

Letter of Support for Women and Religious Groups suffering Persecution in Iran

Friday, 30th September 2022

To Whom It May Concern,

Religions for Peace Australia and its affiliates join our voices to the United Nations call for an end to all systematic persecution of religious minorities, and the persecution of women in Iran.

We add our voices to the call from UN experts for the immediate and unconditional release of all individuals detained on the basis of their religious affiliation, and accountability for the systematic persecution of religious minorities by Iranian authorities.

On 22 August 2022, the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights released a formal statement, calling “on Iranian authorities to stop persecution and harassment of religious minorities and end the use of religion to curtail the exercise of fundamental rights.”

The statement continues: “The international community cannot remain silent while Iranian authorities use overbroad and vague national security and espionage charges to silence religious minorities or people with dissenting opinions, remove them from their homes, and effectively force them into internal displacement”.

These acts were not isolated but formed part of a broader policy to target any dissenting belief or religious practice, including Christian converts, members of the Gonabadi dervish order, and atheists (RFE/RL 2022).

The Baha’i Community has kept meticulous records of individuals and communities who have suffered persecution, and the spurious/official reasons given for individual detentions and deliberate destruction of homes, farms and businesses (BIC, 2022).

We note that UN is not being selective in its open criticism of the situation in Iran. A periodic review of the human rights records of all 193 UN Member States is undertaken through the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) in a unique UN Human Rights Council peer-review process.

The UPR is a significant innovation in human rights, based on equal treatment for all countries, led by Member States and covers a broad range of international human rights obligations. Australia submitted its third Universal Periodic Review (UPR) national report to the UN in December 2020, in a review of Australia’s progress in protecting and promoting human rights.

The Foreign Policy Review UK recently produced a thorough review of the extent and nature of violence against women in Iran (FPR, 2022). According to experts, 66% of Iranian women – twice the global average – experience violence in their lifetime (NCRI, 2018). Most acts of violence against women go unreported, and any official published statistics lack transparency.

It appears that current Iranian laws promote violence against women, particularly with State Security Forces, guidance patrols, morality police, and other authorities who enforce the mandatory veil (NCRI, 2020). Human rights groups report [millions of women](#) are stopped and harassed in Iran for “improper hijab” each year and many Iranian women are [serving](#) long prison sentences for refusing to veil (Sadjadpour, 2022).

The Foreign Policy Review concludes: “violence against women is a form of demonstrating power on the part of the strong against the weak, and those women who are either unaware of their rights or unable to stand up for themselves. In addition, the law, environment and culture of Iranian society results in violence against women based on omission, meaning lack of legal, moral and financial support, or through laws and cultural standards that force women to succumb to their circumstances. Therefore, the primary duty is on the shoulders of governments and responsible organisations to protect women by raising awareness at the level of the society in order to prevent such problems.”

As people of faith and of conscience, we cannot sit silently while such atrocities continue to be inflicted on innocent communities. Religions for Peace Australia encourages our human family across the world to move towards a culture of true equality.

Yours sincerely,

Philippa Rowland,

Chair of Religions for Peace Australia – 30 September 2022

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