

Mandates of the Special Rapporteur on torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment; the Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions; the Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of the right to freedom of opinion and expression; the Special Rapporteur on the right of everyone to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health; the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders; the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Islamic Republic of Iran; the Special Rapporteur on minority issues; the Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms while countering terrorism and the Special Rapporteur on violence against women and girls, its causes and consequences

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(Please use this reference in your reply)

1 May 2025

Excellency,

We have the honour to address you in our capacity as Special Rapporteur on torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment; Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions; Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of the right to freedom of opinion and expression; Special Rapporteur on the right of everyone to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health; Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders; Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Islamic Republic of Iran; Special Rapporteur on minority issues; Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms while countering terrorism and Special Rapporteur on violence against women and girls, its causes and consequences, pursuant to Human Rights Council resolutions 52/7, 53/4, 52/9, 51/21, 52/4, 55/19, 52/5, 49/10 and 50/7.

In this connection, we would like to bring to the attention of your Excellency's Government information we have received concerning Ms. Zeinab Jalalian, an Iranian national of Kurdish origin, who is being held in a situation of deprivation of liberty at the central prison of Yazd, in the Islamic Republic of Iran, for approximately 17 years, in conditions of detention which are considered to fall below international standards. She is believed to be the longest serving female prisoner in Iran and reportedly the only female political prisoner sentenced to life imprisonment in the country.

During the years of deprivation of liberty, Ms. Jalalian has reportedly developed serious health problems for which she needs adequate medical care, which she has allegedly not been able to access while in prison. Therefore, we urge your Excellency's Government to take immediate steps to protect the life of Ms. Jalalian and preserve her health.

We recall that, on 13 June 2016, the Working Group on Arbitrary Detention (WGAD) found that the deprivation of liberty of Ms. Jalalian was arbitrary, thus requesting your Excellency's Government to take the necessary steps to remedy the situation without delay. Taking especially into account the risk of irreparable harm to her health and physical integrity, the WGAD considered that the adequate remedy would be to release Ms. Jalalian and accord her an enforceable right to compensation.¹

¹ See A/HRC/WGAD/2016/1: <https://docs.un.org/A/HRC/WGAD/2016/1>

The WGAD also urged the Government of the Islamic Republic of Iran to ensure that Ms. Jalalian was not subjected to further torture or ill-treatment; to fully investigate the circumstances surrounding her arbitrary deprivation of liberty; and to take appropriate measures against those responsible for the violation of her rights.²

On 27 May 2021, the case of Ms. Jalalian was again raised with your Excellency's Government by various Special Procedures mandate holders.³

Within this context, we also wish to recall a number of communications addressed over the years to the Government of the Islamic Republic of Iran by Special Procedures mandate holders, expressing concern at reports of prisoners allegedly held for political reasons being denied adequate medical care. The aim of such deprivation would appear to be to intimidate, punish or coerce detainees, in contravention of internationally recognised minimum standards for the treatment of prisoners.⁴

According to the information received:

Ms. Zeinab Jalalian is reportedly held in the central prison of Yazd. In 2008, she was sentenced to death by the Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Court. In October 2011, the sentence was commuted to life imprisonment.

The charges brought against Ms. Jalalian included *moharebeh*⁵ and membership of Party for Free Life of Kurdistan (PJAK), designated by the Iranian Government as a terrorist organisation.

During the years of imprisonment, Ms. Jalalian was reportedly interrogated on various occasions while being handcuffed and shackled. She was told that if she did not express remorse for the crimes allegedly committed, she would be refused access to needed medical care. Signing a "letter of repentance" was also allegedly imposed as a condition for her release. Ms. Jalalian always rejected

² *Ibid.*

³ See AL IRN 14/2021 available here:

<https://spcommreports.ohchr.org/TMResultsBase/DownloadPublicCommunicationFile?gId=26438>; the Government's reply can be found here:

<https://spcommreports.ohchr.org/TMResultsBase/DownloadFile?gId=36488>.

⁴ See UA IRN 6/2024 accessible here:

<https://spcommreports.ohchr.org/TMResultsBase/DownloadPublicCommunicationFile?gId=28929>; the Government's reply is accessible here:

<https://spcommreports.ohchr.org/TMResultsBase/DownloadFile?gId=38452>; UA IRN 2/2024 accessible here:

<https://spcommreports.ohchr.org/TMResultsBase/DownloadPublicCommunicationFile?gId=28716>; the Government's reply is accessible here:

<https://spcommreports.ohchr.org/TMResultsBase/DownloadFile?gId=38145>; UA IRN 25/2022 accessible here:

<https://spcommreports.ohchr.org/TMResultsBase/DownloadPublicCommunicationFile?gId=27702>; the Government's reply is accessible here:

<https://spcommreports.ohchr.org/TMResultsBase/DownloadFile?gId=37394>; UA IRN 24/2022 accessible here:

<https://spcommreports.ohchr.org/TMResultsBase/DownloadPublicCommunicationFile?gId=27680>; the Government's reply is accessible here:

<https://spcommreports.ohchr.org/TMResultsBase/DownloadFile?gId=37481>; AL IRN 12/2021 accessible here:

<https://spcommreports.ohchr.org/TMResultsBase/DownloadPublicCommunicationFile?gId=26375>; no reply from the Government has yet been received. See also Report of the Secretary-General, Situation of human rights in the Islamic Republic of Iran, (A/HRC/37/24): <https://www.ohchr.org/en/documents/country-reports/ahrc3724-situation-human-rights-islamic-republic-iran-report-secretary>.

⁵ Commonly translated as "enmity against God", but translated by the Government as a crime in which "a person brandishes or points a weapon at members of the public to kill, frighten and coerce them", see Report of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Islamic Republic of Iran (A/HRC/25/61): <https://docs.un.org/A/HRC/25/61>.

such demands.⁶

Due to the resulting lack of medical attention, Ms. Jalalian reportedly developed several health problems. She is believed to suffer from kidney and gastrointestinal issues, pterygium, foot-and-mouth disease (FMD), impaired vision, and dental infections.

Furthermore, since June 2024, she has reportedly been experiencing excruciating pain in the region of her abdomen/uterus, causing her bleeding. In July 2024, she requested to be transferred to a medical centre outside the prison to diagnose such pain. Her request was refused.

On 26 September 2024, Ms. Jalalian was transferred to Farrokhi Hospital, in the city of Yazd, for a PET/CT scan. She was allegedly forced to undergo such medical examination handcuffed and shackled. Neither the results of the scans, nor any other medical information, were eventually shared with her.

Subsequently, Ms. Jalalian threatened to go on hunger strike. The authorities agreed then to give her access to some of the medical tests/imaging that were conducted in September, which were also shared with a specialised doctor.

The doctor reportedly alerted that Ms. Jalalian could have a cancer in her uterus and would therefore require further medical tests for an accurate diagnosis.

To date, however, Ms. Jalalian has reportedly not been able to undergo any further medical examination. In prison, she has allegedly only been able to obtain inconsistent access to one medical staff, and a general practitioner who lacks the necessary expertise.

It is further submitted that Ms. Jalalian's health is aggravated by the conditions in which she has been detained and the alleged acts of harassment she has been subjected to.

In November 2020, for instance, she was reportedly transferred from Kermanshah Prison to the central prison in Yazd without explanation. Yazd prison is located more than 1,300 kilometres away from Makou, the town where Ms. Jalalian's family lives. As a result, Ms. Jalalian has not been able to receive visits from her family on a regular basis. The family was only able to visit her once. In addition, on various occasions, family visits in prisons have allegedly been restricted or banned for several months, as was reportedly the case until at least January 2025.

Prior to November 2020, Ms. Jalalian had already been transferred periodically to different places of detention, allegedly with the purpose of punishing her and isolating her from her family.

According to reports, as of January 2025, the Iranian authorities continued to condition Ms. Jalalian's access to adequate medical care, and potential release,

⁶ See A/HRC/WGAD/2016/1, quoted above, footnote 1.

on her commitment to no longer engage in political activities, or on her expression of remorse or signing a letter of repentance.

In light of the possibility that Ms. Jalalian may be suffering from a life-threatening disease, which is allegedly not being adequately diagnosed and treated, concern is expressed that her continued deprivation of liberty endangers her life, exposing her at the risk of irreparable harm or even fatal consequences.

It has been submitted that Ms. Jalalian's case forms part of a broader pattern of persecution and repression aimed at targeting civil society and human rights defenders in the Islamic Republic of Iran.

While we do not wish to prejudge the accuracy of these allegations, we are of the view that, should they be confirmed, they would be in violation of the right to life, set forth in article 3 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) and article 6 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), ratified by your Excellency's Government in 1975; the absolute prohibition of torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment, including the requirement of humane and dignified treatment in detention, protected, *inter alia*, by article 5 of the UDHR and articles 7 and 10 of the ICCPR; the prohibition on arbitrary detention enshrined in article 9 of the UDHR and articles 3 and 9 of the ICCPR; and the right to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health, recognised in article 12 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, also ratified in 1975. In this regard, States have the obligation to refrain from denying or limiting equal access for all persons, including prisoners or detainees, to health services (Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, general comment No. 14 para. 34).

We emphasize that the State bears heightened responsibility for all persons in its custody and care. We raise serious concern that inadequate conditions of detention and standards of treatment may present an immediate or longer-term danger to life and health; and stress that the denial of health care as a form of punishment or intimidation, or to extract a forced confession is tantamount to torture and/or other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment.⁷

We recall that the United Nations Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners ("Nelson Mandela Rules") affirm the responsibility of States to provide health care for prisoners, free of charge without discrimination (rule 24), paying special attention to those with special healthcare needs (rule 25); and indicate that prisoners requiring specialized treatment shall be transferred to specialized institutions or to civil hospitals (rule 27). Rule 58 further requires that prisoners shall be able to communicate with family members at regular intervals by correspondence and receiving visits; while rule 59 mandates that prisoners should, to the extent possible, be accommodated close to their homes. Family visits shall never be restricted for disciplinary measures and can only ever be restricted for a limited time for the purposes of maintaining security and order (rule 43).

⁷ See, *inter alia*, A/HRC/37/24, quoted above, footnote 4.

We also refer to the United Nations Rules for the Treatment of Women Prisoners and Non-Custodial Measures for Women Offenders (“Bangkok Rules”), which establish that the health screening of women prisoners shall include comprehensive screening to determine primary health-care needs (rule 6); that preventive health-care measures of particular relevance to women, such as screening for gynaecological cancer, shall be offered to women prisoners on an equal basis with women of the same age in the community (rule 18); and that women prisoners’ contact with their families and legal representatives “shall be encouraged and facilitated by all reasonable means” (rule 26). Rule 4 also specifies that female prisoners shall be allocated, as far as possible, close to their homes to be able to maintain family relations.

In light of the above, we respectfully call on your Excellency’s Government to immediately provide Ms. Zeinab Jalalian with urgent, adequate, and comprehensive medical care in a civilian hospital outside the prison where she is being held. We stress that time is of the essence.

We further request that she be transferred, with her consent and at the earliest opportunity, to a women’s prison closer to her family. Contact with family members can have a positive impact on health and in particular can reduce the suffering inherent in being imprisoned, especially important during times of medical deterioration.

We fear that the arrest and detention of Ms. Jalalian may have resulted from the peaceful exercise of rights and freedoms guaranteed under the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and her work as a human rights activist advocating for women’s rights and the provision of education. We therefore wish to refer your Excellency’s Government to the fundamental principles set forth in the Declaration on the Right and Responsibility of Individuals, Groups and Organs of Society to Promote and Protect Universally Recognized Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms, also known as the UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders. In particular we would like to refer to articles 1 and 2 of the Declaration, which state that everyone has the right to promote and to strive for the protection and realization of human rights and fundamental freedoms at the national and international levels and that each State has a prime responsibility and duty to protect, promote and implement all human rights and fundamental freedoms. Additionally, we would like to bring to the attention of your Excellency’s Government the provisions of article 12 of the Declaration, which provide that the State shall take all necessary measures to ensure the protection of everyone against any violence, threats, retaliation, de facto or de jure adverse discrimination, pressure or any other arbitrary action as a consequence of their legitimate exercise of their rights.

Finally, in relation to the charges brought against Ms. Jalalian, we wish to remind your Excellency’s Government that any measures taken ostensibly to combat terrorism or violent extremism must comply with the obligations of States under international law, in particular international human rights law, refugee law and international humanitarian law.⁸ Counter-terrorism measures must conform to fundamental requirements of legality, necessity, proportionality and non-discrimination and should not be misused against individuals exercising their rights protected under

⁸ Security Council resolutions 1373 (2001), 1456 (2003), 1566 (2004), 1624 (2005), 2178 (2014), 2242 (2015), 2341 (2017), 2354 (2017), 2368 (2017), 2370 (2017), 2395 (2017) and 2396 (2017); Human Rights Council resolution 35/34; and General Assembly resolutions 49/60, 51/210, 72/123 and 72/180, among others.

international law.

The full texts of the human rights instruments and standards recalled above are available on www.ohchr.org or can be provided upon request.

In view of the urgency of the matter, we would appreciate a response as soon as possible on the initial steps taken by your Excellency's Government to safeguard the rights of the above-mentioned person(s) in compliance with international instruments.

As it is our responsibility, under the mandates provided to us by the Human Rights Council, to seek to clarify all cases brought to our attention, we would also be grateful for your observations on the following matters:

1. Please provide any additional information and any comment you may have on the above-mentioned allegations.
2. Please provide updated and detailed information on the present state of physical and mental health of Ms. Zeinab Jalalian. Please explain what measures have been taken, or may be envisaged to be adopted, to protect her life and preserve her health and well-being, including timely access to adequate medical care, as appropriate.
3. Please explain, in light of the distance between where Ms. Jalalian is being held and where her family lives, what measures have been adopted, or may be undertaken, to facilitate family visits on a regular basis. Please provide reasons for why she is presently being detained so far from family members, and identify women's prisons that would be more suitable.
4. Please provide information on measures taken, or envisaged to be adopted, to bring to an end the arbitrary deprivation of Ms. Jalalian's liberty, including by in response to the findings of the Working Group on Arbitrary Detention. Please explain whether there has been any investigation in this connection, and please provide the results of it, including in terms of accountability of persons possibly found responsible for any violation. If there has been no investigation, please explain why.
5. Please provide information on measures adopted by your Excellency's Government to ensure a safe and enabling environment for human rights defenders, in particular women human rights defenders, in the Islamic Republic of Iran, to carry out their legitimate and peaceful human rights activities.

This communication and any response received from your Excellency's Government will be made public via the communications reporting [website](#) within 60 days. They will also subsequently be made available in the usual report to be presented to the Human Rights Council.

While awaiting a reply, we urge that all necessary interim measures be taken to halt the alleged violations and prevent their re-occurrence and in the event that the investigations support or suggest the allegations to be correct, to ensure the accountability of any person responsible of the alleged violations.

We may publicly express our concerns in the near future as, in our view, the information upon which the press release will be based is sufficiently reliable to indicate a matter warranting immediate attention. We also believe that the wider public should be alerted to the potential implications of the above-mentioned allegations. The press release will indicate that we have been in contact with your Excellency's Government's to clarify the issue/s in question.

Please accept, Excellency, the assurances of our highest consideration.

Alice Jill Edwards

Special Rapporteur on torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment

Morris Tidball-Binz

Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions

Irene Khan

Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of the right to freedom of opinion and expression

Tlaleng Mofokeng

Special Rapporteur on the right of everyone to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health

Mary Lawlor

Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders

Mai Sato

Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Islamic Republic of Iran

Nicolas Levrat

Special Rapporteur on minority issues

Ben Saul

Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms while countering terrorism

Reem Alsalem

Special Rapporteur on violence against women and girls, its causes and consequences