

The Question of the Human Rights Abuses in Iran

Introduction

A conflict between the government of Iran and its citizens has developed into extensive violent and non-violent protests with an armed response by the government.

Political unrest has ensued in Iran from protests concerning the imposition of Islamic law, a continuing economic crisis, lack of freedom of expression, violation of women's rights, brutality carried out during protests, internet cutoffs and the death of Mahsa Amini.

These protests began in 2021 and are still continuing. In 2022 the death of Mahsa Amini sparked large-scale uprisings after she was arrested by Iran's morality police for failure to wear a hijab and sporting skinny jeans, later to die in custody under disputed circumstances. Iranian police claimed Amini suffered a heart attack whilst her family claim her death was caused by police brutality.

Most recently, a BBC report revealed that 26 schools had been victims of gas poisonings since November 2022, with over 1000 students being affected. None of the students have died but many suffered respiratory problems, nausea, dizziness and fatigue. Several of these attacks have been on girl's school leading many Iranians to suspect they are a deliberate attempt to prevent women's education.

Background

Religion and the creation of the Islamic Republic of Iran

The 1979 Islamic revolution replaced the Imperial State of Iran with the Islamic Republic of Iran following a referendum with 98% supporting the change. Ruhollah Khomeini, a religious cleric who had headed one of the rebel factions, was appointed the supreme leader of Iran.

The Islamic Republic's constitution requires that all laws and regulations be based on Islamic principles and the teachings of the Quran. Strict Islamic dress codes and behavior standards for both men and women are enforced, and the country's legal system includes sharia law.

Religious minorities, including Christians, Jews, and Sunni Muslims, are recognized and have some protections under the law but face limitations and discrimination in various aspects of public life.

United Nations Intervention

At its 35th special session, the UN Human Rights Council (UNHRC) decided to create a new factfinding mission to investigate alleged HUMAN Rights Abuses in the Islamic Republic of Iran related to the protests that began on 16 September 2022. 3 months later, on 14th December, the 54-member UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) on Wednesday

adopted a resolution to remove Iran from the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) with immediate effect for the remainder of its four-year term ending in 2026.

It received 29 in favour to 8 against (Bolivia, China, Kazakhstan, Nicaragua, Nigeria, Oman, Russian Federation, Zimbabwe), with 16 abstentions. The representative of Iran present described the UN request as something that would set a dangerous precedent of going against the Charter of the United Nations, “notably its basic notion of sovereign equality of States in membership with equal participation in all multilateral forums, which has been recognized as the main pillar of multilateralism”. He went on to reference the hypocrisy of the fact that “the United States has remained silent on Israel's violations of Palestinian women's rights”.

Sanctions

The US has imposed a series of sanctions on Iran for a range of reasons, including its nuclear program, support for terrorism, and human rights abuses. In 1995, President Clinton imposed trade and investment sanctions on Iran, and in 2006, the UN imposed its own sanctions on Iran's nuclear program.

The US also ramped up its sanctions on Iran's nuclear and ballistic missile programs, as well as its support for terrorism. In 2010, the US and EU imposed sanctions on Iran's oil and gas industry, including a ban on the import of Iranian oil.

Most recently, in 2018, the US withdrew from the 2015 Iran nuclear deal and reimposed economic sanctions on Iran, targeting its oil exports, banking sector, and other key industries. These sanctions have had a significant impact on Iran's economy, leading to high inflation, unemployment, and shortages of essential goods.

Human Rights Record

Iran has been criticized for its human rights record, including its treatment of minorities, political dissidents, and journalists. The government has targeted religious and ethnic minorities, including Baha'is, Christians, and Sunni Muslims, with discrimination, arbitrary detention, and harassment.

The Baha'i community, which Iran does not recognize as a legitimate religion, has been subjected to systematic persecution, including arrests, executions, and the destruction of their cemeteries and holy places. Political dissidents, including journalists, bloggers, and social media users, have faced censorship, imprisonment, and torture.

The government has also been accused of using forced confessions, denial of medical treatment, and other forms of mistreatment against prisoners. The situation has worsened in recent years, with the government cracking down on protests, detaining more political prisoners, and increasing its surveillance of citizens.

[Key Issues](#)

Discrimination

Members of religious minorities, such as Baha'is, Christians, and Sunni Muslims, have faced persecution in Iran for decades. In 2020, at least 90 Baha'i individuals were arrested or detained in Iran, and dozens were reportedly sentenced to prison terms.

Women and members of the LGBTQ+ community face discrimination and legal restrictions in Iran. Women are required to adhere to a strict dress code and are prohibited from participating in certain sports and cultural events. Homosexuality is illegal in Iran and punishable by death.

Freedom of Expression

The Iranian government has a history of suppressing political dissent and cracking down on peaceful protests. In 2019, security forces reportedly killed hundreds of protesters and arbitrarily arrested thousands more during nationwide demonstrations sparked by an increase in fuel prices.

Human Rights Violations

Human rights groups have documented cases of torture, ill-treatment, and lack of due process in Iranian prisons. In 2019, prominent human rights lawyer Nasrin Sotoudeh was sentenced to 38 years in prison and 148 lashes for defending women who protested Iran's compulsory hijab law.

Iran has one of the world's highest rates of executing juvenile offenders. According to Amnesty International, at least four juvenile offenders were executed in Iran in 2020.

Timeline

1979: The Islamic Republic of Iran is established after the overthrow of the monarchy in the Iranian Revolution.

1980-1988: Iran-Iraq War. The conflict drained Iran's resources and left the country heavily in debt, which hampered its development in the years that followed. Additionally, the war deepened political divisions within Iran and contributed to the rise of hardline factions in the government, who sought to exert greater control over society and suppress dissent.

1988: Thousands of political prisoners are executed in Iran in what is known as the "summer of blood".

1997: Reformist Mohammad Khatami is elected president of Iran. He allowed for greater freedom of press and relaxed restrictions on other political parties and NGOs but faced significant opposition from hardline conservatives.

2003: Iran is accused of pursuing nuclear weapons by the international community.

2005: Conservative Mahmoud Ahmadinejad is elected president of Iran. He advocated for a return to traditional values and promoted Iran's nuclear program. Ahmadinejad implemented several populist policies to redistribute wealth such as cash payments to families, but these policies contributed to inflation, high unemployment and corruption.

2009: Ahmadinejad is elected president again. Following this, protests erupted across the country with allegations of voter fraud. The government responded with a harsh crackdown on protesters, arresting and imprisoning thousands of people. Many were tortured, and at least 36 people were killed.

2010: The Iranian government executed two men for homosexuality, sparking international condemnation.

CRISIS

2011: Iranian authorities arrested and detained several opposition leaders, including former presidential candidates, after they called for protests inspired by the Arab Spring uprisings.

2012: Iran's judiciary announced that it would implement a new punishment for criminals: blinding them by pouring acid in their eyes.

2013: Hassan Rouhani was elected president of Iran, promising to promote human rights and improve relations with the international community.

2014: Iranian authorities arrested and imprisoned several journalists, including Washington Post correspondent Jason Rezaian, on charges of espionage.

2015: Iran reached a landmark nuclear agreement with the United States and other world powers, which lifted some of the sanctions against Iran in exchange for curbing its nuclear program.

2016: The Iranian government sentenced an Iranian-British charity worker, Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe, to five years in prison on vague charges of attempting to overthrow the government.

2017: The Iranian government executed a man who was only 17 years old at the time of his alleged crime, violating international law that prohibits the execution of juvenile offenders.

2017: The United States withdraws from the nuclear deal under the Trump Administration and reimposes sanctions on Iran.

2018: Protests erupted across Iran over economic grievances and political corruption. The government responded with a violent crackdown, arresting thousands of protesters and killing at least 25 people.

2019: Iran faced widespread condemnation for its treatment of women, particularly after footage emerged of a woman being arrested for not wearing a hijab.

2019: Further protests break out in Iran after the government raises fuel prices.

2020: Iran became one of the hardest-hit countries by the COVID-19 pandemic. The government was criticized for its slow response and lack of transparency in reporting the number of cases and deaths.

2021: Iran held a presidential election, which was marred by controversy and a low voter turnout. Ebrahim Raisi, a hardline judge accused of human rights abuses, was elected as president.

July 2021: Protests began due to worsening water shortages in Khuzestan and spread across the country

September 2021: Massive rallies protested the bad economic situation in Iran

November 2021: The number of female demonstrators heavily increased. Demonstrations against water shortages in Isfahan grew violent and were repressed by the government

February 2022: Teachers across the country performed a one-day strike after three consecutive days of protests. A policeman was stabbed to death by an unknown attacker, leading to concerns about police brutality

May 2022: Protests broke out in Iran after a hike in wheat prices

September 2022: Mahsa Amini dies under disputed circumstances

November 2022: The Islamic Revolutionary Guard, Basij militia, and police utilized live ammunition, tear gas, batons, and water cannons to quell the protests, resulting in injury and death. Over 10,000 protesters were imprisoned without due process of law. The UN Human Rights Council held a special meeting to discuss Iran and begin an investigation into the protests

December 2022: Iranian women were honored by Time magazine as Heroes of 2022. Iranian students protested and skipped class on Student Day.

7 January 2023: The authorities execute two protestors linked to the Mahsa Amini protests

9 January 2023: Hundreds of protestors gather at a prison in Karaj after word circulates that two protestors are scheduled for execution

11 January 2023: The execution of one of the protestors is suspended for a retrial

16 January 2023: 12,000 people march in solidarity with Iranian protestors in Strasbourg, France

23 January 2023: The U.S. imposes new sanctions on Iran, including designating the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps Cooperative Foundation and senior IRGC commanders

26 January 2023: The U.S. House of Representatives passes a resolution condemning the Iranian regime's human rights abuses against protestors

5 February 2023: The President of Iran reduces the sentences of at least 1,000 protestors

10 February 2023: Eight prominent exiled dissidents agree to unify against the Iranian regime

11 February 2023: Iran celebrates the anniversary of the revolution, with 20,000 protestors still in prison

14 February 2023: Iran offers a limited amnesty to over 50 political prisoners

Questions to Consider

1. How should the UN deal with state religion affecting women's rights as well as the LGBTQ+ community?
2. How can the UN investigate and address the use of torture and other forms of mistreatment by Iranian authorities against protestors, prisoners and detainees?
3. How can the UN ensure that Iran complies with international human rights standards and protects the rights of minority groups, including ethnic and religious minorities?
4. How can the UN encourage Iran to increase its cooperation with the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) and provide greater access to its nuclear facilities for inspections?
5. How can the UN support efforts to increase women's participation in politics and decision-making processes in Iran?
6. How can the UN promote freedom of expression and protect the rights of journalists, bloggers, and activists in Iran?

7. What can be done to improve the economic situation in Iran and address the root causes of civil unrest?
8. What should Iran's position be on committees pertaining to women's rights?

Useful Links

Recent report by BBC on gas poisonings in Iranian schools

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-64816750>

Report by Amnesty International: <https://www.amnesty.org/en/location/middle-east-and-north-africa/iran/report-iran/>

Report by CNBC: <https://www.cnbc.com/2022/09/23/mass-protests-in-iran-is-the-regimes-biggest-challenge-in-years.html>

Report by UK Parliament: <https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/research-briefings/cbp-9679/>

YouTube video by The Economist: [Iran protests: can they topple the regime?](#)

Coming problems to Iran's economy: <https://www.iranintl.com/en/202211078535>

Removal of Iran from UN Commission on Status of Women:

<https://news.un.org/en/story/2022/12/1131722>

Report by Forbes on Iran's expulsion from the Commission on Status of Women:

<https://www.forbes.com/sites/stephaniefillion/2022/12/14/united-nations-expels-iran-from-womens-commission-over-human-rights-abuses/?sh=30dadbbc7e5b>