

**United Nations Human Rights Council**

**28th session**

**Statement by Dr. Ahmed Shaheed**

**United Nations Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in  
the Islamic Republic of Iran**

Thank you Mr. President,

Excellencies, distinguished delegates, ladies and gentlemen

Implementation of the 123 recommendations accepted at the outcome of the Islamic Republic of Iran's 2010 universal periodic review (UPR) has been the focus of my reports for the past three years. These reports present developments in addressing concerns raised during that review and identified by the human rights mechanisms and Secretary General in subsequent years. The report before you reiterates some of these concerns and presents emerging problems that may further impact the Government's capacity to improve conditions.

Of particular alarm is the surge in executions documented this past year. At least 252 individuals were reportedly executed since the presentation of my last report to the Council; the highest total recorded in the past 12 years. This includes at least 753 executions in 2014, and 252 in the last 10 weeks, for a total of 1,005 executions of rate past 14 months. A majority of these executions continue to be for crimes that do not meet international standards of "most serious"; and at least 13 juveniles were executed in 2014, in violation of international law.

The Government continues to highlight its need to interdict drug-trafficking activities as a justification for this alarming use of the death penalty citing drug-related offenses as a "most serious" crime. The fact remains, however, that executions for drug-related crimes, adultery, sodomy, alcohol consumption, and for vaguely worded national security offenses, such as corruption on earth, are illegal under international law.

Mr. President,

Regrettably, authorities in Iran *continue* to harass, arrest, prosecute, and imprison members of civil society who express criticism of the Government or who publicly deviate from officially sanctioned narratives. The Government's stated position is that it does not arrest journalists, lawyers, or human rights activists for their activism *per se*, but rather for their commission of separate "national security crimes."

This logic, which by its nature leads to overly broad implementation, has led to the imprisonment of more journalists than almost any country in the world, often on charges which do not meet

international requirements for limits on freedom of expression, like “propaganda against the system,” “assembly and collusion against the system,” and “insulting” Government leaders. I reiterate my call on the Government to immediately release all individuals currently detained for legitimately exercising their right to freedom of expression or dissent.

Between 2011 through 2013, the Working Group on Arbitrary Detention (WGAD) issued 10 Opinions regarding the detention of 13 Iranians, including the detention of Messes Mehdi Karroubi, Mir-Hossein Mousavi, and his wife, Ms. Zahra Rahnavard, along with several journalists, lawyers, a Christian pastor, and a student activist. Regrettably, 10 of these individuals remain in some form of confinement for exercising their fundamental rights, in addition to at least 30 journalists and bloggers, 100 Baha’i, and 92 Christians.

These concerns are further compounded by reports, which signal the persistence of malfunctions in the administration of justice, including due process of law, abuse of solitary confinement, and the failure to take into account the principle of proportionality in passing sentence, as documented by the Working Group on Arbitrary Detention during its 2003 visit to the country.

Mr. President,

I continue to insist that the situation presented in this and other reports issued by the human rights mechanisms and the Secretary General reflect the capricious application of national and international rights protections established by the country’s Constitution and by the five human rights conventions to which the Islamic Republic of Iran is a party.

The report before you also pays particular attention to content in legislation currently being considered by various government bodies and agencies that, if adopted, will likely aggregate the situation. This includes provisions that appear to expand government influence over the media, civil society, political organizations, and the legal community. Content in draft laws and policies currently under consideration that further limit economic opportunities for women and that segregate them in the workplace are also cause for serious concern.

Mr. President, Excellencies,

The second-cycle of Iran’s UPR provided an opportunity to reflect on the successes and shortcomings in improving the status of rights protections in the country. I recognize that a number of Government efforts to implement the 2010 UPR commitments have been pursued, but the underlying sources of violations raised during Iran’s first and its most recent UPR persist, rendering a majority of recommendations accepted by the Government unimplemented to date.

Willingness to admit that rights violations *are* occurring; resolve to examine laws or policies; and incremental steps to amend and/or rescind aspects of laws that violate national and international rights protections are necessary for progress.

High priority should be placed on considering a moratorium on capital punishment and on reconsidering the use of the death penalty for acts not considered to be either criminal offenses or “most serious” crimes as defined by international human rights law. Taking these steps would likely reduce the number of executions in Iran by more than half.

Furthermore, every effort to amend laws that regard the legitimate exercise of internationally recognized rights as offenses, including those that restrict the press and criminalize other forms of expression, limit access to information and give rise to the ongoing arrests of civil society actors and members of vulnerable groups; including religious and ethnic minorities should be rescinded.

Transparency and cooperation with the international human rights mechanisms is also necessary for progress. By maintaining a strong, open and cooperative dialogue with authorities, the special procedures are better able to examine the nature of allegations made, to assess their veracity, and where appropriate, to bring remedy and redress.

Likewise, country visits would further contribute to the Council’s ongoing interest in supporting Iran’s domestic efforts to strengthen rights protections. I have been able to successfully gather information in the absence of such access for the past three years. This includes information gained during lengthy interviews with individuals residing in the country and from media reports emanating from Iran, as well as information contained in laws, draft legislation, national budgets, policy reports, and studies maintained on government websites. However, country visits would allow for greater access to engage with a more of stakeholders, including civil society actors and government officials and would strengthen my capacity to document a wider range of views.

Mr. President,

We must remain steadfast in our encouragement of the recent deepening of Iran’s engagement with the international community, which presents numerous opportunities for future cooperation, especially with regard to capacity building to advance the country’s international human rights obligations. The special procedures, including my mandate, are well placed to assist with these efforts, and I look forward to continuing a constructive and meaningful dialogue with the Iranian government in order to promote incremental steps that may advance its efforts to strengthen rights protections.

We must also continue to send a message to every single Iranian whose rights have been violated that the international community is aware, that it cares, and that it will continue to take steps, in cooperation with the Iranian authorities to address those violations. We must continue to work together to bridge the gulf between international commitments and implementation in order to begin to fully operationalize universal human rights principles, which do not impose a single cultural standard on diverse societies, but rather a single legal standard which affords the minimum protection necessary for the human dignity of all.