

Mandates of the Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms while countering terrorism; the Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions; the Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of the right to freedom of opinion and expression; the Special Rapporteur on the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and of association; the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Islamic Republic of Iran; the Special Rapporteur on torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment and the Working Group on discrimination against women and girls

Ref.: UA IRN 12/2025
(Please use this reference in your reply)

13 August 2025

Excellency,

We have the honour to address you in our capacity as Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms while countering terrorism; Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions; Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of the right to freedom of opinion and expression; Special Rapporteur on the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and of association; Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Islamic Republic of Iran; Special Rapporteur on torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment and Working Group on discrimination against women and girls, pursuant to Human Rights Council resolutions 58/14, 53/4, 52/9, 50/17, 55/19, 52/7 and 50/18.

In this connection, we would like to bring to the attention of your Excellency's Government information we have received concerning the **alleged escalation since June 2025 of systematic measures of repression by the Islamic Republic of Iran against the Persian language news service Iran International and its personnel worldwide**. In particular, we are concerned at **credible threats to the physical safety and lives of 45 journalists and staff and 315 family members, across seven countries**: Belgium, Canada, Germany, Sweden, Türkiye, the United Kingdom, and the United States. Some journalists were given until the end of July 2025 to stop working for Iran International or they and named family members would face execution. With the deadline now passed, we are concerned that these threats could materialize at anytime. We are also concerned about threats to impose financial and travel sanctions.

In communication [IRN 10/2024](#) sent on 23 May 2024, concerns were raised by several Special Procedures mandate holders about (1) harassment, intimidation and multiple, credible threats to the lives of Iran International personnel and journalists in the UK; (2) a violent attack causing injury to Iran International journalist Pouria Zeraati on 29 March 2024; and (3) the imposition of counter-terrorism sanctions on Iran International, its parent company Volant Media and their personnel in 2022, and an earlier assets freeze in 2019 directed at their family members in Iran. We acknowledge your Excellency's Government's [reply](#) of 12 August 2024, denying the allegations and accusing Iran International of being a terrorist network. Concerns were raised about alleged violations against BBC News Persian Service staff in [IRN 7/2024](#) sent on 24 April 2024. We acknowledge your Excellency's Government's [reply](#) of 2 August 2024. Concerns about these cases were also raised by the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Islamic Republic of Iran in her report to the Human

Rights Council in March 2025 (A/HRC/58/62, para. 46).

Concerns about threats and harassment against staff working for various overseas-based Persian language news outlets were also raised in communications [IRN 10/2022](#) sent on 26 May 2022; [IRN 4/2020](#) sent on 5 March 2020; [IRN 17/2019](#) sent on 18 December 2019; [IRN 29/2017](#) sent on 24 October 2017; and [IRN 4/2017](#) sent on 27 January 2017. While we acknowledge your Excellency's Government's replies to IRN 10/2022 and IRN 17/2019,¹ we regret that, to date, we have not received responses to the other three communications. These issues were also raised by the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Islamic Republic of Iran in reports to Human Rights Council, including in 2019 (A/HRC/40/67), 2022 (A/HRC/49/75) and a report to the General Assembly in 2019 (A/74/188); and by the United Nations Fact-Finding Mission on the Islamic Republic of Iran in 2024 (A/HRC/55/67, paras. 83-84) and 2025 (A/HRC/58/63, para. 110). We further highlight that the targeting of Persian language journalists abroad and their families in Iran was included in the 2019, 2020 and 2024 Secretary General's reports on reprisals (A/HRC/42/30, A/HRC/45/36 and A/HRC/57/60).

According to the information received:

Iran International is an independent, international Persian language news channel headquartered in London, and broadcasting from London and Washington DC. It broadcasts free-to-air by satellite and reaches a substantial audience in Iran, and among the global Persian diaspora and the wider public.

Since it was founded eight years ago in 2017, Iran International and its staff have been subjected to threats and intimidation, and prolific abuse on social media, by the Iranian authorities (including the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps ('IRGC')), apparently aimed at silencing critical reporting on Iran. These threats escalated after the death of a female Iranian student in custody in Tehran on 16 September 2022 and the 'Woman, Life, Freedom' protests that spread across Iran in 2022, with Persian language media abroad being falsely blamed for fueling violent unrest.

The targeting of Iran International has intensified since mid-June 2025 and appears connected to the military hostilities between Israel and Iran which started on 13 June 2025. Iranian authorities have systematically accused Iran International journalists of being spies for Israel and providing information about Iranian infrastructure to Israeli intelligence. 45 journalists and staff from Iran International were targeted in this six-week period, along with approximately 315 of their family members, in seven countries: Belgium, Canada, Germany, Sweden, Türkiye, the UK, and the US. The current campaign is more intense and serious than at any time since the targeting of Iran International began in 2017. Some journalists were given until the end of July 2025 to stop working for Iran International or they and named family members would face execution. With the deadline now passed, we are concerned that

¹ Reply to IRN 10/2022 received on 28 July 2022:
<https://spcommreports.ohchr.org/TMResultsBase/DownloadFile?gId=37044>
Reply to IRN 2019 received on 18 July 2020:
<https://spcommreports.ohchr.org/TMResultsBase/DownloadFile?gId=35176>

these threats could materialize at anytime. Targeting has taken a number of forms.

Serious and credible threats to life

Iran International journalists and staff have been threatened with death in Belgium, Canada, Germany, Sweden, Türkiye, the UK, and the US,² in some instances requiring police protection and moving into safe houses. These include British citizens [REDACTED]; investigative journalist Motjaba Pourmohsen; and a senior journalist and a staff member based in London. In addition, threats have been made to kill relatives based in Iran, the UK, the US and Canada. In at least nine cases, threats have been made to kill both the journalists and named family members. Deadlines of the end of July 2025 were given by the Iranian authorities for certain journalists to stop working for Iran International or they and named family members would face execution.

To ensure their safety, some Iran International staff and their families have been advised to relocate by UK authorities. Stringent security measures have been taken in relation to Iran International and individual staff, including physical protection, frequent relocation, surveillance and online security, resulting in long-term impacts on their well-being, their quality of life and their families.

In addition, since communication IRN 10/2024, it was reported that the extensive security measures taken by the UK authorities to protect Mr. Zeraati were unable to prevent a violent attack on him, and that it was believed that he was left alive as a warning to others. Two foreign nationals suspected of the attack were extradited to the UK in December 2024 and await trial. It is reported that criminal networks may have been engaged to carry out the attack, along with plots against at least five other Iran International journalists.

Proposed death penalty law for collaboration with Israel

Connected to death threats are reports in June and July 2025 that Iran's parliament had introduced legislation, carrying the death penalty, to "intensify punishment for espionage and collaborators with the Zionist regime". Further, threats have been made to both apply such a law, not yet passed, to Iran International staff for alleged collaboration with Israel, and that it could even authorize extrajudicial killings abroad, without trial or judicial sentence. Such threats have also been made in relation to some family members.

Surveillance in the UK

Various staff in the UK have been under apparent surveillance, being followed, having a tracking tag attached to their car, and repeated break ins of staff cars. Mr. Pourmohsen has received online threats that include details of restaurants he has visited and threats to poison him.

² Concerns may also exist in several other countries in Europe.

Intimidation of families and friends in Iran

Family members in Iran have been interrogated, placed under surveillance and threats of arrest and death have been made against their relatives at Iran International or themselves if their relatives do not cease working for the media network by specified deadlines. The tone of interrogations has been much more aggressive than in the past. With the July 2025 deadlines now passed, family members are terrified at the consequences for themselves and their relatives. In [REDACTED], relatives have had their own family members threatened with arrest and forced confessions to be broadcasted on Iranian television. Relatives abroad have also been threatened with death. Similarly, relatives of Mr. Pourmohsen have been interrogated and threatened with arrest in Iran.

Family members have been further pressured to obtain information from their Iran International relatives about their alleged associations with Israeli intelligence or Israelis. The risk to family members in Iran has forced some Iran International staff to distressingly break contact with their family members in order to protect them. Staff have also been unable to return to Iran for important family reasons, such as funerals or to visit ill relatives, due to the risks.

Threats have also included the seizure of assets of family members (whether in Iran or abroad) who own property in Iran.

Intimidation has also extended to the friends in Iran of Iran International staff.

Social media threats

Threats, including of death and sexual violence to women journalists, have been prolifically made on social media and instant messaging services against Iran International personnel. For example, one staff member in London received over 500 threats on an instant messaging platform and 100 anonymous telephone calls after stolen personal data was published in Iranian media. Mr. Pourmohsen has received threats on social media of being abducted to Iran and executed there. One female journalist has received death threats and gendered threats of sexual violence and over 50 messages a day requesting sexual images or videos.

Hacking and publication of personal data

The personal data, such as passports, identity documents, foreign residency permits, photos and email addresses of numerous Iran International staff was reportedly hacked by personnel associated with the Iran's Ministry of Intelligence in summer 2024 and January 2025, using malware-infected messages. Information stolen at that time has been used in the current phase of repression against Iran International personnel, by publishing it in Iranian state media to intimidate them.

Other developments

In response to an alleged broader pattern of escalating threats by Iranian intelligence services in their territories “to kill, kidnap, and harass people [including journalists] ... in clear violation of our sovereignty”, a joint statement was issued on 31 July 2025 condemning such acts, by fourteen States.³

In March 2025, the UK authorities placed Iran on the enhanced tier of its impending Foreign Influence Registration Scheme, which requires anyone who is directed by Iran to conduct activities in the UK, including criminal proxies, to register this activity or face 5 years’ imprisonment. The UK will also provide enhanced police training on state threats and continue providing protective security advice and support to individuals and organizations at risk, including Persian language media organizations and their employees.

In July 2025, the UK Parliament’s Intelligence and Security Committee reported that Iran poses ‘one of the highest kidnap and assassination state threats to the UK’, including Iranian media organizations and particularly Iran International, and that ‘[m]onitoring and silencing UK-based opponents of the Iranian regime is one of Iran’s primary tactical objectives in relation to the UK’.⁴ It also queried the sufficiency of protective actions by the UK authorities.

Without prejudging the accuracy of these allegations, if the allegations prove to be true, they may constitute violations of the right to life (International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), ratified by Iran on 24 June 1975, article 6); the right to security of person, including bodily and mental integrity (ICCPR, article 9); freedom from cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment (ICCPR, article 7); freedom of expression (ICCPR, article 19); freedom of association (ICCPR, article 22); the right to work (International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), ratified by Iran on 24 June 1975, article 6); and freedom from unlawful attacks on one’s honour and reputation (ICCPR, article 17). We also emphasize the gendered dimension of these violations, particularly in relation to threats of sexual violence and online harassment targeting women journalists. We are further concerned that the imposition of counter-terrorism sanctions would additionally infringe the requirement of legality (ICCPR, article 15); due process and judicial protection (ICCPR, article 14); and freedom from arbitrary or unlawful interference in privacy, the home and the family (ICCPR, article 17).

Right to life and security of person and freedom from torture and/or other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment

We are particularly alarmed by the alleged threats of violence or death against the journalists and their families, which violate their fundamental rights to life (ICCPR, article 6) and to security of person (ICCPR, article 9 (1)), including physical and mental integrity. The obligation to refrain from arbitrarily depriving a person of their life applies to all activities ‘having a direct and reasonably foreseeable impact on the right to life of individuals outside their territory’ (general comment No. 36, para. 22). The intentional taking of life is permissible only if it is strictly necessary to protect life from

³ [Statement on state threats from Iranian intelligence services, 31 July 2025](#)

⁴ [Intelligence and Security Committee of Parliament, Iran, 10 July 2025.](#)

an imminent threat (para. 12). A State that kills a journalist in another country, where there is no basis in self-defence, commits an arbitrary deprivation of life and an extrajudicial killing. The State is internationally responsible for such killing whether it is committed directly by State officials, or by private actors instructed, directed or controlled by the State.⁵

The right to security of person protects individuals against intentional infliction of bodily or mental injury even if it is not life-threatening (general comment No. 35, para. 55), again whether an attack is committed by state officials or carried out by other actors on behalf of the State, and including where the State acts extraterritorially. We add that threats to life, particularly prolonged and repeated, can cause mental suffering sufficiently severe to constitute inhuman or degrading treatment, in violation of article 7 of the ICCPR (A/HRC/43/49, para. 48).⁶ Threats targeting women journalists, including sexualized violence and harassment, may amount to gender-based violence and other human rights violations.

The right to life obliges States to prevent and suppress threats to life or bodily integrity from any government or private actor, including against patterns of violence or intimidation against journalists, and to redress unjustifiable use of force by law enforcement (general comment No. 35, para. 9). We also refer your Excellency's Government to paragraph 4 of the Principles on the Effective Prevention and Investigation of Extra-Legal, Arbitrary and Summary Executions, adopted by the Economic and Social Council resolution 1989/65, according to which States must provide 'effective protection through judicial or other means to individuals and groups who are in danger of extra-legal, arbitrary or summary executions, including those who receive death threats'.

We highlight that the right to life requires States to investigate potentially unlawful deprivations of life and, where appropriate, prosecute the perpetrators (general comment No. 36, para. 27). Investigations must always be independent, impartial, prompt, thorough, effective, and transparent (para. 28), and must be undertaken in accordance with relevant international standards, including the Minnesota Protocol on the Investigation of Potentially Unlawful Death (2016). Investigations must also be aimed at ensuring that those responsible are brought to justice, at promoting accountability and preventing impunity, at avoiding denial of and at drawing necessary lessons for revising practices and policies with a view to avoiding repeated violations, and at ensuring the responsibility of superior officials with regard to violations committed by their subordinates (general comment No. 36, para. 27). Where a violation is found, full reparation must be provided, including adequate compensation, rehabilitation and satisfaction; and steps must be taken to prevent re-occurrence.

We recall that article 7 of the ICCPR absolutely prohibits torture and/or other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment, and States must criminalize and investigate all such acts, prosecute suspects, punish those responsible and provide remedies to victims (A/HRC/52/30). Victims must be protected from reprisals or

⁵ International Law Commission, Responsibility of States for Internationally Wrongful Acts 2001, article 8.

⁶ See also *Oganezov v Armenia*, Application No. 7137/12, 72961/12, European Court of Human Rights, Judgment, 17 May 2022, para. 80; *Al-Saadoon and Mufdhi v United Kingdom*, Application No. 61498/08, European Court of Human Rights, Judgment, 2 March 2010, para. 137; *Urrutia v Guatemala*, Inter-American Court of Human Rights, Judgment, 27 November 2023, para. 92.

intimidation during investigations, and have an enforceable right to fair and adequate compensation including the means for as full rehabilitation as possible (see further [A/77/502](#) and [A/HRC/52/30](#)).

In addition, we are concerned by the possible introduction of legislation expanding the scope of the death penalty to crimes such as “espionage and collaboration with the Zionist regime”, which do not meet the “most serious crimes” threshold (meaning intentional killing) under article 6(2) of the ICCPR, and which risk being used as a tool of repression to silence journalists and human rights defenders.

Freedoms of opinion and expression, peaceful assembly and association and the media

We express our grave concern at the continuing, systematic attacks by the Iranian authorities on Iran International, its staff and family members, including threats of death or violence, harassment and intimidation, online threats, and counter-terrorism sanctions.

This campaign appears not to be taken to protect a legitimate purpose but appears to be aimed at preventing them from continuing their legitimate journalistic activities, including criticism of the Iranian Government, and at impairing the legitimate exercise of the right to freedom of expression in the performance of their professional duties. We are further concerned that such attacks may have a ‘chilling effect’ on the work of other journalists in Iran and elsewhere reporting on the country and may deter them from reporting on issues of public interest. These practices also deprive the public, both in Iran and around the world, from receiving information in the public interest. The above-mentioned actions appear to constitute an attempt to silence and censor critical reporting.

We appeal to your Excellency’s Government to take all measures to guarantee the right to freedom of opinion and expression, as provided in article 19 of the ICCPR. This right entails that everyone shall have the right to hold opinions without interference as well as that everyone shall have the right to freedom of expression, including freedom to seek, receive and impart information and ideas of all kinds, regardless of frontiers, either orally, in writing or in print, in the form of art, or through any other media of his choice. This right includes not only the exchange of information that is favorable, but also that which may shock or offend and it protects the freedom of the press as one of its core elements. The right to freedom of expression may be restricted only if the restriction is provided by law and necessary and proportionate to protect a legitimate objective, as established under article 19(3).

In this regard, we would like to highlight that the Human Rights Committee, in general comment No. 34, has stated that under no circumstance can an attack on a person because of the exercise of the person’s freedom of opinion or expression be compatible with article 19. The Committee asserts 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. Furthermore, it states that as journalists are frequently subjected to threats, intimidation and attacks because of their activities, all such attacks should be vigorously investigated in a timely fashion, and the perpetrators prosecuted (CCPR/C/GC/34). As underlined by the Special Rapporteur on the

promotion and protection of the right to freedom of opinion and expression, an attack against journalists is not only a violation of their right to impart information, but also undermines the right of individuals and society at large to seek and receive information under article 19 of the ICCPR. An attack against a journalist is therefore an attack against the principles of transparency and accountability, as well as the right to hold opinions and to participate in public debates, which are essential for democracy (A/HRC/20/17). We express our strong concern that Iranian journalists in exile and other journalists reporting on Iran abroad continue to face threats and harassment in relation to their work. We urge your Excellency's Government to refrain from committing, co-opting or condoning acts of transnational repression, online and offline, and to ensure that all such acts are investigated and promptly, fully and effectively prosecuted.

We also draw the attention of your Excellency's Government to paragraphs 75(a) to (i) of the 2018 report of the Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms while countering terrorism (A/HRC/40/52) on the impact of terrorism measures on civic spaces and human rights defenders. Any restriction on expression or information that a government seeks to justify on grounds of national security and counterterrorism must have the genuine purpose and demonstrable effect of protecting a legitimate national security interest (general comment No. 34).

We note that attacks on freedom of expression and the media contributes to the hostile environment in Iran not only for the exercise of freedom of opinion and expression, but consequently also for peaceful assembly and association in Iran. Article 21 of the ICCPR guarantees the right to freedom of peaceful assembly: 'The right of peaceful assembly shall be recognized. No restrictions may be placed on the exercise of this right other than those imposed in conformity with the law, and which are necessary in a democratic society in the interests of national security or public safety, public order (*ordre public*), the protection of public health or morals or the protection of the rights and freedoms of others'. Article 22 of the ICCPR protects the right to freedom of association.

Obligation to protect human rights defenders and journalists

We wish to stress that the obligation to respect and to ensure respect of the human rights of journalists, media professionals and all human rights defenders rests on the State. It encompasses a positive duty of States to ensure that persons are protected from any act that would impair the enjoyment of their rights, including by taking effective measures or exercising due diligence to prevent any harm caused by private persons or entities (see e.g. A/HRC/17/27, para. 66 and A/HRC/29/25/Add.1). In this regard, we also note that the obligation to protect is particularly important in the case of threats and attacks made against journalists by non-State actors. Journalists exercising freedom of expression in the public interest are protected as human rights defenders (UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders 1998).

In the reports of the Working Group on Discrimination of Women and Girls on the elimination of discrimination against women in political and public life (e.g. A/HRC/23/50), it has been emphasized that harassment and direct attacks have been used to silence and discredit women who make their voices heard, including as human

rights defenders. Women defenders are often subjected to acts of gender-based violence, such as verbal abuse, sexual abuse or rape, intimidation, assault, death threats, and murder, including where condoned or committed by State agents. The Working Group has recommended that States accelerate measures to eliminate all forms of violence against women, including through a comprehensive legal framework to combat impunity, in order to realize women's human rights and promote their participation in political and public life.

Counter-terrorism sanctions

We are concerned about threats to impose sanctions on Iran International personnel or their family members in Iran. In this respect we reiterate our concerns expressed in communication IRN 10/2024 that such measures are based on vague and overbroad criteria and would violate freedoms of expression and the media and association and assembly, the right to privacy, the home and family life, the right to reputation, and the right to leave or re-enter one's own country.

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(s) 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 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 indicate what measures will be taken by your Excellency's Government to ensure that Iran International, its personnel and other journalists reporting on the Islamic Republic of Iran are able to carry out their legitimate work in a safe and enabling environment without fear of threats or acts of violence, intimidation or harassment of any sort, both inside and outside of the Islamic Republic of Iran.
3. Please provide information on measures taken to (a) protect the rights to life and security, including physical and mental integrity, and the right not to be subjected to torture and/or other cruel inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment, of Iran International journalists, their family members and/or friends, as raised in this and previous communications, (b) investigate all allegations of human rights violations including death threats in accordance with international standards,⁷ (c) prosecute alleged perpetrators, and (d) provide remedies and reparation to the victims. If no steps have been taken, explain why.

⁷ Including the Minnesota Protocol on the Investigation of Potentially Unlawful Death (2016) and the Istanbul Protocol: Manual on the Effective Investigation and Documentation of Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (2002).

4. Please clarify that no financial or travel sanctions will be imposed on Iran International personnel or their families. Please indicate whether existing sanctions on media personnel or their families will be immediately lifted.
5. Please explain what administrative, legislative and judicial measures have been, or will be, taken to ensure that the violations detailed in this communication will not reoccur.
6. Please provide information on protections for women journalists and human rights defenders, including against gender-based violence and reprisals, in accordance with international human rights law.

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 to clarify the issues in question.

Please be informed that a copy of this letter has been sent to the Governments of Belgium, Canada, Germany, Israel, Sweden, Türkiye, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, and the United States of America.

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

Ben Saul

Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms while countering terrorism

Morris Tidball-Binz

Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions

Irene Khan

Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of the right to freedom of opinion and expression

Gina Romero

Special Rapporteur on the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and of association

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

Alice Jill Edwards
Special Rapporteur on torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or
punishment

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