched and systemic impunity for those responsible for these crimes. The lack of criminal accountability has emboldened Iranian officials to persist in their criminal conduct and deliberately turn to mass killings of protesters demanding human rights and dignity.

In this context, the Council must now act decisively by convening a special session and adopting a strong resolution that signals unequivocally to Iranian authorities that the spiral of bloodshed and impunity must end. Through the special session, the HRC should ensure that the truth about these grave human rights violations and crimes under international law is established and evidence preserved, requesting the Fact-Finding Mission to **carry out an urgent inquiry and ensuring it has the resources to carry out its investigations**, and request that they submit recommendations on concrete avenues to pursuing comprehensive justice and ending the impunity that is driving the state policy of lethal repression.

The Council must also affirm the rights of people in Iran to freedoms of opinion, expression, association and peaceful assembly as well as their right to freely and equally participate in the political and public life of their country.

To this end, we call on the Council to:

- Extend the mandate of the Independent International Fact-Finding Mission on the Islamic Republic of Iran (FFMI) to enable continued investigations into the ongoing wave of lethal repression, and renew the mandate of the Special Rapporteur on

human rights in Iran, whose role remains vital for engaging with state authorities, including on urgent cases of individuals at risk of executions, torture and other serious human rights violations, and for serving as a visible voice for the promotion and protection of human rights for all in Iran;

- Request the FFMI to conduct an urgent inquiry, consistent with its mandate, into violations committed in the context of the current wave of protest repression, and to present its findings in an oral update at the 62nd session, and a comprehensive report at the 63rd session of the UN Human Rights Council, which should also include recommendations for a comprehensive approach for justice to break the cycle of impunity;
- Ensure that the FFMI be provided with appropriate additional resources to fulfil its mandate, including the additional reporting requested;
- Enhance the joint interactive dialogue with the FFMI and the Special Rapporteur scheduled for the 61st session of the UN Human Rights Council, to allow for the participation of other stakeholders including survivors and Iranian human rights defenders.

We thank you for your attention to these pressing issues and stand ready to provide your delegation with further information as required.

Sincerely,

1. Abdorrahman Boroumand Center for Human Rights in Iran
2. Access Now
3. Ahwaz Human Rights Organisation (AHRO)
4. All Human Rights for All in Iran
5. Amnesty International
6. AR - Artists at Risk (AR)
7. ARC-Artists at Risk Connection
8. Arseh Sevom
9. Article18
10. ARTICLE 19
11. Association for the human rights of the Azerbaijani people in Iran - AHRAZ
12. Baloch Activists Campaign
13. Balochistan Human Rights Group
14. Cairo Institute for Human Rights Studies (CIHRS)
15. Center for Human Rights in Iran (CHRI)
16. The Centre for Supporters of Human Rights (CSHR)
17. Child Rights International Network (CRIN)
18. Christian Solidarity Worldwide (CSW)
19. Defenders of Human Rights Center (کانون مدافعان حقوق بشر)
20. Education International
21. Freedom House
22. Front Line Defenders
23. Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect (GCR2P)
24. Global Human Rights Defence
25. Hawaii Institute for Human Rights

26. Hengaw
27. Human Rights Watch
28. Humanists International
29. Impact Iran
30. International Bar Association's Human Rights Institute (IBAHRI)
31. ILGA World
32. International Educational Development (IED)
33. International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH)
34. International Practice of Human Rights (IPHR)
35. International Service for Human Rights (ISHR)
36. Iran Human Rights
37. Iran Human Rights Documentation Center
38. Justice for Iran
39. Kurdistan Human Rights Association-Geneva (KMMK-G)
40. Kurdistan Human Rights Network
41. Kurdpa Human Rights Organization
42. Miaan Group
43. Minority Rights Group
44. Mouvement contre le racisme et pour l'amitié entre les peuples (MRAP)
45. Narges Foundation
46. Outright International
47. PEN Austria
48. PEN America
49. PEN Canada
50. PEN Denmark
51. PEN Melbourne
52. Physicians for Human Rights
53. Raoul Wallenberg Centre for Human Rights (RWCHR)
54. Rasank
55. Rights Realization Centre
56. Robert & Ethel Kennedy Human Rights Center
57. Siamak Pourzand Foundation
58. The Advocates for Human Rights
59. Together Against the Death Penalty (ECPM)
60. United for Iran
61. Unrepresented Nations and Peoples Organization (UNPO)
62. Women Deliver
63. World Organisation against Torture (OMCT)
64. 6Rang (Iranian LGBT+ Network)