

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 minority issues; 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 24/2025

(Please use this reference in your reply)

20 January 2026

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 minority issues; 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, 52/5, 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 disturbing trend of increasing executions for drug offences in violation of the right to life under international human rights law.

Concerns at the imposition of the death penalty for drug offences have been raised in previous communications: [IRN 9/2025](#), IRN 5/2022, IRN 6/2012, IRN 21/2015, IRN 8/2012, IRN 15/2012, IRN 25/2012, IRN 28/2012.

According to the information received:

Ms. [REDACTED], born in 1977, and Ms. [REDACTED], born in 1983, are Iranian nationals of Baloch ethnicity and Sunni faith. Both individuals had no prior criminal records, were unemployed, had incomplete high school education, and came from very low socio-economic backgrounds.

They were arrested on 28 December 2019 by Drug Enforcement Police in the city of Gonabad, Khorasan Razavi Province, while travelling on a public passenger bus from Chabahar to Mashhad. They were accused of complicity in the possession and transportation of approximately 13.7 kilograms of heroin – specifically 6 kg allegedly found on Ms. [REDACTED] and 7.7 kg found with Ms. [REDACTED]. They were promised payment in return for assisting in the transportation, without knowledge of the contents. The case originally involved four people, but charges against two other defendants were subsequently dropped. Ms. [REDACTED] was additionally charged with possession of a small quantity (2.7 grams) of opium for personal use.

Following their arrest, both women were reportedly denied prompt access to their families and legal counsel. They were initially detained at a Drug Enforcement Police detention facility in Gonabad before being transferred to Gonabad prison.

According to the information received, during interrogation, both women were placed under pressure to confess and to incriminate one another.

In May 2020, Branch 1 of the Revolutionary Court of Torbat-e Heydarieh, in a closed hearing, convicted both women of *efsad fel-arz* (corruption on earth) through complicity in drug transportation and sentenced them to death. Ms. [REDACTED] was also fined and received a flogging sentence for the possession of opium.

Both appealed their verdicts. In August 2020, Branch 45 of the Supreme Court overturned their death sentences, citing serious investigative deficiencies: the failure to clearly establish ownership and attribution of the narcotics, the use of contradicting evidence, and the insufficient examination of relevant materials, including phone records between Ms. [REDACTED] and Ms. [REDACTED].

Following additional inquiries, the Revolutionary Court reissued the death sentences for both defendants. The judgments relied primarily on police statements used at trial, relying on contested confessions made during detention, with no decisive new evidence to address the concerns identified by the Supreme Court.

A subsequent appeal was rejected on 15 November 2021 by Branch 41 of the Supreme Court, which upheld their death sentences, thereby exhausting all domestic remedies. Currently, Ms. [REDACTED] and Ms. [REDACTED] remain detained in Gonabad prison and are reportedly at imminent risk of execution.

Reports indicate a steady rise in drug-related executions since 2021. Particularly concerning is that Baluch minorities represented 17 per cent of documented drug-related executions in 2024, despite comprising only an estimated 2-6 per cent of the population.

While we do not wish to prejudge the accuracy of these allegations, we wish to emphasise that States maintaining capital punishment may apply this penalty solely in exceptional circumstances for the ‘most serious crimes’ while ensuring adherence to fair trial standards and due process protections. The Human Rights Committee has clarified in general comment 36 that ‘most serious crimes’ encompasses intentional murder, meaning that capital punishment for drug offences violates article 6 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), which the Islamic Republic of Iran ratified in 1975. The Working Group on Arbitrary Detention’s study “Arbitrary detention relating to drug policies” (A/HRC/47/40) reinforces this position, confirming that executing individuals for drug offences contradicts international death penalty standards.

Additional concerns arise from reported procedural violations and the conducting of proceedings in secrecy within Revolutionary Courts. Such practices, if substantiated, would breach the rights to liberty, security, and fair trial guaranteed under articles 9 and 14 of the ICCPR.

We emphasise that Governments retaining the death penalty must ensure transparency through publishing written judgements and official execution statistics.

This transparency requirement flows from the right to information established in article 20 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and article 19(2) of the ICCPR. Demonstrating compliance with international death penalty standards necessitates public disclosure of investigative and prosecutorial pathways leading to capital charges and judicial application of this ultimate sanction. Article 14(2) of the ICCPR mandates public judgements. Transparency remains essential for states to prove non-discrimination and equal treatment, as opacity prevents verification of consistent and fair death penalty application.

We urge Your Excellency's Government to halt the extensive use of executions for drug crimes, in accordance with international human rights law prohibiting death sentences for such offences. Based on available evidence, these executions violate international human rights standards and therefore constitute arbitrary executions. We further encourage legislative and policy reforms regarding drug offences, promoting comprehensive approaches to drug use and trafficking that address root causes. Research demonstrates that capital punishment fails to deter drug-related crimes. We wish to again draw the attention of Your Excellency's Government that a high number of women are sentenced to death for drug-related offences. As noted in the Special Rapporteur's report (A/HRC/58/62), 107 out of the 241 women that executed between 2010 and 2024 were executed for drug-related offences (44%). Research and reports by the UN and special procedures have highlighted the disadvantage and biases that women accused of drug trafficking experience in accessing effective justice. Women – accused of being involved in the illicit drug trade or involved in it are disproportionately impacted. Research also indicates that female offenders convicted of drug trafficking in some countries have a significantly lower chance than men of having their cases reviewed and overruled; this suggests possible gender bias in capital appeals.

Furthermore, 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, such as the lack of criminal history and relative non-severity and nature of the criminal conduct, in the light of women's caretaking responsibilities and 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. Similarly, the Working Group on discrimination against women and girls have 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 (A/HRC/41/33).

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 persons 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 the written judgements for the cases of Ms. [REDACTED] and Ms. [REDACTED], as required by article 14 of the ICCPR.
2. Please provide detailed information on how the imposition of the death penalty for drug offences in the cases of Ms. [REDACTED] and Ms. [REDACTED] is consistent with article 6 of the ICCPR and general comment 36.
3. Please explain how the death sentences for Ms. [REDACTED] and Ms. [REDACTED] comply with fair trial standards under article 14 of the ICCPR, given the Supreme Court's initial finding in August 2020 of serious investigative deficiencies.
4. Please explain the extent to which the 2017 Law Combating Illicit Drugs allows judges' discretion to take into account mitigating circumstances of the offenders, such as poverty and lack of prior criminal history – circumstances present in both Ms. [REDACTED] and Ms. [REDACTED] cases – bearing in mind that mandatory death penalty violates the ICCPR (CCPR/C/GC/36, para. 37).
5. The death penalty for drug offences under the 2017 amendment of the Law Combating Illicit Drugs (article 45), is applied on the basis of *efsad-e fel arz* (sowing corruption on earth). The jurisprudential basis through *efsad-e fel arz* appears to have been contested by religious experts and officials. Please provide information on any efforts to abolish the death penalty for drug offences and/or to reduce the scope of its application for drug offences, including any amendments to the 2017 law.
6. Please clarify the timeline for any planned executions of Ms. [REDACTED] and Ms. [REDACTED] and confirm what final legal remedies, if any, remain available to them.

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.

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

Nicolas Levrat
Special Rapporteur on minority issues

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

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