

Submission to the Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade Committees inquiry on Human rights implications of recent violence in Iran

14/11/2022

Thank you for the opportunity to contribute a submission to the Senate inquiry into Human rights implications of recent violence in Iran.

Background

A nationwide movement (i.e., 'Woman Life Freedom') sparked in Iran by the death of 22-year-old woman, Mahsa (Zhin) Amini, while in the custody of so-called "morality police". In the last nine weeks protesters across Iran have continued to fiercely take to the streets, chanting for change and freedom. This protest has been brutally quashed by the Iranian authorities who used unlawful force, fired live ammunition, and metal pellets at protesters¹. According to human rights organisations, as of 12 November 2022 at least 326 people 43 children and 25 women have been killed by security forces in the ongoing nationwide protests².

Opportunities for nations that value human rights to support those being persecuted and oppressed in Iran

As an Australian citizen who was born and grew up in Iran, I have witnessed that the Islamic Republic of Iran (IRI) has no means of survival except violence, persecution, oppression, murder, and corruption. In last few decades, they have always responded to peaceful protests for basic human rights with gross violence and brutally oppressed unarmed citizens. The following groups are systemically persecuted and oppressed in Iran, and are at great risk of imprisonment, torture, rape, and other forms of inhumanity, being sentenced to death in a sham trial without any form of due process:

- Political dissidents
- Peaceful civilian protesters
- Journalists who speak up and critically report on political and social issues
- Ethnic groups who have been subject to most severe violence since the IRI came to power in 1979 such as communities of Kurds, Balochis, Turks(Azeris and Turkmen), Arabs, Armenians and Assyrians³

¹ <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2022/11/iran-more-than-760000-people-around-the-world-calling-for-un-investigative-mechanism-on-iran/>

² <https://iranhr.net/en/articles/5583/>

³ <https://www.amnesty.org/en/location/middle-east-and-north-africa/iran/report-iran/>

- Religious minorities such as Christians, Jews, Zoroastrians, Dervishes, Yaresan, Sunni Muslims, Mandaeans and particularly members of the Bahā'ī faith^{4,5}
- LGBTIQ Iranians
- Authors, artists, or activists who express disagreement with the IRI

Additionally, people born to parents classified as Muslim by the authorities would remain at risk of arbitrary detention, torture, or the death penalty for “apostasy” if they adopted other religions or atheist beliefs.

The nations that value human rights and denounce any forms of inequality and discrimination are expected to take meaningful actions against the IRI rather than merely condemning the gross violence and oppression in Iran.

The application of sanctions on those responsible for the widespread violence and killing of women, girls, and protesters in Iran

The Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC), the oppressive arm of the IRI, has been engaged in not only brutal crackdown on peaceful protests in Iran but also assassination of dissidents abroad since its foundation in 1979^{6,7}. IRGC's global campaign of terrorism has included as many as 360 targeted assassinations in other countries, and mass bombing attacks that killed and maimed hundreds⁸. In January 2020, The Aerospace Force of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps took full responsibility for shooting down Ukraine International Airlines Flight 752 with a surface-to-air missile, killing all 176 passengers and crew aboard⁹. IRGC's militia force, Basij, has been actively murdering, arresting, and abusing women, girls and protesters in the 'Woman Life Freedom' movement^{10,11}.

The IRGC is a conglomerate organisation which dominates social, cultural, political, and economic aspects of today's Iran. It is the spine of the current political structure and a major player in the Iranian economy. I believe the application of sanctions against the IRGC must target this entity as whole, given its oppressive parts such as Basij or Quds force are funded and supported by IRGC's financial offshoots and affiliates in Iran and overseas. Thus, piecemeal sanctions cannot attenuate the oppressive force of this organisation. The US designated the IRGC as a terrorist organization on 15/04/2019¹² and most recently Canada

⁴ <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2022/08/iran-un-experts-alarmed-escalating-religious-persecution>

⁵ <https://news.un.org/en/story/2022/08/1125162>

⁶ <https://www.justice.gov/opa/pr/member-irans-islamic-revolutionary-guard-corps-irgc-charged-plot-murder-former-national>

⁷ <https://www.iranintl.com/en/202204301212>

⁸ <https://2017-2021.state.gov/irans-assassinations-and-terrorist-activity-abroad/index.html>

⁹ <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-51140806>

¹⁰ <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2022-10-13/what-we-know-about-the-basij-in-iran/101534184>

¹¹ <https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/irans-basij-force-specialists-cracking-down-dissent-2022-09-22/>

¹² <https://www.state.gov/foreign-terrorist-organizations>

implemented new measures against the IRGC, banning 10,000 of its members from entering the country permanently, which represents the top 50% of the organization's leadership, for their engagement in terrorism and systemic and gross human rights violations¹³.

As stated above, taking piecemeal approach while imposing sanctions cannot be effective and therefore the IRGC in its entirety must be targeted so that its financial affiliates and espionage agents around the globe can also be identified and deactivated.

Urgency of the issue

Given that the death toll, the rate of arbitrary detention, the risk of abuse and torture are constantly rising since September, the international community including Australia must step up and take decisive actions urgently.

Recommendations

The Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade Committees can use their voice to demand the Australian government to take the following actions:

- Designate the IRGC as a terrorist organisation and the IRI as a state sponsor of terrorism
- Designate the ambassadors or other representatives of the IRI in Australia, serving either within embassies or international institutions, personae non grata and order their removal from Australia in protest to the illegal and inhumane treatment of protesters in Iran
- Enact Magnitsky-style sanctions against the IRI's and the IRGC's officials and affiliated individuals
- Impose sanctions and introduce legislations to enable restrictive financial measures for foreign nationals responsible for gross violations of human rights in Iran, freeze and seize assets they may hold in Australia
- Unequivocally demand the release of persons detained for the exercise of their human rights and fundamental freedoms, including those who have been detained solely for taking part in peaceful protests, or for removing the compulsory hijab
- Counter the killing of protesters in Iran with firm and timely action and work with like-minded nations to establish a mechanism to hold the IRI accountable for their gross violation of human rights¹⁴

Yours faithfully,

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¹³ <https://pm.gc.ca/en/news/news-releases/2022/10/07/canada-implement-new-measures-against-iranian-regime>

¹⁴ <https://www.amnesty.org.au/australia-must-step-up-for-brave-iranians-like-mahsa-amini>