

IRAN 2022 INTERNATIONAL RELIGIOUS FREEDOM REPORT

Executive Summary

The constitution defines the country as an Islamic republic and specifies Twelver Ja'afari Shia Islam as the official state religion. It states all laws and regulations must be based on "Islamic criteria" and an official interpretation of sharia. The constitution states citizens shall enjoy human, political, economic, and other rights, "in conformity with Islamic criteria." The penal code provides for hudud punishments (those mandated by sharia), including amputation, flogging, and stoning. It specifies the death penalty for proselytizing and attempts by non-Muslims to convert Muslims as well as for moharebeh ("enmity against God") and sabb al-nabi ("insulting the Prophet or Islam"). According to the penal code, the application of the death penalty varies depending on the religion of both the perpetrator and the victim. In 2021, parliament amended the penal code to criminalize insulting "divine religions or Islamic schools of thought" and committing "any deviant educational or proselytizing activity that contradicts or interferes with the sacred law of Islam." Nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) said these new provisions put religious minorities at a higher risk of persecution. The law prohibits Muslim citizens from changing or renouncing their religious beliefs. The constitution states Zoroastrians, Jews, and Christians (excluding converts from Islam) are the only recognized religious minorities permitted to worship and form religious societies "within the limits of the law."

According to numerous international human rights NGOs and media reporting, the government convicted and executed dissidents, political reformers, and peaceful protesters on charges of "enmity against God" and spreading anti-Islamic propaganda. Authorities carried out hudud punishments such as amputation of fingers (for theft), flogging, and internal exile. The government denied individuals access to attorneys and obtained false confessions through torture in some cases. It reportedly detained and held members of religious minorities incommunicado. In his July report on human rights in Iran, the UN special rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Islamic Republic of Iran (UNSR) expressed alarm at "the disproportionate number of executions of members of minority communities, in particular the Baluch and Kurdish minorities," who together accounted for 35 percent of the 251 individuals executed between January and June. The Abdorrahman Boroumand Center for

Human Rights in Iran (ABC) reported there were 576 executions in 2022, including 71 in December, an increase from 317 executions in 2021 and 248 in 2020. On November 16, Amnesty International reported that authorities were seeking the death penalty for at least 21 persons, many for “enmity against God.” The Human Rights Activists News Agency (HRANA) stated that during the year, the government arrested 140 individuals, imprisoned 39, issued travel bans against 51, summoned 102, raided the homes of 94, and brought 11 to trial for their religious beliefs. Government officials, including the Supreme Leader, routinely engaged in egregious antisemitic rhetoric and Holocaust denial and distortion.

In September, 22-year-old ethnic Kurd Mahsa Amini, a Sunni, died in the custody of the *Gasht-e-Ershad* (literally “Guidance Patrol” but more commonly known as “Morality Police”) after being detained for allegedly wearing her hijab improperly and thereby violating the country’s strict Islamic dress code. Her death sparked nationwide protests, particularly in regions home to minority populations, including Amini’s home province of Kurdistan. According to NGOs and media reports, on September 30, security forces killed several dozen Baluch protesters in Zahedan city, Sistan and Baluchistan Province, and injured hundreds more during demonstrations after Friday prayers, sparked by Amini’s death. The demonstrators also demanded accountability for the alleged rape of a 15-year-old girl by a police commander. According to analysis by Human Rights Watch (HRW), police and intelligence agents opened fire on unarmed protestors from rooftops around the open-air Sunni Grand Mosalla prayer complex and the Maki Mosque, the main Sunni mosque in Zahedan and the largest Sunni mosque in the country. At year’s end, the Human Rights Activists News Agency (HRANA) reported that government security forces had killed 512 protestors, including 69 children, and arrested or detained 19,204 individuals since the outbreak of demonstrations in September. On December 8, authorities executed Mohsen Shekari for “enmity against God,” the first reported instance of the death penalty being imposed on an individual tied to the nationwide protests.

According to the Baha’i International Community (BIC), Amnesty International, multiple international news organizations, and the United Nations, in July and August, security forces in cities across the country conducted multiple raids of Baha’i homes, confiscated property deemed “illegitimate wealth,” and arrested Baha’is in their homes or workplaces on unsubstantiated charges including “causing intellectual and ideological insecurity in Muslim society.” In October, the

organization Baha'is of the United States stated that more than 1,000 Baha'is were being held within the criminal justice system. In August, a group of UN human rights experts released a joint statement calling on the government to stop the increasing arbitrary arrests and enforced disappearances of members of the Baha'i Faith and the destruction or confiscation of their properties in what the experts said "bears all the signs of a policy of systematic persecution."

Officials continued to disproportionately arrest, detain, harass, and surveil Christians, particularly evangelicals and other converts from Islam, according to Christian NGOs. Authorities also forcibly disappeared Christian converts, whom it accused of "Zionism" and proselytizing. On November 24, the UN Human Rights Council adopted a resolution calling on the government to "uphold all human rights, including the rights to freedom of opinion, expression, peaceful assembly, association and religion or belief." According to the database of the NGO United for Iran, *Iran Prison Atlas*, at least 75 individuals remained imprisoned for religious practice. Of the prisoners listed in the database, many were sentenced on charges of "enmity against God," or "insulting Islamic sanctities." Those imprisoned included Baha'is, Christians, including Christian converts, Gonabadi Dervishes, Sunnis, and some Shia. Human rights NGOs reported poor prison conditions and mistreatment of religious minority prisoners, including beatings, degradation specifically targeting their religious beliefs, and denial of medical treatment. In July, according to several NGOs, at least 22 Sunni prisoners in Karaj city went on a hunger strike to protest the refusal of Tehran prosecutor Ali Salehi to address poor prison conditions, to which Salehi responded, "Sunni citizens do not even have the right to live in Iran."

In August, *IranWire* reported that the government published a 119-page document, *Hijab and Chastity Project*, detailing the government's hijab policy and calling for stronger measures of strict enforcement. Sunni Muslims said the government did not permit them to build prayer facilities sufficient to accommodate their numbers, and government restrictions forced many Christian converts and members of unrecognized religious minority groups, such as Baha'is and Yarsanis, to assemble in private homes to practice their faith in secret. The Jewish community in Tehran warned people via the messaging app Telegram to not visit synagogues during the High Holy Days "due to the dangerous situation."

Authorities reportedly continued to deny members of unrecognized religious minority groups access to education and government employment unless they declared themselves as belonging to one of the country's recognized religions on their application forms. UN experts reported universities rejected more than 90 Baha'i students between January and August. The NGO Institute for Monitoring Peace and Cultural Tolerance in School Education (IMPACT-se) reported, "The curriculum remains rife with antisemitic rhetoric" and textbooks also contained anti-Sunni material. Government officials and government-affiliated organizations continued to disseminate anti-Baha'i and antisemitic messages using traditional and social media. On December 15, the UN General Assembly approved a resolution expressing concern regarding "ongoing severe limitations and increasing restrictions on the right to freedom of thought, conscience, religion or belief, restrictions on the establishment of places of worship, undue restrictions on burials carried out in accordance with religious tenets, attacks against places of worship and burial, and other human rights violations, including but not limited to the increased harassment, intimidation, persecution, arbitrary arrests and detention of, and incitement to hatred that leads to violence against, persons belonging to recognized and unrecognized religious minorities."

On November 7, the Ministry of Intelligence and Security stated it had arrested 26 individuals in connection with an attack on a Shia shrine in Shiraz city, in Fars Province, for which ISIS claimed responsibility. On August 15, Radio Farda reported, "In a sign of ... rising anger [against the clerical regime], physical attacks against clerics appear to be increasing," and that, as a result, some religious officials did not wear their robes or turbans in public to avoid being targeted, while others warned about public anger and the decline in the stature and influence of the Shia clergy. The press and NGOs reported several attacks on Shia clerics during the year. According to multiple sources, non-Shia Muslims and those affiliated with a religion other than Islam, especially members of the Baha'i community, continued to face discrimination in employment and other societal discrimination and harassment. Prominent Sunni cleric Molavi Abdolhamid Izmaee Izahi criticized the government in a number of Friday sermons and called on it to release those arrested during antiregime protests, to respect the rights of all religious minorities, and to stop accusing members of the Baha'i Faith of apostasy. According to human rights NGOs, converts from Islam to Christianity faced ongoing societal pressure and rejection by community members. Sunni students reported professors continued to routinely insult Sunni religious figures

in class. Baha'is reported continued destruction and vandalism of their cemeteries.

The United States does not have diplomatic relations with Iran. During the year, the U.S. government used public statements, sanctions, and diplomatic initiatives in international forums to condemn and promote accountability for the government's abuses against and restrictions on worship by members of religious minorities. The President and other senior U.S. government officials expressed support for peaceful protesters in the wake of Mahsa Amini's death; they used social media to affirm the rights of the country's religious minorities and condemn officials for antisemitic statements.

Since 1999, Iran has been designated as a "Country of Particular Concern" (CPC) under the International Religious Freedom Act of 1998 for having engaged in or tolerated particularly severe violations of religious freedom. On November 30, 2022, the Secretary of State redesignated Iran as a CPC. The following sanction was identified in connection with the designation: visa restrictions pursuant to section 221(c) of the Iran Threat Reduction and Syria Human Rights Act of 2012 (TRA) for certain senior officials of the Government of Iran identified under section 221(a)(1)(C) of the TRA in connection with the commission of serious human rights abuses against citizens of Iran or their family members.

Section I. Religious Demography

The U.S. government estimates the population at 86.8 million (midyear 2022). According to Iranian government estimates, Muslims constitute 99.4 percent of the population, of whom 90 to 95 percent are Shia, and 5 to 10 percent are Sunni. Most Sunnis are Turkmen, Arabs, Baluch, and Kurds, living in the northeast, southwest, southeast, and northwest provinces, respectively. Afghan refugees, economic migrants, and displaced persons also make up a significant Sunni population, but accurate statistics on the breakdown of the Afghan refugee population between Sunni and Shia are unavailable. There are no official statistics available on the number of Muslims who are Sufi adherents, although unofficial reports estimate several million. A very small number of Ahmadi Muslims also reside in the country.

According to U.S. government estimates, groups constituting the remaining less than 1 percent of the population include Baha'is, Christians, Yarsanis, Jews, Sabeen-Mandaeans, and Zoroastrians. The three largest non-Muslim minorities are Baha'is, Christians, and Yarsanis.

According to HRW data, Baha'is number at least 300,000.

The government Statistical Center of Iran reports there are 117,700 Christians in the country, as of the 2016 census. Some estimates, however, suggest there may be many more than reported. According to Boston University's 2020 World Religion Database, there are approximately 579,000 Christians. The London-based NGO Article 18, based on a 2020 online survey conducted by the Netherlands-based Group for Analyzing and Measuring Attitudes in Iran (GAMAAN) in conjunction with the head of the ABC, suggested there could be as many as one million Christians, while the Christian advocacy NGO Open Doors USA estimates the number is 1.24 million.

Estimates by the Assyrian Church of the total Assyrian and Chaldean Christian population put their combined number at 7,000. The Assyrian Policy Institute estimates there are fewer than 50,000 Assyrian Christians in the country, the majority residing in Tehran, with 15,000 residing in the northern city of Urmia. There are also Protestant denominations, including evangelical groups, but there is no authoritative data on their numbers. Christian groups outside the country disagree on the size of the Protestant community, with some estimates citing figures lower than 10,000. Many Protestants and converts to Christianity from Islam reportedly practice in secret.

There is no official count of Yarsanis, but estimates from human rights organizations and news outlets, including *IranWire*, range between one and three million. Yarsanis are mainly located in Lorestan and the Kurdish regions.

According to recent estimates from Armenian Christians who maintain contact with the Christian community in the country, their current numbers are approximately 40,000 to 50,000. The number of Roman Catholics in the country is estimated to be 21,000.

According to Zoroastrian groups and the government-run Statistical Center of Iran, the population includes approximately 25,000 Zoroastrians, although the 2020 World Religion Database estimates this number to be 64,000.

According to the Tehran Jewish Committee, the population includes approximately 9,000 Jews, while a member of the community estimated their number at 20,000 during a 2021 visit to the United States.

Government media report the population includes 14,000 Sabean-Mandaeans.

The 2020 World Religion Database estimates there are 9,000 atheists and 239,000 agnostics in the country. The 2020 online survey conducted by GAMAAN found that 22 percent of respondents did not believe in God.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal Framework

The constitution defines the country as an Islamic republic and designates Twelver Ja'afari Shia Islam as the official state religion. The constitution stipulates all laws and regulations must be based on "Islamic criteria" and an official interpretation of sharia. The constitution states citizens shall enjoy all human, political, economic, social, and cultural rights "in conformity with Islamic criteria."

The constitution prohibits the investigation of an individual's ideas and states no one may be "subjected to questioning and aggression for merely holding an opinion." The law prohibits Muslims from changing or renouncing their religious beliefs. The only recognized conversions are from other religions to Islam. Sharia as interpreted by the government considers conversion from Islam apostasy, a crime punishable by death. Under the law, a child born to a Muslim father is Muslim.

By law, non-Muslims may not engage in public persuasion or attempt to convert a Muslim to another faith or belief. The law considers these activities to be proselytizing and punishable by death. In addition, citizens who are not recognized as Christians, Zoroastrians, or Jews may not engage in public religious expression, such as worshiping in a church or wearing religious symbols such as a

cross. The government makes some exceptions for foreigners belonging to unrecognized religious groups.

The penal code specifies the death sentence for moharebeh (“enmity against God,” which, according to the *Oxford Dictionary of Islam*, means in Quranic usage “corrupt conditions caused by unbelievers or unjust people that threaten social and political wellbeing”), *fitna* (“corruption on earth,” which includes apostasy or heresy), and sabb al-nabi. According to the penal code, the application of the death penalty varies depending on the religion of both the perpetrator and the victim. In 2021, the government amended the penal code, adding provisions criminalizing “insulting legally recognized religions and Iranian ethnicities.” The amendments allow authorities to impose a sentence of two to five years in prison, a monetary fine where violence is involved, and between six months and two years and a monetary fine where violence is not involved, on anyone who “insults Iranian ethnicities or divine religions or Islamic schools of thought recognized under the constitution.” Under the amendments, authorities may impose prison sentences of two to five years and a fine on anyone who commits “any deviant educational or proselytizing activity that contradicts or interferes with the sacred law of Islam.”

The constitution states the four Sunni schools (Hanafi, Shafi, Maliki, and Hanbali) and the Shia Zaydi school of Islam are “deserving of total respect,” and their followers are free to perform religious practices. It states these schools may follow their own jurisprudence in matters of religious education and certain personal affairs, including marriage, divorce, and inheritance.

The constitution states Zoroastrians, Jews, and Christians are the only recognized religious minorities. “Within the limits of the law,” they have permission to perform religious rites and ceremonies and to form religious societies. They are also free to address personal affairs and religious education according to their own religious canon. The government considers any citizen who is not a registered member of one of these three groups or who cannot prove his or her family was Christian prior to 1979 to be Muslim.

The constitution bars discrimination based on race, gender, disability, language, and social status “in conformity with Islamic criteria,” but the government did not effectively enforce these prohibitions. According to the constitution, “Everyone

has the right to choose any occupation he wishes, if it is not contrary to Islam and the public interests and does not infringe on the rights of others.”

Because the law prohibits citizens from converting from Islam to another religion, the government only recognizes the Christianity of citizens who are Armenian or Assyrian Christians, because the presence of these groups in the country predates Islam, or of citizens who can prove they or their families were Christian prior to the 1979 revolution. The government also recognizes Sabean-Mandaeans as Christian, even though adherents to that faith state they do not consider themselves as such. The government often considers Yarsanis as Shia Muslims practicing Sufism, but Yarsanis identify Yarsan as a distinct faith (also known as *Ahl-e-Haq* or *Kakai*). Yarsanis may also self-register as Shia to obtain government services. The government does not recognize evangelical Protestants as Christian.

Citizens who are members of one of the recognized religious minorities must register with authorities. Registration conveys certain rights, including the use of alcohol for religious purposes. Authorities may close a church and arrest its leaders if churchgoers do not register or if unregistered individuals attend services.

The constitution provides that the judiciary be “an independent power” that is “free from every kind of unhealthy relation and connection.” The government appoints judges “in accordance with religious criteria.” The constitution provides that a judge should rule on a case based on codified law, but, in a situation where such law is absent, he should deliver his judgment based on “authoritative Islamic sources and authentic fatwas.”

The Islamic republic is a Shia Islamic political system based on *Velayat-e Faqih* (Guardianship of the Jurist). Shia clergy, most notably the *Rahbar-e Mo’azzam* (Supreme Leader), and political leaders vetted by the clergy dominate key power structures. The Supreme Leader (the country’s head of state) holds constitutional authority over the judiciary, government-run media, and other key institutions, and oversees extrajudicial special clerical courts, which are not provided for by the constitution. These courts, each headed by a Shia Islamic legal scholar, operate outside the judiciary’s purview and investigate offenses committed by clerics, including nonreligious activities and political statements inconsistent with

government policy. These courts also issue rulings based on independent interpretations of Islamic legal sources.

The Supreme Leader holds ultimate authority over all security agencies. The Ministry of Intelligence and Security and law enforcement forces under the Interior Ministry, which report to the President, and the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps, which reports to the Supreme Leader, share responsibility for law enforcement and maintaining order. The *Basij*, a nationwide volunteer paramilitary group, is an auxiliary law enforcement unit subordinate to the Revolutionary Guard.

According to the constitution, Islamic scholars in the Assembly of Experts, a group of 86 popularly elected and supreme leader-approved clerics, whose qualifications include piety and religious scholarship, elect the supreme leader. To “safeguard” Islamic ordinances and to ensure legislation passed by the Islamic Consultative Assembly (parliament) is compatible with Islam, a Guardian Council, composed of six Shia clerics appointed by the supreme leader and six Shia legal scholars nominated by the judiciary, must review and approve all legislation. The Guardian Council also vets all candidates for the Assembly of Experts, president, and parliament, and supervises elections for those bodies. Individuals who are not Shia Muslims are barred from serving as supreme leader or president as well as from being a member of the Assembly of Experts, Guardian Council, or Expediency Council (the country’s highest arbiter of disputes between the parliament and the Guardian Council over legislation).

Non-Muslims may not be elected to a representative body or hold senior government, intelligence, or military positions, with the exception of five of the 290 parliamentary seats reserved by the constitution for members of recognized religious minority groups. There are two seats reserved for Armenian Christians, one for Assyrian and Chaldean Christians together, one for Jews, and one for Zoroastrians. The constitution provides for the establishment of political parties, professional and political associations, and Islamic and recognized religious minority organizations, as long as such groups do not violate the principles of freedom, sovereignty, national unity, or Islamic criteria, or question Islam as the basis of the country’s system of government.

The constitution prohibits parliament from passing laws contrary to Islam and states there may be no amendment to its provisions related to the “Islamic character” of the political or legal system or to the specification that Twelver Ja’afari Shia Islam is the official religion.

The constitution states that in regions where followers of one of the recognized schools of Sunni Islam constitute the majority, local regulations are to be in accordance with that school, within the bounds of the jurisdiction of local councils and without infringing upon the rights of the followers of other schools.

The constitution specifies the government must “treat non-Muslims in conformity with the principles of Islamic justice and equity, and respect their human rights, as long as those non-Muslims have not conspired or acted against Islam and the Islamic Republic.”

The constitution provides for freedom of the press, except when it is “harmful to the principles of Islam or the rights of the public.”

The law authorizes collection of “blood money,” or *diyya*, as restitution to families for Muslims and members of recognized religious minorities who are victims of murder, bodily harm, or property damage. Baha’i families, however, are not entitled to receive blood money. This law also sets the blood money for recognized religious minorities and women at half that of a Muslim man. Women are entitled to equal blood money as men for insurance claims where loss of life occurred in automobile accidents, but not for other categories of death, such as murder. In cases of bodily harm, according to the law, certain male organs (for example, the testicles) are worth more than the entire body of a woman.

The criminal code provides for hudud punishments (those mandated by sharia) for theft, including amputation of the fingers of the right hand, amputation of the left foot, life imprisonment, and death, as well as flogging of up to 99 lashes or stoning for other crimes. As part of hudud, the code allows for *qisas* (retribution in kind). The code also allows for *ta’zir*, which allows judges to use their personal discretion to determine punishment.

The penal code provides women who appear in public without “prescribed Islamic dress,” i.e., hijab, may be sentenced to either imprisonment of between 10 days and two months, or a fine of between 50,000 and 500,000 rials (\$1 and \$12).

The Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance and the Ministry of Intelligence and Security monitor religious activity. The Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC), an independent, stand-alone branch of the armed services charged with protecting the integrity of the Islamic Republic and reporting directly to the Supreme Leader, also monitors churches.

The Ministry of Education determines the religious curricula of public schools. All school curricula, public and private, must include a course on Shia Islamic teachings and all pupils must pass this course to advance to the next educational level, through university. Sunni students and students from recognized minority religious groups must take and pass the courses on Shia Islam, although they may also take separate courses on their own religious beliefs. Applicants to university must pass an exam on Islamic, Christian, or Jewish theology, based on their official religious affiliation.

Recognized minority religious groups, except for Sunni Muslims, may operate private schools. The Ministry of Education supervises private schools operated by recognized minority religious groups and imposes certain curriculum requirements. The ministry must approve all textbooks used in coursework, including religious texts. These schools may provide their own religious instruction and in languages other than Farsi, but authorities must approve those texts as well. Minority communities must bear the cost of translating the texts into Farsi for official review. Directors of such private schools must demonstrate loyalty to the state and adherence to Shia Islam. This requirement, known as *gozinesh* review, is an evaluation to determine adherence to the governmental ideology and system as well as knowledge of the official interpretation of Shia Islam.

The law bars Baha’is from founding or operating their own educational institutions. A Ministry of Science, Research, and Technology order requires universities to exclude Baha’is from access to higher education, or to expel them if their religious affiliation becomes known. Government regulations state Baha’is are only permitted to enroll in universities if they do not identify themselves as

Baha'is. To register for the university entrance examination, Baha'i students must identify themselves as followers of one of the four officially recognized religions (i.e., Islam, Christianity, Judaism, or Zoroastrianism).

By law, non-Muslims may not serve in the judiciary, the security services (which are separate from the regular armed forces), or as public school principals. Officials screen candidates for elected offices and applicants for public sector employment based on their adherence to and knowledge of Islam and loyalty to the Islamic Republic (gozinesh review requirements), although members of recognized religious minorities may serve in the lower ranks of government if they meet these loyalty requirements. Government workers who do not observe Islamic principles and rules are subject to penalties and may be fired or barred from work in a particular sector.

The constitution does not provide for the establishment or the mandate of the revolutionary courts, which were created pursuant to the former Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini's edict immediately following the 1979 revolution, with a sharia judge appointed as the head of the courts. The courts were originally intended as a temporary measure to try high-level officials of the deposed monarchy, but they became institutionalized and continue to operate in parallel to the criminal justice system.

The Special Clerical Court is headed by a Shia Islamic legal scholar, overseen by the Supreme Leader, and charged with investigating alleged offenses committed by clerics and issuing rulings based on an independent interpretation of Islamic legal sources. As with the revolutionary courts, the constitution does not provide for the Special Clerical Court, which operates outside the judiciary's purview. Clerical courts prosecute Shia clerics who express controversial ideas and participate in activities outside the sphere of religion, such as journalism or reformist political activities.

The government bars Baha'is from all government employment and forbids Baha'i participation in the government's social pension system. Baha'is may not receive compensation for injury or crimes committed against them and may not inherit property. A religious fatwa from the Supreme Leader encourages citizens to avoid all dealings with Baha'is.

Recognized religious groups issue marriage contracts in accordance with their religious laws. The government does not recognize Baha'i marriages or divorces but allows a civil attestation of marriage. The attestation serves as a marriage certificate and allows for basic recognition of the union but does not offer legal protections in marital disputes.

The constitution states the military must be Islamic, must be committed to Islamic ideals, and must recruit individuals who are committed to the objectives of the Islamic revolution. In addition to the regular military, the IRGC is charged with upholding the Islamic nature of the revolution at home and abroad. The law does not provide for exemptions from military service based on religious affiliation or conscientious objection. The law forbids non-Muslims from holding positions of authority over Muslims in the armed forces. Members of recognized religious minorities with a college education may serve as officers during their mandatory military service, but they may not continue to serve beyond the mandatory service period to become career military officers.

The country is a party to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, but at the time of ratification in 1975, it entered a general reservation "not to apply any provisions or articles of the Convention that are incompatible with Islamic Laws and the international legislation in effect."

Government Practices

According to UN experts, numerous international human rights NGOs and media reports, the government continued to arrest, convict, and execute dissidents, political reformers, and peaceful protesters on charges of "spreading corruption on earth," "enmity against God," and producing anti-Islamic propaganda. Officials arrested and disappeared Baha'i, Kurdish, and Baluch minority individuals, including civil society activists, labor rights activists, environmentalists, writers, university students, teachers, and political activists. In an August report titled *Situation of human rights in the Islamic Republic of Iran - Report of the Secretary-General*, the UN Secretary-General stated, "Numerous testimonies and reports by nongovernmental organizations, individuals, victims, and their families were received concerning potential violations of the right to life allegedly by the State, including arbitrary executions, use of deadly force by security forces against peaceful protesters and border couriers, as well as arbitrary deprivation of life in

detention as a result of torture or denial of timely access to medical care.” The UN Secretary-General stated authorities harassed minority rights activists. Because religion and ethnicity are often closely linked, it was difficult to categorize many incidents as being solely based on religious identity. In November, the UK-based NGO Minority Rights Group International (MRG) stated that the protests during the year went beyond the voicing of immediate grievances and “targeted the ideological nature of the Islamic Republic.”

On September 16, 22-year-old Sunni Kurdish citizen Mahsa (Zhina) Amini died while in the custody of the Morality Police. They detained her on September 13 while she was visiting Tehran with family members from her hometown of Saqiz, in Kurdistan Province, allegedly for wearing her hijab improperly and thus violating the country’s dress code, which is based on the state’s interpretation of sharia. The government attributed her death to a pre-existing illness, a claim her family repeatedly and publicly denied. The family said she died after officers beat her about the head. Her death sparked nationwide protests against the mandatory hijab and the government’s treatment of women. Social media and international press reported women of all ages, including schoolgirls, protested by publicly removing and in some cases burning their hijabs.

At year’s end, HRANA reported government security forces had killed 512 protestors, including 69 children, since the outbreak of antigovernment demonstrations in September. HRANA also reported that the government arrested or detained 19,204 individuals.

On October 26, 22 UN human rights experts, including the Special Rapporteur on the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and of association and the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Islamic Republic of Iran, issued a joint statement condemning the government’s violent and sometimes deadly crackdown on peaceful protesters, “including alleged arbitrary arrests and detentions, gender-based and sexual violence, excessive use of force, torture, and enforced disappearances.” The experts said, “We are deeply troubled by continued reports of deliberate and unlawful use by the Iranian security forces of live ammunition, metal pellets and buckshot against peaceful unarmed protesters... An alarming number of protesters have already been detained and killed, many of whom are children, women, and older persons.” The experts said there was evidence government officials threatened protesters’ family members.

September 30 became known among citizens and in the media as “bloody Friday” when, according to Amnesty International, Radio Farda, *IranWire*, and other NGOs and media reports, security forces killed several dozen Baluch protesters in Zahedan city, and injured hundreds more during demonstrations sparked by Amini’s death and fueled by reports that a police official had raped a 15-year-old Baluch girl. After Sunni cleric Molavi Abdolhamid Ismaeelzahi called for an investigation of the case during his Friday sermon, worshippers assembled to protest at a police station. Videos posted on social media showed security forces shooting at protesters, including from rooftops. The government instituted an internet blackout immediately, making it difficult to obtain accurate information. Some of the casualties were children. In December, HRW published a study of the September 30 violence. According to HRW, after the conclusion of Friday prayers on that day, police and intelligence agents opened fire on unarmed protestors from rooftops around the open-air Sunni Grand Mosalla prayer complex and the Maki Mosque, the main Sunni mosque in Zahedan and the largest Sunni mosque in the country.

Human rights NGOs reported especially violent responses to protesters in the Sunni-majority Kurdistan Province. According to the Center for Human Rights in Iran (CHRI), on October 9, authorities killed at least four persons and injured more than 100. The Kurdish human rights NGO Hengaw posted videos, reportedly from the city of Sanandaj, showing gunfire and explosions with a caption stating the city was being “heavily shelled.”

The *Washington Times* reported in October that a senior fellow for international religious freedom at the Family Research Council said in the wake of Amini’s death, more than 300 Christian citizens released a public letter protesting the regime as a “bloodthirsty infection” on the nation. According to the senior fellow, the protest letter represented the first time the Christian community had made a statement against the regime.

The UN Secretary-General stated in his August report that authorities continued to use force against border couriers, who are primarily members of the Kurdish and Baluch minorities. According to the report, border officials shot at least 18 couriers between January and March 20.

On November 24, the UN Human Rights Council adopted a resolution titled “Deteriorating situation of human rights in the Islamic Republic of Iran, especially with respect to women and children.” The resolution noted the protests following the death of Mahsa Amini, expressed deep concern over the government’s violent crackdown on peaceful protests, and called on the government to “uphold all human rights, including the rights to freedom of opinion, expression, peaceful assembly, association, and religion or belief.”

In his August report on human rights in the country, the UN Secretary-General stated that during the year, authorities continued to impose the death penalty for charges including “spreading corruption on earth” and “enmity against God.” On December 17, *IranWire* reported the government, since 2008, executed an average of 25 persons per year on charges of “enmity towards God” and “spreading corruption on earth.” *IranWire* cited the Oslo-based NGO Iran Human Rights as the source of this information but stated “the actual number is believed to be higher.”

In his July report on human rights in the country, the UNSR expressed alarm at “the disproportionate number of executions of members of minority communities, in particular the Baluch and Kurdish minorities.” The UNSR stated that between January 1 and June 30, 62 out of 251 individuals executed (25 percent) were from the Baluch minority. In the same period, the government executed over 25 individuals from the Kurdish minority (10 percent), the majority on murder charges. Amnesty International, HRANA, and other NGOs reported an increase in the execution of ethnic minority prisoners during the year.

Human rights groups told the expatriate news outlet Iran International that on June 6, the government hanged 12 Baluch, including one woman, in Zahedan Prison in Sistan and Baluchistan Province. On August 19, according to Iran Human Rights, the government executed five Baluch men in Zahedan prison, three for drug-related offences. The other two, including 17-year-old Omid Alizehi, were sentenced to qisas for murder. Alizehi allegedly committed murder during a street fight. Initially, according to Iran Human Rights, the death was ruled unintentional, but the victim’s family successfully petitioned for a change to the verdict; Alizehi’s family reportedly could not afford an attorney.

On December 26, HRANA released its annual report on human rights in the country. According to HRANA, the government executed at least 565 individuals – including 11 women and five juveniles – by hanging, compared with 299 individuals in the prior year, an increase of 88 percent. One execution was carried out in public. Forty-nine percent of the executions were for murder, while 43 percent were for drug offenses, 3 percent for rape, 2 percent for offenses classified as “corruption on earth,” and the remainder for other charges. The majority of executions (18.6 percent) took place in Sistan and Baluchistan Province. ABC reported that there were 576 executions during the year, including 71 in December, an increase from 317 executions in 2021 and 248 in 2020.

Radio Farda reported that on June 20, authorities executed Abdolatif Moradi, a citizen of Uzbek descent who was sentenced to death for killing two Shia clerics – Hojatoleslam Mohammad Aslani and Mohammad Sadegh Daraei – and wounding another in a knife attack at the Imam Reza shrine in Mashhad city, the largest religious complex in the country, on April 5 during Ramadan. Authorities charged Moradi with “enmity against God” and executed him by hanging. According to *al-Jazeera*, the attacker, whom the website *Middle East Eye* described as having “radical Sunni views,” expressed contempt for Shia Islam during the attack. Interior Minister Ahmad Vahidi described Moradi’s actions as a “terrorist attack,” while other officials, including President Ebrahim Raisi, reportedly blamed “takfiri elements,” a reference to radical Sunni Islamist groups. After the attack, the state news agency reported that Sunni scholars throughout the country issued statements condemning the attack. The government said it arrested six others connected to the attack.

On December 8, authorities executed Mohsen Shekari by hanging, the first reported instance of the death penalty being imposed on an individual tied to the nationwide protests. State media reported that a revolutionary court found Shekari guilty of “enmity against God.” Authorities accused him of being a “rioter” who blocked a main road in Tehran in September and wounded a member of a paramilitary force with a machete. An activist told the BBC that the court convicted Shekari after a “show trial without any due process.”

On December 12, authorities in Mashhad executed Majid Reza Rahnavard after he was found guilty of “enmity against God” for the alleged killing of two security officers. According to HRW, authorities arrested Rahnavard on November 19,

started a trial on November 29, and executed him 13 days later (23 days after his arrest). The *Washington Post* reported that Rahnavard was publicly executed by being hanged from a construction crane.

Judicial institutions sentenced religious minorities to imprisonment, suspended imprisonment, flogging, internal exile, and fines. In its annual report, HRANA stated that according to information released by the Iranian Department of Statistics, during the year, the government arrested 140 individuals, imprisoned 39, issued travel bans against 51, summoned 102, raided the homes of 94, and brought 11 to trial for their religious beliefs. HRANA stated 64.6 percent of cases violated the rights of Baha'is, 20.8 percent the rights of Christians, 8.8 percent Yarsanis, 4.6 Sunnis, and less than 2 percent Gonabadi dervishes and others.

On May 8, according to HRANA, IRGC intelligence agents arrested four Christian converts, Behnam Akhlaghi, Babak Hossein-Zadeh, Ayoub Pourreza-Zadeh, and Ahmad Sarparast, and took them to an unknown location. Akhlaghi and Hossein-Zadeh, whom authorities had previously been sentenced to five years in prison on a charge of "acting against national security and promoting Evangelical Christianity and Zionism," were released after a few days. Authorities sentenced Pourreza-Zadeh and Sarparast in April to five years in prison on charges of "holding home church services, propaganda against the regime, and association with Zionism and the Branhamist [non-Trinitarian Church of Iran] sect." In June, Branch 18 of the Gilan Court of Appeals upheld the sentences along with that of a third Christian convert, Morteza Hajeb.

According to Article 18, on July 30, authorities arrested Christian convert Mohammad Golbaz at his motorcycle repair shop and held him incommunicado at an unknown location for four days before allowing him to call his parents. Before his arrest, agents had searched the home of Golbaz's parents and confiscated a framed picture of Jesus. Article 18 said the charges against him remained unknown.

In March, the press reported that Ebrahim Babaei, a political activist, had disappeared in December 2021 while trying to flee to Turkey. According to Amnesty International and press reports, he faced imprisonment and flogging in two separate cases, one involving his support for his daughter Shima Babaei's campaign against compulsory hijab laws, for which he was sentenced to 74

lashes. In August, Amnesty reported that his fate remained unknown and at year's end, social media posts stated that his family remained unaware of his whereabouts.

On August 22, UN experts, including UNSR Rehman, released a statement expressing concern for “the increasing arbitrary arrests, and, on occasion, enforced disappearances of members of the Baha’i faith and the destruction or confiscation of their properties, in what bears all the signs of a policy of systematic persecution.” The experts said these acts of government repression “were not isolated but formed part of a broader policy to target any dissenting belief or religious practice, including Christian converts, Gonabadi dervishes, and atheists.”

Human rights NGOs reported poor conditions and the mistreatment of religious minorities held in government prisons. In August, the Kurdistan Human Rights Network reported Shia prisoners in the women’s ward of Orumiye Prison beat Sunni Kurdish prisoners because they “insulted the Muharram ceremony of Shiite [Shia] prisoners” by not participating. Prison officials reportedly incited the beatings.

On August 27, according to *IranWire* and Radio Farda, authorities transferred Gonabadi dervish and journalist Kasra Nouri from Adelabad Prison to an unknown location and held him incommunicado for more than a week. Authorities subsequently charged him with “gathering and colluding to act against the security of the country” and held him in solitary confinement in the detention center of the Intelligence Department. In 2018, authorities also held Nouri incommunicado for several months before sentencing him to 12 years in prison for reporting on the violent suppression of dervish protests in Tehran. Shortly after his imprisonment in 2018, prison guards attacked Nouri and other dervishes who were engaging in a sit-in. On World Press Freedom Day in May 2021, the One Free Press Coalition named Nouri one of the “10 most urgent” cases of persecuted human rights journalists in the world.

Media outlets reported the government continued to carry out qisas punishments. According to Radio Farda, “Such retribution sentences used to be rare but have increased in frequency since 2015.” In August, Tehran’s *Hamshahri* newspaper reported the Tehran Criminal Prosecutor’s Office was directed to blind

three individuals, one woman and two men, carrying out literal “eye for an eye” sentences under the qisas principle. Authorities convicted the three following their involvement in altercations that resulted in victims’ loss of sight.

Several prisoners convicted of robbery faced hudud punishments involving the amputation of fingers. Amnesty International reported authorities in Evin Prison amputated four fingers of the right hand of Sayed Barat Hosseini on May 31 without anesthetic. According to Amnesty International, Hosseini immediately lost consciousness due to blood loss. Authorities removed the fingers of another prisoner, Pouya Torabi, on July 27.

The Kurdistan Human Rights Network reported that officials at Evin Prison amputated the fingers of Behrouz Moradi in late July and Morteza Jalili in early September. Both men had been convicted of robbery.

In June, Amnesty International reported that authorities were preparing to amputate the fingers of eight other men, including Hadi Rostami, Mehdi Sharafian, Mehdi Shahivand, Amir Shirmard, Morteza Jalili, Ebrahim Rafiei, Yaghoub Fazeli Koushki, and one unknown man. Authorities had convicted the men of robbery, in some cases based on forced confessions and in trials where they did not have legal representation. Authorities told the men in early June that they would be transferred to Evin Prison for their sentences to be carried out, but the transfer was postponed at the last minute for unknown reasons.

On June 22, a spokesman for the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights called on the government “to urgently revise its criminal penalties to do away with any form of corporal punishment, including amputations, flogging, and stoning, in line with its obligations under international human rights law and consistent with recommendations of UN human rights mechanisms.”

In June, ABC reported that since the 1979 revolution, courts had issued at least 356 sentences of amputation and implemented 192. Amnesty International said the punishments were violations of international law and called for the investigation and prosecution of those responsible. In a June letter to the country’s chief justice, head of the Iranian Association of Surgeons Iraj Fazel called for the end of the practice, saying it was “horrifying.”

On August 23, Iran Human Rights reported that imprisoned protester Vahid Afkari received death threats from officials in Shiraz's central prison. Authorities had held Afkari and his brother Habib in solitary confinement since September 2020. Authorities executed their other brother, Navid Afkari, in 2020. Authorities arrested the three brothers in 2018 on charges that included "enmity against God" and sentenced them in what Iran Human Rights said were "trials that were a travesty of justice" without due process or adequate representation. Iran Human Rights said authorities subjected Vahid to torture and forced his confession.

On July 6, Article 19, a London-based human rights organization, published an analysis of the 2021 amendments to the penal code that criminalized insulting Iranian ethnicities or "divine religions or Islamic schools of thought" and committing "any deviant educational or proselytizing activity that contradicts or interferes with the sacred law of Islam." Article 19 stated that the provisions "pose a major threat to the rights to freedom of expression and freedom of religion and belief in the country and will further diminish the already shrunken space for dissenting voices. They are also likely to disproportionately impact individuals belonging to ethnic and religious minorities, who have faced systematic discrimination and persecution over the past decades, while failing to protect them against incitement to hatred and discrimination."

In his August report, the UN Secretary-General stated the government continued to incarcerate numerous prisoners, including minority rights defenders, on various charges related to religion, including "propaganda against the state," "spreading corruption on earth," and "enmity against God." The *Iran Prison Atlas*, a database compiled by the U.S.-based NGO United for Iran, stated at least 75 members of minority religious groups remained imprisoned as of year's end for "religious practice," compared with 67 the previous year. The most common charges were membership in or leadership of organizations that "disrupt national security" and spread "propaganda against the state." Charges also included "insulting Islamic sanctities," "enmity against God," and "agitating the public consciousness." The majority of those imprisoned were Baha'is and Christians, including Christian converts, but also included Gonabadi Dervishes, Sunnis, and some Shia. Some of those imprisoned were sentenced to internal exile.

According to the Human Rights Without Frontiers (HRWF) database, there were 66 individuals imprisoned for exercising their right to freedom of religion or belief

as of December 30, the majority of whom were Baha'is, but some were Protestants and Sufi Muslims.

HRWF and Ahmadi sources stated that on December 15, authorities arrested 15 Ahmadi Muslims, including three minors, for their religious beliefs and held them in Evin Prison.

In the July report, the UNSR again expressed concern at the reportedly disproportionate level of arbitrary detention of members of minority groups, many of whom were religious minorities.

In their August 22 statement, the UN experts stated that as of April, more than 1,000 Baha'is awaited imprisonment, following their initial arrests and hearings. The experts expressed concern about "a marked increase in arrests and targeting" during the year of members of the Baha'i community, as well as destruction and confiscation of their property. The experts said that between July and August, security agents raided the homes of more than 35 Baha'is in multiple cities and arrested several individuals across the country. The arrests included three former leaders of the Baha'i community, Mahvash Sabet, Fariba Kamalabadi, and Afif Naimi. Authorities subsequently charged them with "managing the unlawful [Baha'i] administration," which carries a sentence of up to 10 years in prison. According to the experts, authorities forcibly disappeared Naimi for over a month before disclosing his whereabouts. On December 11, the press reported that after a one-hour trial on November 21, a court sentenced Sabet and Kamalabadi to 10 years imprisonment. On December 13, HRANA reported authorities had released Naimi from prison.

Human rights NGOs reported that arbitrary arrests of Baha'i continued throughout the year. The organization Baha'is of the United States stated in October that more than 1,000 Baha'is were being held within the criminal justice system – more than twice as many as the prior high point in 2014. The group said the government routinely claimed members of the Baha'i community were heretics who were spying on behalf of Israel. On September 30, the Ministry of Information released a statement about the protests over Mahsa Amini's death in which it described the arrest of members of "the Baha'i spy organization...based in occupied Haifa [in Israel]." In August, the principal representative of the Baha'i

International Community to the UN said Iran was carrying out a “systematic onslaught” against the nation’s Baha’is.

In June, according to BIC and *IranWire*, Branch 1 of the Revolutionary Court sentenced 26 Baha’is from Shiraz city to between two and five years in prison in a mass trial on charges of unlawful assembly and collusion “for the purpose of causing intellectual and ideological insecurity in Muslim society.” Some of the Baha’is also received in addition sentences of two years’ internal exile and bans on foreign travel. The 37th Branch of the Fars Provincial Court of Appeals denied their appeals on August 30. BIC said many of those convicted were couples with young children, from whom they were forcibly separated due to the prison sentences.

According to Iran Human Rights Monitor and HRANA, on July 19, security forces arrested five Baha’is – Hanan Hashemi, Behieh Manavipour, Misagh Manavipour, Elhan Hashemi, and Nilufar Hosseini. Authorities searched their homes and sent them to the Shiraz Intelligence Detention Center. Hashemi reportedly called her family and told them she was under pressure to make a forced confession, although her family did not know what charges the government was bringing against her.

HRANA reported security forces conducted multiple arrests of Baha’is in the last week of October without providing reasons or charges. On October 24, security forces in Kerman Province arrested Baha’i couple Shagaig Bahrami and Shayan Gholami, searched their house, seized personal belongings, and transferred them to the Kerman Intelligence Department detention center. Their families were unable to gain further information on the couple’s welfare or the charges against them. On October 25, authorities arrested Baha’i photographer Milad Sanai outside his home in Sari city, searched his home and confiscated his mobile phone and laptop. Authorities reportedly cited “protest activity in cyberspace” as the reason for his arrest. On October 26, security forces arrested Baha’i citizen Leily Karami at her home in Shiraz on unknown charges and transferred her to a detention facility known as House No. 100.

The Christian media outlet *Morningstar News* reported that on August 13, authorities in Tehran detained house-church members Hodayoun Zhavah and his wife, Sara Ahmadi, in Evin Prison. The NGO Middle East Concern reported

officials first arrested the couple in 2019 on suspicion of belonging to an “illegal organization” and held Zhavah for one month in Evin Prison and Ahmadi for 67 days, half the time in solitary confinement.

According to HRANA, authorities released Yarsani Kurdish activist and documentary filmmaker Mozghan Kavousi on parole from prison in January. In 2020, Branch 1 of the Revolutionary Court of Noshahr had convicted her of “spreading propaganda against the system” and “inciting people to disrupt the country’s order and security” in connection with two posts on her Instagram account about the 2019 antigovernment protests and sentenced her to five years and nine months in prison.

Christians, particularly evangelicals and other converts from Islam, continued to experience disproportionate levels of arrests and detentions and high levels of harassment and surveillance, according to Christian NGOs. Human rights organizations and Christian NGOs continued to report authorities arrested Christians, including members of unrecognized churches, for their religious affiliation or activities and charged them with operating illegally in private homes or supporting and accepting assistance from “enemy” countries. The Catholic media outlet *AsiaNews* reported that between January and June, authorities arrested 58 Christian converts, compared with 72 in the whole of 2021. According to human rights NGOs, the government also continued to enforce the prohibition against proselytizing.

HRANA reported that on May 10, authorities summoned Christian convert Morteza Hajeb Mashhoud-Kari to the Rasht city courthouse, where they arrested him and took him to Lakan Prison, in Gilan Province. In April, the Revolutionary Court of Rasht sentenced Mashhoud-Kari to five years in prison and a 1,800 million rials (\$43,000) fine on charges of forming a house church, propaganda against the regime, and “association with Zionism and the Branhamist sect.”

According to Article 18, in May, authorities rearrested three Christian converts – Ahmad Sarparast, Morteza Mashhoodkari, and Ayoob Poor-Rezazadeh – and took them to an IRGC detention center. Authorities had previously arrested the three in September 2021 during raids on a house church and a private home in Rasht city and later released them on bail. On January 5, the 4th Branch of the Civil and Revolutionary Court of Rasht charged the three men with “engaging in

propaganda and educational activities for deviant beliefs contrary to the holy sharia,” and “connections with foreign leaders,” specifically referencing their ties to the Church of Iran.

On November 16, Amnesty International reported that authorities were seeking the death penalty for at least 21 persons “in sham trials” intended to intimidate those protesting against the government, many are charged with “enmity against God.” Kurdish citizen Saman Yasin (Seydi), a singer and songwriter from Kermanshah city, was one of the individuals Amnesty International identified. Hengaw reported that on October 2, Tehran authorities arrested Yasin and on October 29, they charged him with “enmity against God” for supporting the nationwide protests against the killing of Mahsa Amini and for posting songs critical of the government on his personal Instagram webpage. The Kurdistan Human Rights Network reported authorities subjected Yasin to “severe” physical and mental torture, including being kept in solitary confinement, being kept in a morgue, being severely abused and thrown from a height, and being forced to make confessions under the pressure of security interrogators. On December 8, Hengaw reported that Branch 15 of the Islamic Revolutionary Court in Tehran sentenced Yasin to death. Radio Farda reported Yasin attempted suicide on December 20. On December 24, the Supreme Court agreed to hear Yasin’s appeal of his sentence. The Kurdistan Human Rights Network subsequently reported that the court had overturned his death sentence due to “a flaw in the investigation” and sent it back to the original court for reinvestigation and retrial.

After Mohsen Shekari’s execution on December 8, a group of UN human rights experts issued a press statement that condemned the government’s action and raised concern about others charged with similar crimes carrying the death penalty. In their statement, the UN experts cited the cases of Saman Yasin and rapper Toomaj Salehi, whom the government had indicted for “spreading corruption on earth,” which also carries the death penalty. Authorities arrested Salehi on 30 October for posting videos of himself encouraging followers to protest, as well as songs disparaging authorities.

Prisoners practicing a religion other than Twelver Shia Islam reported experiencing discrimination.

In June, according to the Kurdistan Human Rights Network and Iran Human Rights Monitor, at least 22 Sunni prisoners in Rajai Shahr Prison in Karaj city, in Alborz Province, went on a hunger strike to protest the alleged refusal of Tehran prosecutor Ali Salehi to address their complaints about poor prison conditions, documented by multiple NGOs, including overcrowding and lack of adequate sanitation and medical care. According to Iran Human Rights Monitor, on June 2 during a visit to the prison, Salehi said, “Sunni citizens do not even have the right to live in Iran.”

Activists and NGOs reported that the government continued to detain or disappear Yarsani activists and community leaders for engaging in awareness-raising regarding government practices or discrimination against the Yarsani community. According to NGO reports, on June 21, the Islamic Revolutionary Court of Sahneh city, in Kermanshah Province, sentenced Kheyrollah Haghjouyan from the Yarsan Civil Rights’ Activists Advisory Council to a year in prison on charges of “propaganda against the state” and “insulting Islamic sanctities.” Authorities arrested Haghjouyan in June 2021 for his remarks criticizing the government’s discriminatory practices against the Yarsani community and for commemorating the eight-year anniversary of the deaths of three Yarsani activists who self-immolated to protest Hamadan Prison authorities’ forcibly shaving Yarsani prisoners’ mustaches – considered an insult in the Yarsani religion.

According to human rights NGOs, judges continued to use internal exile as a form of punishment for political prisoners, including peaceful activists, religious minorities, and dissidents. According to CHRI, the concept of exile or banishment is rooted in Shia theology and is referred to as “denial of country” (*nafiye balad*). Exile could be ordered as the primary punishment, for example for those found guilty of “enmity against God” or “armed rebellion,” or as a supplemental punishment for various crimes, to be carried out after the completion of a prison sentence. Judges chose exile locations from a list prepared by the Ministry of Interior; these were usually remote towns in regions with extreme poverty. Iran Human Rights Monitor reported that during the year, judges also sent individuals into “prison exile” by transferring them to severely under-resourced prisons far from their families and friends. CHRI stated that prison exile also harmed the detainee’s family by putting the individual in a location family members could not easily visit.

Media outlets reported that on January 20, Christian convert Sasan Khosravi completed his one-year prison sentence but began his sentence of two years of internal exile far from his home of Bushehr city. In January 2021, the 4th Branch of the Bushehr Court of Appeal upheld one-year prison sentences for Khosravi and one other Christian convert, agreeing with a lower court finding that they were guilty of the “organization of house churches and promotion of Christianity, which are clear examples of propaganda against the state.” In 2019, Ministry of Intelligence agents arrested Sasan Khosravi and his brother Sam, their wives Maryam Falahi and Marjan Falahi, Heydari, and Pooriya Peyma and his wife Fatemeh Talebi at their homes in Bushehr Province. In 2020, authorities fined the women and gave the men prison terms. The court also prohibited Khosravi from working in his profession, the hospitality sector, while exiled.

According to the Baha’i National Center, in June, Branch 1 of the Revolutionary Court sentenced Mahyar Sefidi, Varqa Kaviani, Shamim Akhlaghi, Farzad Shadman, Farbud Shadman, and Soroush Ighani, all members of the Baha’i community in Shiraz, to two years in prison, a ban on leaving the country, and two years of internal exile. The individuals were charged with assembly and collusion “for the purpose of causing intellectual and ideological insecurity in Muslim society.” Authorities sent Sefidi to Lemerud City, Fars Province; Kaviani to Kashmar city, in Razavi Khorasan Province; Akhlaghi to Semiran city, in Tehran Province; Shadman to Minab city, in Hormazgan Province; Shadman to Firuzabad city, in Fars Province; and Ighani to Mehriz city, in Yazd Province – locations that were between 100 kilometers (62 miles) and 1,000 kilometers (621 miles) from Shiraz.

Media outlets reported that on September 26, intelligence services agents detained civil rights activists Golrokh Ebrahimi Iraee in Tehran. Agents reportedly broke into Iraee’s residence, entered her room, kicked her in the stomach, and threw her against a cabinet. They ransacked the house and confiscated some of her belongings. Security services reportedly transferred her first to Qarchak Prison and then to an unknown location on October 10. Authorities charged her with “assembly and collusion” and “propaganda against the state” through her activities on social media. Iraee had been released from prison in April after finishing her second sentence for protesting the practice of stoning women accused of adultery. Authorities originally arrested and charged Ebrahimi in 2014 with “insulting Islamic sanctities” and “spreading propaganda.”

In his August report, the UN Secretary-General expressed concern about the overly broad formulation of the constitutional provision for confiscation of “illegitimate” wealth,” as well as about “the manner in which this authority is being exercised to confiscate wealth and property of minorities, particularly the Baha’i religious minority, as well as of political dissidents and their families.” The Secretary-General stated that between June 2021 and March 2022, authorities confiscated properties, farms, and farmland owned or cultivated by members of the Baha’i community, including in Mazandaran and Kohgiluyeh and Boyer-Ahmad Provinces. In their August joint statement, the UN experts noted increasing instances of authorities raiding or destroying Baha’i homes and confiscating Baha’i property.

In January, *IranWire* reported that 27 Bahai families in the village of Ivel, Mazandaran Province, sent a petition to top political and judicial officials, including Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, asking the government to stop selling off land it seized from them in 2019 while they pursued their case further in court. In a 2020 decision upholding the government’s 2019 confiscations of Baha’i property in Ivel, a court ruled that Baha’is had “a perverse ideology” that was “heretical and ritually unclean,” and they therefore had no “legitimacy in their ownership” of any property. The Baha’i’s petition stated their land deeds “are valid both in law and in sharia,” that a 1984 fatwa issued by then Supreme Leader Ayatollah Khomeini provided the rulings of Islam, including property rights, applied to non-Muslims as well as Muslims, and that the constitution and Islamic law emphasize people’s rights and “the principle of observing justice and fairness in judgement....”

On August 23, Amnesty International reported that since July 31, authorities “raided dozens of Baha’i houses, detained at least 30 persons, and subjected many more to interrogation, electronic ankle bracelets and threats of imprisonment” solely because of their Baha’i faith. Amnesty International stated, “The Ministry of Intelligence announced on August 1 that those arrested were ‘core members of Baha’i espionage party’ who ‘propagated Baha’i teachings’ and ‘sought to infiltrate ... the educational sector across the country, especially kindergartens.’”

On August 2, security and intelligence agents in Mazandaran Province demolished eight Baha’i homes and confiscated 20 hectares (approximately 49.5 acres) of

land belonging to 25 persons in Roshankouh village. Agents used pepper spray against protesters and arrested those who resisted. According to Amnesty International, the actions deprived at least 18 farmers of their livelihood. CHRI Executive Director Hadi Ghaemi said in August, "It has been the Islamic Republic's modus operandi to ratchet up repressive measures against religious and ethnic minorities whenever popular discontent and international pressure are on the rise." Ghaemi said authorities justified the raids, confiscations, and arrests by accusing the victims of "transgressions such as spying for Israel," "infiltrating educational institutions at various levels, especially child daycare centers throughout the country," and conducting "organized campaigns against the hijab." BIC's representative to the United Nations in Geneva stated, "Every day there has been fresh news of persecution of the Baha'is in Iran, demonstrating unmistakably that the Iranian authorities have a step-by-step plan that they are implementing, first blatant lies and hate speech, then raids and arrests, and today land grabs, occupations, and the destruction of homes."

There were continued reports of authorities placing restrictions on Baha'i businesses or forcing them to shut down after they temporarily closed in observance of Baha'i holidays, or of authorities threatening shop owners with potential closure, even though by law, businesses may close without providing a reason for up to 15 days a year. In June, *IranWire* reported that in Bandar-e-Lengeh, Hormozgan Province, officials forced the closure of a Baha'i-owned workshop and denied business licenses to two optical businesses. On August 18, human rights attorney Saieid Dehghan posted on Twitter that a court in Semnan Province upheld the forced closure of more than 20 Baha'i-owned shops, confiscation of production equipment, and seizure of agricultural land.

According to *IranWire*, on August 3, authorities in Roshankuh village, Mazandaran Province, without warning demolished the homes of at least three Baha'i families on orders from the provincial prosecutor's office. On August 18, by order of the Ministry of Information, the head of Branch 1 of the Semnan Revolutionary Court, Judge Mohammad Ghasem Ain al-Kamali, ordered the confiscation of more Baha'i properties in the province. The confiscation order alleged the Revolutionary court had discovered incriminating evidence at the home of Baha'i follower Jamaloddin Khanjani, calling Khanjani "an official of the illegal Baha'i organization." Sources told *IranWire* that no such evidence had been found.

In November, an MRG analysis posted online stated that despite the country's religious and ethnic diversity, "Authorities have for decades imposed a homogenous Iranian identity rooted in the Persian [Farsi] language and culture, and, since the 1979 Revolution, Shia Islam. This has resulted in the repression of minority languages, faiths, and cultures, and to varying degrees, the exclusion of ethnic and religious minorities ... from public life and the benefits of economic development." According to this report, minorities "are routinely denied equal access to justice, education, employment, and political participation." Mehdi Khalaji, writing for the Washington Institute for Near East Policy (WINEP), stated, "The regime's comprehensive effort to 'Islamicize' Iranian society and to control all aspects of citizens' lives has steadily deprived people of freedom in the public and private sphere." Another academic, Saeid Golkar, an assistant professor of political science at the University of Tennessee at Chattanooga, told Reuters that "Iranians are revolting against the clergy ... who use religion to suppress the people."

In an analysis posted online on September 30, Amnesty International stated that the initial outrage at the death of Mahsa Amini, after her arrest for not complying with what the NGO characterized as the country's discriminatory and abusive compulsory veiling laws, "quickly expanded to broader grievances against the political establishment and encompassed demands for the end of the Islamic Republic system and the establishment of a secular democratic system respecting human rights." In a December 20 article, the *Financial Times* said, "While Iran has witnessed protests before, these are the first to call for the toppling of the Islamic establishment. 'Canons, tanks, firecrackers; the clergy must get lost' has been one of the protest's most popular slogans, the first part borrowed from a football [soccer] chant critical of referees."

According to *IranWire*, members of recognized minority religions continued to be barred from much political participation. The NGO stated that although the country's Sunni community "is relatively free to practice its religion," the constitution excludes non-Shias from being supreme leader and Sunnis may not become president or chief justice. While membership in the Guardian Council is technically only off-limits to "non-Muslims," in practice, Sunnis were not permitted to serve on the council. Similarly, Sunnis may technically run for election, but in practice were often disqualified before the vote. There were no non-Shia political parties in the country during the year.

According to Mehrzad Boroujerdi, a WINEP scholar, the country's Sunni minority had suffered disproportionately in the four decades since the 1979 revolution in terms of their political voice and representation. According to Boroujerdi, "This long-term lack of representation can help explain the recent expressions of support from key Sunni religious figures for the ongoing protests in Iran, in spite of the danger and ongoing suppression that has specifically targeted minorities, including Sunnis." Boroujerdi added that the government's attempts at outreach programs and appointment of Sunni officials "have not proven effective against the cumulative impact of decades-worth of political marginalization, socio-economic deprivation, and historical disrespect towards Sunni-populated regions in Iran, especially as disrespect towards Sunni religious icons and places has continued until today."

The government continued to require all women to adhere to "Islamic dress" standards in public, including covering their hair and fully covering their bodies in loose clothing – an overcoat and a hijab or, alternatively, a chador (a full body-length piece of fabric worn over both the head and clothes). "Un-Islamic dress" could be punished with arrests, lashings, fines, and dismissal from employment.

In August, *IranWire* reported that the headquarters for the Promotion of Virtue and Prevention of Vice published a 119-page document titled *Hijab and Chastity Project* detailing the government's hijab policy and calling for stronger measures of strict enforcement. The document called for, among other measures, the introduction of surveillance cameras to monitor and fine unveiled women or refer them for "counseling"; fines for designing, importing, buying, or selling "vulgar dresses"; and a mandatory prison sentence for any individual who questioned or posted content online against mandatory hijab. The document declared the project's most important goals to be "cleansing society of the pollution caused by nonconformance with Islamic dress codes," "building a model of an Islamic society in regard to chastity," and "preserving values and the fight against cultural invasion."

Iran International reported that on July 5, President Raisi ordered stricter enforcement of the "chastity and hijab" law, calling lack of compliance with the dress code "an organized promotion of [moral] corruption in Islamic society" and placing the blame on "enemies of Iran." In response, the Morality Police

increased street patrols, subjecting women deemed to not be wearing their hijab “properly” to increased verbal and physical harassment and abuse.

According to HRANA, on July 16, authorities arrested Sepideh Rashno after another woman on a city bus harassed and assaulted her for an “improper” hijab. On July 30, official media outlets released Rashno’s confession video. HRANA stated that prior to making the video, Rashno had been hospitalized due to the risk of internal bleeding, indicating she may have been physically forced to make the confession. In late December, her brother Saman announced on social media that authorities sentenced Rashno to five years of suspended imprisonment for “assembly and collusion against national security,” “propaganda against the regime,” and “not wearing hijab in public.” HRANO reported authorities also required Rashno to appear at the court office quarterly and to ask permission from judicial authorities if she wanted to leave the country or have access to certain publications or printed matter.

Iran International reported Esmail Rahmani, deputy public prosecutor of Mashhad City, the capital of Razavi Khorasan Province and the country’s second-most populous city, ordered the municipality to prevent “bad-hijab” women from using public transportation and ordered the governor to ban them from receiving service in banks and government offices. Governor of Fars Province Mohammad-Hadi Imanieh said female government employees who did not wear hijab should take leave without pay and only return to work “when they can respect the law.” Some authorities ordered businesses, such as restaurants, cafes, and shopping malls, to deny service to “bad-hijab” women and threatened to shut down their businesses if they did not comply.

In a televised speech on December 20, commander of the IRGC’s Qods Force Esmail Ghani, speaking about the protests, said, “Go to the entire Valiasr Street [one of Tehran’s main commercial areas]. You won’t see a single honorable woman without a hijab, not a single honorable woman.”

Article 19 reported that in the run-up to the National Day of Hijab and Chastity on July 12, activists on social media using the hashtag #No2Hijab posted messages and images of women without hijab in public spaces. More than 120 human rights activists signed a statement, “No Means No,” outlining the damage done to society by 43 years of compulsory veiling.

On April 27, according to HRANA and the NGO Frontline Defenders, the Supreme Court reduced Saba Kord-Afshari's prison sentence, which she received in 2019 on a set of charges connected to her protest of the compulsory hijab, from seven years and six months to five years. The court acquitted her of the charge of “encouraging people to commit immorality and/or prostitution,” although the charges of “propaganda against the regime” and “assembly and collusion to act against national security” remained. Authorities arrested Kord-Afshari's mother Rahele Ahmadi, also a women’s rights defender, in 2019 after she publicly criticized her daughter’s arrest and treatment in custody. A fellow activist posted to social media that Ahmadi, who was sentenced to two years and seven months in prison, was released on October 13.

In a September 29 article in *Time Magazine*, prominent human rights lawyer Nasrin Sotoudeh said that although she was out of prison on medical furlough, she was under perpetual threat of being returned to prison. “They can take me back to prison at any point in time that they wish,” she stated. In July 2021, authorities released Sotoudeh from Qarchak Women’s Prison on temporary leave to receive treatment after she contracted COVID-19. Her husband told media that conditions in the prison were “catastrophic.” The government arrested Sotoudeh multiple times since 2009 because of her work as a rights defender. In 2019, a court sentenced her to 33 years in prison and 148 lashes. Charges against her included “propaganda against the state,” “assembly and collusion,” and “espionage,” and were related to her legal work representing individuals imprisoned for their activism, including opposition to the mandatory hijab law.

The government reportedly continued to suppress other public behavior it deemed counter to Islamic law, such as dancing and unmarried men and women appearing together in public.

According to BIC, the government continued to hold many Baha’i properties it had seized following the 1979 revolution, including cemeteries, holy places, historical sites, and administrative centers. It also continued to prevent Baha’is from performing burials in accordance with their religious tradition.

The NGO Women’s Committee of Iran and Iran International reported photographs and videos on social media showed the government built high concrete walls around the Khavaran Cemetery in Tehran, a site where in 2021 the

government required Baha'is to bury their dead after prohibiting them from accessing Golestan Javid Cemetery, which had previously been allocated for Baha'i use. NGOs said the government also installed security cameras with the intent of intimidating mourners. Khavaran Cemetery was believed to be the site of a mass grave for political prisoners killed by the government in 1988. In addition to political prisoners and Baha'is, the cemetery was used to bury other religious minorities, including Armenian Christians and Hindus. Previously, Amnesty International stated authorities bulldozed the mass grave site multiple times.

The Jewish community in Tehran warned people on the messaging app Telegram to not visit synagogues during the High Holy Days in September and October "due to the dangerous situation."

Article 18 reported that in February, Branch 34 of the Tehran Court of Appeal acquitted nine Christian converts of "acting against national security" by gathering in a house church: Abdolreza (Matthias) Ali-Haghnejad, Shahrooz Eslamdoust, Behnam Akhlaghi, Babak Hosseinzadeh, Mehdi Khatibi, Khalil Dehghanpour, Hossein Kadivar, Kamal Naamanian, and Mohammad Vafadar. The acquittal followed a November 2021 Supreme Court decision in which Justice Seyed-Ali Eizadpanah stated, "The promotion of Christianity and the formation of a house church is not criminalized in law." Shortly after the acquittal, however, the state charged Ali-Haghnejad, Akhlaghi, and Hosseinzadeh with "propagating Christianity" and "propaganda against the state."

The Christian aid group Barnabas Aid stated, "Farsi-speaking Christians are converts from Islam and therefore punishable as apostates according to Islamic law. Unlike the historic Armenian- and Assyrian-speaking Christian communities, they are not permitted to hold church services or worship freely." According to Barnabas Aid, on April 18, security agents raided the home of Christian convert Rahmat Rostamipour and confiscated several Bibles, mobile phones, identification cards, books, and electronic tablets. On May 21, the Civil Court of Bandar Anzali, in Gilan Province, ruled Rostamipour had engaged in "propaganda" by "messaging others about Christianity" and "teaching the religion of Christianity." The court fined him six million rials (\$143).

In its annual report from January, Open Doors USA said that converts from Islam to Christianity bore the brunt of religious freedom violations carried out by the government and, to a lesser extent, by society and the converts' families. The NGO stated that the government viewed Iranian Christians as "an attempt by Western countries to undermine Islam and the Islamic regime of Iran." Authorities arrested, prosecuted, and gave long prison sentences to leaders of Christian convert groups, as well as lay members and Christians of other denominational backgrounds supporting them, for "crimes against national security." Open Doors USA said the historical communities of Armenian and Assyrian Christians, although recognized and protected by the state, were "treated as second-class citizens." They suffer from legalized discrimination, including being prohibited from worshiping in Farsi or possessing Christian material written in Farsi. In addition, historical Christian communities were not allowed to have contact with Christians from Muslim backgrounds or have them attend church services.

On July 26, CHRI posted on Twitter that authorities removed 98 headstones from the Behesht Zahra Cemetery in Tehran that were etched with images of women without hijabs. CHRI called the action "depraved."

IranWire reported Sunnis continued to face challenges holding Eid al-Fitr prayers in Tehran, with media debates about whether or not they were allowed to hold prayers in the capital. There were reports police blocked Sunnis from entering informal places of worship during the holiday.

The government restricted the foreign travel of some religious leaders and members of religious minorities. According to the NGO Iran Human Rights Documentation Center, the government imposed in-country travel restrictions on Sunni clerics and prohibited them from going abroad.

The government maintained control over cinema, music, theater, and art exhibits and censored those productions deemed to transgress Islamic values. The government censored or banned films deemed to promote secularism and those containing what it deemed as non-Islamic ideas concerning women's rights, unethical behavior, drug abuse, violence, or alcoholism. According to the Iran Human Rights Documentation Center, the nine-member film review council of the Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance, consisting of clerics, former directors,

former parliamentarians, and academics, must approve the content of every film before production and again before screening.

Authorities restricted access to tens of thousands of websites, particularly those of international news and information services, the political opposition, ethnic and religious minority groups, and human rights organizations. They continued to block online messaging tools, such as Facebook, YouTube, and Twitter.

Human rights NGOs as well as diaspora communities and international media reported that authorities continued to employ tactics of internet disruption and blackouts to prevent sharing of information about their violent response to protests following the death of Mahsa Amini, including targeted disruptions in areas such as Zahedan, the city in Sistan and Baluchistan Province where the “bloody Friday” events of September 30 took place after Friday prayers at a Sunni mosque.

According to Christian NGOs, government restrictions on published religious material continued, although government-sanctioned translations of the Bible reportedly remained available. Government officials frequently confiscated Bibles and related non-Shia religious literature and pressured publishing houses printing unsanctioned non-Muslim religious materials to cease operations. Unrecognized religious minorities, such as Yarsanis and Baha’is, continued to report they were unable to legally produce or distribute religious literature. Authorities required books published by religious minorities, regardless of topic, to carry labels on the cover denoting their non-Shia Muslim authorship.

Members of the Sunni community continued to dispute statistics published in 2015 on the website of the Mosques Affairs Regulating Authority that stated there were nine Sunni mosques operating in Tehran and 15,000 across the country. Community members said the vast majority of these were simply prayer rooms or rented prayer spaces. Shia clerics continue to manage Sunni institutions and control Sunni educational facilities. International media and the Sunni community continued to report authorities prevented construction of any new Sunni mosques in Tehran, a city with, according to the Iran Human Rights Documentation Center, more than one million Sunnis. Sunnis said there were not enough mosques in the country to meet the needs of the population. Because the government barred them from building or worshiping in their own mosques in

Tehran, Sunni leaders said they continued to rely on ad hoc, underground prayer halls to practice their religion. Security officials reportedly continued to raid these unauthorized sites.

According to human rights organizations, Christian advocacy groups, and NGOs, the government continued to regulate Christian religious practices. Official reports and media continued to characterize private Christian churches in homes as “illegal networks” and “Zionist propaganda institutions.” Authorities also reportedly barred unregistered or unrecognized Christians from entering church premises and closed churches that allowed them to enter. In response, many Christian converts reportedly practiced in secret. Other unrecognized religious minorities, such as Baha’is and Yarsanis, were also forced to assemble in private homes to practice their faith in secret.

According to the World Jewish Congress, there were 13 active synagogues in Tehran, and media reports from 2018 (the most recent available) suggested there were between 25 and 35 throughout the country.

The government continued to permit Armenian Christians to exercise what sources stated was perhaps the greatest degree of religious freedom among religious minorities in the country. It extended preservation efforts to Armenian holy sites and allowed nationals of Armenian descent and Armenian visitors to observe religious and cultural traditions within their churches and dedicated clubs.

The government reportedly continued to allow recognized minority religious groups to establish community centers and some self-financed cultural, social, athletic, and charitable associations.

In August, IMPACT-se published a study, *Iran’s Radical Education: An Interim Update Report, 2021-22*, that examined all new textbooks for the 2021-22 academic year for grades 1-12. The study found that textbooks acknowledged the existence of Iranian Jews but did not discuss that community’s long presence in the country, which, according to the World Jewish Congress, dates to the 6th century B.C.E. IMPACT-se stated, “Jewish history in the region is avoided. Jews are blamed for enhancing the status of Jerusalem at the expense of Mecca, but [a] Jewish connection to the city is denied. The Holocaust is ignored.” The study

found “the curriculum remains rife with antisemitic rhetoric when Jews are discussed. This consists of heinous and phantasmagoric descriptions of Zionism, anti-Israeli propaganda, and a host of Shiite-Islamic anti-Jewish anecdotes, which present the Jews as partners to Sunni Muslims who operate against the Shiites. There is no counterweight educational material that could mitigate the damage of this propagated messaging.”

According to the IMPACT-se report, Sunni Arabs were portrayed dualistically in textbooks. “On the one hand, they are fellow Muslims and oppressed people receiving Iranian assistance and participation in Iran’s ongoing jihad fight. On the other, bitter memories of the Arab conquerors and oppressors of Iranians/Shiites – particularly Sunni dynasties – remain. Those who do not follow Iranian hegemony, [or who] make peace with Israel, and hold good relations with America or the West, are portrayed as collaborators and traitors.” Textbooks redefined the prodemocracy Arab Spring movements as an “Islamic Awakening” and praised the Muslim Brotherhood.

According to the Tehran Jewish Committee, five Jewish schools and two preschools continued to operate in Tehran, but authorities required their principals to be Muslim. The government reportedly continued to allow Hebrew language instruction but limited the distribution of Hebrew texts, particularly nonreligious texts, making it difficult to teach the language, according to the Jewish community.

BIC stated that on July 31, authorities entered a kindergarten with a video camera, distributed Baha’i literature to the non-Baha’i teachers, and instructed them to say, on camera, that members of the Baha’i community had given them the materials. Later that day, the Ministry of Intelligence released a statement accusing Baha’is of “propagating the teaching of the fabricated Baha’i colonialism and infiltrating educational environments.” According to BIC, the government subsequently used the statement as a pretext to arrest several Baha’i kindergarten and preschool teachers.

Article 18 reported that on January 24, a group of 20 Christian converts who were former prisoners of conscience published an open letter criticizing the government’s denial of education to Farsi-speaking Christians. In the statement, released on International Education Day, the signatories said that as an

“unrecognized” minority, Farsi-speaking Christians were subjected to “a sea of persecution and oppression.” The group said the government, “in violation of its international obligations and the constitution, expels us Farsi-speaking Christians and our children from school and university... The dreams we nurtured in our hearts and minds, and the plans we had for our jobs and our future, disappear like a cloud overhead.” As a result, the signatories said, the children of converts were rendered “invisible” to society, with most of the population unaware of this discrimination.

Sunni leaders continued to report authorities banned Sunni religious literature and teachings from religion courses in some public schools, even in predominantly Sunni areas. Other schools, notably in the Kurdish regions, included specialized Sunni religious courses. Assyrian Christians reported the government continued to permit their community to use its own religious textbooks in schools, but only after the government authorized their content. Armenian Christians were also permitted to teach their practices to Armenian students as an elective at select schools.

Authorities reportedly continued to deny the Baha’i, Sabean-Mandean, and Yarsani communities, as well as other unrecognized religious minorities, access to education and government employment unless they declared themselves as belonging to one of the country’s recognized religions on their application forms.

In 2020, authorities changed the state-issued national identity card, required for almost all government and other transactions, to allow citizens to only register as belonging to one of the country’s recognized religions. The Atlantic Council stated in September 2021, “Baha’i families, Yarsanis, Sabean-Mandaeans, and other religious minorities or atheists must either lie to receive a national identification card or be denied access to services, such as insurance, education, banking, and, most recently, public transportation.” Previously, application forms for an identification card had an option for “other religions.”

Public and private universities continued to deny Baha’is admittance and to expel Baha’i students once their religion became known. According to HRW, authorities systematically refused to allow Baha’is to register at public universities because of their faith. As in previous years, the government organization responsible for holding university entrance exams and for placing students, the Sazeman-e

Sanjesh, used pretexts, such as “incomplete information,” “further investigation required,” or application “defective” to reject Baha’i applicants. In its August 22 statement, the UN experts said that between January and August, more than 90 Baha’i students were barred from enrolling in the country’s universities.

According to BIC, the government continued to ban Baha’is from participating in more than 25 types of work, many related to food industries, because the government deemed Baha’is “unclean.”

According to Amnesty International, atheists and agnostics often do not publicly identify because those who profess atheism are at risk of arbitrary detention, torture, and the death penalty for apostasy.

According to MRG, despite constitutional guarantees of equality, workplace discrimination was institutionalized through the practice of gozinesh. Gozinesh criteria barred members of unrecognized religious groups, disadvantaged Sunnis, and anyone holding views contrary to those of the government from seeking employment.

The government prohibited travel to Israel, which was punishable by imprisonment. While previous reports suggested authorities were more lenient in allowing Jewish citizens to make the trip via a third country, the chair of the Tehran Jewish Committee said that while some individuals still traveled to Israel, since the 2021 Gaza conflict, the government enforced the prohibition more severely. He said, “Some who go are imprisoned, fined, and interrogated. Two community members had been sentenced to 91 days, although this was later reduced to 20 days.”

Throughout the year, authorities reportedly continued to propagate hate speech and falsehoods against religious minorities.

According to BIC and members of the Baha’i community, during the year, the government campaign of hate speech and propaganda against Baha’is continued to escalate, including blaming COVID-19 and the economic decline of the country on the Baha’i community. The claims about the economy led to efforts online to boycott and shut down Baha’i businesses under the guise of economic benefit. BIC stated discriminatory online material existed alongside videos, print

newspaper articles, books, seminars, exhibitions, graffiti, and fatwas. In January, according to HRANA, the Islamic Propagation Office organized a three-day workshop in Karaj city, in Alborz Province, during which participants were asked to design anti-Baha'i posters and other artwork. This was the second such workshop, the first having been held in Shiraz city in December 2021.

In January, WINEP published an article stating that in undated fatwas posted on his official website, the Supreme Leader “has called the Bahai ‘impure’ infidels and ‘enemies’ of the Shia faith, exhorting his followers to ‘avoid any sort of socialization with such a misguided and misleading sect.’” The Supreme Leader also emphasized that “all believers should confront [Bahai] ruses and perversions ... and prevent others from being perverted by joining them.”

Government officials continued to employ antisemitic rhetoric in official statements and to sanction it in media outlets, publications, and books. The *Jerusalem Post* reported that on March 10, the government-affiliated Fars News Agency published an article referring to Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy as a Jew with “deep ties to Jewish officials and the rich” and saying his “Zionist behavior” was duplicitous.

In April, *IranWire* reported a government-supported website named the Jewish Studies Center, headed by Isfahan cleric Kayvan Ezzati, had since its inception in 2016 published more than 1,000 antisemitic articles, reports, commentaries, books, and videos. These were arranged into 10 categories with such titles as “Jews and the Media,” “Jewish Methods,” and “Jewish Corruption.” According to *IranWire*, “In many of texts published by this hate-filled website, Jews are presented as a ‘blood-thirsty’, ‘deviant’ people who are guilty of ‘infanticide.’”

On April 29, Channel 1 aired a lecture given to foreign students in the country by Supreme Council for Cultural Revolution member Hassan Rahimpour-Azghadi at the 2019 International Quds (Jerusalem) Day Conference. In the lecture, Azghadi stated that Israel abducted children from throughout the Arab world and harvested their organs, to be used as “spare parts” by “wealthy Jews and Westerners.” He expressed doubts about the Holocaust and said that according to studies, Hitler was “born to Jews.” In a July 29 broadcast on Ofogh TV, Rahimpour-Azghadi said that “Jewish investment companies” and “Zionists” controlled the “enemy's media.”

On April 29, the imam of the main mosque in Isfahan, Ayatollah Yousef Tabatabaeinejad, used his Qods Day sermon to preach that “the Jews and Israelites are the dumbest creatures of God, so Britain and the United States use them to spy.” He called Jews “extremely ignorant and cowardly people.”

On June 8, Supreme Leader Khamenei posted to Twitter: “Today, #Zionism is an obvious plague for the world of #Islam. The Zionists have always been a plague, even before establishing the fraudulent Zionist regime.” In a July 27 nationally televised speech, Khamenei said that the Western powers were a “mafia” headed by Zionists, by “prominent Jewish merchants,” and by politicians who were subordinate to them. On July 27, he posted a tweet repeating these statements, writing, “The Western powers are a mafia. The reality of this power is a mafia. At the top of this mafia stand the prominent Zionist merchants, and the politicians obey them. The U.S. is their showcase, and they’re spread out everywhere.” In July, the Antidefamation League wrote a letter to Twitter requesting the account of the Supreme Leader be permanently suspended for his antisemitic rhetoric, specifically the July 27 tweet.

In January, Iran was the only country to object to a UN resolution condemning denial and distortion of the Holocaust.

In September, President Raisi questioned the Holocaust in an interview with CBS’ *60 Minutes*, saying while there were “some signs” it occurred, “they should allow it to be investigated and researched.” He also called Israel a “false regime.”

State media, including *Mehr News*, portrayed modern-day celebrations of Purim as commemorations of the mass murder of Iranians.

International media and NGOs reported continued government-sponsored propaganda aimed at deterring the practice of or conversion to Christianity.

Endowed religious charitable foundations (*bonyads*) accounted for one-quarter to one-third of the country’s economy, according to some experts. According to NGOs, government insiders, including members of the military and clergy, ran these tax-exempt organizations, which the law defines as charities. Members of the political opposition and international corruption watchdog organizations frequently accused bonyads of corruption. Bonyads received benefits from the

government, but there was no requirement for government agencies to approve their budgets publicly.

On December 15, the UN General Assembly approved a resolution on the situation of human rights in the country. The resolution expressed “serious concern about ongoing severe limitations and increasing restrictions on the right to freedom of thought, conscience, religion or belief, restrictions on the establishment of places of worship, undue restrictions on burials carried out in accordance with religious tenets, attacks against places of worship and burial, and other human rights violations...” These violations included, but were not limited to “increased harassment, intimidation, persecution, arbitrary arrest and detention of, and incitement to hatred that leads to violence against, persons belonging to recognized and unrecognized religious minorities, including Christians (particularly converts from Islam), Gonabadi Dervishes, Jews, Sufi Muslims, Sunni Muslims, Yarsanis, Zoroastrians, and, in particular, Baha’is, who have been subjected to a sudden increase in persecution, who have faced increasing restrictions and systemic persecution by the Government of the Islamic Republic of Iran on account of their faith, and have been reportedly subjected to mass arrests and lengthy prison sentences, as well as the arrest of prominent members and increased confiscation and destruction of property...” The resolution called on the government “to cease monitoring individuals on account of their religious identity, to release all religious practitioners imprisoned for their membership in or activities on behalf of a minority religious group, to cease the desecration of cemeteries, and to ensure that everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion or belief, including the freedom to have, to change, or to adopt a religion or belief of their choice, in accordance with its obligations under the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.”

The UN resolution also called on the government “to eliminate, in law and in practice, all forms of discrimination on the basis of thought, conscience, religion or belief, including restrictions contained in article 499 bis and article 500 bis of [Iran’s] Islamic Penal Code, the enforcement of which has significantly escalated discrimination and violence, as well as economic restrictions, such as the closure, destruction or confiscation of businesses, land and properties, the cancellation of licenses and the denial of employment in certain public and private sectors, including government or military positions and elected office, the denial of and restrictions on access to education, including for members of the Baha’i Faith, and

other human rights violations against persons belonging to recognized and unrecognized religious minorities.” The resolution condemned “without reservation antisemitism and any denial of the Holocaust” and called upon the government “to end ongoing systemic impunity for those who commit crimes against persons belonging to recognized and unrecognized religious minorities.”

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

Media outlets reported that on October 26, gunmen opened fire on the Shia Shah Cheragh Shrine in Shiraz, killing at least 15 persons and injuring at least 19. ISIS claimed responsibility for the attack. In a statement, ISIS said its purpose was to “let the *rawafidh* [rejectionists, a derogatory term used by Sunni Muslims for Shia Muslims] know that the companions [of the Prophet Muhammad] have descendants who inherit revenge generation after generation.” On October 27, the Supreme Leader, in a statement read on national television, vowed to retaliate against those threatening the country's security. On November 7, the Intelligence Ministry stated it had arrested 26 individuals in connection with the incident who were citizens of Azerbaijan, Tajikistan, and Afghanistan.

On August 16, Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty (RFE/RL) reported, “In a sign of ... rising anger [against the clerical regime], physical attacks against clerics appear to be increasing” and that, as a result, some religious officials did not wear their robes or turbans in public to avoid being targeted, while others warned about public anger and the decline in the stature and influence of the Shia clergy. According to the report, which came out prior to Amini’s death and subsequent protests, many of the attacks appeared to have been aimed at clerics who tried to enforce Islamic codes in public, such as compulsory hijab. Subsequently, amidst the protests, WINEP published analysis that stated, “Many protesters see all Shia clerics – not just key regime supporters, but also silent critics and neutral authorities – as the foundation of the regime’s legitimacy, facilitating its initial emergence and justifying its principles, policies, and decisions ever since. Clerics represent sharia, an inherently discriminatory legal system that claims divine authority to abuse human rights and, in particular, subjugate women.”

On June 3, an unidentified man attempted to stab Ayatollah Yousef Tabatabaeinejad after Friday prayers in Isfahan. According to the Fars News Agency, mosque guards subdued and detained the attacker, who was remanded

to police custody. Tabatabaeinejad, who said he was “scratched” after the attack, received treatment at the scene. Tabatabaeinejad is the representative of Supreme Leader Khamenei in Isfahan Province and is the Friday prayer leader of the city of Isfahan, the provincial capital. The press reported that the attack was under investigation.

On July 2, an unknown assailant on a motorcycle shot Mohsen Akhavan, a Shia cleric holding the rank of *hojatoleslam* (an honorific meaning “authority on Islam” used for the clerical rank below *ayatollah*), in Isfahan, according to state media. According to the report, the cleric was not seriously injured and was being treated in a hospital.

On December 15, the press reported that unknown persons attacked four Shia mullahs in Qom with “sharp objects.” Authorities took two of the clerics, described as elderly, to the hospital for treatment. The other two received what were described only as superficial wounds. The press also reported that the attack followed an August 29 attack by two young men using an iron pipe on two newly named imams in Qom mosques. One of the imams required surgery. There were no other details on either incident at year’s end.

Baha’is continued to be targets of violence and social stigma as government repression continued to intensify, according to Baha’is and those who advocated for their rights; perpetrators reportedly continued to act with impunity. There continued to be reports of non-Baha’is dismissing or refusing employment to Baha’is, sometimes in response to government pressure, according to BIC and other organizations monitoring the situation. BIC continued to report cases of physical violence committed against Baha’is based on their faith.

Baha’is reported there were continued incidents of destruction or vandalism of their cemeteries. HRANA reported that in April, unknown individuals vandalized a Baha’i cemetery in Hamedan Province, partially demolishing the mortuary and prayer hall and causing the roof to collapse. BIC spokesperson Simin Fahandej said, “It is not known which institution has instigated the perpetrators to take this action ... It is one of the regime’s cruelest acts against the Baha’i community that they are not allowed to have a burial place for their deceased ones.”

According to human rights NGOs, including the Christian advocacy group CSW, Open Doors USA, and others, converts from Islam to Christianity faced ongoing societal pressure and rejection by family or community members.

Shia clerics and prayer leaders reportedly continued to denounce Sufism and the activities of Sufis in both sermons and public statements.

Sunni students reported that professors continued to routinely insult Sunni religious figures in class.

Media reported that prominent Sunni cleric and director of the country's main Sunni seminary Molavi Abdolhamid, known for his advocacy on behalf of Sunni rights, gave multiple Friday sermons criticizing the government. In an October 28 sermon, he said, "Sunnis have been suffering from discrimination since the start of the Islamic revolution in 1979." In an October 21 sermon, Abdolhamid, who previously said that the killing of 66 persons after Friday prayers in Zahedan by security forces was a "crime," said Supreme Leader Khamenei and other officials were "responsible before God." After the sermon, the IRGC issued what it said was a "last warning" to Abdolhamid not to agitate youth, saying it "may cost you dearly." The Fars News Agency accused him of using his sermon to encourage people to revolt.

On November 28, the Middle East Institute posted analysis online that stated that, notwithstanding the government's pressure on Abdolhamid, other Sunni clerical leaders in the Baloch and Kurdish communities were calling for the government to recognize the protestors' political demands and were supporting his proposal for a referendum on the future of the Islamic Republic. On November 29, Sunni clerics in Sistan and Baluchistan Province issued a statement that "completely condemned" authorities' crackdown on nationwide protests, stating, "The killing of people, whether in Zahedan, Khash, dear Kurdistan, or in any other part of Iran, has no justification."

The press reported that in several Friday sermons in December, after calling for the release of those arrested during antiregime protests, Abdolhamid said the government's charging protestors with "enmity against God" and enforcing the death penalty was not warranted. In his December 30 sermon, Abdolhamid called

on the government to respect the rights of all religious minorities and to stop accusing members of the Baha'i community of apostasy.

The Middle East Media Research Institute reported that in an interview with OFOG TV, former Ambassador to Mexico and Australia Mohammad-Hassan Ghadiri-Abyaneh said that "Zionists" controlled British political parties, the royal family, and the economy, as well as "the media" and "the banks" in America and Europe. Another former diplomat, Professor Hossein Akbari, said in a June 29 interview on Channel 1 that America was an "empire" that belonged to the Zionists, adding, "Today, the media is operating under Zionist control, not only in the U.S., but also in France, Europe, and everywhere."

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy and Engagement

The United States does not have diplomatic relations with Iran and did not have opportunities during the year to raise concerns in a bilateral setting with the government about its religious freedom abuses and restrictions.

The U.S. government continued to call publicly and in multilateral forums for the Iranian government to respect religious freedom and continued to condemn and promote accountability for its abuses of members of religious minority groups in a variety of ways and in different international forums. These included public statements by senior U.S. government officials, use of social media, reports issued by U.S. government agencies, support for relevant UN and NGO efforts, diplomatic initiatives, and sanctions.

On June 8, the Special Envoy to Monitor and Combat Antisemitism responded on Twitter to a tweet from the Supreme Leader attacking the "Zionist regime." The Special Envoy wrote, "Unacceptable. Let us make no mistake, the use of 'Zionist' here is nothing but a foil for 'Jewish.' This vile, antisemitic rhetoric is not only disturbing, but deeply problematic. No government should tolerate, let alone espouse, these hateful and dangerous views."

On July 28, responding to the Supreme Leader's Twitter post in which he said Western countries were a "mafia" and that "Zionist merchants" controlled it, the Special Envoy to Monitor and Combat Antisemitism posted on Twitter, "We

denounce this continued, egregious antisemitism. This rhetoric is unacceptable – not to mention dangerous – especially from a head of state. It must cease.”

On September 16, the Special Envoy for Iran posted to Twitter, “Mahsa Amini’s death after injuries sustained in custody for an ‘improper’ hijab is appalling. Our thoughts are with her family. Iran must end its violence against women for exercising their fundamental rights. Those responsible for her death should be held accountable.”

On September 19, the Special Envoy to Monitor and Combat Antisemitism posted on Twitter, “Iranian President Raisi’s call for ‘research’ to determine whether the Holocaust happened is ludicrous and dangerous. His statement is a form of Holocaust denial and a form of antisemitism.”

On August 2, the Office of International Religious Freedom posted on Twitter, “Amid a continued rise in arrests, sentences, and imprisonments, the U.S. urges Iran to halt its ongoing oppression of the Baha’i community and honor its international obligations to respect the right of all Iranians to freedom of religion or belief.”

On September 21 at the UN General Assembly, the President said, “Today, we [the United States] stand with the brave citizens and the brave women of Iran who right now are demonstrating to secure their basic rights.”

On September 22, the U.S. Treasury Department designated the Morality Police as an entity and seven senior leaders – Morality Police members Mohammad Rostami Cheshmeh Gachi and Haj Ahmad Mirzaei, Ministry of Intelligence and Security member Esmail Khatib, Army Ground Forces member Kiyumars Heidari, Basij Resistance Forces member Salar Abnoush, and Law Enforcement Forces (LEF) members Qasem Rezaei and Manouchehr Amanollahi – pursuant to Executive Order 15553, which imposes sanctions on certain persons with respect to serious human rights abuses. In a press release accompanying the designations, the Treasury Department stated Gachi had declared that the Morality Police would punish Iranian women who refuse to wear a hijab. Mirzaei served as head of the Tehran division of the Morality Police during Amini’s detention and death. Under Khatib’s leadership, the Ministry of Intelligence and Security arrested and detained a large number of human rights defenders,

women's rights activists, journalists, filmmakers, and members of religious minority groups, subjecting detainees to torture. Under Abnoush's command, the Basij were linked to the killing of unarmed protestors on numerous occasions, including members of religious minority groups. Qasem Rezaei directly oversaw violence against detainees, including torture and beatings. LEF units under Amanollahi's command used live rounds against protestors when suppressing the protests, resulting in multiple deaths. Heidari publicly admitted to his and his force's involvement in the violent response to the 2019 protests that led to the death of at least hundreds of protesters.

In connection with the U.S. Treasury Department designations, on September 22 the Secretary of State issued a statement saying, "The United States condemns the tragic and brutal death of Mahsa Amini, a 22-year-old Iranian woman who died in the custody of the Iranian Morality Police after being detained for purportedly wearing a hijab too loosely. We mourn with her loved ones and with the Iranian people."

On September 23, the President's press secretary called Mahsa Amini's death while in police custody "an appalling and egregious affront to human rights" and said, "Women in Iran should have the right to wear what they want, free from violence or harassment. Iran must end its use of violence against women for exercising their fundamental freedoms."

On October 3, the President issued a statement saying, "I remain gravely concerned about reports of the intensifying violent crackdown on peaceful protestors in Iran, including students and women, who are demanding their equal rights and basic human dignity. They are calling for just and universal principles, which underpin the UN Charter and Universal Declaration of Human Rights. For decades, Iran's regime has denied fundamental freedoms to its people and suppressed the aspirations of successive generations through intimidation, coercion, and violence. The United States stands with Iranian women and all the citizens of Iran who are inspiring the world with their bravery.

On October 6, the U.S. Treasury Department's Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC) designated five senior leaders within Iran's government and security apparatus, pursuant to Executive Order 13553, in connection with continued violence against peaceful protestors in the wake of Mahsa Amini's death. These

were Minister of the Interior Ahmad Vahidi, who oversaw all LEF officers deployed to subdue protests in the country; deputy operations commander Hossein Sajedinia of the LEF who, in April 2019, announced the deployment of over 8,000 male and female undercover Morality Police officers to identify and punish dress code offenders; deputy political commander Yadollah Javani of the IRGC, who led his organization in violently suppressing protests; IRGC commander Hossein Nejat, head of Sarallah, the IRGC's security apparatus based in Tehran tasked with quelling antigovernment protests; and LEF police chief Hossein Rahim in Tehran, who oversaw much of the Morality Police's hijab compliance enforcement in the capital and spearheaded what the Treasury Department characterized as the government's controversial and oppressive "Nazer plan," deploying Morality Police throughout the capital to punish women who improperly wore the hijab.

On October 26, OFAC designated 10 individuals with roles in the government, security forces, and prisons, also pursuant to E.O. 13553. These were: Hossein Modarres, Governor of Khiabani of Sistan and Baluchistan Province, who had direct oversight of security forces commanders during the September 30 protests in the province that resulted in hundreds of casualties among the Sunni minority population, including several children; director general for Tehran Province Prisons Seyyed Heshmatollah Hayat al-Ghaib, who oversees Evin Prison, Rajaei Shahr Prison, and other U.S.-designated entities; warden Heidar Pasandideh of Sanandaj Central Prison in Kurdistan Province; director general for Kurdistan Province Prisons Murad Fathi; warden Morteza Pirithi of Zahedan Central Prison; warden Hedayat Farzadi of Evin Prison, known for its poor conditions and for housing of political prisoners, including religious minorities; director general Mohammad Hossein Khosravi of the Sistan and Baluchistan Province prisons; commander Ahmad Shafahi of Salman Corps, an IRGC military unit in Sistan and Baluchistan Province; Mohammad Kazemi, chief of the IRGC Intelligence Organization; and deputy commander for Operations Abbas Nilforushan of the IRGC.

Also on October 26, the United States designated Mohammad Reza Mirheydari, police commander in Isfahan Province, pursuant to Section 7031(c) of the Department of State, Foreign Operations and Related Programs Appropriations Act for his involvement in gross violations of human rights. Mirheydari led the police forces' response to November 2021 protests in Isfahan, during which,

according to human rights NGOs, authorities attacked peaceful protesters with batons, tear gas, and pellet guns, leading to multiple injuries, including head and eye injuries. OFAC also designated Mirheydari, as well as Bushehr Prison and its warden, Mohammad Reza Ostad, pursuant to section 106(a) of the Countering America's Adversaries Through Sanctions Act of 2017, in connection with gross violations of human rights.

On December 9, the United States designated three government officials, including Ali Akbar Javidan, the LEF commander in Iran's Kermanshah Province, pursuant to E.O. 13818, for being a foreign person who is or has been a leader or official of an entity, including any government entity, that has engaged in, or whose members have engaged in, serious human rights abuse relating to his tenure. Javidan had direct oversight over forces that killed protesters, including children and the elderly; made public statements justifying the police response to the protests while valorizing the LEF forces for suppressing them; and publicly vowed to punish "moral crimes," including the alleged improper wearing of the hijab, during a July roundup of 1,700 people. The United States also designated Ebrahim Kouchakzadeh, who served as an LEF commander in Chabahar city, in Sistan and Baluchistan Province, pursuant to E.O. 13553 for having acted or purported to act for or on behalf of, directly or indirectly, the LEF. Kouchakzadeh was the alleged perpetrator of a mid-September rape of a 15-year-old girl that occurred shortly after the death of Mahsa Amini and fueled major protests throughout the province in late September, leading to a violent backlash from security forces and the killing of more than 60 persons. The United States also designated Allah Karam Azizi, the warden of the Rezaee Shahr Prison, pursuant to E.O. 13818, for being a foreign person who is or has been a leader or official of an entity, including any government entity, that has engaged in, or whose members have engaged in, serious human rights abuse relating to his tenure. The Rezaee Shahr Prison is known to house political prisoners and those who protest against the regime, and those imprisoned there have suffered serious physical abuse at the hands of the prison's guards. Azizi has personally ordered the abuses. Under Azizi's leadership, Rezaee Shahr Prison has remained a place rife with abuse, where prisoners suffered from physical abuse and medical neglect.

Since 1999, Iran has been designated as a Country of Particular Concern (CPC) under the International Religious Freedom Act of 1998 for having engaged in or tolerated particularly severe violations of religious freedom. On November 30,

2022, the Secretary of State redesignated Iran as a CPC and identified in connection with the designation the following sanction: visa restrictions pursuant to section 221(c) of the Iran Threat Reduction and Syria Human Rights Act of 2012 (TRA), for certain senior officials of the Government of Iran identified under section 221(a)(1)(C) of the TRA in connection with the commission of serious human rights abuses against citizens of Iran or their family members.