

Mandates of the Special Rapporteur on the independence of judges and lawyers and the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Islamic Republic of Iran

Ref.: AL IRN 2/2026
(Please use this reference in your reply)

24 February 2026

Excellency,

We have the honour to address you in our capacities as Special Rapporteur on the independence of judges and lawyers and Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Islamic Republic of Iran, pursuant to Human Rights Council resolutions 53/12 and 58/21.

In this connection, we would like to bring to the attention of your Excellency's Government information we have received concerning systematic denial of access to legal representation for protesters arrested in the Islamic Republic of Iran, as well as the arbitrary arrest and detention of lawyers for the legitimate exercise of their professional duties in connection with the recent and ongoing uprising.

Concerns over the situation of lawyers in the Islamic Republic of Iran were the subject of previous communications sent by Special Procedures on 23 July 2025 (IRN 11/2025) and 14 October 2022 (IRN 20/2022). We thank your Excellency's Government for its response to the latter communication and look forward to a reply to the 23 July 2025 communication as well as to the present one.

We remain concerned that the reported obstacles to the legal profession continue, in the context of a crackdown against massive protests.

According to the information received:

Since the outbreak of nationwide protests on 28 December 2025 thousands of individuals in Iran have been reportedly arbitrarily arrested and detained. Reports indicate that many detainees have been denied timely and effective access to lawyers of their choosing, particularly during the critical initial stages of detention and interrogation. In numerous cases, families have been left without information regarding the whereabouts or legal status of their detained relatives.

Further reports explain that lawyers in Iran who have sought to represent protesters or document violations of due process have been subjected to harassment, intimidation, arrest, or threat of arrest, as well as prosecution, in connection with their professional activities, underscoring concerns that the legal profession is operating under sustained threat.

Recent reports indicate that, in what has been described as an unusual and unlawful measure, branches of the Shiraz Prosecutor's Office handling security-related cases made acceptance of bail conditional upon families of detainees paying substantial sums, (reportedly 100 million tomans, approximately 611 USD, for those arrested before 8 January 2026 and 300 million tomans,

approximately 1,834 USD, for those arrested after) into an account associated with the Shiraz Municipality, ostensibly as “compensation for damages”. The information suggests that such payments have no clear legal basis, particularly as no convictions have been issued in these cases. The reported practice now appears to have been halted, though serious concerns remain regarding accountability and the return of the funds.

This pattern occurs in the context of longstanding and increasingly restrictive state policies aimed at undermining lawyers’ independence and obstructing access to legal representation, particularly during periods of unrest.

According to the information received, the following lawyers have been arrested in recent weeks, after stating their intention to defend the rights of detainees or after making public statements.

Ms. Shima Ghoosheh, a lawyer known for her work on women’s rights and human rights, including representing individuals targeted for their peaceful activism, was arrested on Saturday 16 January 2026, after her house was raided in Tehran. Although there was no immediate information about her whereabouts, it is now known that she is currently detained in solitary confinement in Ward 209 of Evin Prison. She has now been detained for approximately three weeks, with very limited information available regarding the status of her case. No formal charges have been communicated, nor have the authorities disclosed the legal basis or reasons for her arrest. She has reportedly been denied effective access to a lawyer of her choice and to regular contact with her family

On 6 January 2026, Ms. Nazanin Salari, a human rights lawyer, was summoned and appeared before the Branch I of the Shiraz Revolutionary Court charged with ‘collaborating with hostile states,’ gathering and ‘collusion against national security’, and ‘propagating against state.’ Nazanin Salari is also charged with ‘encouraging people to engage in corruption and prostitution’ and ‘being present in public places without a religious veil’ before Branch 112 of the Criminal Court. She was initially charged for these offences in November 2023. On 1 January 2026, Ms. Salari, who was a member of the Disciplinary Court of the Fars Bar Association, resigned from her position along with a group of lawyers due to the Bar Association's failure to support the legal rights of protesters. After she publicly raised concerns about the illegality of the measures against protesters, a new case was opened against her on the charge of “spreading falsehoods”.

Without prejudging the accuracy of these allegations, we wish to convey our profound concern regarding the allegations of harassment of lawyers and interference with the legal profession in the context of a crackdown against protesters that include detentions and arrests. We are particularly concerned at reports that suggest that lawyers have been arbitrarily detained, face heavy sentences and lack of due process guarantees themselves, reportedly for carrying out their functions as lawyers.

We recall that the free exercise of the legal profession contributes to ensuring access to justice, oversight of state power, protection of due process and judicial

guarantees. According to international standards, States must guarantee that those who practice law can do so free from intimidation, obstacles, harassment, or interference. Standards also provide that lawyers shall not be identified with their clients or their clients' causes as a result of discharging their functions.

We highlight with concern the impact that these actions against lawyers may have for all individuals in Iran. In addition to guaranteeing access to counsel, international standards on the right to a fair trial also provide that accused persons must have adequate time and facilities for the preparation of their defense and must be able to communicate with counsel of their choice. Access to legal counsel from the moment of arrest is a fundamental safeguard against torture, ill-treatment, forced confessions, and other serious violations of due process. This right is enshrined in international human rights law, including the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, to which Iran is a State Party, as well as the UN Basic Principles on the Role of Lawyers.

If confirmed, the facts alleged would violate article 9 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, which Iran acceded to on 24 June 1975, which enshrines the protection of the right to liberty and security of a person and establishes that no one shall be deprived of his or her liberty except on such grounds and in accordance with such procedure as are established by law. Certain allegations would also conflict with the State's obligations to treat arrested and detained persons with dignity and humanity, in line with articles 7 and 10 of the ICCPR. These actions also potentially violate article 14, right to a fair trial, and article 19, freedom of expression.

It is pertinent to remind your Excellency's Government that, according to the UN Basic Principles on the Role of Lawyers, governments have the duty to ensure that legal professionals are able to perform all of their functions without intimidation, hindrance, harassment or improper interference, including threats of prosecution or administrative, economic or other sanctions for any action taken in accordance with their recognized professional duties, standards and ethics (principles 16 and 17). In this regard, principle 23 further provides that lawyers are entitled to freedom of expression, including the right to take part in public discussion of matters concerning the promotion and protection of human rights, without suffering professional restrictions by reason of their lawful action.

In light of several communications on related matters sent to your Excellency's Government in past months, we wish to reiterate that these actions appear to reflect a broader pattern indicative of a crackdown on the legal profession and human rights advocacy in Iran. Such practices risk creating a serious chilling effect, deterring or impeding those engaged in legal work from carrying out their professional and legitimate activities. We wish to recall that without the protection provided by an independent bar association, lawyers are extremely vulnerable to attack and to restrictions on their independence.

Finally, we would like to refer 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.

In connection with the above alleged facts and concerns, please refer to the **Annex on Reference to international human rights law** attached to this letter which cites international human rights instruments and standards relevant to these allegations.

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 be grateful for your observations on the following matters:

1. Please provide any additional information and/or comment(s) you may have on the above-mentioned allegations.
2. Please provide detailed information on the legislative and other measures adopted by the Islamic Republic of Iran to ensure that lawyers are able to perform all of their professional functions without intimidation, hindrance, harassment or improper interference (principle 16(a) of the Basic Principles on the Role of Lawyers).
3. Please provide detailed information regarding the legal basis for the arrests of Ms. Ghoosheh and Ms. Salari, which is seemingly in relation to their human rights activism as a lawyer and defenders of human rights, and explain how these are compatible with Iran's obligations under international human rights law.
4. Please provide detailed information on the measures adopted by your Excellency's Government to ensure respect for the right to freedom of expression, as guaranteed under article 19 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, in particular with regard to lawyers and human rights defenders, and explain how any restrictions imposed the legal profession in relation to their public statements, advocacy, or cooperation with international mechanisms meet the requirements of legality, necessity, and proportionality under international human rights law.
5. Please provide information on measures adopted by your Excellency's Government to ensure a safe and enabling environment for human rights defenders in the Islamic Republic of Iran, to carry out their legitimate and peaceful human rights activities

We urge the Iranian authorities to guarantee the safety and protection of all protesters and lawyers, and ensuring that lawyers and human rights defenders can continue their human rights advocacy without fear of retaliation.

This communication, and any response received from your Excellency's Government, will be made public via the communications reporting [website](#) at the 60 days mark. Should Your Excellency's Government respond within 60 days, both the communication and the response, may be published before the 60 days mark. The

communications and responses will also be made available in the subsequent periodic 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(s) responsible for 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 issues in question.

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

Margaret Satterthwaite
Special Rapporteur on the independence of judges and lawyers

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

Annex

Reference to international human rights law

In connection with above alleged facts and concerns, I would like to draw the attention of your Excellency's Government to the relevant international norms and standards that are applicable to the issues brought forth by the situation described above. In particular, I would like to highlight the relevant provision of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), which Iran ratified in 1972, as well as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which reflects customary international law.

As it relates the right to a fair trial, article 14(1) of the ICCPR sets out a general guarantee of equality before courts and tribunals and the right of every person to a fair and public hearing by a competent, independent and impartial tribunal established by law. In addition, article 14 of the ICCPR encompasses the right of access to the courts in cases of determination of criminal charges and rights and obligations in a suit at law. Access to administration of justice must effectively be guaranteed in all such cases to ensure that no individual is deprived, in procedural terms, of his/her right to claim justice; and provides a set of procedural guarantees that must be made available to all persons, including the right of accused persons to have access to, and communicate with, a counsel of their own choosing.

Article 14 of the ICCPR establishes the right to fair proceedings before a competent, independent and impartial tribunal established by law. In this regard, general comment No. 32 (2007) of the United Nations Human Rights Committee notes that the element of independence requires the judiciary to be free from political interference by the executive branch, as well as the legislature. The Committee notes in particular that a situation where the executive is able to control or direct the judiciary is incompatible with the notion of an independent tribunal (general comment No. 32, para. 19).

Article 19 of the ICCPR guarantees the right to freedom of opinion and the right to freedom of expression, which includes the right "to seek, receive and impart information and ideas of all kinds". In its general comment No. 34, the Human Rights Committee stated that States parties to the ICCPR are required to guarantee the right to freedom of expression, including "political discourse, commentary on one's own and on public affairs, canvassing, discussion of human rights, journalism, cultural and artistic expression, teaching, and religious discourse" (CCPR/C/GC/34, para. 11).

The Committee further asserted that there is a duty of States to put in place effective measures to protect against attacks aimed at silencing those exercising their right to freedom of expression (para. 23). Recognizing how journalists and persons who engage in the gathering and analysis of information on the human rights situation and who publish human rights-related reports, including judges and lawyers, are frequently subjected to threats, intimidation and attacks because of their activities, the Committee stressed that "all such attacks should be vigorously investigated in a timely fashion, and the perpetrators prosecuted, and the victims, or, in the case of killings, their representatives, be in receipt of appropriate forms of redress" (para. 23).

Any restriction on the right to freedom of expression must be compatible with the requirements set out in article 19(3) ICCPR. Under these requirements, restrictions

must (i) be provided by law; (ii) pursue one of the legitimate aims for restriction, which are the respect of the rights or reputations of others and the protection of national security or of public order (*ordre public*), or of public health or morals; and (iii) be necessary and proportionate for those objectives. The State has the burden of proof to demonstrate that any such restrictions are compatible with the Covenant, and any restriction must be “the least intrusive instrument among those which might achieve their protective function” (CCPR/C/GC/34, para. 34).

We would also like to recall the UN Basic Principles on the Role of Lawyers, which provides guarantees for the functioning of lawyers, and in article 16 calls on governments to ensure that lawyers are able to perform all their professional functions without intimidation, hindrance, harassment or improper interference. Article 23 provides that lawyers, like other citizens, shall be entitled to freedom of expression, belief, association and assembly. In particular, they shall have the right to take part in public discussion of matters concerning the law, the administration of justice and the promotion and protection of human rights and to join or form local, national or international organizations and attend their meetings, without suffering professional restrictions by reason of their lawful action or their membership in a lawful organization. In exercising these rights, lawyers shall always conduct themselves in accordance with the law and the recognized standards and ethics of the legal profession.

We would like 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 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.