

Mandates of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Islamic Republic of Iran; the Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions; the Special Rapporteur on contemporary forms of slavery, including its causes and consequences; the Special Rapporteur on violence against women and girls, its causes and consequences and the Working Group on discrimination against women and girls

Ref.: UA IRN 20/2025
(Please use this reference in your reply)

1 December 2025

Excellency,

We have the honour to address you in our capacity as Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Islamic Republic of Iran; Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions; Special Rapporteur on contemporary forms of slavery, including its causes and consequences; 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 55/19, 53/4, 51/15, 59/20 and 59/14.

In this connection, we would like to bring to the attention of your Excellency's Government information we have received concerning the imminent execution of Goli Kouhkan, a 25-year-old undocumented Baluch woman, scheduled for December 2025 for murder if she cannot raise the 10 billion tomans (approximately USD 90,000) blood money demanded by the victim's family. Concerns about the imposition of the death penalty for qisas sentences have been raised in previous communications, most recently in UA IRN 17/2024.

According to the information received:

Goli Kouhkan was forced into marriage at the age of 12 years to her cousin. Aged 13, she gave birth to a son at home without medical care. Throughout her marriage, she was a farm labourer and was subjected to severe and continuous physical and psychological violence by her husband, who also isolated her from family and friends. Kouhkan's attempts to escape the abusive marriage were unsuccessful due to her undocumented status and societal and family pressures.

In May 2018, when Kouhkan was 18 years old, her husband beat both her and their then five-year-old son. In desperation, she called her relative for help. When he arrived, a confrontation ensued that resulted in her husband's death. Kouhkan immediately called for an ambulance and reported the incident to authorities. Kouhkan was sentenced to *qisas* (retribution-in-kind) for 'participating in intentional murder' on 21 December 2021 by Branch 2 of the Criminal Court One in Gorgan, Golestan province. She has been detained in Amirabad Prison. Her qisas sentence was upheld by Branch 6 of the Supreme Court on 5 July 2022.

During interrogation, Kouhkan, who was illiterate and had no access to legal representation, was subjected to psychological pressure and threats. Under these conditions, she accepted full responsibility for the husband's death. At trial, Kouhkan was assigned a court-appointed lawyer, but the confession formed the

basis for imposing the *qisas* sentence, without the court examining the context of sustained domestic violence or the particular circumstances of her case.

The family of the deceased have agreed to forgo execution on the condition that Ms. Kouhkan would pay 10 billion tomans (approximately USD 90,000) in *diya* (blood money) and agrees to leave Gorgan permanently. This amount is several times the recommended official rate. This is an impossible sum for an undocumented Baluch woman from a deprived background who has been rejected by her family.

While we do not prejudge any of the information received, we would like to express our grave concern regarding the *qisas* sentence of Kouhkan, particularly in the context of those who are victims of child marriage and domestic violence. Furthermore, Ms. Kouhkan's case exemplifies the discrimination and structural violence experienced by women facing the death penalty in the Islamic Republic of Iran, particularly those who are victims of child marriage and domestic violence.

We would like to emphasise that Kouhkan's case is not isolated. As noted in the Special Rapporteur's report (A/HRC/58/62), at least 241 women were executed between 2010 and 2024. Of these executions: 114 women were sentenced to *qisas* for homicide, 107 for drug-related offences, four for national security offences, and 16 for unidentified offences. Details were obtained for 75 of the 114 women executed for homicide. Of these 75 cases, the majority (69 per cent) had killed their husband or intimate partner. Additionally, 11 were victims of domestic violence, eight involved child marriages, and four women reportedly killed in self-defence against rape.

We remind Your Excellency's Government that rule 61 of the UN Rules for the Treatment of Women Prisoners and Non-custodial Measures for Women Offenders (Bangkok Rules) emphasises that courts shall have the power to consider mitigating factors when sentencing women offenders, taking into account their typical backgrounds. The rules acknowledge that women prisoners have disproportionate experience of domestic violence and that criminal justice responses should address the structural causes that contribute to women's contact with the criminal justice system.

We would also like to recall to your Excellency's Government that the Working Group on discrimination against women and girls, in its 2019 thematic report (A/HRC/41/33), noted that "patriarchal ideas of women's 'morality' and associated expectations concerning their public and private behaviour have detrimental effects for women in the justice system, as they may be subjected to moral judgments founded more on social expectations than on the crimes they may have committed." The Working Group warned against "[j]udicial gender bias [which] often subjects women to disproportionate sentencing for non-conformity with gender stereotypes," even resulting in the death penalty in some cases, and urged States to create accountability mechanisms to prevent, mitigate and remedy the discriminatory application of the law.

Furthermore, we recall that the Convention on the Rights of the Child, ratified by the Islamic Republic of Iran in 1994, sets 18 as the minimum age for marriage and requires States to take measures to prevent child marriage. The practice of forced child marriage constitutes a form of violence against women and girls and violates fundamental human rights principles.

We would also like to reiterate that for States that retain the death penalty, such punishment can only be imposed as an exceptional matter, only for the ‘most serious crimes’ and in full respect of fair trial and due process rights. In general comment No. 36 (para. 35), the Human Rights Committee has noted that the term ‘most serious crimes’ must be read restrictively and appertain only to crimes of extreme gravity, involving ‘intentional killing’, a finding also reflected in paragraph 1 of the United Nations Safeguards guaranteeing protection of the rights of those facing the death penalty, approved by the Economic and Social Council on 25 May 1984. Similarly, the mandate on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions has submitted to the Human Rights Council that a death sentence can only be imposed in cases where it can be shown that there was an intention to kill which resulted in the loss of life (A/HRC/4/20, para. 53).

Courts must consider all mitigating circumstances, including histories of domestic violence, coercion, and the age and circumstances of the defendant. In Kouhkan’s case, the killing occurred in the context of defending herself and her child from ongoing domestic violence, without premeditation or clear intent to kill.

In the cases of women who kill in the context of domestic violence courts should fully take into account mitigating factors relating to the sexual and gender based violence that women and girls have experienced, including by addressing the gender bias facing women and girls that are sentenced to death. Such considerations must be taken into account prior and during sentencing. The failure to consider such circumstances in capital cases may constitute a violation of the right to life under article 6 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, ratified by Iran in 1975 and call upon States to pay greater attention to the gender dimensions of the death penalty, including by addressing intersectional gender biases facing women sentenced to death and taking full account of gender-related mitigating factors during sentencing, such as a history of surviving gender-based violence.

Without prejudging the accuracy of the information received, we remain concerned at the imminent threat of execution of Kouhkan, due to the impossibility of paying the sum requested. We are particularly concerned that qisas, which places the responsibility on the victim’s family to choose between the offender’s life and death, as well as the discretionary amount of *diya*, ultimately results in uneven and disproportionate sentencing. For the same offence, the offender’s fate may differ simply based on the relative wealth of their families, resulting in a system that determines the fate of offenders differently based on their socioeconomic background.

We would like to remind Your Excellency’s Government that article 6(1) of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights prohibits the arbitrary deprivation of life. The different socioeconomic background of offenders and their families means that the qisas practice may be applied in a discriminatory manner, resulting in an arbitrary deprivation of life for persons accused of murder.

Additionally, articles 6(2) and 9(3) require that the sentence of death can only be carried out pursuant to a final judgement rendered by a competent court. The dual practice of *qisas* (retribution in kind) and *diya* under which the victim’s families are granted the authority to choose between retribution and forgiveness (with or without

diya), significantly complicates the prosecution proceedings. This discretionary role impedes the consistent application of procedural safeguards, in place to protect the right to a fair trial and the principle of non-discrimination cannot be effectively followed.

We note with particular concern that Kouhkan belongs to the Baluch ethnic minority and is undocumented, placing her in an extremely vulnerable position with limited access to legal protections, education, and state services. This intersectional discrimination compounds the violations of her human rights and may also constitute part of the bias she experienced during the sentencing.

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 on the initial steps taken by your Excellency's Government to safeguard the rights of the above-mentioned person 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 explain how the failure to consider the context of domestic violence and child marriage in Kouhkan's case is consistent with international human rights obligations, including the Convention on the Rights of the Child.
3. Please provide detailed information on the nature of the offence for which Kouhkan was convicted. To what extent does Iranian Penal Code distinguish between different levels of *mens rea* for homicides (e.g. intentional murder, or other forms of homicides), noting that the ICCPR only permits the application of the death penalty for intentional killing?
4. Please provide information on any reviews on legislation related to *diya* and *qisas*, and any efforts made to ensure the practice does not result in arbitrary deaths or unfair outcomes contrary to articles 6 and 9 of the ICCPR.
5. What steps are being taken to address the issue of child marriage and domestic violence that create the conditions leading to such tragic cases?
6. Please provide information about the number of women currently facing the death penalty for killings committed in contexts of domestic violence.

7. Please provide information on the measures taken by the Government of Iran to address gender bias and intersecting forms of discrimination in sentencing women convicted of serious crimes. Please also indicate what steps are being taken to challenge patriarchal narratives and to promote legal practices that consider sex- and gender-related factors in death penalty cases, including efforts to recognize and address intersecting biases affecting women on death row.

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.

Mai Sato

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

Morris Tidball-Binz

Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions

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Chair-Rapporteur of the Working Group on discrimination against women and girls