

Mandates of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Islamic Republic of Iran and the Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief

Ref.: UA IRN 10/2026

(Please use this reference in your reply)

10 July 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 and Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief, pursuant to Human Rights Council resolutions 58/21 and 58/5.

In this connection, we would like to bring to the attention of your Excellency's Government information we have received concerning the treatment of Christian communities in the Islamic Republic of Iran have previously been raised in communications: IRN 4/2011, IRN 4/2013, IRN 8/2013, IRN 4/2018, and IRN 26/2020. In this connection, we would like to bring to the attention of your Excellency's Government information we have received concerning the alleged confiscation of the compound of St Peter's Evangelical Church in Tehran, the planned eviction of the 27 members of Iran's recognised Armenian and Assyrian Christian minorities who reside within it, and threats of arrest directed against the church leaders.

According to the information received:

In late June 2026, the 20 families residing in the compound of St Peter's Evangelical Church in Tehran were reportedly ordered to vacate their homes within two weeks, and worshippers were told to find alternative churches in which to worship. Most of the resident families have lived in the compound for many years, are on low incomes, and depend upon the support of the church. The church's leaders have reportedly been threatened with arrest should the families fail to comply.

On Sunday 28 June 2026, six Ministry of Intelligence agents reportedly visited the compound and remained on site for several hours, informing residents that they had come so that the residents would become accustomed to their presence.

The planned confiscation of St Peter's is reported to form part of a wider pattern of confiscations of church properties, many with EIKO's direct or indirect involvement. On 9 May 2019, agents of the Ministry of Intelligence and EIKO reportedly raided and forcibly closed the Assyrian Presbyterian church in Tabriz, changing the locks, destroying the cross on the church tower, ordering the church warden to leave the premises, and installing surveillance cameras in and around the building. No explanation for the closure was reportedly provided. Similarly, on 4 June 2026, an Evangelical (Presbyterian) church in Mashhad building was reportedly demolished, without warning or explanation. Before the demolition, the church, which offered Persian-speaking services, had been forced closed more than two decades ago.

These incidents follow earlier confiscations stretching back several years. In Karaj, a 10,000-square-metre church retreat centre belonging to the Assemblies of God denomination since the early 1970s, purchased with donations from church members and used for children's camps and family retreats, was confiscated by EIKO in March 2018, pursuant to a July 2015 ruling of the Third Branch of the Revolutionary Court of Tehran. In Gorgan, an Assemblies of God church established in 1970 was forcibly closed and reportedly stood empty for more than 25 years before being offered for sale, in 2023, on EIKO's own website.

These closures and confiscations have had a cumulative effect. There were once around 50 Protestant churches offering services in Persian in the Islamic Republic of Iran. Today there are effectively none because the three Anglican churches that were permitted to preach in Persian in Tehran, Isfahan and Shiraz have not been allowed to reopen since the COVID-19 pandemic.

Context

St Peter's Evangelical Church is a Presbyterian church located in central Tehran. Its compound, approximately ten acres in size, comprises: the church building; two schools; homes currently housing 27 individuals from 20 Armenian and Assyrian Christian families; and offices, including those of the Bible Society and of the Council of Evangelical Churches of Iran, the Presbyterian church council which owns the land.

The Council of Evangelical Churches of Iran was established in 1970 and at that time included representatives of the Assyrian, Armenian and Persian-speaking churches. Following the 1979 revolution, the authorities declined to recognise the Council's Persian-speaking representative. While the Council was able to register itself again in 1980, it was subsequently required to re-register and has never again been permitted to do so, despite repeated attempts. It has therefore ceased to be legally recognised.

Other parts of the compound have also been progressively removed from the community's use. The two schools were taken over by the authorities after the revolution and now operate as state schools. The offices of the Bible Society were forcibly closed in 1990, on a "temporary" basis "pending investigation" which never concluded and have never been permitted to reopen.

In 1998, a Revolutionary Court ruled that the entire compound should be handed over to the Execution of Imam Khomeini's Order (EIKO), a state organisation operating under the Office of the Supreme Leader. The Council of Evangelical Churches of Iran, as owner of the land, only became aware of the ruling in 2008 and protested against it; however, the case was reportedly closed at the direction of the Office of the Supreme Leader. In 2013, the church was reportedly forced to cease its Persian-language services, in order to prevent Christians of Muslim background from attending.

While we do not wish to prejudge the accuracy of the information made available to us, we express grave concern at the imminent confiscation of the St Peter's

church compound and at the forced eviction of its 27 residents, which risks rendering members of recognised religious and ethnic minorities homeless and depriving a long-standing Christian community of its place of worship.

We are also concerned that these developments do not appear to constitute an isolated incident, but rather the culmination of a decades-long pattern of measures directed against the Christian community in the Islamic Republic of Iran, and in particular against Persian-speaking Christian worship.

The above allegations appear to be in contravention of international human rights law, in particular articles 17, 18, 22 and 27 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) and article 11 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), both ratified to by the Islamic Republic of Iran in 1975, as well as the United Nations 1981 Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Intolerance and of Discrimination Based on Religion or Belief (A/RES/36/55) (1981 Declaration).

In this regard, we would like to stress that article 18 of the ICCPR guarantees the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion, including the freedom, either individually or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest one's religion or belief in worship, observance, practice and teaching. The Human Rights Committee, in its general comment No. 22 (para. 4), has observed that the freedom to manifest religion or belief encompasses a broad range of acts, including the building of places of worship, and (para. 8) that limitations on this freedom must be established by law, must be directly related and proportionate to the specific need on which they are predicated, and may not be imposed for discriminatory purposes or applied in a discriminatory manner. We also refer to para. 6 of the 1981 Declaration, whereby the right to freedom of thought, conscience, religion or belief shall include, inter alia, the freedom to worship or assemble in connection with a religion or belief, and to establish and maintain places for these purposes.

We would further like to remind your Excellency's Government that article 27 of the ICCPR provides that, in those States in which ethnic, religious or linguistic minorities exist, persons belonging to such minorities shall not be denied the right, in community with the other members of their group, to enjoy their own culture, to profess and practise their own religion, or to use their own language.

With respect to the reported eviction of the compound's residents, we would like to draw the attention of your Excellency's Government to article 11(1) of the ICESCR, which recognises the right of everyone to an adequate standard of living, including adequate housing. The Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, in its general comment No. 7, has stated that forced evictions are *prima facie* incompatible with the requirements of the Covenant; that evictions should not result in individuals being rendered homeless or vulnerable to the violation of other human rights; and that appropriate procedural protections must be afforded, including genuine consultation with those affected, adequate and reasonable notice, the provision of legal remedies and, where those affected are unable to provide for themselves, the adoption of all appropriate measures to ensure that adequate alternative housing is available. We also recall article 17 of the ICCPR, which provides that no one shall be subjected to arbitrary or unlawful interference with his or her privacy, family or home.

Furthermore, we would like to refer your Excellency's Government to article 22 of the ICCPR, which guarantees the right to freedom of association with others. The repeated refusal to permit the re-registration of the Council of Evangelical Churches of Iran, which appears to have deprived the Council of legal personality and thereby facilitated the confiscation of its property, raises serious concerns under this provision.

In view of the urgency of the matter, and in particular the two-week deadline reportedly imposed upon the residents of the compound, we would appreciate a response on the initial steps taken by your Excellency's Government to safeguard the rights of the above-mentioned persons in compliance with the above international instruments.

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

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 information on the factual and legal basis for the 1998 ruling ordering the transfer of the St Peter's church compound to EIKO, and for the decision to enforce that ruling at the present time, and explain how these measures are compatible with articles 18 and 27 of the ICCPR.
3. Please provide information on the legal basis for the order requiring the 27 residents of the compound to vacate their homes within two weeks. Please explain what procedural safeguards, including genuine consultation, adequate and reasonable notice, access to legal remedies, compensation, and the provision of adequate alternative housing, have been afforded to them, in accordance with article 11 of the ICESCR and general comment No. 7 of the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights.
4. Please provide information on the reported threats of arrest made against the leaders of St Peter's Evangelical Church.
5. Please explain why the Council of Evangelical Churches of Iran has not been permitted to re-register since 1980, and indicate what steps are being taken to restore its legal recognition, in accordance with article 22 of the ICCPR.
6. Please explain why the Bible Society remains closed more than 35 years after its "temporary" closure in 1990, and explain what steps are being taken to permit its reopening.

7. Please indicate what measures are in place to ensure that Persian-speaking Christians, including Christians of Muslim background, are able to worship freely in their mother tongue, free from fear of arrest and prosecution.
8. Please provide information on the factual and legal basis for the confiscation, closure, demolition or repurposing of the church properties in Tabriz, Mashhad, Gorgan and Karaj, and explain how these measures are compatible with articles 18 and 27 of the ICCPR. Please explain what measures have been taken to provide redress in respect of the properties and affected Christians concerned.

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 your Excellency's Government to take all necessary interim measures to halt any action that could lead to the confiscation, transfer, demolition or repurposing of the St Peter's church compound; to suspend the eviction of its residents pending full compliance with international human rights standards; and to cease all threats, intimidation and legal or administrative pressure directed against the church's leaders, staff, residents and members. In the event that your investigations support or suggest the above allegations to be correct, we urge that the accountability of any person responsible for the alleged violations be ensured, and that effective measures be adopted to prevent the recurrence of such acts.

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

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Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief