

Mandates of the Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms while countering terrorism; the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Afghanistan; the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea; the Special Rapporteur on the right to development; the Special Rapporteur on the rights of persons with disabilities; the Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances; the Special Rapporteur on the right to education; the Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions; the Independent Expert on the effects of foreign debt and other related international financial obligations of States on the full enjoyment of all human rights, particularly economic, social and cultural rights; the Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of the right to freedom of opinion and expression; the Special Rapporteur on the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and of association; the Special Rapporteur on the independence of judges and lawyers; the Special Rapporteur on the human rights of internally displaced persons; the Independent expert on the promotion of a democratic and equitable international order; the Independent Expert on human rights and international solidarity; 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 situation of human rights in the Palestinian territory occupied since 1967; the Special Rapporteur on contemporary forms of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance; the Special Rapporteur on the implications for human rights of the environmentally sound management and disposal of hazardous substances and wastes; the Special Rapporteur on trafficking in persons, especially women and children; the Special Rapporteur on the negative impact of unilateral coercive measures on the enjoyment of human rights; the Special Rapporteur on violence against women and girls, its causes and consequences and the Working Group on discrimination against women and girls

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24 June 2025

Excellency,

We have the honour to address you in our capacity as Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms while countering terrorism; Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Afghanistan; Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea; Special Rapporteur on the right to development; Special Rapporteur on the rights of persons with disabilities; Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances; Special Rapporteur on the right to education; Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions; Independent Expert on the effects of foreign debt and other related international financial obligations of States on the full enjoyment of all human rights, particularly economic, social and cultural rights; Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of the right to freedom of opinion and expression; Special Rapporteur on the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and of association; Special Rapporteur on the independence of judges and lawyers; Special Rapporteur on the human rights of internally displaced persons; Independent expert on the promotion of a democratic and equitable international order; Independent Expert on human rights and international solidarity; Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Islamic Republic of Iran; Special Rapporteur on minority issues; Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Palestinian territory occupied since 1967; Special Rapporteur on contemporary forms of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance; Special Rapporteur on the implications for human rights of the environmentally sound management and disposal of hazardous substances and wastes; Special Rapporteur on trafficking in persons, especially women and children; Special Rapporteur on the negative impact of unilateral coercive measures on

the enjoyment of human rights; Special Rapporteur on violence against women and girls, its causes and consequences and Working Group on discrimination against women and girls, pursuant to Human Rights Council resolutions 58/14, 54/1, 55/21, 51/7, 53/14, 54/14, 53/7, 53/4, 52/17, 52/9, 50/17, 53/12, 50/6, 57/7, 53/5, 55/19, 52/5, 1993/2A, 52/36, 54/10, 53/9, 54/15, 50/7 and 50/18.

In this connection, we would like to bring to the attention of your Excellency's Government information we have received concerning the military strikes conducted by the United States Armed Forces on Iran on 22 June 2025, following strikes on Iran by Israel on 13 June 2025. These strikes, which reportedly targeted Iranian nuclear facilities, raise grave questions about compliance with fundamental obligations under international law, including the prohibition on the use of force, non-intervention, respect for State sovereignty, the international crime of aggression, and international human rights law. We are gravely concerned at the threats of additional escalation, including the further targeting of nuclear facilities, which could lead to devastating consequences for human rights, in particular for the rights to life, security of person, health and a healthy environment.

According to the information received:

From approximately 2:10 a.m. to 2:35 a.m. (Iran Standard Time) on 2 June 2025, seven U.S. B-2 stealth bomber aircraft originating from the U.S. attacked Iranian nuclear and scientific research sites at Fordo and Natanz, and a U.S. Navy submarine attacked the Iranian nuclear site at Isfahan with over a dozen cruise missiles, in a mission known as "Operation Midnight Hammer". In total more than 75 precision-guided munitions struck Iran, including 14 GBU-57 Massive Ordnance Penetrator bombs. The B-2 aircraft were reportedly present in Iranian airspace for about one and a half hours. In total 125 aircraft were involved in the mission, including fighter jets, reconnaissance planes and refuelling tankers. According to the U.S., the three sites sustained extensive damage. The International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) previously reported that Israeli attacks on Iranian nuclear facilities caused radiological chemical contamination within those sites.

In a Security Council debate on 22 June 2025, the U.S. Acting Representative stated that the strikes aimed "to eliminate a long standing but rapidly escalating source of global insecurity and to aid our ally Israel in our inherent right of collective self-defence, consistent with the UN Charter". The U.S. Secretary of Defence indicated on 22 June 2025 that the strikes aimed "to neutralize the threats to our national interests posed by the Iranian nuclear program and [to support] the collective self-defence of our troops and our ally, Israel". In this regard we note that Israel claimed its own strikes aimed to prevent Iran from acquiring a nuclear weapon and possessing ballistic missiles in that connection, and to counter Iran's alleged support for terrorism and destabilise Iran's Government.

The U.S. President threatened further attacks on other targets in Iran if the Government of Iran did not "make peace". He further did not rule out coercive "regime change".

Domestically, the U.S. President claimed authority to attack Iran under article II of the U.S. Constitution, which designates the President as the military commander in chief. There is debate in the U.S. whether Congressional approval was, however, necessary under article I of the Constitution, which grants Congress the power “to declare war”.

On 24 June 2025, Iran retaliated against the U.S. strikes by firing 14 missiles at the U.S.’ Al Udeid Air Base in Qatar, after giving the U.S. advance warning. Of these, 13 missiles were intercepted and one was “set free” because it was not deemed a threat. No injury or damage was reported.

The IAEA has indicated that military strikes on Iran have disrupted the exercise of its mandate to monitor Iranian nuclear sites under the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty and to pursue peaceful nuclear diplomacy, and contribute to undermining the global nuclear non-proliferation regime.

On 24 June 2025, there were unconfirmed reports of a ceasefire agreement between Israel and Iran, but violence between those States has continued.

We express our deep concern regarding this unilateral attack on Iran, which appears to violate numerous fundamental rules of international law, including:

- the right to life under article 6 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, ratified by the U.S. on 8 June 1992;
- the international prohibition on the use of force under article 2(4) of the United Nations Charter and customary international law (General Assembly resolution 2625 (XXV) (1970): Declaration on Principles of International Law concerning Friendly Relations), which has the status of jus cogens;
- the prohibition on aggression (General Assembly resolution 3314 (XXIX) (1974): Definition of Aggression);
- the duty of non-intervention in the internal affairs of another State (General Assembly resolution 2625 (XXV) (1970): Declaration on Principles of International Law concerning Friendly Relations);
- the duty to respect the sovereignty of another State; and
- the right of the Iranian people to self-determination under article 1(2) of the United Nations Charter and common article 1(1) of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights.

We further note that political and military leaders who order an act of aggression, being a particularly serious use of force comparable to an armed attack, may be individually liable for the international crime of aggression under customary international law.

We emphasize that States engaged in acts of aggression as defined in international law, resulting in deprivation of life, violate the right to life under article 6 of the ICCPR (Human Rights Committee, general comment No. 36, para. 70). The U.S.’ heavy military strikes without warning on three nuclear sites inevitably risked serious loss of life. Any further escalation of violence would risk further unlawful deprivation of life and bring grave humanitarian consequences, potentially including arbitrary displacement of civilians from their homes and violations of their rights. Further, States that fail to take all reasonable measures to settle their international disputes by peaceful means might also fall short of complying with their positive obligation to ensure the right to life (ibid).

We highlight that the unilateral use of force against another State is only permitted in response to an armed attack under article 51 of the United Nations Charter. Iran has not attacked the U.S. or Israel with a nuclear weapon and there is no evidence whatsoever that Iran intends to imminently attack the U.S. or Israel with a nuclear weapon. Neither the U.S. nor Israel claims that Iran possesses even a single nuclear weapon. We note that the U.S. intelligence community assessed in March 2025 that Iran is not building a nuclear weapon. The IAEA has not concluded that Iran possesses or is building a nuclear weapon.

We note further that the U.S. possesses over 5,000 nuclear weapons, and Israel allegedly possesses 90 nuclear weapons (with material for over 100 more), making it virtually inconceivable that Iran, even if it acquired a small nascent nuclear arsenal, would initiate a first nuclear strike on either country, suicidally risking its own annihilation. We note that Israel’s undeclared nuclear weapons programme, being entirely outside international scrutiny, is itself prone to fuel nuclear proliferation in the Middle East. Israel is also not a party to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons, the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons or subject to comprehensive IAEA safeguards.

We reaffirm that “preventive” or “anticipatory” self-defence has never been accepted as a lawful doctrine in international law since the United Nations Charter was adopted in 1945. In the past such claims have been condemned, including by the Security Council (resolution 487) when Israel attacked a nuclear reactor under construction in Iraq in 1981. We recall the consensus statement by the member States of the United Nations in the 2005 World Summit Outcome Document (A/RES/60/1, para. 79):

“We reaffirm that the relevant provisions of the Charter are sufficient to address the full range of threats to international peace and security. We further reaffirm the authority of the Security Council to mandate coercive action to maintain and restore international peace and security. We stress the importance of acting in accordance with the purposes and principles of the Charter.”

We further reiterate the Secretary-General’s 2005 report, *In Larger Freedom: Towards Development, Security and Human Rights for All* (A/59/2005, paras. 124-125):

“Imminent threats are fully covered by article 51, which safeguards the inherent right of sovereign States to defend themselves against armed attack. Lawyers

have long recognized that this covers an imminent attack as well as one that has already happened.

Where threats are not imminent but latent, the Charter gives full authority to the Security Council to use military force, including preventively, to preserve international peace and security.”

In addition, we draw attention to the 2004 Report of the High-level Panel on Threats, Challenges and Change, *A More Secure World: Our Shared Responsibility* (A/59/565, annex, paras. 190-191):

“...if there are good arguments for preventive military action, with good evidence to support them, they should be put to the Security Council, which can authorize such action if it chooses to. If it does not so choose, there will be, by definition, time to pursue other strategies, including persuasion, negotiation, deterrence and containment — and to revisit again the military option.

For those impatient with such a response, the answer must be that, in a world full of perceived potential threats, the risk to the global order and the norm of non-intervention on which it continues to be based is simply too great for the legality of unilateral preventive action, as distinct from collectively endorsed action, to be accepted. Allowing one to so act is to allow all.”

Although the IAEA has reported in this case there is no expected “health consequences for people or the environment outside the targeted sites,” we share the position of the IAEA that armed attacks on nuclear facilities must never take place¹ as they could cause the release of radioactive material with grave risks to life and harmful domestic and cross-border consequences. In this context, we recall that international humanitarian law, prohibits attacks on civilian objects and on works or installations containing dangerous forces (including nuclear facilities) even where these objects are military objectives, if such attack may cause the release of dangerous forces and consequent severe losses among the civilian population (ICRC Customary International Humanitarian Rule 42). Such attacks could also violate the right to life (ICCPR, article 6), security of person (ICCPR, article 9), the right to health (International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, article 12), the right to a healthy environment (A/RES/76/300 (2022) and HRC/RES/48/13 (2001)) and equivalent rights under the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

We recognise that the U.S. strikes on Iran appear to be sufficiently grave to constitute an armed attack on Iran under article 51 of the United Nations Charter, entitling Iran to exercise a right of self-defence where necessary to repel any continuing U.S. attacks. However, we strongly urge all parties to refrain from further uses of force and to commit to the peaceful settlement of international disputes in accordance with the United Nations Charter, including through the framework of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty and the IAEA.

¹ The IAEA General Conference has explicitly declared that attacks against peaceful nuclear installations are prohibited under international law in a number of resolutions, including GC(XXVII)/RES/407 (1983); GC(XXIX)/RES/444 (1984); and GC(XXIX)/765/Rev.1 (1985).

We warn that any attempt to coercively pursue “regime change” in Iran would pose a further imminent threat to human rights, including the right to life. It would additionally violate international law, including the right of self-determination under article 1(2) of the United Nations Charter and common article 1(1) of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights, by which all peoples have the right to “freely determine their political status and freely pursue their economic, social, and cultural development.”

This aggression will also increase geopolitical tension and further violence in the region and distracts from the on-going military assault on Gaza. More generally, this attack, by a permanent member of the Security Council responsible for the maintenance of international peace and security, normalizes the illegal use of force as a tool of statecraft, undermining the most fundamental rules of the post-1945 democratic international order established under the United Nations Charter, including the non-use of force, non-intervention, sovereignty, the peaceful settlement of disputes and the international rule of law. Further, by setting a dangerous precedent of “might is right”, it encourages other States to pursue their national security and foreign policy interests by resort to unilateral military force, thus fuelling distrust, “arms races” and destabilizing “balance of power” politics. In a world experiencing a deep economic crisis, and as members of an international community that is committed to peace, we believe that financial resources mobilised for military aggression should be utilized to foster peace-making and development. It is estimated that the U.S. strikes expended US\$140 million in munitions alone. We also draw attention to the United Nations’ Women Peace and Security Agenda, articulated through resolution 1325 (2000) and subsequent resolutions, which highlight the impact of armed conflict on women and their role in peacebuilding.

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 refrain from any further threat or use of force, in accordance with international law.

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 explain how the U.S. attack on Iran is consistent with the prohibition on the use of force under international law, and what authority supports “preventive” or “anticipatory” action.
3. Please disclose any evidence that Iran possessed a nuclear weapon and threatened to imminently use it against the U.S. or Israel.

4. Please indicate whether your Excellency's Government will refrain from further unilateral uses of force against Iran and renounce any doctrine of preventive self-defence, in compliance with international law.
5. Please indicate whether the U.S. action was authorized by domestic law, given the absence of any Congressional approval of "war" under the U.S. Constitution.
6. Please indicate whether your Excellency's Government will provide full reparation to any individual victims of violations of the right to life, and to the Government of Iran for the damage caused by the unlawful attack.
7. Please explain what measures are being taken to investigate and prosecute responsible U.S. political and military leaders for the alleged international crime of aggression against Iran.
8. Please indicate what preventive measures will be taken to ensure that U.S. military personnel refuse to carry out orders that are manifestly illegal under international law, including orders to launch an aggressive armed attack contrary to the United Nations Charter.

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 to clarify the issues in question.

Please be informed that a copy of this communication has been sent to the Government of Iran and the Government of Israel.

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

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Elizabeth Salmón
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