



Justice for the Victims of the 1988 Massacre in Iran (JVMI)

Open Letter Regarding Systematic Executions and Escalation of Atrocity Crimes in Iran

18 May 2026

H.E. António Guterres
Secretary-General of the United Nations
United Nations Headquarters
New York, NY 10017, USA

Your Excellency,

We write to express grave concern over the accelerating use of the death penalty in Iran as an instrument of political repression. Since the outbreak of regional hostilities on 28 February 2026, the Iranian authorities have exploited heightened instability to intensify a coordinated campaign of mass arrests, torture, and state sanctioned killing, in flagrant breach of international human rights law, and have simultaneously cut off internet access for the general population.

The scale of executions has reached levels not seen in nearly four decades. Of particular concern is the targeted execution of [political prisoners and protesters](#). Since 19 March 2026, dozens have been arbitrarily executed following proceedings that manifestly fail to meet even minimal standards of due process. Many were convicted under vaguely defined “national security” charges. At least eight political prisoners have been executed solely due to affiliation with the People’s Mojahedin Organisation of Iran (PMOI or MEK), while at least 11 others currently face execution on similar grounds. Others have been put to death for taking part in protests on charges such as *baghi* (“armed rebellion”) after summary trials.

Senior officials have openly incited this climate of repression. As documented by the Independent International Fact-Finding Mission on Iran (A/HRC/61/60, 11 March 2026), the Prosecutor General declared that all protesters had committed *moharebeh* (“enmity against God”), a capital offence, while the Head of the Judiciary instructed judges to show “no mercy” in protest-related cases. The FFMI has estimated that more than 50,000 protesters have been arrested.

This wave of executions cannot be separated from Iran’s long-standing culture of impunity, rooted in the 1988 massacre, during which some 30,000 political prisoners were extrajudicially executed or forcibly disappeared. The UN Special Rapporteur on Iran concluded in 2024 that these crimes constitute ongoing crimes against humanity and genocide.

We announce our solidarity with the ‘*No to Executions*’ campaign in Iran’s prisons and with the ‘*No to Rule of Executioners, Yes to a Democratic Republic in Iran*’ campaign.

In light of the urgency of the situation, we ask that you call on Iran to halt executions, immediately and unconditionally release all political prisoners, and restore access to the internet. We urge UN Member States to heed the recommendations contained in the Special Rapporteur’s [2024 Atrocity Crimes report](#) in establishing an international accountability mechanism to enable effective investigations into crimes under international law and using universal jurisdiction to hold perpetrators accountable, as well as to condition diplomatic and economic engagement with Iran on a verifiable halt to executions and measurable human rights improvements.

Silence in the face of these atrocities only reinforces impunity. We look to your leadership to ensure that the United Nations acts decisively to prevent further loss of life.

Yours sincerely,

SIGNED:

1. **Mark Ellis** - Executive Director, International Bar Association
2. **Lord Alton of Liverpool** - Chair, UK Parliament Joint Committee on Human Rights
3. **Joachim Rucker** - Former President of the UN Human Rights Council
4. **Sang-Hyun Song** - Former President of the International Criminal Court (ICC)
5. **Mogens Lykkesøft** - Former President of the UN General Assembly
6. **Solomon Passy** - Former President of the UN Security Council
7. **Stephen Rapp** - Former US Ambassador-at-Large for Global Criminal Justice
8. **Ruth Dreifuss** - Former President of Switzerland
9. **Javied Rehman** - Former UN Special Rapporteur on the Situation of Human Rights in the Islamic Republic of Iran
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16. **Jody Williams** - 1997 Nobel Peace Prize Laureate
17. **Heiner Bielefeldt** - Former UN Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief
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19. **Richard Goldstone** - Former Judge of the Constitutional Court of South Africa
20. **David Crane** - Founding Chief Prosecutor, UN Special Court for Sierra Leone
21. **Robert Goldman** - Former President, International Commission of Jurists
22. **Leila Nadya Sadat** - Former Special Adviser on Crimes Against Humanity to the ICC Prosecutor
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25. **Barbara Lochbihler** - Former Member of the European Parliament
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30. **Rui Manuel Gens Moura Ramos** - Former President of the Constitutional Court of Portugal
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63. **Manfred Nowak** - Secretary General of the Global Campus of Human Rights
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77. **Lindsay Harris** - Director, International Human Rights Clinic, University of San Francisco School of Law
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79. **Betsy Popken** - Executive Director, Human Rights Center, University of California, Berkeley School of Law
80. **David Simon** - Director, Yale University Genocide Studies Program
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82. **Paul Nurse** - President, The Royal Society; 2001 Nobel Laureate in Physiology or Medicine
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84. **Elisabeth Ward** - Executive Director, International Human Rights Law Institute (IHRLI), DePaul University College of Law
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86. **John Torpey** - Director of the Ralph Bunche Institute for International Studies at the Graduate Center, City University of New York
87. **Josef Azizi** - Former Judge, General Court of the European Union
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89. **Richard Wilson** - Founding Director, International Human Rights Law Clinic, American University Washington College of Law
90. **James Silk** - Binger Clinical Professor Emeritus of Human Rights, Yale Law School
91. **Elizabeth Brundige** - Clinical Professor of Law and Director, Gender Justice Clinic, Cornell Law School
92. **Michael Lysander Fremuth** - Professor of Fundamental and Human Rights, University of Vienna; Director Ludwig Boltzmann Institute of Fundamental and Human Rights

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95. **Madeleine Rees** - Former Secretary General of the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom
96. **Ken Blackwell** - Former US Ambassador to the UN Commission on Human Rights
97. **Kevin Jon Heller** - Professor of International Law and Security, University of Copenhagen
98. **Klaus Rackwitz** - Former Director, International Nuremberg Principles Academy
99. **Juan Garces** - Winner of the 1999 Right Livelihood Award
100. **Sandy Pappas** - Former President of the Minnesota Senate
101. **Zorica Marić-Djordjević** - Former Ambassador of Montenegro to the UN Human Rights Council
102. **Tracy Edwards** - Founder, The Maiden Factor
103. **Joanna Cherry** - Former Chair of UK Parliament Joint Committee on Human Rights
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106. **Jeremy Sarkin** - Former Chair-Rapporteur of the UN Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances
107. **Jennifer Rasmussen** - Executive Director, Center for Justice and Accountability (CJA)
108. **Ingrid Betancourt** - Former Member of the Senate of Colombia
109. **Howard Morrison** - Former President of the Appeals Division of the International Criminal Court
110. **Abbé Jolles** - International Human Rights Litigator
111. **Abraham Cooper** - Former Chair, U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom
112. **Achille Campagna** - Member of the List of Counsel for the International Criminal Court
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115. **Alastair McEwin** - Former Disability Discrimination Commissioner of Australia
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121. **Alma Lama** - Former Ambassador of Kosovo to Italy, Malta and San Marino
122. **Amanda Ellis** - Prime Minister's Special Envoy and inaugural Ambassador for Women and Girls, New Zealand
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129. **Anna Adamska-Gallant** - Judge of the European Court of Human Rights
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131. **Anthony Chase** - Professor, Diplomacy & World Affairs, Occidental College
132. **Arbana Xharra** - Recipient of US Secretary of State's International Women of Courage Award 2015
133. **Ariel Dorfman** - Novelist, playwright, and human rights activist
134. **Ariel Dulitzky** - Former Chair-Rapporteur of the UN Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances
135. **Avidan Cover** - Professor of Law, Case Western Reserve University School of Law
136. **Baher Azmy** - Legal Director, Center for Constitutional Rights
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155. **David Hunter** - Professor Emeritus, American University Washington College of Law
156. **David Russell** - UK Coordinator, Survivors Fund (SURF)
157. **David Wineland** - 2012 Nobel Laureate in Physics
158. **Debórah Dwork** - Director, Center for the Study of the Holocaust, Genocide, and Crimes Against Humanity at The Graduate Center—CUNY
159. **Deena Hurwitz** - Human Rights Attorney and Educator
160. **Denis Jivaga** - Director, Kazakhstan International Bureau for Human Rights and Rule of Law (KIBHR)
161. **Dianne Post** - International Human Rights Attorney
162. **Dick Spring** - Former Foreign Minister of Ireland
163. **Dominique Attias** - Former President of the European Bars Federation
164. **Edvard Moser** - 2014 Nobel Laureate in Physiology or Medicine
165. **Eleonora Mongelli** - Vice President, Italian Federation for Human Rights (FIDU)
166. **Elfriede Jelinek** - 2004 Nobel Laureate in Literature
167. **Elias Corey** - 1990 Nobel Laureate in Chemistry
168. **Elisa von Joeden-Forgey** - Executive Director, Lemkin Institute for Genocide Prevention
169. **Elisabeth Rabesandratana** - Member of the List of Counsel for the International Criminal Court
170. **Ellen Kennedy** - Executive Director, World Without Genocide
171. **Eric Schwartz** - Professor of Public Affairs, University of Minnesota
172. **Eric Sottas** - Founder and former Secretary General of the World Organisation Against Torture (OMCT)
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191. **Gulnara Shahinian** - Former UN Special Rapporteur on Contemporary Forms of Slavery, Including Its Causes and Consequences
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193. **Hans Noot** - Director, Gerard Noodt Foundation for Freedom of Religion or Belief
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195. **Hansdeep Singh** - Co-Founder, International Center for Advocates Against Discrimination (ICAAD)
196. **Haun Saussy** - Professor, University of Chicago
197. **Henrikas Mickevičius** - Former Member, UN Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances
198. **Hiljmnijeta Apuk** - Winner, United Nations Prize in the Field of Human Rights for 2013
199. **Houria Esslami** - Former Chair-Rapporteur of the UN Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances
200. **Hurst Hannum** - Professor Emeritus of International Law, Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy, Tufts University
201. **Irene Victoria Massimino** - Former High Criminal Court Rapporteur of Buenos Aires
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203. **Jamil Dakwar** - International Human Rights Lawyer and Adjunct Professor, New York University and Hunter College
204. **Jasper Krommendijk** - Professor of Human Rights Law, Radboud University
205. **Jaspreet Singh** - Co-Founder, Director of Policy & Advocacy, International Center for Advocates Against Discrimination (ICAAD)
206. **Jeanne Sarson** - Co-founder, Persons Against Non-State Torture (NST)
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208. **Jean-Pierre Sauvage** - 2016 Nobel Laureate in Chemistry
209. **Jeff Kaufman** - Director, writer, producer of the documentary about Iranian human rights activist Nasrin Sotoudeh "Nasrin"
210. **Jennifer Trahan** - Clinical Professor; Director, Concentration in International Law and Human Rights, NYU Center for Global Affairs
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227. **Lia Tsuladze** - Executive Director, Center for Social Sciences (CSS)
228. **Linda MacDonald** - Co-founder, Persons Against Non-State Torture (NST)
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273. **Richard Henderson** - 2017 Nobel Laureate in Chemistry
274. **Richard Roberts** - 1993 Nobel Laureate in Physiology or Medicine

275. **Roald Hoffmann** - 1981 Nobel Laureate in Chemistry
276. **Robert Huber** - 1988 Nobel Laureate in Chemistry
277. **Roger Clark** - Former Member, UN Committee on Crime Prevention and Control
278. **Roger Kornberg** - 2006 Nobel Laureate in Chemistry
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287. **Scott Roehm** - Adjunct Professor, Georgetown Law School; Senior Director for Justice and Accountability, Center for Victims of Torture
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290. **Sonja Biserko** - Former Member, UN Commission of Inquiry on Human Rights in the DPRK
291. **Stanislav Pavlovschi** - Former Judge, European Court of Human Rights
292. **Stephen Rosenbaum** - Frank C. Newman Lecturer, School of Law, University of California, Berkeley
293. **Stuart Russell** - Co-chair, Monitoring Committee on Attacks on Lawyers, International Association of People's Lawyers (IAPL)
294. **Suliman Baldo** - Former UN Independent Expert on the Situation of Human Rights in Mali
295. **Susan Bazilli** - Member, UN Group of Independent Experts on the Human Rights Situation in Belarus
296. **Susana SáCouto** - Director, War Crimes Research Office (WCRO), American University Washington College of Law
297. **Takaaki Kajita** - 2015 Nobel Laureate in Physics
298. **Tali Nates** - Recipient of the 2023 US Secretary of State Religious Freedom Award
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301. **Tom Rawlings** - Former Judge of the US Juvenile Courts
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304. **Valeriu Ciucă** - Former Judge, General Court of the European Union

305. **Victoria Sanford** - Founding Director, Center for Human Rights & Peace Studies at Lehman College-City University of New York (CUNY)
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309. **William Bourdon** - International human rights lawyer
310. **Yevgeniy Zhovtis** - Member of the Board of the International Bar Association's Human Rights Institute
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312. **Nenad Stojanović** - Professor, University of Geneva
313. **Neus Torbisco-Casals** - Adjunct Professor; Senior Research Fellow, Albert Hirschman Centre on Democracy, Geneva Graduate Institute
314. **David Edward** - Former Judge, European Court of Justice
315. **Balakrishnan Rajagopal** - Former UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to Adequate Housing
316. **Stephanie Farior** - Former Legal Director, Amnesty International
317. **Kathya Dawe** - Adjunct Professor and International Human Rights Specialist, University of St. Thomas School of Law
318. **Timothy Christian** - Former Chief Federal Negotiator of the Government of Canada
319. **Patrick Baudouin** - Honorary President, International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH); Honorary President, Ligue des Droits de l'Homme (LDH)
320. **Cesare Romano** - Director, International Human Rights Center, Loyola Law School, Los Angeles

CC:

- UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, H.E. Volker Türk
- President of the UN General Assembly, H.E. Annalena Baerbock
- President of the UN Human Rights Council, H.E. Sidharto Reza Suryodipuro
- Member and Observer States of the UN Human Rights Council
- President of the European Council, H.E. António Costa
- UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Iran, Dr Mai Sato
- Chair and Members of the Independent International Fact-Finding Mission on Iran
- Other relevant UN Special Procedures