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Written statement submitted by United Nations Watch, a non-governmental organization in special consultative status*

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement, which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[23 January 2026]

* Issued as received, in the language of submission only.



United Nations Experts Silent on the Islamic Republic of Iran

On December 28, 2025, large-scale protests erupted across the Islamic Republic of Iran, reflecting longstanding demands of the Iranian people for fundamental rights, dignity, and accountability. The immediate trigger for the protests was currency inflation, which caused a sharp spike in prices of basic goods. Other contributing factors are poverty and ethnic inequality. While women’s rights were not the primary catalyst for these protests, freedom and equality for Iranian women remain critical issues.

The Iranian authorities responded with extreme and unlawful violence, including mass arrests, unfair trials, forced confessions, and executions.¹ As part of the crackdown, the government cut internet and phone service on the night of January 8, 2026.² As of January 19, 2026, credible reports estimated that 16,500 protesters had been killed since the demonstrations began, with many more injured, arbitrarily detained, or forcibly disappeared.³

Analysis

Out of 87 Special Procedures, only seven issued or endorsed an official statement condemning the crackdown.⁴ Published on January 13, 2026—two and half weeks into the violence—the statement was signed by the experts on the Islamic Republic of Iran, extrajudicial executions, freedom of expression, freedom of assembly, torture, international solidarity, and Afghanistan. Other than this, there have been only a handful of social media posts on X—an extremely weak response given the scale, intensity, and barbarity of the government response.

This silence results from selective and politicized engagement by UN human rights experts who routinely mobilize on issues unrelated to their mandates. For example, on August 28, 2025, 47 Special Procedures—including country mandate-holders and experts on migration, food, and displacement—co-signed a statement on gender equality, despite having no mandate-based connection to that issue.⁵

UN experts have repeatedly mobilized with remarkable speed to condemn the United States of America and Israel. On January 7, 2026—just four days after the United States of America forces arrested Nicolas Maduro—19 UN experts signed an official statement “strongly condemning” the move.⁶ Similarly, on June 5, 2020, less than two weeks after the police

¹ Why Moscow may be central to Tehran’s struggle for survival, Iran International (January 12, 2026), <https://www.iranintl.com/en/202601063678>; Iran set to execute protester days after arrest, EuroNews (January 14, 2026), <https://www.euronews.com/2026/01/14/iran-set-to-execute-protester-days-after-arrest-as-tehran-speeds-up-death-sentences>; Iran updates: ‘No plan’ to hang people—foreign minister, DW (January 14, 2026), <https://www.dw.com/en/iran-updates-no-plan-to-hang-people-foreign-minister/live-75498434>; ‘Shoot to kill: Accounts of brutal crackdown emerge from Iran, NYT (January 13, 2026), <https://www.nytimes.com/2026/01/13/world/middleeast/iran-protester-deaths.html>.

² Why are there mass protests in Iran, CNN (January 14, 2026), <https://edition.cnn.com/2026/01/12/middleeast/iran-mass-protests-explained-intl>.

³ Iran report says 16,500 dead, The Times (January 19, 2026), <https://www.thetimes.com/world/middle-east/article/iran-young-protesters-news-nsdztp5t2>.

⁴ Experts urge Iran to break cycle of violence, create space for dialogue, OHCHR (January 13, 2026), <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2026/01/experts-urge-iran-break-cycle-violence-create-space-dialogue>.

⁵ Reaffirming the Centrality of Gender as a Tool for Advancing Equality and All Human Rights, OHCHR (August 28, 2025), <https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/documents/issues/sexualorientation/statements/2025-08-28-joint-statement-reaffirming-the-centrality-of-gender.pdf>.

⁶ UN experts condemn UN aggression against Venezuela, OHCHR (January 7, 2026), <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2026/01/un-experts-condemn-us-aggression-against-venezuela>.

killings of George Floyd in Minnesota, 27 UN experts co-signed a statement criticizing the United States of America's government.⁷

The same pattern is evident with respect to Israel. On September 19, 2024, within two days of Israel's targeted pager attack on Hezbollah operatives in Lebanon, 22 UN experts jointly condemned Israel for "terrifying" violations of international law.⁸ Similarly, on May 29, 2024, just two days after an Israeli strike targeting Hamas sparked a fire in nearby civilian tents, 52 UN experts condemned Israel.⁹

These statements also reveal the extent to which UN experts routinely overreach their mandates when addressing Israel. For example, on October 3, 2025, 28 UN experts—including the Special Rapporteurs on human rights in Eritrea and Somalia—co-signed a statement criticizing the Trump peace plan for Gaza, despite having no mandate-related connection to Middle East peace negotiations.¹⁰ Similarly, in response to October 7, a joint statement condemning both Hamas and Israel was issued by 50 Special Procedures, including mandate-holders on climate change, albinism, and unrelated country situations such as Cambodia, Eritrea, and Iran (the Islamic Republic of).¹¹

Seven UN Experts That Signed or Endorsed January 13, 2026 Statement on The Islamic Republic of Iran

Mai Sato, SR on the situation of human rights in the Islamic Republic of Iran

- January 2, 2026: Six days into the protests, Sato commented for the first time on her X account, calling on the authorities to "respect the rights to freedom of expression, association and peaceful assembly, and refrain from using excessive force against peaceful protesters."
- January 13, 2026: Signed joint statement on the Islamic Republic of Iran.
- January 13, 2026: Shared her UN statement on X.¹²
- January 14, 2026: Shared and endorsed tweet by Special Rapporteur on freedom of assembly Gina Romero strongly objecting to the crackdown.¹³

Morris Tidball-Binz, SR on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions

- January 13, 2026: Signed joint statement on the Islamic Republic of Iran.
- No social media posts.

Irene Khan, SR on the promotion and protection of the right to freedom of opinion and expression

- January 13, 2026: Signed joint statement on the Islamic Republic of Iran.
- No social media posts.

⁷ UN experts condemn modern-day racial terror lynchings, OHCHR (June 5, 2020), <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2020/06/un-experts-condemn-modern-day-racial-terror-lynchings-us-and-call-systemic>.

⁸ Exploding pagers and radios, OHCHR (September 19, 2024), <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2024/09/exploding-pagers-and-radios-terrifying-violation-international-law-say-un>.

⁹ UN experts outraged by Israeli strikes in civilians, OHCHR (May 29, 2024), <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2024/05/un-experts-outraged-israeli-strikes-civilians-sheltering-rafah-camps>.

¹⁰ Palestine: Any peace plan must respect international law, OHCHR (October 3, 2025), <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2025/10/palestine-any-peace-plan-must-respect-international-law-beginning-self>.

¹¹ UN experts deplore attacks on civilians, OHCHR (October 12, 2023), <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2023/10/israeloccupied-palestinian-territory-un-experts-deplore-attacks-civilians>.

¹² @drmaisaito, X (January 13, 2026, 4:39PM), <https://x.com/drmaisaito/status/2011085753162645633>.

¹³ @drmaisaito, X (January 14, 2026, 7:25AM), <https://x.com/drmaisaito/status/201130855400593414>.

Gina Romero, SR on the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and of association

- January 2, 2026: Tweeted calling to “respect of lives and integrity of protestors and the right to assemble.”¹⁴
- January 12, 2026: Tweeted praise and sympathy for the protesters.¹⁵
- January 13, 2026: Signed joint UN Statement on the Islamic Republic of Iran.
- January 14, 2026: Tweeted urging Iranian authorities to stop threatening the death penalty against Erfan Soltani.¹⁶

Richard Bennet, SR on the situation of human rights in Afghanistan

- January 13, 2026: Signed joint UN Statement on the Islamic Republic of Iran.
- No social media posts.

Alice Jill Edwards, SR on torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment

- January 13, 2026: Signed joint UN Statement on the Islamic Republic of Iran.
- No social media posts (X Account is private)

Cecelia M. Bailliet, Independent expert on human rights and international solidarity

- January 13, 2026: Signed joint UN Statement on the Islamic Republic of Iran.
- No social media posts (No X Account)

Other UN Experts That Should Have Spoken Out

Mary Lawlor, SR on the situation of human rights defenders

- January 15, 2026: Shared a post by another organization about the protests, adding “shocking reports” about violations against human rights defenders coming from the Islamic Republic of Iran.¹⁷

Margaret Satterthwaite, SR on the independence of judges and lawyers

- Retweeted January 13, 2026 tweet by Mai Sato sharing her UN statement.
- January 16, 2026: Posted a short thread recalling the right to defense and a fair trial and stating that she is following the situation closely.¹⁸

Matthew Gillett, WG on arbitrary detention

- Silent (No X Account)

Miriam Estrada-Castillo, WG on arbitrary detention

- Silent (X Account inactive)

Mumba Malila, WG on arbitrary detention

- Silent (No X Account)

¹⁴ @Ginitastar, X (January 2, 2026, 8:54PM), <https://x.com/Ginitastar/status/2007163515614728200>.

¹⁵ @Ginitastar, X (January 12, 2026, 3:52AM), <https://x.com/Ginitastar/status/2010530251332341932>.

¹⁶ @Ginitastar, X (January 14, 2026, 12:55AM), <https://x.com/Ginitastar/status/2011210444909002856>.

¹⁷ @MaryLawlorhrds, X (January 15, 2026, 12:20PM), <https://x.com/MaryLawlorhrds/status/2011745201958834381>.

¹⁸ @SRJudgeslawyers, X (January 16, 2026, 11:07PM), <https://x.com/SRjudgeslawyers/status/2012270538085793832>.

Aue Balde, WG on enforced or involuntary disappearances

- Silent (Working Group X Account also silent)

Gabrielle Citroni, WG on enforced or involuntary disappearances

- Silent (No X Account; Working Group X Account silent)

Grażyna Baranowska, WG on enforced or involuntary disappearances

- Silent (X Account is deactivated; Working Group X Account silent)

Ana Lorena Delgadillo, WG on enforced or involuntary disappearances

- Silent (Working Group X Account also silent)

Mohammed Al-Obaidi, WG on enforced or involuntary disappearances

- Silent (Working Group X Account also silent)

Reem Alsalem, SR on violence against women and girls, its causes and consequences

- Silent

Claudia Flores, WG on discrimination against women and girls

- Silent (No X Account; Working Group X Account silent)

Ivana Krstić, WG on discrimination against women and girls

- Silent (No X Account; Working Group X Account silent)

Dorothy Estrada-Tanck, WG on discrimination against women and girls

- Silent

Haina Lu, WG on discrimination against women and girls

- Silent (No X Account; Working Group X Account silent)

Laura Nyirinkindi, WG on discrimination against women and girls

- Silent (No X Account; Working Group X Account silent)

K.P. Ashwini, SR on contemporary forms of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance

- Silent

Olivier de Schutter, SR on extreme poverty and human rights

- Silent (X Account is inactive)

Michael Fakhri, SR on the right to food

- Silent (X Account is inactive)

Tlaleng Mofokeng, SR on the right to health

- Silent

Balakrishnan Rajagopal, SR on the right to adequate housing

- Silent

Pedro Arrojo-Agudo, SR on the human rights to safe drinking water and sanitation

- Silent

Farida Shaheed, SR on the right to education

- Silent
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