

Dr Adele Murdolo
Suite 207, Level 2
134 Cambridge Street
Collingwood, Victoria, 3066
adele@mcwh.com.au

Committee Secretary
Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade Committee
Department of the Senate
PO Box 6100
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

Submitted online at

https://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Committees/Senate/Foreign_Affairs_Defence_and_Trade/HumanRightsinIran

21 December 2022

To Whom It May Concern,

Re: Submission into the Senate Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade References Committee, inquiry into the human rights implications of recent violence in Iran.

On 27 October 2022 the Senate referred the following matter, [Human rights implications of recent violence in Iran] to the Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade References Committee for inquiry.

Please find attached a submission to the Senate Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade References Committee, written in direct response to the consultation listed on the committee website.

My name is Dr Adele Murdolo and I write from my position as the Executive Director of the **Multicultural Centre for Women's Health (MCWH)**. MCWH is a national women's organisation led by migrant and refugee women and gender diverse people to achieve equity in women's health and wellbeing.

We appreciate and welcome the opportunity to provide this submission. If you have any questions about this submission, you are welcome to contact me at adele@mcwh.com.au.

Sincerely,



Dr Adele Murdolo
Executive Director, Multicultural Centre for Women's Health

Senate Inquiry into human rights implications of recent violence in Iran

Prepared by the Multicultural Centre for Women's Health

December 2022



Multicultural Centre for Women's Health is a feminist organisation led by migrant and refugee women to achieve equity in women's health and wellbeing.

Executive Summary

This submission has been developed by the Multicultural Centre for Women's Health (MCWH), the national voice for migrant and refugee women's health and wellbeing. MCWH is a Victorian women's health service established in 1978 that works both nationally and across Victoria to promote the health and wellbeing of migrant and refugee¹ women and people across Australia. We do this through research and publication, participation in advisory groups and committees, written submissions, and training and capacity building (see [MCWH Annual Report 2022](#)).

As a feminist organisation working to advance the health and wellbeing of migrant and refugee women and gender diverse people, we find the situation in Iran deeply troubling. While there is a plethora of issues that need to be addressed, our submission focusses on the Islamic Republic of Iran's human rights violations and violence against women and girls in Iran and its implications for people's ongoing health and wellbeing. Our key recommendations are:

1. Australia must continue to advocate and take necessary action to support Iranian women and people in their revolution for self-determination and freedom;
2. Australia should expel the Islamic Republic's ambassador and diplomats;
3. Australia must list the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) as a terrorist organisation;
4. Australia should use its Magnitsky-styled sanctions, freeze the assets and impose a travel ban against the IRGC, key security officials and the 'morality police';

¹ The term 'migrant and refugee' refers to people who have migrated from overseas, and their children. It includes people who are part of both newly emerging and longer established communities, and who arrive in Australia on either temporary or permanent visas.

5. Australia should take the necessary measures to support and protect Iranian-Australian activists and Australian residents who have been subjected to harassment and threats by the Islamic Republic for speaking up against human rights violations in Iran;
6. Australia should consider establishing a national task force or an expert advisory group to review and develop specific guidelines and policies including specific refugee visas for Iranians under immediate danger and persecution, including those from religious and ethnic minorities, women and LGBTIQ+ people;
7. The Australian government and international community must be more vocal in their condemnation of the detainment and executions of Iranian protestors;
8. The Australian government should urge all Australian news media to be vigilant in their reporting of the revolution and to ensure they are centring and amplifying the voices of people from Iran, as opposed to narratives that further perpetuate the regimes' propaganda.

Background

On 16 September 2022, Mahsa Jina Amini, a Kurdish-Iranian woman was killed whilst in police custody after being detained and brutally beaten by the Islamic Republic's 'morality police' for not wearing her hijab in accordance with the government standards. This subsequently led to nationwide protests with the central slogan "Women, Life, Freedom" in response to the regime's misogynistic policies, laws, and structures. These protests have now transformed to one of the first women-led revolutions in the history of the world. In short, this revolution is a result of over 43 years of systemic oppression, gender-based violence and discrimination perpetrated by the Islamic Republic against the people of Iran. Over the past three months, the Iranian people have been clear on their abhorrence towards the Islamic Republic and have been continuously and actively fighting for regime change. Iranians have also been clear that they do not want any international military interventions but are asking the international community to support their mission for regime change.

The ongoing human rights violations committed by the Islamic Republic is deeply concerning and MCWH stands in solidarity with the women and people of Iran in their fight for autonomy, freedom, and human rights.

We consent to this submission being published on the inquiry website and shared publicly online.

Human rights violations

This section is framed in response to the ongoing human rights violations in Iran. It outlines our concerns related to various human right abuses committed by the Islamic Republic against the people of Iran.

Violence against women and girls

According to the World Economic Forum 2022 Global Gender Gap Report, Iran is ranked 143 out of 146 countries in the gender gap index (World Economic Forum 2022). This ranking is not surprising given the Islamic Republic's misogynistic laws and policies over last 40 years, which have been designed to oppress and subjugate Iranian women. For example, women in Iran face serious life-threatening consequences and death if they do not comply with their compulsory veiling laws, as was the case with Mahsa Jina Amini. Over the years, numerous Iranian activists and human right lawyers who have spoken up about this issue have been detained by the regime for opposing gender oppressive laws and practices. Furthermore, under the Islamic Republic's Civil Code, girls as young as 13 years old can get married and those younger can be married off with the consent of the father and court judge (Hanna 2020). Under the law, husbands are given the full authority to decide on their spouses future living situations including location, employment, and ability to travel (Human Rights Watch 2017). Under the Civic Code, women in Iran also have restrictive divorce rights; if they can get divorced and then remarry, they forfeit the custody of their child, even if their husband has died (Hanna 2020). An additional mechanism for controlling women and their autonomy over their bodies was enacted through the 'Youthful Population and Protection of the Family law' in November 2021 that restricted women's access to contraception and abortion care (Krishna and Howard 2022). In addition, lack of domestic violence laws to protect women and girls has contributed to the ongoing institutionalised violence perpetrated against women and many incidents of honour killings. These are just some examples of the oppressive laws and structures that women and girls in Iran continue to live under.

Following the protests and women-led movements, many women and girls have been detained, tortured, sexually assaulted, and killed by the regime for demanding their human rights. Nika Shakarami, Sarina Esmailzadeh, Hadis Najafi, Nasrin Ghaderi, Hasti Narouei and Ghazaleh Chalabi are just a few amongst the many girls and women who have been killed by the Islamic Republic over the past months. We are also extremely concerned by the treatment of women protestors like Armita Abbasi who has been abducted, raped, and tortured by the Islamic Republic's authorities and the lack of information regarding her current detainment and her wellbeing status. The right to freedom of assembly and association is protected by article 20 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and therefore any state that is party to this treaty should be condemning the Islamic Republic's actions, through the use of clear strategies as outlined in our recommendations.

According to The Guardian, the Islamic Republic's security forces are specifically "targeting women at anti-regime protests with shotgun fire to their faces, breasts and genitals." (Parent and Habibiadzad 2022). Moreover, there is evidence of widespread perpetration of sexual violence against girls and women who have been detained during the protests. According to recent CNN Special Report, "Iran's security forces use rape to quell protests." (Qiblawi et. al 2022). As an organisation that focuses on the prevention of violence against women, we are deeply concerned by these reports and for the welfare of all detainees in Iran, particularly women and girls. We therefore applaud the Australian government and the international community for sending a clear message about the values we uphold by removing the Islamic Republic from the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women. However, considering the Islamic Republic's continuous violations of women's rights and complete lack of respect for women, we also call on the Australian government

to take further robust actions to support Iranian women and people in their revolution for self-determination.

Detainment, torture, and execution of protestors

According to recent reports over 18,000 people have been detained in recent protests including journalists, lawyers, and activists. At least 62 professional journalists have been arrested; amongst them are Niloofar Hamedi and Elaheh Mohammadi, two journalists who were arrested for reporting on Mahsa Amini's death. Human right activists and political prisoners are enduring torture with serious health implications. Arash Sadeghi is amongst one of the many human rights activists who has been detained by the Islamic Republic. Despite having cancer, the regime continues to deny him access to medical support and medications. Earlier last week, United Nations Human Rights experts called for the immediate "release of critically ill human rights defender Arash Sadeghi." (United Nations Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner 2022).

As the revolution continues, we are alarmed by the Islamic Republic's security forces continuous use of excessive and lethal force to crackdown on protests. The ongoing torture and detainment of protestors requires international attention and condemnation. According to the Islamic Republic's laws, the age of criminal responsibility and execution for girls is nine compared to 15 for boys. This is deeply concerning as there are reports suggesting that the average age of protestors is between 16-22 years old. Additionally, there is a long and historic practice of sexual assault, rape and violence against girls and women in detainment before an execution takes place. This is deeply disturbing, should not be ignored, nor allowed to continue.

In November, a majority\ 227 lawmakers in the Iranian parliament requested for the execution of protestors who had been arrested to "to be taught a 'good lesson' to deter others who threaten the authority of the Iranian government" (Deaton and Magramo 2022) Since then, two protestors, Mohsen Shekari and Majidreza Rahnavand have been executed on December 8 and 12, respectively. According to Amnesty International, after China, Iran has the world's most prolific use of the death penalty (Amnesty International 2020). We are outraged by the unjust killing of protestors and are concerned for the welfare of the many other detainees like Sahand Nourmohammad-Zadeh, Mahan Sedarat Madani, Sayed Mohammad Hosseini, Mohammad Boroughani, Manouchehr Mehman Navaz, Saman Seydi (Yasin), Mohammad Ghobadlou, Dr. Hamid Ghare Hasanlou, Hossein Mohammadi, Reza Arya and Mohammad Mehdi Karami who are at imminent risk of execution in sham trials without due process or legal representation.

As the state-sponsored violence against people of Iran escalates, the Islamic Republic has taken every opportunity to provide misinformation and false narratives to support their inexcusable actions and human rights abuses. Last month, during the United Nations Human Rights Council's special session on Iran, the Islamic Republic's representative continuously denied human rights violations committed by the regime. Moreover, the Embassy of the Islamic Republic of Iran in Australia has provided a submission to this Inquiry with false and fabricated information in an attempt to further obscure truth and justice. As such we echo the voices of Iranian people who believe the current Islamic Republic's ambassadors in Australia do not represent them and their rights. As such we are asking the Australian government to expel the Islamic Republic ambassadors and any affiliated diplomats.

Restricting communication services and internet

On numerous occasions, the Islamic Republic has shut down the internet and limited cell connectivity to prevent Iranian people from being able to communicate within and outside Iran. This is a violation of people's rights and has been particularly concerning as social media has been the main channel of communication in documenting violence against the people of Iran. The regime has used similar violent repressions in the past. In 2019, during the Aban uprising, the Islamic Republic shut down the internet and killed over 1,500 peaceful protestors in a media silence. Additionally, limiting access to the internet allows the Islamic Republic and their sympathisers to control the narratives and perpetuate propaganda. Currently, the limited internet connection and communication restricts access to accurate reports of numbers of injuries, arrests, and deaths. Internet suppression violates the rights to freedom of expression and access to information. The international community should support tech companies to provide free internet access to Iranians.

Genocide and brutal attacks on ethnic and religious minorities

Over the years, the Islamic Republic has continued the systemic discrimination and persecution of Baha'is in Iran. Recently, two Baha'i women, Mahvash Sabet and Fariba Kamalabadi, who are regarded as symbols of resilience in Iran have been detained again and sentenced to a second 10-year imprisonment. The Regime's unjust treatment of Baha'i communities and their machinery of repression continues to violate human rights. We recognise that Australia has a strong Baha'i community, and we acknowledge the pain and suffering that these communities may endure in light of the ongoing arrests and prosecution of Baha'i people in Iran.

Another brutal attack by the Islamic Republic is their act of genocide and attempts for ethnic cleansing in Kurdistan-Iran, the homeland of Mahsa Jina Amini. There are reports of use of nerve gases in many places like city of Javanrud in response to protestors. According to international protocols, Responsibility to Protect – known as R2P “States have obligations to prevent and punish genocide, war crimes and crimes against humanity.” (Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect 2009) According to reports, the Islamic Republic's security forces are opening fire on peaceful protestors and are specifically targeting ethnic minorities in regions of Kurdistan and Zahedan. We welcome the UN Human Rights Council call to conduct a "fact-finding mission" to investigate the human rights violations in Iran and we ask for this process to be expedited to reduce further loss of lives.

Harassment and targeting of the Iranian diaspora in Australia

The Islamic Republic's effort to crackdown on protests has extended beyond Iran's borders with many Iranian Australians reporting experiences of harassment and threats after participating in protests against the regime in Australian cities. Earlier last month, Foreign Minister, Penny Wong stated that law enforcement is investigating these threats (Knott 2022). As an organisation concerned with the health and wellbeing of migrant and refugee women and communities, we recognise the significant impact of these traumatic events on the Iranian diaspora living in Australia. Currently, this is further exacerbated for Australian-Iranians due to the human rights violations committed by the Islamic Republic which endangers the lives of family and community both in Iran

and Australia. Considering the terror and violence perpetrated by the Islamic Republic, we are asking Australia to officially list the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) as a terrorist organisation and use its Magnitsky-styled sanctions against the IRGC, key security officials and the 'morality police'.

Recommendations

MCWH recognises the importance of amplifying voices and experiences of Iranian women and people who are fighting for their fundamental human rights. As such we call on the Australian government to take immediate action by adopting the recommendations outlined below:

1. Australia must continue to advocate and take necessary actions to support Iranian women and people in their revolution for self-determination and freedom;
2. Australia should expel the Islamic Republic's ambassador and diplomats;
3. Australia must list the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) as a terrorist organisation;
4. Australia should use its Magnitsky-styled sanctions, freeze the assets and impose a travel ban against the IRGC, key security officials and the 'morality police';
5. Australia should take the necessary measures to support and protect Iranian-Australian activists and Australian residents who have been subjected to harassment and threats by the Islamic Republic for speaking up against human rights violations in Iran;
6. Australia should consider establishing a national task force or an expert advisory group to review and develop specific guidelines and policies including specific refugee visas for Iranians under immediate danger and persecution, including those from religious and ethnic minorities, women and LGBTIQ+ people;
7. The Australian government and international community must be more vocal in their condemnation of the detainment and executions of Iranian protestors;
8. The Australian government should urge all Australian news media to be vigilant in their reporting of the revolution and to ensure they are centring and amplifying the voices of people from Iran, as opposed to narratives that further perpetuate the regimes' propaganda.

Further comments

MCWH supports the submissions and recommendations outlined by Monash University (Monash Gender, Peace, and Security Centre), Dr Kylie Moore-Gilbert and Human Rights Watch.

References

Amnesty International 2020, *Iran: Execution of young man 'vengeful and cruel'*, Amnesty International, viewed 2 December 2020, <<https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2020/04/iran-execution-of-young-man-vengeful-and-cruel/#:~:text=This%20is%20abhorrent%20and%20must%20stop.%E2%80%9D%20Amnesty%20International,after%20China.%20Escape%20from%20prison%20and%20retaliatory%20execution>>.

Deaton, J & Magramo, K 2022, *Iranian lawmakers demand 'no leniency' for protesters as mass demonstrations continue*, CNN, viewed 19 November 2022, <<https://edition.cnn.com/2022/11/06/middleeast/iran-lawmakers-judiciary-letter-protests-intl-hnk/index.html>>.

Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect 2009, *Implementing the Responsibility to Protect*, Ralph Bunche Institute for International Studies, viewed 11 December 2022, <<https://www.globalr2p.org/resources/implementing-the-responsibility-to-protect-2009/>>.

Hanna, A 2020, *Iranian Laws on Women*, United States Institute of Peace, viewed 2 December 2022, <<https://iranprimer.usip.org/blog/2020/dec/08/part-3-iranian-laws-women#:~:text=The%20Islamic%20Republic%20annulled%20many%20of%20the%20monarchy%E2%80%99s,eliminated%20a%20woman%E2%80%99s%20right%20to%20divorce%20her%20husband>>.

Human Rights Watch 2017, *"It's a Men's Club" – Discrimination Against Women in Iran's Job Market*, Human Rights Watch, viewed 2 December 2022, <https://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/report_pdf/iran0517_web_11.pdf>.

Knott, M 2022, *'We will defend our democracy': Penny Wong warns Iran on foreign interference*, The Sydney Morning Herald, viewed 15 December 2022, <<https://www.smh.com.au/politics/federal/we-will-defend-our-democracy-penny-wong-warns-iran-on-foreign-interference-20221122-p5c0fc.html>>.

Krishna, G & Howard, S 2022, *'How Iran's protests are a response to the "backslide" in women's health rights'*, *The BMJ*, vol 379.

Parent, D & Habibiadzad, G 2022, *Iranian forces shooting at faces and genitals of female protesters, medics say*, The Guardian, viewed 8 December 2022, <<https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2022/dec/08/iranian-forces-shooting-at-faces-and-genitals-of-female-protesters-medics-say>>.

Qiblawi, T, Arvanitidis, B, Elbagir, N, Platt, A, Moshtaghian, A, Mezzofiore, G, Alkhalidi, C & Jambaz, M 2022, *How Iran's security forces use rape to quell protests*, CNN, viewed 8 December 2022 <<https://edition.cnn.com/interactive/2022/11/middleeast/iran-protests-sexual-assault/index.html>>.

United Nations Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner 2022, *Iran must immediately release critically ill human rights defender Arash Sadeghi: UN experts*, United Nations, viewed 3 December 2022, <<https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2022/12/iran-must-immediately-release-critically-ill-human-rights-defender-arash>>.

World Economic Forum 2022, *Global Gender Gap Report 2022*, World Economic Forum, viewed 10 December 2022, <<https://www.weforum.org/reports/global-gender-gap-report-2022/>>.



Multicultural Centre for Women's Health

www.mcwh.com.au

reception@mcwh.com.au

T (03) 9418 0999

FREE CALL 1800 656 421

ABN 48 188 616 970

Suite 207, Level 2,

134 Cambridge Street,

Collingwood VIC 3066

