

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 the right of everyone to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health and the Special Rapporteur on minority issues

Ref.: AL IRN 9/2025
(Please use this reference in your reply)

5 August 2025

Excellency,

We have the honour to address you in our capacities 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 the right of everyone to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health and Special Rapporteur on minority issues, pursuant to Human Rights Council resolutions 55/19, 53/4, 51/21 and 52/5.

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 and bring to your attention the cases of Mr. Sadollah Gorgij, Mr. Abdolsamad Shahbazi, Mr. Amanollah Barahouyi, Mr. Iraj Memari, Mr. Morteza Kazemzadeh, Mr. Hossein Molazadeh, Mr. Feizollah Karami, Mr. Mehdi Fathollahpour.

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

According to the information received:

Drug-related executions have reportedly increased continuously since 2021. Between 2018 and 2020, reported executions decreased to 24-30 per year. However, executions have risen dramatically since then, with at least 503 people reportedly executed for drug offences in 2024. During the first semester of 2025 at least 411 executions for drug offences have allegedly taken place, suggesting that the total number of executions for 2025 may exceed the 2024 figures.

In October 2017, the Guardian Council approved a bill amending the Law Combating Illicit Drugs, which came into force in November 2017. The law amended the punishment for some drug offences that previously carried the death penalty or life imprisonment, to imprisonment for maximum 30 years. Despite the amendment, the executions for drug offences have recently increased.

Furthermore, under the 2017 amendment of the Law Combating Illicit Drugs, individuals sentenced to death for drug offences are subjected to confiscation of assets (articles, 4, 5, 6, 8, 18, 35, 36 and 45).¹

¹ Others who are sentenced to a lesser punishment are also subjected to asset expropriation.

This provision appears to ignore the reality of defendants convicted of drug-related offences, many of whom are allegedly driven to illicit drug activity by poverty and financial difficulties.

Furthermore, the most recent, 2024, government-initiated draft amendment bill to the 2017 Law currently under review by the Islamic Consultative Assembly (*Majles*), proposes the confiscation of assets, regardless of their origin or proven connection to drug offences.

Furthermore, drug-related executions are reportedly often unaccounted for by official sources. According to information received, only 3 per cent of known executed for drug offences were announced through official sources.

According to information received, 17 per cent of known drug-related executions in 2024 were Baluch minorities while their population estimate is 2-6 per cent.

We express serious concern at the continuing high number of executions being carried out in the first semester of 2025.

The consistent and escalating pattern of executions demonstrates that urgent action remains necessary to prevent further deaths, as this data indicates that additional executions for drug offences are highly likely to continue in the coming months.

Furthermore, we would like to bring to the attention of your Excellency the below cases involving executions of individuals based on drug related charges. Many of whom were allegedly driven to illicit drug activity by poverty and financial difficulties. These cases are illustrative of a broader pattern of general increase in the number of executions for drug offences observed since 2021.

1. Mr. Sadollah Gorgij is a 25-year-old undocumented Baluch man from a village in Saravan in Sistan and Bluchistan province. He worked as a *sookhtbar* (cross-border fuel carrier) in 2021, he was arrested on the Zahedan to Zabol road and later sentenced to death by the Zabol Revolutionary Court on charges of carrying and possession of heroin and opium (*taryak*), a total quantity of 10,000 grams. He was reportedly executed in Zahedan Central Prison on 20 April 2025. Due to his undocumented status, he did not own any property. Nevertheless, the court ordered the confiscation of the house he rented and the vehicle he used to transport fuel.
2. Mr. Abdolsamad Shahbazi, a Baluch individual from Zahedan, was 24 years of age and without employment at the time of his arrest on drug-related charges. He was subsequently sentenced to death by the Zahedan Revolutionary Court on charges of carrying and possessing controlled substances, specifically methamphetamine (*shisheh*) and heroin, totalling 3,700 grams. Following two years of incarceration on death row, Mr. Shahbazi was reportedly executed at Zahedan Central Prison on 26 April 2025. As Mr. Shahbazi had no movable or immovable

property, no confiscation order was issued. However, he was fined 95 million tomans, which remains unpaid due to his family's dire economic situation.

3. Mr. Amanollah Barahouyi a Baluch father and farmer from Zahedan lived in Galikesh in Golestan province. He was arrested in Alborz province in 2017 and sentenced to death by the Alborz Revolutionary court on charges of carrying and possession of methamphetamines (*shisheh*) and heroin, a total quantity of 2900 grams. He was reportedly executed in Ghezelhesar Prison on 23 April 2025. Mr Barahouyi was also fined 76 million tomans, which was withdrawn from his account by court order. His bank accounts were frozen and remain so, whilst his 4-hectare farmland – purchased two years prior to his arrest – and his house in Galikesh were confiscated.
4. Mr. Iraj Memari, a resident of Kashmar in Khorasan Razavi province, was employed as a shepherd in his village for seven years but experienced financial hardship. He subsequently relocated to the city with his wife and infant child in pursuit of improved economic opportunities for his family. He was arrested on drug-related charges approximately three years prior. Mr. Memari was sentenced to death by a Revolutionary Court and was executed at Khorramabad Central Prison on 2 March 2025 at the age of 29. His house was ordered to be confiscated.
5. Mr. Morteza Kazemzadeh, was a resident of Assad Abad village in Semnan. He was employed as a manual labourer and experienced financial difficulties while supporting two young children. Mr. Kazemzadeh was arrested in 2022 for a drug related offence, sentenced to death by a Revolutionary Court, and executed at Semnan Central Prison on 13 March 2025.
6. Mr. Hossein Molazadeh, aged 26 at time of his arrest was employed at a vehicle repair facility in Zanzan whilst experiencing financial hardship. Mr. Molazadeh was arrested in 2022 and subsequently sentenced to death by a Revolutionary Court on drug-related charges for transporting 95 kilograms of heroin. Mr. Molazadeh was executed at Zanzan Central Prison on 5 April 2025.
7. Mr. Feizollah Karami, a resident of Varamin and father of two children, was 30 years of age at the time of his arrest on the Ray to Qom road alongside a co-defendant. Mr. Karami was sentenced to death on drug-related charges by a Revolutionary Court. Following three years on death row, Mr. Karami was executed at Qom Central Prison on 15 April 2025.
8. Mr. Mehdi Fathollahpour, a resident of Abyek in Qazvin, was 27 years of age and the father of an infant daughter. As the sole financial provider for six family members, he was attempting to support his household on a monthly income of 12 million tomans (approximately 436 US dollars

at the time). He was arrested in 2022 with no previous criminal record and subsequently sentenced to death on drug-related charges by a Revolutionary Court. He did not have legal representation. Mr. Fathollahpour was executed at Rasht (Lakan) Central Prison on 21 April 2025 at the age of 30.

While we do not prejudge any of the information received, we would like to reiterate our grave concern over the application of the death penalty for drug related offenses and the increase in the number of executions for drug offences.

We remind Your Excellency's Government 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.

We call on your Excellency's Government to put a stop to the large number of executions being carried out for drug offences, in compliance with international human rights law, which prohibits the use of the death penalty for crimes not reaching the threshold of the most serious crimes, including drug offences. These executions, on the facts available to us, would constitute a violation of applicable international human rights standards and would thus constitute arbitrary executions.

We also urge your Excellency's Government to take steps to further reform its legislation and policies related to drug offences, and address drug use and trafficking through comprehensive means, including addressing the underlying reasons for such crimes.

We also urge your Excellency's government for transparency on the application of the death penalty. Without transparency, it is impossible for a State to demonstrate non-discrimination and equal treatment under the law, as there is no way to verify that the death penalty is being applied according to the strict requirements provided under international law.

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 information on any efforts envisaged to abolish the death penalty for drug offences and/or to reduce the scope of its application for drug offences.
3. Please provide detailed information about all executions for drug offences that took place since January 2025

4. Please provide the written judgements related to the above-mentioned cases, as required by article 14 of the ICCPR.
5. Please provide detailed information on how the imposition of the death penalty for drug offences is consistent with article 6 of the ICCPR and general comment 36.
6. Please provide information about the total number of individuals facing the death penalty for drug offences who are yet to be executed as of August 2025
7. Please explain any changes in law, policy or practice leading to the recent increase in the number of executions for drug-related offences, which reverses the positive trend observed following the 2017 amendment of the Law Combating Illicit Drugs.
8. Please explain the extent to which the 2017 Law Combating Illicit Drugs allows judges discretion to take into account mitigating circumstances of the offender, such as poverty, bearing in mind that mandatory death penalty violates the ICCPR (CCPR/C/GC/36, para. 37).
9. Please provide information on any changes in the 2017 Law, the 2024 draft bill or any policies or practices that are in place or planned to address the economic hardship expropriation causes to offenders' families and dependents.

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(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 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

Tlaleng Mofokeng
Special Rapporteur on the right of everyone to the enjoyment of the highest attainable
standard of physical and mental health

Nicolas Levrat
Special Rapporteur on minority issues

Annex

Reference to international human rights law

In connection with above alleged facts and concerns, we would like to refer your Excellency's Government to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR or "the Covenant"), ratified by the Islamic Republic of Iran on 24 June 1975, including the right to life under article 6.

We underline that the Human Rights Committee (general comment 36) has interpreted 'most serious crimes' as intentional murder and that the imposition of the death penalty for drug-related charges would be in contravention of the right to life under article 6 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), ratified by the Islamic Republic of Iran in 1975. Drug-related crimes do not meet this internationally recognized threshold. States must therefore refrain from using the death penalty for crimes not involving intentional killing, including drug-related offences.

In this regard, we would also like to recall the Study of the Working Group on Arbitrary Detention 'Arbitrary detention relating to drug policies' (A/HRC/47/40), which states that imposing the death penalty for drug-related offences is incompatible with international standards on the use of the death penalty.

Similarly, the [International Guidelines on Human Rights and Drug Policy](#), state that, in accordance with the right to life, "States shall: Take immediate action to halt executions, commute death sentences, and abolish the death penalty for drug offences (guideline II.5, page 5)."

In this regard, we would also like to recall the report of the Special Rapporteur on the right of everyone to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health, which states that the criminalization, overuse of incarceration, arbitrary deprivation of life, unnecessary use of lethal force in drug enforcement and application of the death penalty as punishment in the name of public health have resulted in various human rights violations (A/HRC/56/52, para. 54).

We express further concerns at the reports of due process violations and that proceedings have taken place behind closed doors at Revolutionary Courts. If confirmed, these practices would be in contravention of the right to liberty and security of person and the right to a fair trial under articles 9 and 14 of the ICCPR.

We remind Your Excellency's Government that those States retaining the death penalty must publish written judgements and official figures on death sentences and executions. The right of access to information is enshrined in article 20 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and article 19(2) of the ICCPR. A State's commitment to international human rights standards on the death penalty must include public disclosure of how investigative and prosecutorial processes lead to capital charges and how its judiciary applies this ultimate penalty.

The article 14(2) of the ICCPR also requires the judgment to be public. For individuals facing the death penalty, this lack of transparency compromises several critical rights: access to timely and adequate legal defence (indispensable for those

facing imminent execution); the guarantee of a fair trial; and the prohibition of torture and cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment.

In this regard, we recall that paragraph 5 of the United Nations Safeguards Protecting the Rights of those Facing the Death Penalty provides that capital punishment may only be carried out pursuant to legal procedures which give all possible safeguards to ensure a fair trial. Full respect for these stringent due process guarantees is what distinguishes lawful capital punishment from arbitrary execution. Furthermore, the death penalty, even for the most serious crimes, can only be imposed after a legal process which gives all possible safeguards to ensure a fair trial.