



Systematic state persecution of lawyers in Iran continues with fresh round of interrogations and indictments

Joint statement, 18 March 2025

We, the undersigned organisations, are dismayed by the intensified state crackdown on lawyers in Iran simply for defending human rights and respect for the rule of law. The [systematic targeting of lawyers](#) and human rights defenders by the state in Iran shows no signs of stopping, with escalated attacks in January and February 2025.

On 3 February 2025, the prosecutor's office in Mashhad issued indictments against [15 lawyers](#) on the charge of "propaganda against the state," reportedly due to social media activities and posts that expressed concern over human rights violations, social and economic injustices in Iran's impoverished provinces, corruption, and other aspects of state policy. Initially, [17 lawyers](#) were interrogated, with two issued restraining orders and 15 formally charged with offences against the state. The investigating judge at Branch 901 of the Public and Revolutionary Prosecutor's Office in District 9 of Mashhad had dismissed the case, but the prosecutor objected and Branch 5 of the Revolutionary Court in Mashhad intervened, overturning the judge's initial decision and issuing the indictments.

There have also been reports that Iranian state agents have warned other lawyers not to intervene in the cases against these 15 lawyers. It is not unusual in Iran for lawyers to receive threats by state agents against themselves or their families that are intended to discourage them from taking on sensitive cases. Disbarment or suspension of licenses is also used to silence lawyers. This not only deprives individuals of their livelihood and defendants of their legal right to defence but also stifles the legal community's ability to function independently.

The Islamic Republic of Iran's absolute disregard for the rule of law and the Iranian judiciary's lack of independence have left the country's lawyers in a perilous position. Lawyers face a multitude of risks when carrying out their duties, including threats, bans and disbarment, arbitrary arrest and detention, unjustified criminal prosecution, torture, and imprisonment following unfair trials. Lawyers handling cases related to human rights, who are human rights defenders themselves, political dissidents, or minority groups are particularly at risk.

Presently, multiple lawyers in Iran are serving long prison sentences for their defence of human rights. To name just a few cases that have been publicly reported, [Mohammad Najafi](#) has been in prison since 2018; [Amirsalari Davoudi](#) was handed a 10-year sentence which he began serving in 2022 (having been previously detained from November 2018 until

June 2021; he was released in September 2024 pending a Supreme Court [review](#) of his case but could be sent back to prison at any time); and [Mohammad Reza Faghihi](#) is serving a five-year prison sentence. Recently, [Behnam Nezadi](#) has been sentenced to four months in prison and one year of disbarment; [Seyed Mehdi Karimi Farsi](#) was sentenced to one year in prison; and [Taher Naqvi](#) was also sentenced to six years in prison. In addition, [Javad Alikordi](#), the brother of lawyer [Khosrow Alikordi](#) who was recently released from prison after serving his sentence, has been arrested by Iranian Intelligence Ministry agents and transferred to an undisclosed location, and [Payam Derafshan](#) was reportedly summoned recently to the Prosecutor's Office in Karaj on security-related charges.

The situation for lawyers in Iran is [documented](#) in the alternative reports of many of the undersigned organisations to the Universal Periodic Review of Iran's human rights record, which took place on 24 January 2025.

Top UN experts [noted](#) in a 2024 statement that the Government of Iran has "imprisoned, tortured and disbarred lawyers solely for defending human rights" and that "at least 66 lawyers have been arrested and detained since September 2022, [when the "[Women, Life Freedom](#)" protests erupted across Iran] apparently in an attempt to both intimidate them and to prevent them from representing protestors. Eleven of these lawyers have been sentenced, and 47 have been released pending trial."

Under international human rights law, lawyers must be free to practice their profession without interference and are entitled to respect for their rights to freedom of expression, association, and peaceful assembly.

Iran ratified the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) on 24 June 1975 and has an obligation to respect and guarantee the rights established therein, including the right to liberty and security of person (Article 9), the right to a fair trial (Article 14) and the right to freedom of expression (Article 19).

Furthermore, in accordance with Principle 16 of the UN Basic Principles on the Role of Lawyers (Basic Principles), governments should "ensure that lawyers (a) are able to perform all of their professional functions without intimidation, hindrance, harassment or improper interference; [...] and (c) shall not suffer, or be threatened with, prosecution or administrative, economic or other sanctions for any action taken in accordance with recognized professional duties, standards and ethics."

In addition, Principle 23 of the Basic Principles states that: "Lawyers like other citizens are entitled to freedom of expression, belief, association and assembly. They shall have the right to take part in public discussion of matters concerning the law, the administration of justice and the promotion and protection of human rights."

Moreover, the UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders stipulates that "Everyone has the right, [...] to promote and to strive for the protection and realization of human rights [...]" and "to offer and provide professionally qualified legal assistance [...] in defending human rights and fundamental freedoms."

The targeting of lawyers by the state is an egregious assault on the independence of the legal profession, the fundamental rights of all Iranians, and the rule of law in Iran.

Accordingly, the undersigned organisations urge the Iranian authorities to:

- Ensure that all lawyers in Iran can perform their professional functions without intimidation, hindrance, harassment or improper interference;
- Ensure that lawyers are not subjected to arbitrary arrest, detention and prosecution when conducting their professional duties;
- Guarantee that all lawyers may exercise their right to freedom of expression, belief, association and peaceful assembly;
- Ensure the immediate and unconditional release of lawyers who are arbitrarily detained and prosecuted for their legitimate professional activities or exercising their legitimate right to freedom of expression, belief, association and peaceful assembly;
- Ensure that all individuals charged with offences are guaranteed due process and fair trial rights and guarantee everyone's right to defence and effective access to justice pursuant to Iran's obligations under the ICCPR and other human rights treaties and standards.

Additionally, we urge relevant UN human rights mechanisms, including the Special Rapporteur on the independence of judges and lawyers, Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders, Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Islamic Republic of Iran, and Independent International Fact-Finding Mission on the Islamic Republic of Iran, to continue monitoring and reporting on the situation for lawyers and independence of the legal profession, and highlighting these concerns in any communications with Iranian authorities.

Finally, we urge bar associations, law societies, and civil society organisations around the world to support Iranian lawyers inside and outside of Iran, including practical support and, where possible, monitoring and reporting on violations of lawyers' professional guarantees.

SIGNED:

Law Society of England and Wales

Center for Human Rights in Iran (CHRI)

Front Line Defenders

Frontline Lawyers Association

Geneva Bar Association

International Bar Association's Human Rights Institute (IBAHRI)

Iran Human Rights Documentation Center (IHRDC)

Lawyers for Lawyers

Ordre des Avocats de Paris / Paris Bar

Association des juristes progressistes (AJP)