

## Iran: Increased support for UN human rights scrutiny needed amid crackdown on dissent

As we mourn the passing of Asma Jahangir, the UN Special Rapporteur on the human rights situation in Iran, ARTICLE 19 calls on States at the UN Human Rights Council (HRC) to stand as she did with Iranians and civil society in calling for immediate reforms to protect freedom of expression and information in the country.

On 28 December 2017, widespread protests broke out across Iran on an unprecedented scale, making it the country's biggest anti-government demonstration since the post-election protests in 2009. The crackdown in response to the protests has been heavy handed and repressive. Internet shutdowns during the protests highlight the extent to which the government exercises an iron grip over the free flow of information in Iran.

These recent developments only add to continuing concerns ARTICLE 19 has regarding violations of the right to freedom of expression in Iran. Notwithstanding some improvements in diplomatic relations between Iran and other countries in recent years, and the welcome launch of the Citizen Charter by President Rouhani in February 2017, the rights to freedom of expression, association, peaceful assembly, and privacy, continue to be violated, online and offline. Activists, journalists, trade unionists, lawyers, artists, academics, women and ethnic and religious minorities are increasingly being harassed and intimidated, detained and subjected to torture, inhuman and degrading treatment.

Notwithstanding these challenges, Asma Jahangir had made significant progress as Special Rapporteur in engaging the Iranian government in dialogue regarding the human rights situation; her death came days before she was scheduled to meet with Iran's Ministry of Foreign Affairs. This demonstrates that international and objective scrutiny by the HRC has positive impact; anything less than increased support for the renewal of the Special Rapporteur mandate at this point in time would send precisely the wrong message, at precisely the wrong time.

At the 37th Session of the UN Human Rights Council, ARTICLE 19 calls on States to raise the following freedom of expression concerns at every available opportunity, and increase their support for the renewal of the Special Rapporteur mandate.

### Killings and arrests of protesters

In late December 2017, the government heavily cracked down when thousands took part in protests that spread across the country in response to widespread discontent around socio-economic concerns.<sup>1</sup> The use of force against protesters included the use of tear gas, water canons, and physical attacks from authorities using batons, and other assaults.<sup>2</sup>

21 individuals were killed during the protests, predominately by security forces, and there has been no independent investigation either into their deaths, or into the authorities' use of lethal force during the protests.<sup>3</sup> While the majority of those detained have been released, of the more than 4,970 people arrested following the protests, many remain in custody without charge.

Three of the protesters arrested, Sina Ghanbari, Vahid Heidari and Saro Ghahremani, subsequently died in custody.<sup>4</sup> Instead of independently investigating the deaths in custody, officials have alleged

<sup>1</sup> "Iran: protect constitutional right to protest", ARTICLE 19, 3 January 2018; available at: <https://tinyurl.com/ycodj649>

<sup>2</sup> "Iran's Suppression of December 2017 Unrest Marked by Brutal Violations of Law," CHRI, 19 February 2018; available at: <http://bit.ly/2oj0Z11>

<sup>3</sup> "Iran's Supreme Leader blames 'enemies' for protests, death toll hits 21," CNN 2 January 2018; available at: <http://cnn.it/2BLO8fw>

<sup>4</sup> "Iran: authorities must investigate deaths in custody and respect the right to protest", ARTICLE 19, 10 January 2018; available at:

that Ghanbari and Heidari died by suicide, also alleging Heidari was in possession of drugs.<sup>5</sup> A video of a seemingly coerced statement from the father of Saro Ghahremani, stating that Ghahremani died in a violent clash with the police at the protest, was aired on the government-owned national television.<sup>6</sup> In each case, there are reports of signs of torture on the bodies returned to families.

**States at the HRC must call for a full investigation into the use of force, in particular the use of lethal weapons, during the December 2017 protests, as well as the deaths in custody of protesters, and immediately charge or release other protesters who remain in detention. The government must respect, protect and fulfil the right to protest of all in Iran.**

## Internet shutdowns and blocking during protests

There have been intensive efforts from various branches of the Iranian government to restrict freedom of expression online, and undermine users' right to privacy. This is a very concerning regression, given previous seemingly positive attitudes of the Iranian government during the Presidential elections in May 2017, when the Internet remained relatively open.

During protests in December 2017 and January 2018, Internet users reported intermittent periods of disconnection on their mobile phones to websites and applications hosted outside of Iran.<sup>7</sup> This included reports of the blocking of apps Telegram and Instagram, as well as other periods of blocking access to websites hosted on foreign servers. Circumvention tools such as "Lantern" were also targeted by blocking access to cloud host services such as Digital Ocean, despite the fact that many local businesses use this same website for many other purposes.<sup>8</sup> Following the removal of the block on Telegram, both the company and users confirmed the government was throttling Telegram traffic in Iran.<sup>9</sup>

Internet shutdowns of this nature clearly violate international human rights law.<sup>10</sup> HRC resolution 33/13, adopted by consensus in June 2016, "condemns unequivocally measures to intentionally prevent or disrupt information online in violation of international human rights law" and called on States to desist from such practices.<sup>11</sup> However, reports from the Minister for ICTs confirmed that the National Security Council ordered the Internet Exchange Point to disrupt internet traffic, indicating that even national legal procedures were not followed. According to the national legal framework, filtering should follow a decision of the multi-agency body of the Committee Charged with Determining Offensive Content, which is situated within the judicial rather than security branch.

These events corroborate ARTICLE 19's longstanding concerns around Iran's "National Internet Project" (NIN), the National Information Network, first launched in 2012, and the ways in which it has expanded the government's controls over information flows in the country.<sup>12</sup> The government's attempts to centralise these controls are particularly concerning, given the broad content-based criminal offences within the 2010 Cyber Crimes Law and its corresponding and far-reaching

<https://tinyurl.com/yaq8dym7>

<sup>5</sup> "Iran should launch independent investigation of deaths of two protesters in prison", Center for Human Rights in Iran, 11 January 2018; available at: <https://tinyurl.com/y852dole>

<sup>6</sup> "Intelligence ministry forces father of slain protester to repeat authorities' version of events on TV", Center for Human Rights in Iran, 16 January 2018; available at: <https://tinyurl.com/yaupwkt5>

<sup>7</sup> "Iran's severely disrupted internet during protests: 'websites hardly open'", Center for Human Rights in Iran, 2 January 2018; available at: <https://tinyurl.com/y78butao>

<sup>8</sup> Tweet by Nariman Gharib, 3 January 2018, available at: <https://tinyurl.com/ybb3zoz2>

<sup>9</sup> According to Telegram, there are more than 40 million monthly Iranian users (<https://bloom.bg/2AvursU>). According to the latest ITU statistics, there about 55 million Internet users in Iran (<http://bit.ly/2yv0Aws>). Reports on throttling were confirmed by the CEO of Telegram Pavel Durov (<http://bit.ly/2orFISs>) as well as by users (<http://bit.ly/2sO7eij>).

<sup>10</sup> See, Report of the UN Special Rapporteur for the promotion and protection of the right to freedom of expression A/HRC/35/22, June 2017; available at: <http://bit.ly/2sCus9w>

<sup>11</sup> UN Human Rights Council Resolution A/HRC/res/32/13, June 2016; available at: <http://bit.ly/2F2R8GE>

<sup>12</sup> "Tightening the net: Iran's National Internet Project", ARTICLE 19, 29 March 2017; available at: <https://tinyurl.com/y75xku2n>

surveillance, search and seizure powers.<sup>13</sup> Furthermore, the strengthening of local infrastructure for hosting Internet platforms has emboldened the government to cut off the nation from international traffic during times of heightened tension, such as protests. Additional efforts to undermine net neutrality principles, by convincing telecommunications companies to provide subsidies for Iranians to use local Internet platforms over foreign services, are strengthening the government's ability to censor and monitor information flows within Iran.<sup>14</sup>

**States at the HRC must call on Iran to protect freedom of expression online, including by ensuring net neutrality, and by ceasing the practice of shutting down or throttling the Internet. This requires putting in place safeguards to prevent the Supreme National Security Council from illegally interfering with connectivity, and putting in place legal protections against government-ordered Internet shutdowns or throttling.**

## Criminalising dissent and human rights defenders

The criminalisation of dissent, in particular against human rights defenders, minority groups, and other citizens, has continued over the past year.

Sweeping offences contained in the Islamic Penal Code are most commonly used to target dissent, including provisions on: insult, blasphemy (*Moharebeh*), religious insult, disseminating “propaganda against the State”, spreading false rumours or lies, “creating anxiety and unease in the public’s mind”, “acting against national security”, “membership in an illegal organisation” and “participation in an illegal gathering.”<sup>15</sup>

In just the first few months of 2018, there have already been growing numbers of **environmental human rights defenders** and high profile academics targeted by the Iranian authorities. The practice has been condemned by UN experts as recently as 23 February.<sup>16</sup> The Deputy Chief of Iran’s Department of Environment, Kaveh Madani, was arrested in February 2018, as confirmed by Member of Parliament Mahmoud Sadeqi.<sup>17</sup> This followed arrests on 24 and 25 January of nine environmental activists, many connected to the Persian Heritage Wildlife Foundation, on accusations of “espionage” and charges of “endangering national security”.<sup>18</sup> Kavvous Seyed-Emami, an Iranian-Canadian academic among them and Managing Director of the Foundation, died in custody, with authorities claiming he died by suicide.

Arrests of **women human rights defenders** have also continued, with 29 people arrested in late January 2018, mostly women who were involved in protests against compulsory hijab laws.<sup>19</sup> These included Vida Movahed who became the symbol of the “Girls of Revolution Street” movement for her 27 December 2017 protest, which went viral on social media. She was arrested and then released on bail on 28 January 2018, though at least one protester inspired to repeat her act of defiance, including Narges Hosseini, remains in jail.<sup>20</sup> On 5 February she refused to appear in court to face charges punishable by up to 10 years, including “encouraging immorality or prostitution.”

<sup>13</sup> “Islamic Republic of Iran: Computer Crimes Law”, ARTICLE 19, 2012; available at: <https://tinyurl.com/ybyxb78h>

<sup>14</sup> “US repeal of net neutrality harms Internet freedom at home and abroad”, ARTICLE 19 and CHRI statement, 21 December 2017; available at: <http://bit.ly/2BLI0Uv>

<sup>15</sup> The Islamic Penal Code criminalises blasphemy (*Moharebeh*) in Book 2 “Hudud”, Part 2, Chapter 8, available in English at: <https://tinyurl.com/y9e3wss5>. Most of the other offences are contained in the wide ranging Book 5, available in English at: <https://tinyurl.com/kvkjkjf>.

<sup>16</sup> “Iran: spying charges against wildlife activists ‘hard to fathom’, say UN experts”, OHCHR, 23 February 2018; available at: <https://tinyurl.com/y9eo8kwc>

<sup>17</sup> “Round up of Environmental Activists Continues With Arrest of Top Official”, *Radio Farda*, 11 February 2018; available at: <https://tinyurl.com/y9dk4lv1>

<sup>18</sup> “Iranian-Canadian environmental activist dies in prison, his son says”, *Reuters*, 10 February 2018; available at: <https://tinyurl.com/ydhttclu>

<sup>19</sup> “Iran arrests 29 linked to protests against compulsory hijab laws”, *New York Times*, 2 February 2018; available at: <https://tinyurl.com/ybmdozuy>

<sup>20</sup> “‘Girls of Revolution St’ Protest Ignites Debate on Iran’s Compulsory Hijab”, *Center for Human Rights in Iran*, 31 January 2018; available at: <https://tinyurl.com/y7puckh8>

Alieh Matlabzadeh, who had worked on the now banned women's magazine *Zanan* and is a member of the One Million Signatures for gender equality campaign, remains in prison after being sentenced to 3 years' imprisonment on 14 August 2017. She was convicted for "assembly and collusion against national security", for reasons believed to be connected to her women's rights activism.<sup>21</sup> Her home was raided by Intelligence Ministry agents on 18 October 2016, a day after her return from a women's empowerment workshop in Georgia.<sup>22</sup> She was summoned for questioning on 26 November 2016 and subsequently detained in the notorious Evin Prison for several months without charge, ahead of her eventual conviction.

Arrests and prosecutions of women human rights defenders can be often linked to authorities' paranoia over alleged espionage or subversive actions conducted by Iranian women in connection with Western countries. Dual nationals are particularly vulnerable in this respect, seemingly on the basis of imputed political opinions. Since March 2017 these have included Morad Tahbaz (Iranian-American, arrested in January 2018), as well as environmentalist Professor Kavous Seyed-Emami, who died in custody (above). We remain concerned about the detentions of Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe (British Iranian, detained since April 2016), and Siamak Namazi (Iranian-American, detained since October 2015), among others.<sup>23</sup>

**States at the HRC must call for the Iranian government to urgently and comprehensively reform the Iranian Penal Code, and cease the harassment of human rights defenders, in particular women's human rights defenders and environmental human rights defenders. All detained human rights defenders must be released, and allegations of mistreatment in custody, including the death of Kavous Seyed-Emami, investigated, and remedies provided to victims and survivors.**

## Arbitrary arrests and threats of journalists and others online

The Iranian authorities continue to apply restrictive laws or misuse criminal laws to silence journalists. Currently, 55 journalists are arbitrarily detained, with nine of those still awaiting trial:

- In September 2017, the sentence of Afarin Chitsaz, a foreign policy journalist and columnist for the Rouhani administration's official newspaper *Iran*, was extended from 10 to 12 years. She was originally sentenced in March 2016 for "assembly and collusion against national security" and "collaboration with enemy states".<sup>24</sup> She was finally released on 21 January 2018.
- On 9 March 2017, Hengameh Shahidi, a reformist political activist and former journalist for Narooz, was arrested on unknown charges and remains in prison. Shahidi, once an advisor to detained former presidential candidate Mehdi Karroubi, went on hunger strike on 15 March 2017.<sup>25</sup> She was finally released on 29 August 2017.
- In July 2016, Ehsan Mazandarani's sentence was reduced from seven years to two, and he remains in prison. He was arrested on 2 November 2015, and initially sentenced on 26 April 2016 for "assembly and collusion against national security" and "propaganda against the state."<sup>26</sup> He was finally released on 31 October 2017.

<sup>21</sup> "Iranian Women's Rights Activist to Serve Three Years in Prison For Attending Seminar", *Center for Human Rights in Iran*, 17 August 2017; available at: <https://tinyurl.com/yb9af89p>

<sup>22</sup> "Women's rights activist arrested after attending workshop in Georgia", *Center for Human Rights in Iran*, 29 November 2016; available at: <https://tinyurl.com/yaymcc8m>

<sup>23</sup> For a full list of dual nationals under arrest in Iran, see 'Iran's jailed dual nationals and their uncertain fate'

BBC News, 13 November 2017, available at: <http://bbc.in/2CfAvpQ>

<sup>24</sup> 'Iran Columnist Serving 10 Years Protests Illegal Prison Sentence Extension' *Center for Human Rights in Iran*, 5 September 2017; available at: <https://tinyurl.com/y6w7dvn7>

<sup>25</sup> 'Political Activist Detained Without Charge Subjected to "Illegal" Interrogations in Evin Prison', *Center for Human Rights in Iran*, 17 June 2017; available at: <https://tinyurl.com/y6uig3yc>

<sup>26</sup> 'Reformist Newspaper Editor's Prison Sentence Reduced on Appeal' *Center for Human Rights in Iran*, 29 July 2016; available at: <https://tinyurl.com/y9ahvsqu>

Citizen journalists, bloggers and popular social media users have also been targeted for arbitrary arrest:

- On 2 December 2017, Hamid Reza Amini, a Telegram channel administrator was detained on charges of publishing lies, blasphemy and insulting officials of the Islamic Republic. He has been on dry hunger strike since 17 February 2018.<sup>27</sup>
- On 14 September 2017, Nasser Atabati, the Public Prosecutor for the province of Aradabil, announced that six administrators had been arrested for “promoting homosexuality.” According to the prosecutor, they were arrested by the Cyber Police of the province.<sup>28</sup>
- In the lead up to the May 2017 elections, 12 Telegram channel administrators were arrested and detained.<sup>29</sup> The arrests were initiated by the Revolutionary Guards and the incarcerations were maintained and justified by the judiciary, despite objections by the Rouhani administration and a number of moderate members of parliament.<sup>30</sup> The arrests were part of a crackdown on reformist and moderate journalists supporting Rouhani. Saeed Naghdi, who ran a pro-Rouhani Telegram news channel, was sentenced to four years in prison and two years under prohibition from any media involvement on 4 September 2017. The previous week, the lawyer for six of the other administrators announced they had combined sentences of 23 years: Sobhan Jafari received three years; Saeed Naghdi and Javad Jamshidi received four years; Nima Keshavarzi and Ali Ahmadnia received five years each.<sup>31</sup> They were charged based on “anti-security actions” and “issues that harmed public morality.”

ARTICLE 19 is further concerned at online threats and intimidation that continue against imprisoned journalists, and persons associated with them and/or advocating for their rights abroad.

One concerning tactic is the suspected use of government “hacking.” Our February 2017 *Tightening the Net* report on Soft War and Cyber Tactics<sup>32</sup> concluded that, while attributing the conduct of hackers to the government is difficult, the causes uniting those targeted indicates government involvement, likely from the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC).

On 6 November 2017, the IRGC targeted several Iranian journalists in the diaspora, including Niusha Saremi. They sent corrupted zip files camouflaged as an “article on women’s rights” that would release spyware (malware) onto the journalists’ computers.<sup>33</sup> Hackers also attempted to intercept two-step verification codes sent to the mobile phones of at least ten reformist political activists in Iran between 31 October and 4 November 2017.

A second concerning tactic is the illegal retrieval of data from detained person’s electronics, to use date in public smear campaigns. On 7 December 2017, Press TV released a documentary on detained dual-national Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe, selectively using documents thought to have been illegally retrieved from her devices to build a case of “sedition” against her, alleging she was posing

<sup>27</sup> “Iran: Detained Telegram Channel Admin on Hunger Strike,” *Iran Human Rights Monitor*, 22 February 2018; available at: <http://bit.ly/2EYptX3>

<sup>28</sup> Otherwise known as FATA.

<sup>29</sup> “Tightening the Net: Online Freedoms in Iran Ahead of the 2017 Presidential Elections”, *ARTICLE 19*, 17 May 2017, p.10. Available at: <https://tinyurl.com/ycef47pa>.

<sup>30</sup> ‘Tightening the Net: Online Freedoms in Iran Following Rouhani’s Reelection’, *ARTICLE 19*, 17 July 2017, p. 8-9; available available at: <https://tinyurl.com/y7ot5kfj>

<sup>31</sup> See, report from Deutsche Welle Persian, 4 September 2017; available at: <http://p.dw.com/p/2jKKj>

<sup>32</sup> ‘Tightening the Net Part 2: The Soft War and Cyber Tactics in Iran’, *ARTICLE 19*, 3 February 2017. Available from: <https://tinyurl.com/ycd77oj5>

<sup>33</sup> “IRGC hackers target Iranian journalists based abroad with malware campaign”, Center for Human Rights in Iran, 9 November 2017; available at: <https://tinyurl.com/y7knam8t>

as a media worker (she was not) for the British and American governments. Her passwords are thought to have been extracted much earlier, during interrogations following her arrest.

**States at the HRC must call on the Iranian government to release all arbitrarily detained journalists, and cease online attacks and harassment against those exercising their right to freedom of expression inside and outside of Iran.**

## **Further threats to media freedom**

In addition to the draconian Penal Code, the arbitrary detention of journalists is enabled by repressive laws which limit media freedom, in particular the Press Law.<sup>34</sup>

Article 6 of the Press Law explicitly prohibits the publishing of atheistic content, or content deemed prejudicial to Islamic codes or to offend Islamic jurists, to insult Islam and/or its sanctities, and to promote extravagance. Article 6 also prohibits publications from quoting “deviant, anti-Islamic” media outlets, groups deemed to oppose Islam or publications deemed contradictory to the Constitution. These highly subjective, broad restrictions effectively facilitate extensive censorship and deny citizens access to diverse sources of information. Violations are punishable by fines ranging from one million to twenty million rials (30 – 600 USD), to closure of the publication for “at least a year” and “deprivation of positions in the Press for at most five years”. Under Article 24 of the Constitution, the authorities are also able to order the temporary or permanent closure of media outlets, and exercise prior censorship, on the vague basis that an organisation is deemed “detrimental to the fundamental principles of Islam or the rights of the public”.

Additionally, ARTICLE 19 remains concerned by the proposed “Comprehensive Mass Media Regulatory Plan”, intended to replace the existing Press Law, which threatens to further restrict press freedom if introduced. It introduces new content restrictions, which broaden the grounds upon which journalists and newspapers may be targeted. Legislation establishing a Media Affairs Commission’ will also, once passed, undermine media independence through onerous and partisan regulation favouring hardline and conservative media. The Commission will have powers to suspend journalists deemed to have violated religious principles, or professional ethics codes.

**States at the HRC must place pressure on Iran to uphold the rights of journalists, bloggers and those who wish to express themselves online. The judiciary must work independently from Iran’s security apparatuses to ensure due process in how those detained receive counsel, and that they do not undergo illegal interrogations. The Iranian government must work to curb the influence and activities of the Revolutionary Guards in intimidating media workers. The Iranian government must work to repeal repressive Press Laws that hinder freedom of expression and prevent further regulations from passing.**

## **Religious & ethnic minority groups and their leaders targeted for speaking out**

The Iranian government has targeted religious and ethnic minorities exercising their rights to freedom expression, and assembly and association. In the past year, minority activists have been subject to arbitrary arrest and detention. Minority groups are often subject to the most severe punishments, including execution:

<sup>34</sup> The Press Law 1986, as amended in 2000, available in English at: <https://tinyurl.com/y8q83t85>

- In February 2018, clashes between peaceful protesters of the minority faith group Sufi Gonabadi and the security forces resulted in the arrests of more than 300 people.<sup>35</sup>
- In January 2018, Iranian-American Zoroastrian couple Karan Vafadari and Afarin Neyssari were sentenced to 27 years in prison and 124 lashes, and 16 years in prison and 74 lashes, respectively, and fined more than nine billion rials collectively (270,000 USD). Their bail is set at the extraordinary amount of 50 billion tomans (15 million USD) each. Their charges included “collusion in plots against national security,” “storing smuggled foreign alcohol,” “possessing [their] father’s opium pipe,” and possession of 124 “inappropriate” films, six packs of playing cards, and marijuana.<sup>36</sup>
- Shamiram Isavi, the wife of [Victor Bet Tamraz](#), who formerly led Iran’s Assyrian Pentecostal Church, has been sentenced to five years in prison.<sup>37</sup> She was convicted of “acting against national security by organizing home churches, attending Christian seminars abroad and training Christian leaders in Iran for the purpose of espionage.”
- Between June and July 2017, the Iranian Revolutionary Court convicted 11 Christian Converts and the leader of the Assyrian Pentecostal Church to 10 year prison terms.<sup>38</sup>

**States at the HRC must demand an end to the persecution of religious minorities, including for exercising their freedom of expression rights.**

## Access to Information

The 2009 Publication and Free Access to Information Act,<sup>39</sup> only implemented in 2015, provides for citizens’ right of access to information held by government institutions and certain private bodies, who must respond to requests within 10 days.

Though the implementation of the law was a positive step towards greater transparency in the country, the law provides for a large number of broad exemptions, which must be repealed. These include exemptions for classified information covered by the 1973 Secrets Act, and for the publication of information by “organs that are under the direct supervision of the Supreme Leader” without the permission of the Supreme Leader.<sup>40</sup> The law also discriminates against non-nationals, limiting access to information rights for migrants.

An ARTICLE 19 survey found that only about one third of citizens in Iran were aware of the law and their right to information.<sup>41</sup> Despite strong calls for transparency in Iran from protesters and officials alike there has been slow progress on measures taken to fully implement the law, by way of publishing information on their activities.

**States at the HRC must call for reforms to the 2009 Publication and Free Access to Information Act, to remove overbroad exemptions, and provide further guidance to aid implementation of the law and increase awareness of the rights it provides among the public.**

<sup>35</sup> ‘Iranians Debate Use of Violence Against Security Forces After Clashes With Sufi Gonabadis Leave Three Dead’ *Center for Human Rights in Iran*, 21 February 2018; available at: <https://tinyurl.com/yayk9qsp>

<sup>36</sup> ‘Iranian-American Zoroastrian Denounces 27-Year “Unjust” Prison Sentence in Letter From Prison,’ *Center for Human Rights in Iran*, 30 January, 2018. <https://tinyurl.com/y7jga86l>

<sup>37</sup> ‘Iranian Pastor’s Wife Sentenced to Five Years in Prison For “Acting Against National Security”’ *Center for Human Rights in Iran*, 29 January, 2018. <https://tinyurl.com/yaxm7unr>

<sup>38</sup> ‘11 Christian Converts Issued Long Prison Sentences in Iran in Less Than Two Months in Sham Trials,’ *Center for Human Rights in Iran*, 20 July 2017. <https://tinyurl.com/y9oupz76>

<sup>39</sup> The Publication and Free Access to Information Act 2009, available at: <http://rc.majlis.ir/fa/law/show/780303>

<sup>40</sup> ‘Iran: Review of the Publication and Free Access to Information Act 2009’ ARTICLE 19, 28 September 2017; available at: <https://tinyurl.com/y7r46czd>

<sup>41</sup> ‘Iran: How to make an information request in Iran’ ARTICLE 19, 28 January 2018, summary of survey available at: <https://tinyurl.com/yaunq2sx>

## Freedom of Association

The Iranian authorities continue to prevent the formation of independent trade unions - in policy and in practice - and subject labour leaders to harassment and intimidation campaigns in contravention of the right to freedom of association and assembly. Strikes, which are not legally recognised in Iran, are subject to brutal repression by the authorities. Trade unionists are routinely convicted for “spreading propaganda against the state”, “gathering and colluding against national security” or “disrupting public order and peace by participating in illegal gatherings” and given harsh sentences. On 4 February 2018 more than 30 strikers were arrested at a major sugar plant near the city of Shush, in Iran’s Khuzestan Province.<sup>42</sup>

**States at the HRC must call on the Iranian government to respect the right to freedom of association, including for trade unionists.**

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<sup>42</sup> “‘This is Slavery’ 30 Sugar Plant Workers Arrested in Iran For Demanding Unpaid Wages’ *Center for Human Rights in Iran*, February 8 2018 ; available at: <https://tinyurl.com/y7kec4bj>