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**Lords Debate - Supporting Women in Iran (21 December 2022)**

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**WOMAN, LIFE, FREEDOM**

The Iranian authorities' deadly repression of the ongoing popular uprising in Iran, which erupted after the **death in custody** of Mahsa (Zhin) Amini on 16 September 2022, is the latest in **the cycle of violent attacks** waged by the authorities against people expressing their legitimate grievances since December 2017. Nationwide protests led by women and girls under the rallying call 'Woman, Life, Freedom', quickly mushroomed to include broader grievances against a government steeped in decades of impunity and human rights violations. Women in Iran faced institutionalised discrimination in law and practice, including in relation to marriage, divorce, employment, inheritance and political office.

Iran's discriminatory compulsory veiling laws have violated women's rights for decades, leading to daily harassment, arbitrary detention, torture and other ill-treatment of women and in the case of Mahsa (Zhin) Amini, her death. Amnesty International has called on Iranian authorities to end their persecution of women who speak out about **compulsory veiling**, and abolish the discriminatory and humiliating practice. Iranian authorities must immediately repeal Article 638 of the Islamic Penal Code (any act that is deemed "offensive" to public decencies is punished with an imprisonment term of 10 days to two months, or 74 lashes), and abolish discriminatory bans on women's appearance in public without out a headscarf.

**'MORALITY' POLICE**

During a press conference on 3 December 2022, Iran's Prosecutor General, Mohammad Jafar Montazeri, said: "The 'morality police' (*gasht-e ershad*) has nothing to do with the judiciary and it was closed by whichever [body] that established it in the past." He then qualified his statement, adding: "The judiciary will continue to regulate people's behaviour in society," indicating that the policing of women's bodies under compulsory veiling laws will continue. **State media outlets** reported the next day that "No official authority in the Islamic Republic of Iran has confirmed the closure of the morality police".

The Prosecutor General's statement was deliberately vague and failed to mention the legal and policy infrastructure that keeps the practice of compulsory veiling against women and girls firmly in place. To say that the 'morality police' has nothing to do with the judiciary distorts the reality that, for decades, the criminalization of women and girls under abusive and discriminatory compulsory veiling laws has been rubber-stamped by judiciary. In the face of outrage in Iran and globally over this extreme form of gender-based discrimination and violence, the Iranian authorities are simply passing the buck to each other to evade responsibility.

The international community must not be confused by the deliberately vague statements from Iranian authorities. Compulsory veiling is entrenched in Iran's Penal Code and other laws and regulations that enable security and administrative bodies to subject women to arbitrary arrest and detention and deny them access to public institutions including hospitals, schools, government offices and airports if they do not cover their hair. Until the day all these laws and regulations are scrapped, the same violence that resulted in the arrest and death in custody of Mahsa (Zhin) Amini will continue against millions of other women and girls.

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**AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL UK ADVOCACY OFFICE**

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## LETHAL FORCE AND THE DEATH PENALTY AS TOOLS OF REPRESSION

As outlined in further detail in [our last briefing](#), Iran's security forces have responded to the popular uprising with violence. Hundreds have been killed with impunity, including at least 44 children. Most of these children were killed due to security forces unlawfully firing live ammunition at their head, heart or other vital organs.

In a new phase of this crackdown, Iranian authorities are not only continuing to carry out mass killings, arrests, enforced disappearances and torture of dissidents, but are now using the death penalty as a tool of political repression. So far, 2 young people have been executed, **sentenced during sham trials** in connection with the protests. **Majidreza Rahnava** was publicly executed less than 2 weeks after his only rubber-stamp court hearing, and **Mohsen Shekari** was executed 3 weeks after Iranian authorities convicted and sentenced him to death. From publicly available materials and other sources, Amnesty has identified the names of 26 people at imminent risk of execution in connection with the protests. These individuals have been referred to trial on capital charges in connection with protests, amid disturbing calls by Iranian officials to rush proceedings and execute them in public. 11 individuals have already been sentenced with death penalty. Amnesty International **fears that many others are at risk of facing the death penalty**, given the thousands of people arrested and number of indictments issued by the authorities.

Amnesty International has consistently documented crimes under international law and other serious human rights violations committed by the Iranian authorities in the context of protests, including:

- [unlawful killings](#) following unwarranted use of lethal force,
- [mass arbitrary arrests and detentions](#),
- [enforced disappearances](#),
- [torture and other ill-treatment](#),
- the sentencing of individuals to lengthy prison terms or [death](#) following grossly unfair trials

Whilst the landmark UN fact-finding mission marks a long-awaited turning point in tackling the systematic impunity in Iran, states must now ensure that the mandate is made operational and sufficiently resourced without delay.

For more updates on the human rights situation in Iran: <https://www.amnesty.org.uk/issues/iran>

For our resource page, for constituents and MPs: <https://www.amnesty.org.uk/resources/stop-execution-iranian-protesters-now>

### SUGGESTED QUESTIONS TO THE UK GOVERNMENT

1. **Supporting women human rights defenders** – The UK has committed to putting women and girls at the centre of UK foreign policy and development policy. How is the UK supporting the courageous work of women HRDs in Iran? Will the FCDO commit to meeting with and supporting Iranian women in particular to speak out in defence of their rights?
2. **Death penalty** - Have UK officials in Iran, including the Ambassador, attended trials and visited prisons to try to ensure that some measure of due process is being followed?
3. **UN fact finding mission** – What progressed has been made in the operationalization of the recently established UN Fact-Finding Mission (FFM) to investigate human rights violations in Iran? What support has the UK already given to the FFM to collect? What progress has been made on urging access to Iran the FFM to take place?

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## RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE UK GOVERNMENT

Amnesty International is calling on the UK government to help end the crisis of systemic impunity, and show support for women and girls in Iran by:

1. **Calling on Iranian authorities to (i) immediately quash all death sentences against protesters, (ii) ensure that any of those charged with a recognizable criminal offence is tried in proceedings meeting international fair trial standards without recourse to the death penalty, (iii) that the principles of juvenile justice are observed for child defendants.** It should be recognised that Iranian authorities are resorting to the use of the death penalty against those detained for exercising their rights of freedom of expression, association and peaceful assembly as a tool of political repression and revenge against those standing up for human rights in Iran.
2. **Ensuring the swift operationalization of the recently established UN Fact-Finding Mission (FFM) to investigate human rights violations in Iran** related to the protests that began on 16 September 2022, especially with respect to woman and girls. The UK should ensure that its mandate is sufficiently resourced and urge the Iranian authorities to fully cooperate with the FFM and allow unhindered access to the country. The UK should also support FFM in its mandate to collect, consolidate and preserve crucial evidence for future prosecutions by sharing information and witness testimony from those persons who may be within their jurisdiction.
3. **Exercising extraterritorial jurisdiction, including universal jurisdiction, to conduct independent and effective investigations and prosecutions** whenever anyone reasonably suspected of criminal responsibility for crimes under international law or other serious human rights violations finds themselves within the jurisdiction of the UK. If there is sufficient admissible evidence, the relevant national authorities should issue arrest warrants and seek to prosecute all those suspected of criminal responsibility before national courts, in proceedings that meet international standards or extradite a suspect to a jurisdiction that will do so.
4. **Undertaking diplomatic initiatives to monitor trials, particularly before Revolutionary Courts.** The UK should urgently seek to ensure that high level observers are able to attend all **ongoing trials where defendants are at risk of being sentenced to death** in connection with the protests as well as those of human rights defenders and other prisoners of conscience.
5. **Undertaking diplomatic initiatives to visit prisons:** The UK should seek to visit prisons where human rights defenders and others are being arbitrarily detained for peacefully exercising their human rights, including in relation to their participation in protests.

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