

# IRAN

The Islamic Republic of Iran was established in 1979 following a revolution that toppled the last Shah, Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, who led the Pahlavi dynasty. The leader of the revolution, the Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, established an Islamic republic, combining theocratic elements with those of a parliamentary democracy. The Supreme Leader, who is appointed for life by an Assembly of Experts, acts as head of State, while the President is elected by a popular vote for a four-year term. Members of the unicameral Islamic Consultative Assembly are also ostensibly elected democratically by popular vote. However, all candidates must be pre-approved by the Guardian Council, a twelve-member group of which six are selected by the Supreme Leader while the other six are jurists chosen by Assembly members.

The country's population is estimated at 82,801,633 and is made up of a diverse range of ethnic and religious groups, including Persians, Azeris, Kurds, Lurs, Baluchis, Arabs, Turkmen, and Turks. Approximately 90% of the population is Shia Muslim, largely of the Ja'afari Shia School, which is the official state religion. Sunnis constitute between 5-10% of the overall population, most of them Turkmen, Arabs, Baluchis, and Kurds. There is also a sizeable Sufi Muslim population of the Nematollahi Gonabadi order. No official records exist of their number, but most observers estimate several millions.<sup>1</sup>

The Iranian Constitution officially recognises only three religious minority groups: Christians, Zoroastrians, and Jews. Estimates as to the size of the Christian population vary considerably between 117,000<sup>2</sup> and 285,000,<sup>3</sup> of which approximately 7,000 are Assyrian and Chaldean Christians and an unknown number of Protestants of various sorts. There is a similarly wide range of estimates concerning the number of Jews in Iran: from 9,000 to 20,000<sup>4</sup> to potentially as many as 30,000<sup>5</sup>. There are an estimated 25,000 Zoroastrians.<sup>6</sup>

Besides these recognised groups, there are others which are larger but unrecognized by the government, such as the Yarsanis who are believed to be as many as one million. Iranian authorities have classified them as Shias practising Sufism, despite Yarsanis' claim to be a distinct faith. Baha'is are another important religious minority group that is officially unrecognized by the Iranian state and are believed to number somewhere between 300,000 and 350,000.

The Shiite Twelver Ja'afari School remains the undisputed foundation for the principles and jurisprudence of the Iran's political and social system.

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/irf/religiousfreedom/index.htm#wrapper>

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/irf/religiousfreedom/index.htm#wrapper>

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/irf/religiousfreedom/index.htm#wrapper>

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/irf/religiousfreedom/index.htm#wrapper>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/mideast/RL34021.pdf>

<sup>6</sup> <http://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/irf/religiousfreedom/index.htm#wrapper>

### Protestant Christians in Prison

Despite the recognised status of Christianity in Iran, Christians – and especially converts to Christianity – are targeted and harassed.<sup>7</sup>

On 26<sup>th</sup> August 2016, intelligence agents raided a garden party and arrested and imprisoned five Christians, four of whom were reportedly converts:<sup>8</sup> **Afshar Naderi, Hadi Asgari, Amir Saman Dashti, Ramil Bet-Tamraz, and Mohammad Dehnavi.**

**Vruir Avanesian**, an Assemblies of God pastor (age sixty-one), was arrested on 27<sup>th</sup> December 2012 while celebrating Christmas. He was charged with action against national security and proselytizing Farsi-speaking citizens. On 5<sup>th</sup> December 2013, he was sentenced to three and half years in prison after a closed door trial.

On 7<sup>th</sup> March 2013, **Ebrahim Firouzi** (age twenty-eight) was arrested on charges of membership to organisations that aim to disrupt national security (Article 499 of the Islamic Penal Code) and with promoting propaganda against Iran (Article 500). Firouzi had launched and administered a Christian missionary website and distributed Bibles. He was first sentenced on 15<sup>th</sup> July to one year in prison and two years of exile to Sarbaz. However, prior to his expected release on 13<sup>th</sup> January 2016, a new case was raised and he was sentenced to an addition five years in prison on charges of acting against national security, gathering, and collusion.

On 31<sup>st</sup> May 2011, **Behnam Irani** (age forty-seven), a pastor of the Church of Iran, was arrested on charges of acting against national security and organizing a group to overthrow the regime. He was sentenced on 30<sup>th</sup> September 2014 to six years in prison and is currently detained at the Rejaei Shahr Prison, where he has reportedly been beaten and abused. The Church of Iran is frequently targeted by Iranian authorities for holding house church services and evangelizing Muslims.

In October 2012, **Massoud Rezaie** and **Mohammad Roghangir**, two other members of the Church of Iran, were arrested on charges of actions against national security and propaganda against the regime. On 16<sup>th</sup> July 2013, Rezaie was sentenced to five years in prison while Roghangir was sentenced to six years in prison, which he started serving in July 2014 at the Adel Abad Prison in Shiraz.

On 5<sup>th</sup> November 2012, **Maryam Naghah Zargaran** (age thirty-six) was arrested and charged with conducting propaganda against the State and acting against national security (Article 610 of the Islamic Penal Code). In March 2013, she was sentenced to four years in

<sup>7</sup> Paragraph 59, <https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/G16/105/97/PDF/G1610597.pdf?OpenElement>

<sup>8</sup> <http://mohabatnews.com/en/?p=3091> ; <http://www.csw.org.uk/2016/09/19/news/3258/article.htm>

prison.

### **Sunnis in Prison**

Sunni Muslims make up the largest minority Muslim denomination in an overwhelmingly Shia country, although they still represent only 5-10% of the total population. Most Sunnis belong to ethnic minorities: Turkmen, Arabs, Baluchis, and Kurds. Some have been sentenced to prison terms, allegedly for preaching Sunni Islam.

Father and son, **Malek Mohammad Abadian** (age fifty-three) and **Abdollah Abadian** (age twenty-three), were arrested in March 2012 on unknown charges. Malek has been subjected to torture and was originally sentenced to death; however, the death sentence was commuted by the Supreme Court. It is not known what sentence was handed down to Abdollah.

**Tohid Ghoreishi-Hafez** was arrested in September 2014 on unknown charges. He was originally sentenced to ten years in prison which was later reduced to seven years.

**Edrees Nemati** was arrested on 9<sup>th</sup> March 2011 on charges of enmity against God, which Nemati claims are related solely to his preaching Sunni Islam. He was tortured and forced to make filmed confessions that were broadcasted on state television. He was then sentenced to death and is currently being held at Rajai Shahr Prison in Karaj.

**Naser Piri** was arrested on 11<sup>th</sup> August 2014 on unknown charges. He was sentenced to five years in prison at the Sanandaj Central Prison by the Islamic Revolutionary Court of Sanandaj.

### **Shias in Prison**

Although Shia Islam is Iran's majority religion, some Shias have been sentenced to prison terms for spreading dissident views on a number of religious issues.

**Ayatollah Mohammad Kazemini Boroujerdi** was arrested in October 2006 on charges of enmity against God and spreading propaganda against the regime. However, according to Ayatollah Boroujerdi these charges are related to his advocating for the separation of religion and state and speaking out on behalf of the rights of Iran's religious minorities and others. He was originally sentenced to death in 2007 by the Special Clerical Court; the sentence was later commuted to eleven years in prison. He is currently being held at Evin Prison.

**Amir Golestani** was arrested on 20<sup>th</sup> August 2013 on charges of propaganda against the regime, insulting the Supreme Leader, publishing obscene photographs, conspiracy, and blasphemy. He was sentenced to twenty years in prison.

**Ayatollah Mohammad Reza Nekounam** was arrested in January 2015 on charges of

insulting a religious figure after he criticized a fatwa issued by Ayatollah Makaram Shirazi against high speed internet. He was sentenced by the Special Clerical Court to five years in prison and is currently being held in the 'Clergy Ward' at Evin Prison.

**Seyed Masoud Seyed Talebi** was arrested on 23<sup>rd</sup> November 2013 on charges of gathering and collusion against national security, propaganda against the regime and blasphemy. He was sentenced to twenty years in prison.

### **Zoroastrians in Prison**

Although Zoroastrianism is Iran's oldest religion, its members are also subject to official persecution by the Shia regime.

**Mojtaba Ahmadi** was arrested in December 2009 on charges of blasphemy, conspiracy, and anti-regime propaganda. In May 2010, he was sentenced to six years in prison.

**Ebrahim Nader Babaie Zeydi** was arrested in November 2011 on charges of propaganda against the regime and acting against national security. He was sentenced to six years and nine months in prison.

### **Baha'is in Prison**

The persecution of Baha'is has become a focal point of international concern following the 2016 report of the **Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Iran**, which recognized 'the continuing systematic discrimination, harassment and targeting facing adherents of the Baha'i faith,' due to 'lack of constitutional recognition of the faith and the absence of legal protections for its adherents.'<sup>1</sup>

In March 2008, a group of leaders of the Iranian Baha'i community, known as the Baha'i Seven, were arrested on baseless accusations of various illegal activities: **Mahvash Sabet** (age sixty), **Fariba Kamalabadi** (age fifty); **Jamaloddin Khanjani** (age eighty); **Afif Naeimi** (age fifty-one); **Saeid Rezaie** (age fifty-four); **Behrouz Tavakkoli** (age sixty-one) and **Vahid Tizfahm** (age forty). All were held incommunicado for a number of weeks and in custody for over twenty months without charge. In June 2010, in a brief and closed trial, they were charged with espionage, propaganda against the regime, assembly, collusion against national security, and spreading corruption on earth. They each received twenty-year jail terms.

#### *Teaching activities for the Baha'i Institute for Higher Education*

On 25<sup>th</sup> September 2011, **Kamran Mortezaie** (age sixty-three) to five years in prison. On 9<sup>th</sup> May 2012, **Faran Hesami** (age forty-one) was sentenced to four years. On 12<sup>th</sup> June 2012, **Kayvan Rahimian** (age fifty-two) was given five years in prison and a fine of approximately 8,000 USD/6,000 EUR.

In 2014, **Peyman Koush-Baghi** and **Azita Rafizadeh** were sentenced to five and four years respectively. They began to serve their sentences on 28<sup>th</sup> February 2016 and 24<sup>th</sup> October 2015 respectively. An Appeals Court decision upheld the initial verdicts. Both were professors at the Baha'i Institute for Higher Education (BIHE).

Many other Baha'is have been imprisoned because of their teaching activities at the BIHE.

#### *Propaganda against the regime*

On 21<sup>st</sup> February 2015, **Fariba Ashtari** was arrested and then sentenced to two years in prison with one year of a suspended sentence.

In March 2013, **Shamim Ettehad** was arrested and charged with propaganda against the regime and acting against national security. Ettehad had broadcast a video showing the destruction of a Baha'i graveyard on a foreign TV channel. On 16<sup>th</sup> June 2013, he was sentenced to five years in prison by the Revolutionary Court of Yazd.

In November 2013, **Manuchehr Kholousi** was arrested and subsequently sentenced to six years in prison. He claims that he was arrested for teaching the Baha'i faith.

On 30<sup>th</sup> January 2013, **Farahnaz Moghadam** of Urumieh was arrested on charges of propaganda against the Islamic Republic, conspiracy, and plotting against the country by encouraging Baha'i membership. She claimed that she was simply teaching her Baha'i faith. In spring 2014, Branch 1 of the Revolutionary Court sentenced her to six years in prison, which was later reduced to three years on appeal.

#### *National security*

In March 2010, **Vahed Kholousi**, a civil rights activist, was arrested on charges of collaboration and conspiracy to commit crimes against national security, propaganda against the regime, and active membership and propagation of the Baha'i faith. He claims the charges are in reaction to his participation in organizations defending both the right to education and human rights. In June 2011, he was sentenced to five years in prison.

On 7<sup>th</sup> July 2012, **Azizollah Samandari** (age fifty-six) was arrested in Tehran on charges of being an active member of the 'perverse' Baha'i sect with the intention to act against national security. On 4<sup>th</sup> October 2011, Samandari was sentenced to five years in prison at Evin Prison.

On 11<sup>th</sup> June 2011, **Pooya Tebyanian** was arrested on charges of acting against national security (Article 498 of the Penal Code) and making propaganda against the system (Article 500). She was later sentenced to six and half years in the central prison of Semnan. Some of her term has reportedly been served in solitary confinement.

### *Insulting Islam*

In March 2009, **Shahram Chiniyan** was arrested on charges of insulting Islam. On the 3<sup>rd</sup> March 2010, he was released on bail and then subsequently sentenced to eight years in prison and seventy lashes.

### *Other spurious charges*

On 16<sup>th</sup> June 2016, **Sara Akhlaghi** was arrested and charged with disseminating indecent photographs, inciting, and encouraging others to breach public decency. It is clear she was arrested for her Baha'i faith.

### **Sufis and Dervishes in Prison**

The Nematollahi Gonabadi and Yarsan (Ahl-e hagh) Sufi Orders have been particularly targeted by the Iranian authorities for repression.

### *Violation of public order*

In September 2011, **Ali Ajdari, Abdol-Reza Arayesh, Mohammad Arayesh, Amanollah Cheraghi, Ghasem Daghtan, Khorshid Dashtaki, Ali Dehghan, Amir-Hamzeh Dehghan, Esmaeil Dehghan, Issa Dehghan, Mehdi Dehghan, Sharam Dehghan, Sohrab Dehghan, Zabihollah Gerdpour, Ebrahim Fazli, Mehdi Ghanbari, and Nasrollah Golshan** were all arrested on charges of being involved in a skirmish, causing physical harm, and violation of public order. All defendants claim the charges are purely based on their membership to the Nematollahi Gonabadi Order.

In January 2014, Ebrahim Fazli, who was shot after being attacked by Basij militia, was sentenced to two years in prison.

In May 2014, Ajdari and Amir-Hamzeh were sentenced to three years in prison and ordered to pay 'blood money' (diyeh) for the injuries caused to Basij forces and plain clothed forces. Abdol-Reza, Mohammad, Cheraghi, Daghtan, Dashtaki, Ali, Esmaeil, Issa, Mehdi, Shahram, Sohrab, Gerdpour, Ghanbari, and Golshan were also sentenced to two years each in prison and ordered to pay blood money.

### *Actions against national security*

In October 2004, **Younes Aghayan** was arrested on charges of carrying ammunition and arms and for armed resistance against the Islamic Republic of Iran. However, Younes has stated that these charges are religiously motivated due to his faith. Originally he was sentenced to five years in prison and death. However, his sentence was commuted to life in prison. He is currently imprisoned at Urumia Prison.

In September 2011, **Hamid-Reza Arayesh**, was arrested and charged with spreading corruption on earth, membership in an illegal group, assembly and collusion with the intent to disrupt national security, causing physical harm and violation of public order, carrying illegal weapons, and enmity against God. In May 2014 he was sentenced to four years in prison and ordered to pay blood money to compensate for injuries caused to Basijis and plain clothed forces.

On 6<sup>th</sup> May 2013, **Seyed Ebrahim Bahrami** was arrested and charged with enmity against God (Articles 183, 186 & 187), assembly and collusion against national security (Article 610), undermining national security (Article 498), membership in an organization which aims to disrupt national security (Article 499), involvement in a skirmish and causing physical harm, violation of public order, carrying illegal weapons, participating in gatherings with the aim of overthrowing the Islamic Republic, and corruption on earth. On 12<sup>th</sup> November 2013, he was sentenced to seven years of internal exile which began on 5<sup>th</sup> April 2015. Prior to sentencing, he was put under physical and psychological pressure and tortured in Shiraz Intelligence Detention Centre.

**Amir Eslami and Omid Behrouzi** were arrested on 4<sup>th</sup> September and 27<sup>th</sup> October 2011 respectively, on charges of membership in a sect endangering national security, propaganda against the state, insulting the Supreme Leader, disturbing the public mind, establishing and membership in a deviant group, and disrupting the public order. Eslami and Behrouzi argue their prosecution is based solely on their contribution to the Sufi website *Majzooban-e Noor*. They were sentenced to seven and half years in Evin Prison by Branch 15 of Tehran's Revolutionary Court.

In September 2011, **Kazem Dehghan** was arrested on charges of spreading corruption on the earth, membership in an illegal group, assembly and collusion with the intent to disrupt national security, causing physical harm and violation of public order, carrying illegal weapons, and enmity with God. He was sentenced in October 2013 to permanent exile in the province of Sistan and Baluchestan by Branch 2 of the Revolutionary Court of Shiraz. In May 2014, he was sentenced by the 1<sup>st</sup> Branch General Court in Kavar to four years in prison and ordered to pay blood money.

The full list of documented cases of FoRB prisoners for each denomination is available on the USB key attached to this report and on our website: <http://hrwf.eu/forb/forb-and-blasphemy-prisoners-list/>

## **Laws Used to Criminalize Religious Activities**

Conversion from Islam to another religion is not expressly prohibited in the country's criminal or penal codes; however, it is considered apostasy under Sharia and punishable by

death.<sup>9</sup> The majority of those arrested from religious groups are charged with taking part in actions against the security of the State, propaganda against the State, violation of public order, or allegations of violence. They may also be charged with membership in an unlawful group, possession of anti-Islamic literature, or proselytising. It is not always clear under which part of the criminal code someone is charged, but most often the following portions of the criminal code are invoked against religious minorities:

**Book Two: Hudud (Pre-2013 Codes<sup>10</sup> and Amended 2013 Codes<sup>11</sup>)**

*Chapter Seven: Moharebeh and corruption on earth (efsad-e-el-fel-arz)<sup>12</sup>/Chapter Eight - Moharebeh<sup>13</sup>*

**Article 183/279:** Criminalises actions or violence involving a weapon with the intention of causing ‘terror and fear or to breach public security and freedom.’ This is considered as a crime against God/enmity against God, since such actions are considered to be against the Islamic State of Iran. Those convicted are considered *moharebe* and corrupt on earth, and face either corporal or capital punishment.

**Article 186/287:** Criminalises the membership of any group ‘which has waged armed rebellion against the Islamic State.’ These actions are considered a crime against God/enmity against God. Those convicted are considered *moharebe* and corrupt on earth and face capital punishment.

**Article 187:** Criminalizes the stockpiling of arms or any financing towards this end or that goes towards helping and supporting any conspiracy or plot to overthrow the Islamic State. Those convicted are considered *moharebe* and corrupt on earth and face either corporal or capital punishment.

**Book Five: Tazie and Deterring Punishments<sup>14</sup>**

*Chapter One: Crimes against the national and foreign security of the State<sup>15</sup>*

**Article 498:** Criminalises the establishment of any group ‘that aims to perturb the security’ of the country and potentially drawing a prison sentence of two to ten years.

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<sup>9</sup> Section 2.1, <http://www.iranhrdc.org/english/publications/reports/1000000512-apostasy-in-the-Islamic-Republic-of-Iran.html#2>

<sup>10</sup> <http://www.iranhrdc.org/english/human-rights-documents/iranian-codes/3200-islamic-penal-code-of-the-islamic-republic-of-iran-book-one-and-book-two.html#14>

<sup>11</sup> <http://www.iranhrdc.org/english/human-rights-documents/iranian-codes/1000000455-english-translation-of-books-1-and-2-of-the-new-islamic-penal-code.html#50>

<sup>12</sup> <http://www.iranhrdc.org/english/human-rights-documents/iranian-codes/3200-islamic-penal-code-of-the-islamic-republic-of-iran-book-one-and-book-two.html#31>

<sup>13</sup> <http://www.iranhrdc.org/english/human-rights-documents/iranian-codes/1000000455-english-translation-of-books-1-and-2-of-the-new-islamic-penal-code.html#50>

<sup>14</sup> <http://www.iranhrdc.org/english/human-rights-documents/iranian-codes/1000000351-islamic-penal-code-of-the-islamic-republic-of-iran-book-five.html>

<sup>15</sup> <http://iranhrdc.org/english/human-rights-documents/iranian-codes/1000000351-islamic-penal-code-of-the-islamic-republic-of-iran-book-five.html#1>

**Article 499:** Criminalises the membership to any group aforementioned in Article 498 with a possible imprisonment of three months to five years.

**Article 500:** Criminalises ‘any type of propaganda against’ Iran ‘or in support of opposition groups and associations’ with a possible imprisonment of three months to one year.

**Article 501:** Criminalises espionage with a possible imprisonment of one to ten years.

*Chapter Two: Insulting sacred religious values and criminal attempt on national authorities*<sup>16</sup>

**Article 513:** Criminalises insulting ‘the sacred values of Islam or any of the Great Prophets or [twelve] Shiite Imams or the Holy Fatima’ and, depending on the circumstances, leading to a conviction of one to five years’ imprisonment and potentially the death penalty.

**Article 514:** Criminalises the insulting of ‘Imam Khomeini, the founder of the Islamic Republic, and/or the Supreme Leader’, with a possible imprisonment of six months to two years.

*Chapter Sixteen: Conspiracy and collusion to commit a crime*<sup>17</sup>

**Article 610:** Criminalises conspiracy among two or more individuals to commit crimes ‘against the national or foreign security of the country’ with a possible imprisonment of two to five years.

*Chapter Seventeen: Crimes against people and children*<sup>18</sup>

**Article 618:** Criminalises acts that disrupt public order and peace by either ‘creating a row and outrageous behaviour or by assaulting other people’ with a possible imprisonment of three months to one year, and potentially up to 74 lashes.

## **National Standards for Detention Conditions**

*In the Iranian Constitution*<sup>19</sup>

**Article 38 [Torture]:** All forms of torture for the purpose of extracting confession or acquiring information are forbidden. Compulsion of individuals to testify, confess or take an

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<sup>16</sup> <http://iranhrdc.org/english/human-rights-documents/iranian-codes/1000000351-islamic-penal-code-of-the-islamic-republic-of-iran-book-five.html#2>

<sup>17</sup> <http://iranhrdc.org/english/human-rights-documents/iranian-codes/1000000351-islamic-penal-code-of-the-islamic-republic-of-iran-book-five.html#16>

<sup>18</sup> <http://iranhrdc.org/english/human-rights-documents/iranian-codes/1000000351-islamic-penal-code-of-the-islamic-republic-of-iran-book-five.html#17>

<sup>19</sup> <http://iranonline.com/iran/iran-info/Government/constitution-3.html>

oath is not permissible; and any testimony, confession or oath obtained under duress is devoid of value and credence. Violation of this article is liable to punishment in accordance with the law.

**Article 39 [Dignity of Arrested]:** All affronts to the dignity and repute of persons arrested, detained, imprisoned or banished in accordance with the law, whatever form they may take, are forbidden and liable to punishment.

## **International Reports on Prison Conditions in Iran**

Despite protections provided by the Constitution, Iran's detention centres are notorious for deplorable conditions as well as for the widespread use of physical, sexual, and mental abuse by authorities. First-hand accounts<sup>19</sup> and testimonies relate clear violations of both national and international law. These include the condition of detention facilities, treatment of detainees, and the application of due process, much of which has occurred without redress or corrective measures. In addition, the Iranian prison system is severely overcrowded, with an estimated population at around 225 624<sup>20</sup> which far exceeds the official capacity of 140 000, which is 160% of the total prison capacity. Inmates are reportedly sometimes forced to sleep in hallways.<sup>21</sup>

Access to adequate and necessary health and medical care is also another critical issue, particularly regarding patient-specific treatment.

**Amnesty International** has criticised what it has described as Iran's 'cruel' denial of medical care in its prisons.<sup>22</sup> The plight of religious minorities as targeted groups makes this situation particularly dire and the treatment they receive especially harsh. The report makes reference to the case of Maryam Naghash Zargaran, an Iranian Christian woman who has gone on two hunger strikes to protest against authorities denying her the medical treatment she requires for long-standing health issues.

Of particular note is Evin Prison, which has become the government's preferred facility for detaining political prisoners. Unlike most detention centres, Evin Prison's wards are run by various organs of Iran's security services such as the Revolutionary Guard Corps or the Ministry of Intelligence. Only a limited number of services are actually managed by Iranian prison authorities. On the 17<sup>th</sup> April 2014, now known as 'Black Thursday',<sup>23</sup> hundreds of

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<sup>19</sup> <http://www.iranhrdc.org/english/publications/reports/3401-surviving-rape-in-iran-s-prisons.html>

<sup>20</sup> <http://www.prisonstudies.org/country/iran>

<sup>21</sup> [https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/500855/CIG-Iran-Prison\\_Conditions\\_February\\_2016.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/500855/CIG-Iran-Prison_Conditions_February_2016.pdf)

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[https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/mde13/4196/2016/en/?utm\\_source=Newsletter&utm\\_medium=email&utm\\_content=Iran%3A+3+Christians+released+on+bail+but+2+others+detained&utm\\_campaign=Iran%3A+3+Christians+released+on+bail+but+2+others+detained](https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/mde13/4196/2016/en/?utm_source=Newsletter&utm_medium=email&utm_content=Iran%3A+3+Christians+released+on+bail+but+2+others+detained&utm_campaign=Iran%3A+3+Christians+released+on+bail+but+2+others+detained)

<sup>23</sup> Section 2.1.1.2.2. 'Black Thursday', <http://www.iranhrdc.org/english/publications/reports/100000574-rights-disregarded-prisons-in-the-islamic-republic-of-iran.html#2.1.1>

guards and security agents violently raided Ward 350, which houses political prisoners including religion and belief prisoners.

The 2014 report of the **United Nations High Commissioner on Human Rights** expressed its deep concern at the ‘widespread use of torture and cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment in detention facilities’<sup>24</sup> which had at times led to the suspicious deaths of detainees. Moreover, it confirmed the practice of illegal ‘incommunicado detention’ and harsh restrictions placed on political prisoners’ access to a lawyer and legal counsel.<sup>25</sup> The report specifically referred to Evin Prison<sup>26</sup> and the poor conditions and treatment to which prisoners were subjected.

In 2014, **the UN Secretary General in a report on the situation of human rights in Iran**<sup>27</sup> also highlighted the denial of adequate medical treatment, a situation compounded by the terrible conditions suffered by prisoners. Moreover, the Special Rapporteur noted in a separate report that:

In 90 per cent of cases, former detainees claimed that their interrogators had subjected them to psychological abuse, including prolonged solitary confinement, mock executions, threats to life, sexual harassment, threats to family members, harsh verbal abuse and threats of rape and other torture. Some 76 per cent also alleged that their interrogators physically abused them in the form of severe beatings to the head and body, often with a baton-like object.<sup>28</sup>

In a report on the prison system in Iran, the **Iran Human Rights Documentation Center** described<sup>29</sup> the treatment by authorities of those detained and imprisoned as ‘harrowing,’ the use of torture being a common occurrence and the system itself as being in a ‘state of crisis’ with all prisoners suffering the consequences of ‘institutionalized neglect.’ The report details how the Iranian prison system and the treatment of its population is in violation of both national and international laws, highlighting how the prison system, and its notoriety as a place of violence, is being used by authorities as a means to repress, intimidate, and ‘crack down on anyone that may threaten its legitimacy.’

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<sup>24</sup> Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (A/HRC/WG.6/20/IRN/2) (2014), Para.

<sup>25</sup> <https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/G14/138/81/PDF/G1413881.pdf?OpenElement>

<sup>25</sup> Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (A/HRC/WG.6/20/IRN/2) (2014), Para.

<sup>26</sup> <https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/G14/138/81/PDF/G1413881.pdf?OpenElement>

<sup>26</sup> Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (A/HRC/WG.6/20/IRN/2) (2014), Para.

<sup>28</sup> <https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/G14/138/81/PDF/G1413881.pdf?OpenElement>

<sup>27</sup> United Nations Secretary-General report on the situation of human rights in the Islamic Republic of Iran (A/HRC/25/26) (2014) Para. 11, <https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/G14/131/62/PDF/G1413162.pdf?OpenElement>

<sup>28</sup> Special Rapporteur on the Situation of Human Rights in the Islamic Republic of Iran, (A/HRC/25/61) (2014) para. 56, <https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/G14/120/75/PDF/G1412075.pdf?OpenElement>

<sup>29</sup> Iran Human Rights Documentation Center, *Rights Disregarded: Prisons in the Islamic Republic of Iran*, at 53, <http://www.iranhrdc.org/english/publications/reports/1000000574-rights-disregarded-prisons-in-the-islamic-republic-of-iran.html#2>

The 2015 country report of the **US State Department** described detention conditions as ‘harsh and life threatening,’ saying that ‘prisoners reportedly suffered at the hands of abusers and [...] illness due to poor sanitary conditions of prison life.’<sup>30</sup>

## **Conclusions**

No improvement in law and in practice could be registered in 2016 for those who do not follow the state-sanctioned Islam. The fundamental rights to freedom of religion or belief are still denied to Iranian citizens and to foreigners living in Iran. This includes freedom of thought and conscience, freedom to change one’s religion or to have no religion, freedom of expression of one’s beliefs in public, freedom of association, freedom of assembly publicly or privately, and freedom of worship.

In Iran, seven denominations are victims of harsh repression: Baha’is, Erfan-e Halghe, Protestants, Shias, Sufis, Sunnis, and Zoroastrians. The Baha’is, whose movement is considered a heresy of Islam, account for the highest number of prisoners. They are followed by the Sufis, Sunnis, and indigenous Evangelical and Pentecostal Christians, who extensively carry out missionary activities among their fellow citizens despite the risk of imprisonment, torture, and execution. Shia dissidents, members of Erfan-e-Halghe, and Zoroastrians are also particularly repressed by the theocratic regime of Tehran.

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<sup>30</sup> United States of America State Department, *Iran 2015 Human Rights Report*, (2015) at 6 <http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/253135.pdf>