

HUMAN RIGHTS IN IRAN

SOLIDARITY TOOLKIT

IMPACT IRAN

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LABOR RIGHTS

SUMMARY

Following the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (i.e., the Iran Nuclear Deal) and the subsequent lifting of most sanctions, there has been a marked increase in trade and economic activity with the Islamic Republic of Iran. However, little attention has been given to the fact that the Islamic Republic's current legislation and practice are in deep violation of international labor rights standards and economic and social rights. Heightened levels of engagement and business with Iran makes this an important time for the international community address the human rights in the country and the rights of workers in particular.

Iran places extensive restrictions and criminal sanctions on expression, association, and assembly. Censorship of speech, art, the internet, and media is common. Civil society groups, including human rights organizations and labor unions, are routinely shut down. Peaceful gatherings and protests are typically disrupted and sometimes met with force. Authorities make widespread use of arrests and detention to deter disfavored expression, association, and assembly.

The Iranian government routinely violates the rights of workers to peaceful assembly and association. The government effectively restricts the formation of independent unions works associations, which are forced to operate without clear legal status. Authorities regularly shutdown unions for advocating for better wages or safer work environments. Trade guilds that issue licenses for craftsmen and shops are effectively quasi-governmental bodies, with all their work overseen by state security agencies. These guilds regularly deny business and trade licenses to religious minorities and activists.

On September 2016, the United Nations Special Rapporteur of the situation of human rights in the Islamic Republic of Iran stated that *“although the Government has allowed—and continues to allow—some labor protests to proceed without interference, the Special Rapporteur has received reports during the reporting period about the arrest and prosecution of labor activists for peacefully exercising their rights to freedom of assembly and association, [including] a leading member of the Tehran bus drivers’ union, ... teachers’ rights activists, and ... independent trade union activists.”*¹

Indeed, in the last decade, Iranian security forces have arrested and imprisoned thousands of labor activists and members of independent trade union. Between March 2014 and March 2015, authorities reportedly arrested at least 233 workers for labor rights-related protests. Iranian authorities arrested at least twelve labor leaders on the eve of International Workers’ Day, on 1 May 2016.² The arrests took place in the context of intensifying labor protests, strikes, and arrests of individuals organizing or participating in them³. In May 2016, authorities also reportedly sentenced 17 mine workers to between 30 and 100 lashes in Western Azerbaijan Province for protesting against the dismissal of 350 workers from the Agh Dara gold mine.

Once in prison, Labor activist often face torture and other forms of ill-treatment. In September 2015, labor activist, Shahrokh Zamani, died of a stroke at Rajaei Shahr Prison in the Iranian city of Karaj, days after prison authorities refused him medical treatment.

A member of Tehran’s bus drivers’ union Reza Shahabi was serving a 6-year sentence for his worker rights efforts. Upon the sixth year of his sentence, Shahabi was granted medical furlough to deal with spinal injuries received from alleged beatings by security forces during his detention. On 9 February 2017, Shahabi was ordered to return to prison, despite the completion of his six-year sentence during his furlough (under Iranian law sentences continue to run while a prisoner is on furlough).

¹ Report of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Islamic Republic of Iran. (19 Oct. 2016). <http://www.ohchr.org/doc/doc/2016/10/SRSGA2016071.pdf>.

² “Labor Leaders Detained in Iran as International Workers’ Day Approaches”. *Campaign for Human Rights in Iran*. (29 April 2015). <https://www.iranhumanrights.org/2015/04/international-workers-day/>.

CASES OF NOTE

Jafar Azimzadeh

Jafar Azimzadeh is the president of the Free Workers Union of Iran, prisoner of conscience, and member of the Azerbaijani ethnic minority in Iran. In 2016 authorities granted him a temporary furlough from prison 11-year to address his medical needs. On 24 January 2017, authorities order Azimzadeh to return to prison however, as of 18 February 2017, Azimzadeh has refused. He is at risk of immediate arrest.

BACKGROUND

Azimzadeh, a 50-year-old former welder, and father of two sons, is one the founders of the Free Union of Workers of Iran. He is one of coordinators of a national petition, which demands an increase of minimum wage, aid to unemployed for workers, and legal recognition of the Free Union. The petition has been signed by over thirty thousand workers.

CASE

Azimzadeh was in-and-out of prison several times between 2006-2009. His most recent arrest was on 30 April 2014, a day before International Labor Day. He was released on bail after being interrogated and held in solitary confinement for over 40 days but authorities returned him to prison later that year.⁴ On March 2015, He was sentenced to 6 years in prison by Tehran's Revolutionary Court on charges of "assembly and collusion against national security" and "propaganda against the state," for his participation in labor unions and promotion of workers rights.⁵

On 29 April 2016, Azimzadeh, began a hunger strike to protest his prison sentence that was imposed on the grounds that he threatened Iran's "national security," despite the fact that he has only participated in peaceful campaigns to for improved workers' rights. He hospitalized after 50 days on hunger strike and released on a temporary furlough to address his poor health.

On 15 October 2016, Tehran's appeals court reportedly upheld his conviction and increased his prison sentence to 11 years.⁶ On 24 January 2017, authorities ordered Azimzadeh to return to prison to serve the remained of sentence. However, as of 18 February 2017, Azimzadeh has refused to return to prison, believing his detention illegal. Authorities have warned his bail would be seized as a result. He is at risk of immediate arrest.

INTERNATIONAL SOLIDARITY

On June 15, 2016, 20 prominent North American scholars, labor leaders and journalists, including professor Noam Chomsky and Safia Gahayr, Chair of the International Solidarity Committee of the Canadian Union of Public Employees, called for Azimzadeh's immediate release.⁷

SOCIAL MEDIA RESOURCES

Twitter hashtag: #FreeAzimZadeh

⁴ "Ailing Political Prisoner Temporarily Released and Promised Retrial Shortly After Judiciary's Harsh Refusal". *Campaign for Human Rights in Iran*. (6 July 2016). <https://www.iranhumanrights.org/2016/07/jafar-azimzadeh/>.

⁵ "Briefly Freed After Long Hunger Strikes, Three Teachers' Rights Leaders Ordered Back to Prison". *Campaign for Human Rights in Iran*. (3 NOV 2016). <https://www.iranhumanrights.org/2016/11/three-summoned-the-union-activist/>

⁶ "Briefly Freed After Long Hunger Strikes, Three Teachers' Rights Leaders Ordered Back to Prison". *Campaign for Human Rights in Iran*. (3 NOV 2016). <https://www.iranhumanrights.org/2016/11/three-summoned-the-union-activist/>

⁷ "Renowned scholars & activists in solidarity with Jafar Azimzadeh & denouncing flogging selectness against workers in Iran". *JASWI*. http://www.workers-iran.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=313:prominent-scholars-labour-and-social-activists-in-solidarity-with-jafar-azimzadeh-denouncing-flogging-selectness-against-workers-in-iran&catid=11&Itemid=129&lang=en

ESMAIL ABDI

Esmail Abdi is an imprisoned leader of Iran's teachers' union. He is currently serving a 6-year sentence.

BACKGROUND

A former high school math teacher, Abdi became a member of the Iranian Teachers' Trade Association in 2007. He later became the union's Secretary-General. Throughout 2015, Abdi helped organize several teacher strikes and peaceful gatherings of educators. The actions were in protest of teacher salaries that were below Iran's official poverty rate and the imprisonment of other leaders from the teachers.

CASE

On 27 June 2016, Abdi was arrested while he was traveling to attend an international teachers' conference in Canada. In February 2016, Judge Abolqasem Salavati of Branch 15 of the Revolutionary Court, who is widely known in Iran for harsh sentences against activists, sentenced Abdi to six years in prison. His alleged crimes were "propaganda against the state" and "collusion against national security" based purely on his peaceful union activities. In October 2016, after he held a hunger strike to protest his arrest, authorities subsequently released him on bail awaiting his appeal. On 18 October 2016, Branch 15 of an appeals court upheld his sentence and ordered Abdi's transfer imminently to Evin Prison to serve the remainder of the six-year prison sentence. He was rearrested in November 2016.

Previously, in 2011, Abdi was found guilty for charges of "propaganda against the state" and "revealing information about security matters" and sentenced to ten years in prison, though this prison sentence was suspended for five years. In other words, if Abdi ceased his activities for five years, the sentence would have been dropped, however, the following year Abdi was elected Secretary General of the Teachers Association.⁸ As such this 10-year sentence can be added on to the more recent 6-year sentence.

Since his detention began, Abdi's salary and health insurance have been suspended. Without him, his wife and three children are faced with great hardship.⁹

INTERNATIONAL SOLIDARITY

In March 2016, 34 human rights organizations voiced their concern regarding Abdi's situation in a letter to the members states of the United Nations Human Rights Council, encouraging to keep human rights pressure on Iran.¹⁰

SOCIAL MEDIA RESOURCES

Twitter hashtag: #FreeAbdi

Image: https://www.frontlinedefenders.org/sites/default/files/esmail_abdi.jpg

⁸"Iranian Teacher's Union Leader Sentenced to Six Years in Prison". *Campaign for Human Rights in Iran*. (24 Feb 2016) <https://www.iranhumanrights.org/2016/02/teachers-union-arrest-abdi>.

⁹"Teachers Union Chief to Go on Trial for Peaceful Labor Activities". *Campaign for Human Rights in Iran*. (15 Jan 2016). <https://www.iranhumanrights.org/2016/01/esmaeil-abdi-teacher-union/>.

¹⁰"THIRTY-FOUR NGOS CALL ON UN HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL TO KEEP ATTENTION ON IRAN". *Impact Iran*. (16 March 2016). <http://impactiran.org/thirty-four-ngos-call-on-un-human-rights-council-to-keep-attention-on-iran/>

SAMPLE ADVOCACY LETTER

RE: The rights of trade unionists in Iran

Your Excellency [Mr. Antonio Patriota],

We, the undersigned are writing to express concern over the continued restrictions on the human rights of trade unions and labor activists in the Islamic Republic of Iran.

According to the Article 8 of the Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), which Iran is a party to, “the right of everyone to form trade unions and join the trade union of his choice, subject only to the rules of the organization concerned, for the promotion and protection of his economic and social interests.” However, Iranian authorities continue to institute barriers to the formation and operation of independent trade unions and regularly arrest labor leaders for exercising their fundamental right to freedom of association.

For example, union leaders Esmail Abdi and Jafar Azim Zadeh are currently imprisoned in Iran under dire conditions or are facing lengthy sentences.

Abdi is a former high school math teacher and Secretary General of the Iranian Teachers’ Trade Association. Throughout 2015, Abdi helped organize several teacher strikes and peaceful gatherings of educators to protest of poor teacher salaries and the imprisonment of other members of the teachers union. On 18 October 2016, an appeals court upheld a six-year prison sentence for Abdi, imposed on him solely for his peaceful trade union activities. Authorities have held him in Tehran’s Evin prison since November 2016.

Azimzadeh is welder and the president of the Free Workers Union of Iran. On 24 January 2017, authorities ordered Azimzadeh, who was free on bail, to return to prison to serve the remainder of an 11-year sentence. He received this sentence for his union activities including organizing a petition that demands an increase of the minimum wage, aid to unemployed for workers, and legal recognition of the Free Union. Azimzadeh remains in immediate risk of detainment.

We ask that your government take action to address the mistreatment of labor activists and provide the following recommendations:

- Urging the Iranian authorities to release imprisoned labor activists and vacate their sentences immediately and unconditionally, as they are targeted solely for peacefully exercising their rights to freedom of association and assembly;
- Urging the Iranian authorities to publicly recognize the rights of labor union activists, stop criminalizing their peaceful human rights activities;
- Support the mandate of the United Nations Special Rapporteur on human rights in Iran, so that the UN can continue to closely monitor the cases of trade unionists subjected to state abuses

We believe your government can make a positive impact on the situation in Iran. We hope you take action and ask that you inform us of the outcome of your efforts.

Sincerely,

HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS

SUMMARY

Human rights defenders and human rights organizations in the Islamic Republic of Iran face harsh restrictions. Numerous Iranian human rights defenders are either in prison, subjected to constant harassment and arbitrary arrest, or in exile. In effect, human rights organizations are largely unable to independently operate inside the country. In 2008, the government shutdown several of Iran's major human rights organizations including the Defender of Human Rights Center, which was founded by well-known lawyers, such as Abdolfatah Soltani and Nobel peace prize laureate Shirin Ebadi. Currently Soltani is in Evin prison and Dr. Ebadi is in exile. In 2010, Iranian government blocked access to several rights websites, such as sites from Human Rights Activist in Iran and the Committee of Human Rights Reporters, and arrested about 30 individuals associated with these organizations, accusing them of cooperating with foreign intelligence agencies.

Iran continues to hold at least 900 political prisoners and prisoners of conscience. Most have been detained for exercising their rights to freedom of expression, association, assembly, and religion. These prisoners include journalists, lawyers, human rights defenders, artists, bloggers, aid workers, members of the political opposition, student activists, and ethnic and religious minority activists. Some political prisoners were unlawfully prosecuted. Trials, often conducted in closed revolutionary courts, which regularly fail to meet international fair trial standards. Such failures often include: lack of access to lawyers or case files, being denied the right to make a defense, and trials lasting only minutes. Many detainees have reported being prosecuted solely on a confession they were forced to make under torture and ill-treatment.

Arbitrary Detention of Human Rights Defenders made a statement regarding Iranian authorities continue to subject human rights defenders and lawyers to a series of limitations, including arbitrary detention.

The Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders expressed serious concerns about the continued pattern of the arbitrary detention and prosecution of human rights defenders in Iran as an attempt to prevent them from engaging in legitimate and peaceful human rights activities.

"The situation of human rights defenders, including lawyers who defend political and human rights activists, remains of deeply concern."

As of July 2016, at least 14 journalists and 15 bloggers and social media activists were reportedly either in detention or sentenced for their peaceful activities, and reports suggest that many others are subjected to interrogations, surveillance and other forms of harassment and intimidation. Social media websites, such as Facebook and Twitter, remain illegal, except for governmental officials, and hundreds of websites dedicated to the arts, social issues, and the news remain blocked.

The authorities continued to detain activists and human rights defenders, such as Atena Daemi and Omid Alishendasi, on account of their peaceful or professional activities. Judiciary officials continued their efforts to further erode the independence of the Iranian Bar Association and restricted the right of criminal defendants to access a lawyer of their own choosing during the investigation phase of national security cases.

On 3 October 2016, officials reportedly sentenced Atena Deami and Omid Alishenas to seven years in prison each for their human rights activism, including engaging in campaigns against the death penalty, and social media activities.

NARGES MOHAMMADI

Narges Mohammadi is a leading Iranian human rights defender and the 2009 recipient of Alexander Langer award for peaceful activism. In March 2015, she was arrested and is currently serving a 16-year sentence.

BACKGROUND

Narges Mohammadi is the former vice-president of the Defenders of Human Rights Center, an NGO founded by Nobel Peace Prize laureate Shirin Ebadi, and the co-founder of the coalition Step by Step to End the Death Penalty. Despite suffering from various health complications, Mohammadi has been a prominent voice for human rights and in particular an advocate for victims of right violations.

In March 2015, Mohammadi was the target of intense attacks by Iranian hardliners after she met with Catherine Ashton, EU foreign policy chief, in the Austrian Embassy in Tehran to discuss human rights concerns. Gohar Eshghi, the mother of blogger Sattar Beheshti, who died in the custody of Iran's cyber-police, accompanied Mohammadi in the meeting.

CASE

In September 2011, the Court of First Instance sentenced Mohammadi to 11 years in prison on charges of "assembly and collusion to disrupt the national security", "membership in illegal group of Defenders of Human Rights Centre", and "propaganda against the state". The Appeal Court subsequently reduced her sentence to 6 years in prison in 2012.

On 31 July 2012, Mohammadi began her prison sentence. As her health condition deteriorated, she was determined by the Medical Examiner's office to be unable to serve as a result of illness and was subsequently released from prison on medical grounds. She reportedly developed an "undiagnosed epilepsy-like disease which causes her to lose control over her muscles temporarily" that led to her temporary release prior to trial.

However, despite the Medical Examiner's opinion, Mohammadi was re-arrested at her apartment on 5 May 2015 and transferred to Evin prison to serve the remainder of her prison sentence. Mohammadi has been denied access to urgent medical care. In addition, she faced a new set of charges for her human rights advocacy.

On 24 September 2016, a Revolutionary Court upheld a new 16-year sentence for Mohammadi. She was sentenced to ten years on charges of "Establishing and operating illegal group"—referring to the Campaign for Step by Step to End the Death Penalty—five years for "assembly and collusion with intent to commit a crime against national security," and one year for "Propaganda against the system."

In 2016, Mohammadi continued to be denied access to medical treatment for her worsening neurological condition while in prison.

INTERNATIONAL SOLIDARITY

In 2011, Mohammadi received the Per Anger Prize, an international award for human rights given by the Swedish government. In 2016, she received the Human Rights Award from the German city of Weimar.

SOCIAL MEDIA RESOURCES

Twitter hashtag: #FreeNarges

ABDOLFATTAH SOLTANI

Abdolfattah Soltani, age 63, a prominent human rights lawyer, and member of the Center for the Defenders of Human Rights is currently serving a 13-year sentence.

BACKGROUND

Abdolfattah Soltani is one of the co-founders of Iran's Centre for Human Rights Defenders along with Dr. Shirin Ebadi. He has been served as lawyer for dissidents and political prisoners in Iran. His clients included, the family of Zahra Kazemi, Iranian-Canadian photojournalist who was tortured to death in Evin prison, and dissident journalist Akbar Ganji.

Soltani was arrested in 2005 and served seven months in prison. Later in 2009 during Iranian Presidential election protests he was arrested again. His last arrest is in October 2011 and has been in prison since then.¹¹

CASE

On 9 October 2011, Abdolfattah Soltani was arrested. He was originally sentenced to 18 years in prison, however, an appeals court reduced his sentence to 13 years. Soltani is now serving this sentence on charges of “being awarded the “Nuremberg International Human Rights Award,” “giving interviews to the media about his clients’ cases,” and “co-founding the Defenders of Human Rights Center” with Nobel Peace laureate Shirin Ebadi. Additionally, Soltani received a 20-year ban from practicing law.

In February 2013, the United Nations Working Group on Arbitrary Detention declared that Soltani imprisonment was illegal and urged for his immediate release.¹²

In 2013, Soltani was hospitalized for 41 days for heart and digestive problems.¹³ In the same year, Soltani went on hunger strike on his 60th birthday to protest detention conditions and lack of access to medical care in prison.¹⁴ Prison authorities temporally transferred him to a hospital for medical treatment.

In October 2016, Soltani completed the 5th year of his sentence. According to Article 58 of Iran’s New Islamic Penal Code, “the deciding court can issue the order of conditional release for convicts sentenced to more than ten years imprisonment after half of the sentence is served, and in other cases after one-third of the sentence is served.” However, as of today, Soltani remains in prison.¹⁵

INTERNATIONAL SOLIDARITY

Bar associations and lawyers groups around the world have advocated for Soltani’s release. In October 2012, the International Bar Association awarded Soltani their Human Rights Award.

SOCIAL MEDIA RESOURCES

Twitter hashtag: #FreeNarges

¹¹“Abdolfattah Soltani Arrested; Home and Offices Illegally Raided”. *Campaign for Human Rights in Iran*. (12 Sep 2016). <https://www.iranhumanrights.org/2011/09/soltani-sep>.

¹² “ United Nations Working Group on Arbitrary Detention orders immediate release of Abdolfattah Soltani!” FIDH (6 Feb 2013) <https://www.fidh.org/en/region/asia/iran/12849-iran-united-nations-working-group-on-arbitrary-detention-orders-immediate>

¹³“Prominent, Ailing Human Rights Lawyer Sees 64th Birthday Pass by in Evin Prison”. *Campaign for Human Rights in Iran*. (3 NOV 2016). <https://www.iranhumanrights.org/2016/11/abdolfattah-soltani-12/>.

¹⁴Political Prisoners Embark on Hunger Strike on Behalf of Sick Prisoners. *Campaign for Human Rights in Iran*.(6 NOV 2013). <https://www.iranhumanrights.org/2013/11/soltani-hunger/>.

¹⁵“English Translation of Books I & II of the New Islamic Penal Code”. *IHRDC*.(8 April 2014). <http://www.iranhrdc.org/english/human-rights-documents/iranian-codes/1000000455-english-translation-of-books-1-and-2-of-the-new-islamic-penal-code.html#14>.

SAMPLE ADVOCACY LETTER

RE: Iranian human rights defenders and anti-death penalty campaigners

Your Excellency

We, the undersigned are writing to express concern over the continued mistreatment of human rights defenders and lawyers in the Islamic Republic of Iran.

According to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, of which Iran is a signatory to, human rights defenders are afforded freedom of expression, assembly, and associations. However, the Iranian authorities continue to institute barriers to the formation of independent human right organizations and continuously arrest human rights activists for exercising their fundamental rights.

Iranian Human rights defenders, including Narges Mohammadi and Abdolfattah Soltani, remain imprisoned in poor health.

Narges Mohammadi is the former vice-president of the Defenders of Human Rights Center, an NGO founded by Nobel Peace Prize laureate Shirin Ebadi, and the co-founder of the coalition Step by Step to End the Death Penalty. Since March 2016, she has been held in Tehran's Evin Prison serving a 16-year sentence for her human rights advocacy.

Abdolfattah Soltani is a prominent human rights lawyer and member of the Center for the Defenders of Human Rights currently serving a 13-year sentence in Evin prison. His charges were "being awarded the "Nuremberg International Human Rights Award," "giving interviews to the media about his clients' cases," and "co-founding the Defenders of Human Rights Center." Additionally, Soltani received a 20-year ban from practicing law.

In your capacity as [Ambassador], therefore, we ask you to make all possible efforts to raise this issue of human rights defenders with the Iranian government through the following actions:

- Urging the Iranian authorities to release imprisoned human rights defender activists, including Mohammadi and Soltani, immediately and unconditionally, as they are targeted solely for peacefully exercising their rights to freedom of expression and association;
- Urging them to stop criminalizing the peaceful activities of human rights defenders and organizations
- Support the mandate of the United Nations Special Rapporteur on human rights in Iran, so that the UN can continue to closely monitor the cases of human rights defenders subjected to state abuses

Finally, in view of the above mentioned information, we urge you to act quickly to correct this situation and ask that you inform us of the outcome of your investigation.

Sincerely,

WOMEN'S RIGHTS

SUMMARY

Despite minor improvements under President Rouhani's administration, such as the lifting of some gender-based quotas in universities, women in Iran remain subject to widespread and systematic discrimination in law and practice. Personal status laws that accord women subordinate status to men in matters such as in marriage, divorce, inheritance, and child custody. For example, married women cannot obtain a passport, or travel outside the country, without the permission of her husband. It is also very difficult for women in Iran to gain custody of their children and can never be granted legal guardianship. Iranian women also cannot pass their nationality to her children with a non-Iranian spouse, while men have this rights.

Additionally, Iranian authorities have imposed a ban on female sports fans from attending public athletic events. Contrary to recent official promises, Iranian women were not allowed into stadiums during a Volleyball World League tournament held in Tehran in June 2015.

In Iran, the age of marriage is 13 years for girls. According to a spokesperson for the Tehran-based Association to Protect the Rights of Children, approximately 17 percent of all marriages in Iran are child marriages. According to an official government website, more than 37,000 marriages involving individuals under 15 years of age took place in period of 2015-2016.¹⁶ Child marriage disproportionately impact girls in.

According to the United Nation General Assembly report from September 2016,

“Gender-based discrimination in matters of civil, political, social and economic rights continue to overshadow the remarkable advances the Islamic Republic of Iran has achieved in women’s education and health. The country ranks at the bottom of countries within its income group in terms of women’s economic participation and political empowerment.”¹⁷

Iran maintains one of the world's lowest percentages of women in the workforce. While women occupy about half of all university student slots, their economic participation in Iran is only 12.8%, five times lower than men, according to government figures. Under the current law, women are barred from several top state positions, such as judges. Some government municipalities have already instituted policies to impede the hiring of women.

On July 31, 2016, the Rouhani administration issued an executive order freezing the civil service exam and all hires of new government employees until such time that the country's laws and procedures guarantee equal opportunities for women and men in employment. However, it remains unclear if the government can stop this form of discrimination.

Indeed, since 2014, the Iranian Parliament has debated eight bills, passing four, that further curtail women's rights by limiting access to employment, health and family planning services, or undermining protections against gender-based violence. For example one pending bill, the Comprehensive Population and Family Excellence Bill, which is still before the Parliament, mandates employment discrimination against women and unmarried persons, makes divorce more difficult, and discourages police and judicial intervention in family conflicts. The Bill to Increase Fertility Rates and Prevent Population Decline, curbs access to contraception and information about family planning, cuts government family planning programs, and outlaws surgical contraception.

These bills if passed would also compound the problem of domestic violence in the country. Iran currently has no anti-domestic violence law or official policy, despite promises to pass one dating back to 2010 at the country's first Universal Periodic Review.

¹⁶ United Nations, General Assembly, Report of the Special Rapporteur on Situation of human rights in the Islamic Republic of Iran, (30 Sep. 2016).A/71/418.

¹⁷ Ibid. p. 17.

TOP WOMEN'S RIGHTS CONCERNS

DRAFT LAWS

Iran is currently debating at least 4 draft laws that, if passed, would cause future harm to women's rights by limiting access to health and family planning services, employment, or putting at risk protections for gender-based violence.

Comprehensive Population and Family Excellence Bill

The "Comprehensive Population and Family Excellence Bill" or "Comprehensive Population and Exaltation of Family Bill" (Bill 315)¹⁸ aims to increase the pregnancy rate to 2.5% of the quantitative population growth until the year 2025. Most alarmingly, the bill requires public and private sector employers to give hiring preference in the following order: married men with children, married men without children, married women without children, and then others.

Bill to Increase Fertility Rate and Prevent Population Decline

The "Bill to Increase Fertility Rate and Prevent Population Decline" (Bill 446)¹⁹ threatens women's access sexual and reproductive care and information.²⁰ The bill would outlaw surgical contraception, restrict access to contraception, ban the provision of information on contraceptive methods, and reduce funding for government family planning programs.²¹ These changes in law would effectively reverse years of state policy in which Iranian authorities implemented an effective "Islamic" family planning education program.

Passport Bill: *Parliament approved bill on 15 November 2012. But not yet approved by the Guardian Council, a body of religious clerics that must approve all laws in Iran.*

The "Passport and Exit Law Bill" requires single women over the age of 18 to seek permission—in the form of a notarized permit—from their male guardian in order to leave the country.²² By providing male guardians legal authority over women, this system intrinsically curtails a range of civil and political rights, such as the right to freedom of movement, the right to leave one's country.

Plan to Protect Hijab and Modesty

The "Plan to Protect Hijab and Modesty" and compulsory veiling (hijab) laws in Iran facilitate discrimination. Article 5 of the bill restricts women's right to work by limiting working hours from 7am to 10 pm.²³ The bill also places regulations on workplace dress codes, requiring that "employees in public or private sectors that do not meet Islamic standards for proper clothing could be could be penalized by pay check cuts up to 1/3 of their salary, for a minimum period of one month and maximum of one year."²⁴ This Bill does not outline any modesty restrictions or penalties for men.

THREATS TO WOMEN HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS

Women's rights defenders that advocate reforms to gender-biased laws are often subject to harassment and prison. Throughout 2016 women's rights defenders have reported an uptick in summons, interrogations and short detentions. On November 26, 2016 Intelligence forces allegedly arrested women's rights activist Alieh Motlabzadeh for attending a workshop in Georgia. Motlabzadeh is one of at least 20 women's rights activists interrogated by authorities for participation in a workshop abroad. As of this writing, she has been release on bail and is awaiting further court proceedings.

¹⁸ Parliament's Research Centre (Markaz-e Pajooresh-haye Majles). "The Comprehensive Population and Exaltation of Family Bill." http://rc.majlis.ir/fa/legal_draft/show/845276.

¹⁹ Guardian Council's Research Centre, The Bill to Increase Fertility Rates and Prevent Population Decline. 7 October 2014. <http://www.shora-rc.ir/portal/File/ShowFile.aspx?ID=f0eed7e0-66ee-4a02-8c3e-151f96ef0ae8>.

²⁰ "You Shall Procreate: Attacks on Women's Sexual and Reproductive Rights in Iran" (p.5). *Amnesty International*. 2015.

²¹ Joint Letter in support of the 2016 UNGA Resolution on the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights in the Islamic Republic of Iran. *Impact Iran*. 12 December 2016. <http://impactiran.org/joint-ngo-letter-in-support-of-2016-unga-resolution-on-hr-in-iran/>.

²² "Lawyer and Women's Rights Activist Hopes Discriminatory Passport Law Does Not Pass." *International Campaign for Human Rights in Iran*. 21 January 2013. https://www.iranhumanrights.org/2013/01/passport_women/.

²³ Report of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Islamic Republic of Iran. (p. 16, #57). 12 March 2015.

²⁴ Report of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Islamic Republic of Iran. (p. 16, #57). 12 March 2015.