CHALLENGES TO HUMAN RIGHTS IN IRAN: GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE AND FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION

HUMAN RIGHTS - BATHMUN 2023

Committee Introduction

Dear delegates,

Welcome to Bath Model United Nations 2023! My name is Jewel Wang Chen, and I will be chairing the Human Rights Council alongside AJ Oppenheimer and Aether Li. On behalf of the Dais, I sincerely welcome you to this committee.

At BathMUN 2023, we will be discussing the topic of *Challenges to Human Rights in Iran: Gender-Based Violence and Freedom of Expression.* This topic was crafted in order to address two sub-topics of human rights challenges: gender-based violence; and freedom of expression. The fact that gender inequality in Iran is so institutionalised and deeply entrenched within the system has led to gender segregation between men and women in Iran. During debate, delegates should take this systematic imbalance into consideration and come up with solutions that could tackle the issue from its roots.

In order to reflect this year's theme, "sliding doors moments", we want delegates to consider certain individuals whose actions have altered the trajectory of future events: for instance, the death of Mahsa Amini that led to nationwide protests against compulsory hijab and worldwide media coverage on women rights in the region. These incidents, despite seemingly inconsequential, have nevertheless made a big impact on the outcome. Bearing this in mind, delegates may think about the potential impact that every speech, drafted clauses, and even informal conversations during lunch have on the final scenes of debate. By the end of the three-day conference, we hope you will walk out of the committee room, with new friendships formed and new memories made, and have a more sophisticated understanding of contemporary issues and the world of diplomacy.

Should you have any concerns or questions prior to the conference, do not hesitate to reach out! We look forward to meeting everyone in December!

Your chairs,

Jewel, AJ and Aether

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Chair Introduction

Jewel Wang Chen

Hi everyone! My name is Jewel, and I am a third-year Law student at Queen Mary, University of London. It is my pleasure to serve as your Head Chair in the Human Rights Council at BathMUN 2023. My MUN journey began in my freshman year of high school, and it was also in the Human Rights Council as the Kyrgyz delegate. Ever since, I have fallen in love with the dynamic of Model UN: the professional diplomatic role-play; intense debate; and collaboration with like-minded individuals who share my passion to refine the global field of diplomacy. By the end of this three-day conference, I hope each and every one of you will acquire a newly enhanced perspective on statesmanship and the fundamental rights of what it means to be human. Can't wait to meet you all!

AJ Oppenheimer

Hi guys! I'm AJ. I'm a third year Social Sciences student at King's College London. I'm originally from San Francisco.

I started doing MUN only a year ago at WarMUN. Jewel was actually my very first chair and has taught me so much about model UN and chairing! Since that first conference I have participated in LSEMUN, and LIMUN as a delegate, ThamesMUN as a chair, and ULMUN as part of the secretariat. I am looking forward to continuing to involve myself in MUN this year!

The issue of freedom of expression and human rights in Iran is a fascinating one for me. Over the summer I took an intensive course in human rights in which we discussed at length issues of Western imperialism in human rights and different ideas of human rights based on non-Western religions and cultures. However, this gets more complicated when states use these non-Western ideas of human rights to justify violence. The question then becomes whether human rights should be reformed to make them more practical or staunchly defended as lofty ideals. I am really looking forward to seeing how delegates navigate these tensions and hope we can have a fruitful and interesting debate!

Aether Li

Hello! My name is Aether (they/them), a second-year student of Politics and International Relations at SOAS, University of London. I am honoured to serve as your deputy chair for BathMUN 2023!

The issue of gender-based violence and freedom of expression in Iran has been a hot topic of discussion in mainstream media. The fight for gender equity continues not only in Iran but also other countries in the international community, and it's important that as much as we discuss and debate it in committee, we practice what we preach. Your politics is unproductive if you choose to do nothing with it. With that said, we hope that you approach this topic with utmost respect, attention and care. After this conference, I hope you walk out with new perspectives and insights on the situations that women and activists in Iran face, and I hope that you will learn more about the various forms gender-based violence and suppression of freedom can take.

I hope your time at UNHRC in BathMUN will be intellectually stimulating and fulfilling for everyo

Committee Introduction

The Human Rights Council was established in 2006 by the United Nations General Assembly. It is composed of 47 members who are elected every three years on a regional group basis. Along with the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), the two intergovernmental bodies work closely together to address and tackle thematic or country-specific human rights issues. In particular, they engage in the UN special procedures, a group of independent human rights experts who report and advise on human rights from their technical points-of-view.[1] For instance, special procedures include:

- acting on reported violations and raising concerns (of a broader nature)
- contributing to the development of international human rights standards
- providing advice for the technical cooperation of countries

Functions and Mechanics

Similar to other General Assembly (GA) committees, the HRC passes draft resolutions to recommend, suggest and advise member states to take certain actions in addressing and combating human rights issues. In addition, it also aims to mandate fact-finding missions to investigate violations of international humanitarian law. In order to pass working documents, the house will require simple majority voting, namely over ½ of present member states. Similarly, simple majority voting will also be used for procedural matters.

Mandate

The Human Rights Council works to promote human rights around the world by addressing human rights violations through discussions and resolutions and through reports and recommendations on country specific situations. It's through these discussions of violations and through raising awareness that the Human Rights Council works to create and uphold a global moral standard that all states and people can aspire to.

Although many of the foundational documents upon which the HRC rests are legally binding, the majority of the resolutions passed by the committee today are not. However, resolutions can still be passed that are not legally binding and merely add to the existing precedent on international human rights standards. Additionally, in conjunction with the General Assembly and the Security

Council, the HRC also has the power to launch investigations and fact-finding missions into specific human rights violations either thematically or by country.[2]

Topic Introduction

Key Definitions

Gender-Based Violence

Gender-Based Violence (hereby referred to as GBV) is a form of violence that occurs because of an individual's sex or gender. It refers to "sexual, physical, mental, and economic harm inflicted in public or in private" and can also include "threats of violence, coercion and manipulation".[3] Some examples include:

- Intimate partner violence and domestic abuse
- Sexual assault and violence
- Child marriage

Gender-based violence can happen against anyone based on their sex and gender, but the issue disproportionately affects women and girls, which is the issue that the debate at hand focuses on. Below are some more definitions of GBV as outlined by the Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women (1993):

- Article 1: "any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life"[4]
- Article 2: "Violence against women shall be understood to encompass, but not be limited to, the following:

(a) Physical, sexual and psychological violence occurring in the family, including battering, sexual abuse of female children in the household, dowry-related violence, marital rape, female genital mutilation and other traditional practices harmful to women, non-spousal violence and violence related to exploitation;

(b) Physical, sexual and psychological violence occurring within the general community, including rape, sexual abuse, sexual harassment and intimidation at work, in educational institutions and elsewhere, trafficking in women and forced prostitution.

(c) Physical, sexual and psychological violence perpetrated or condoned by the State, wherever it occurs. "

Freedom of Expression

The basic ideals of freedom of expression are outlined in Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights,[5] which states, "Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media regardless of frontiers." This was expanded upon in the International Covenant of Civil and Political Rights[6] which, in Article 19, states that this freedom of expression may be carried out "orally, in writing or in print, in the form of art, or through any other media of his choice."

Important instruments of freedom of expression include:

- Protests
- Public speaking
- Articles and other news publications
- Social Media

Additionally, Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights states that "Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; this right includes freedom to change his religion or belief, and freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship and observance.

Timeline of Events in Iran

Date (D/M/Y)	Events
Preface	Reza Shah: In the 1920s a former military officer overthrows the existing Iranian dynasty and becomes the new dictatorial shah. As part of the new shah's aggressive modernization campaign, he banned the veil and headscarves for women.
	Post-Islamic Revolution of 1979: A "mandatory dress code" required all women to wear the hijab and established the morality police.[7]
13/09/2022	Mahsa Amini detained by morality police in Tehran, the capital of Iran, because of "inappropriate attire". She broke the Islamic dress code for women by not wearing her hijab appropriately. Amini was taken to a hospital two hours later after being in the Vozara Detention Center.[8]
	Social media accounts started reporting on Mahsa Amini's case, and her story was shared widely on social media, sparking a wave of public outcry. Demonstrators initially gathered outside Kasra hospital in Tehran, where Amini was being treated.[9]
16/09/2022	After falling into a coma, Mahsa Amini passed away because of a heart attack, according to authorities.[10]
	Many news channels reported that witnesses saw Mahsa Amini being severely beaten by officers during her time in detention.[11] Despite this, the Iranian police have denied these claims – a CCTV video at the detention center was released, depicting a woman who they identified as Amini talking to an official. She later held her head with her hands before collapsing to the ground. At a news conference, Tehran's police chief said that this proves there was "no negligence or inappropriate behaviour on the part of the police".[12] According to him, the officers who made the arrest were not equipped with body cameras or recording devices, but Amini was happy and healthy when she was in the van.[13]
	From this point on, social media posts sharing Amini's situations have gone viral all around the world, garnering international attention. Protests also erupted in various locations such as Saqez, Sanandaj, and Divandarreh shortly after Amini's funeral proceedings. It was reported that during these protests, women removed their headscarves, chanting "death to the dictator". Security forces responded with open fire and tear gas.

17-20/9/2022	Protests spread nationwide as citizens clash with demonstrators across venues and cities beyond Tehran such as Rasht, Mashfad, Isfahan, and even the University of Tehran.
20-21/9/2022	A 16-year-old girl named Nika Shakarami went missing after protesting in Tehran.[15] Authorities claimed to have found her body a day later, but her family did not get access to her body until around a week later.[16] Shakarami's body was moved to Khorramabad, but according to a source, security forces "stole" her body and buried it in the village of Veysian.[17] Protests erupted and chanted "death to the dictator", referring to Supreme Leader Ayatollah Khamenei. Atash, Nika's relative who posted about her on social media, was also arrested. Her story made news headlines and was shared all over social media, sparking more outrage.[18] This is not the first time something like this has happened. Other similar cases where authorities threaten the families of deceased protestors also exist.[19] "Anti-regime demonstrations spilled into cyberspace, with videos of women burning their hijabs going viral. Other women have been posting emotional videos in which they cut their hair in protest under the hashtag #Mahsa_Amini."[20] 1500tasvir emerges as a significant social media account documenting the protest.[21]
22/9/2022	Authorities shut down social media platforms Instagram and Whatsapp[22], attempting to curb the movement by eliminating its main means of documentation and communication. The United States imposes sanctions on Iranian morality police, as well as 7 senior leaders of Iranian security organisations as an act of condemnation against "abuse and violence against Iranian women and the violation of the rights of peaceful Iranian protesters".
23/9/2022	State-organised rallies occur in which protestors are called "rioters" and "Israel's soldiers", including calls for them to be executed.[24] "The Twitter account 1500tasvir, which has 117,000 followers, reported heavy clashes in the central city of Isfahan between anti-government protesters and security forces."[25]
28/9/2022	During an interview with state media, the President of Iran, Ebrahim Raisi, said that Mahsa Amini's death was "being investigated transparently and that forensic experts would present a report in the coming days" .[26] He also warned that "there was a clear distinction between protests and riots" and that those who riot "must be dealt with decisively".[27]

30/9/2022	Iranian security forces using unlawful lethal force, kill and woun several dozen protesters in Zahedan killing the most people during the protests on a single day. Human Rights Watch called the day “Bloody Friday”.[28]
3/10/2022 4/10/2022	A protest erupts at one of Iran’s most prestigious universities, alongside many other universities in Tehran and across the country. Students went on strike, announcing that “ they would not go back to classes until their fellow students had been released.”[29]
	Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, the Supreme Leader of Iran, blamed the United States and Israel for the violent unrest in Iran in a public statement. He claimed that foreign powers, their “paid agents”, and “some traitorous Iranians abroad” were involved in planning the riots because they could not bear to see Iran "attaining strength in all spheres".[30]
8/10/2023	Protests by university students continue. Women students in Alzahra University, Tehran, chant “Raisi get lost” and “Mullahs get lost” as President Raisi visites their campus. Videos of the incident were shared all over social media, such as the ones posted by 1500tasvir.
10/10/2023	Protests reached the oil industry. Workers go on strike at oil refineries in Abadan and Bushehr.
15/10/2023	A fire breaks out at Evin prison in Tehran which holds political prisoners. Reuters reported that a riot police unit was patrolling the area a few days before. As a result, inmates reportedly sang anti-regime chants, leading the police to suppress them forcefully.[32]
17/10/2023	The EU decided to impose sanctions on individuals and entities responsible “for serious human rights violations in Iran, in view of their role in the death of Mahsa Amini and the violent response to the recent demonstrations in Iran.”[33]

30/11/2022 05/12/2022	The first reported case of poisoned Iranian schoolgirls emerges in the city of Qom, with 50 schoolgirls suddenly falling ill. Prior to that, students reported a strange odour resembling "rotten tangerines or a strong perfume".[34] From this point on, poisonings are reported in 91 schools across 23 cities throughout Iran[35], resulting in hundreds of schoolgirls being hospitalised. Some are released soon after, but some are kept there for days. One schoolgirl was also reported to have died from the poisoning, although state television claimed that her death was due to an "acute infection".[36] The journalist who regularly reported these poisonings is arrested[37] alongside those who challenged the government's handling of the case. In a major concession to the protesters, the morality police are shut down, according to the chief prosecutor via state-run media ISNA. He maintained that the judiciary would continue to monitor the situation. However, the public continues to question the status of the Iranian morality police – activists point out the ambiguous and vague nature of the statement, claiming that it demonstrates a tactic frequented by the government. Furthermore, the hijab law still remains in place. It is unclear how these laws will be enforced in the future, even as the government states they would take a "softer approach" towards the protests.[38]
8/12/2023	Iran carries out the first publicly known execution related to the anti-regime protests. Mohsen Shekari was arrested for blocking a street and injuring a member of the Basij militia, which was a unit known for suppressing public unrest. He was not allowed a lawyer of his own choosing, and in a video published by state media containing his confession, a bruise was visible on his right cheek. Shekari is convicted of "waging war against God" and executed. According to his family, Shekari's body is not released, and the family was threatened by security forces to remain silent about the situation[39]

06/03/2023
08/03/2023

Months after the first reported incident, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei makes a statement in response to the poisoning of schoolgirls across Iran. He called the attacks an "unforgivable" crime which should be seriously investigated.[40]

Activists and human rights groups call for rallies to condemn the government's failure to investigate the poisonings.

Shortly after, state television reports the first arrests related to the poisonings, but no further details are provided on the individuals.

By this point, more than 7000 students have been affected in at least 103 schools.[41]

Five hijabless teenage girls record and post a TikTok video dancing to a Selena Gomez song. Authorities track down the girls and detain them for 48 hours. The girls are forced to sign a statement and film an apology video in the same spot, this time wearing hijabs.[42]
News of the girls' arrest creates a massive public backlash, and more people from all over the world post themselves doing the dance in solidarity.

17/7/2023

The Iranian morality police are back on the streets to enforce the Islamic dress code.[43] Meanwhile, the regime claims that they will take a "softer" approach by making the veiling regulation a matter dealt by legal proceedings instead of utilising the morality police.

15/08/2023

A new law concerning the Islamic dress code, officially called the "Supporting the Family through Promotion of the Culture of Chastity and Hijab" bill44, is reportedly being debated behind closed doors by MPs according to Article 85 of the Constitution. The bill, if passed, would specify and increase punishments, such as fines and jail time, for those who violate the dress code. It would also encourage the use of Artificial Intelligence to identify violators.45If this bill gets approved by Iran's Guardian Council, which is a separate unelected body, it would be piloted for 3-5 years. Then, MPs would be able to progress it into law permanently. As of August 20, deliberations of the bill within the Legal Commission of the parliament have reportedly concluded46 and is waiting to be put on the parliamentary agenda for discussion regarding the bill's trial period. "The exact details of the bill, as approved by the Legal Commission of the mullahs' parliament, remain undisclosed and await revelation."

Past Attempts to resolve the Issue.

On September 17th, Secretary General Antonio Guterres expressed concern about the disproportionate use of violence used by the Iranian authorities and called into question the legitimacy of the government's investigation into Mahsa Amini's death. Guterres called for a thorough investigation by a qualified and unbiased authority in the goings on in Iran.[47]

On November 24th, having received more than 17 votes of support, the Human Rights Council convened for a special session to address the "deteriorating human rights situation in the Islamic Republic of Iran".[48] Speeches were entertained from a variety of countries as well as the High Commissioner, the Special Rapporteur on the situation in Iran, and many INGOs and human rights groups.[49] The special session yielded a resolution which passed with 25 in favor, 6 against, and 16 abstentions.[50] The resolution included clauses condemning the violent and repressive crackdown on protests, calling for the Iranian government to respect human rights, particularly those of women and girls, including the right to freedom of expression and freedom of religion, as well as establishing an international fact finding mission while requesting the full cooperation of the Iranian government in this mission. Iran subsequently condemned the investigation launched as 'political' and refused to cooperate.[51]

In December, ahead of the annual meeting of the Commission on the Status of Women, the United States introduced a motion in the Economic and Social Council to remove Iran from the commission. The representative of the United States described Iran as a "stain on the commission's credibility". Iran condemned and rejected the proposal and said it would undermine the credibility of the UN system. Nevertheless, the resolution passed with 29 votes and Iran was removed from the commission.[52]

Current Situation

Instances of Gender Based violence

Back in 2021, a UN report stated that women and girls in Iran were treated as"second-class citizens".[53] While there was progress towards access to education and citizenship rights, laws and mechanisms to safeguard women and children from domestic violence were not strong enough, and women and girls still mostly had to depend on men to gain access to various economic and social opportunities, depriving them of bodily autonomy. Therefore, to establish the context, gender inequality and discrimination in various forms were already a grave challenge in Iran.

The death of Mahsa Amini was a sliding doors moment that brought to the spotlight various forms of oppression and gender-based violence against women committed by the current Iranian regime. As previously mentioned in the definition, GBV can come in various forms, and each different aspect are interrelated to each other. Therefore, this issue should be examined in a holistic manner, and most importantly with respect and understanding.

Physical Violence

Violation of the right not to be subjected to torture, or other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment.

Various cases have been reported and documented of women and anti-regime protestors being beaten and tortured during nationwide protests and during detention. Countless videos and updates of protests online show that security forces, alongside the government-backed Basij paramilitary force[54], have used "excessive and lethal force" such as guns and rubber or metal bullets, against protestors[55], killing at least 537 people as of April 2023.[56]It is also worth noting that exact numbers have been difficult to calculate, as it depends on open verification.

Prominent examples include the circumstances around Mahsa Amini's death, where a witness had reported that she was beaten and tortured leading to her collapse rather than the state media headline that she suffered from a sudden heart attack.

Moreover, According to Amnesty International, Iranian intelligence and security forces have been committing "horrific acts of torture, including beatings, flogging, electric shocks, rape and other sexual violence" against women and children.[57]In fact, part of the reason that Friday protest in Zahedan occurred on the 30th of September was to express frustration towards a report that a 15-year-old girl was sexually assaulted while in police custory in Chabahar, a nearby city in the same province.[58]

Violation of the Right to Liberty and Security of Person

According to Article 9 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the right to liberty and security of person means that "no one shall be subjected to arbitrary arrest or detention except on such grounds and in accordance with such procedures as are established by law".[59] The Article also further explains that anyone arrested or detained is entitled to proper lawful judicial proceedings.

Since the start of nationwide protests, thousands have been arrested. Countless protestors have also been sentenced to death based on the charge of "enmity against God" or "waging war against God". Such victims include Mohsen Shekari and Majidreza Rahnavard.[60]

Economic violence

Although not the usual form of violence that comes to mind when one thinks of GBV, economic discrimination, such as the deprivation

of education or barriers to employment, can significantly impact women and children's social mobility, safety, and livelihood. To this extent, we consider such deprivations and discriminations an act of violence against the ability of women to live a dignified life.

Deprivation of the right to Education

Quality education is not only crucial to the youth's development and self-actualisation, but also essential as a means of lifting lives out of poverty and addressing existing inequalities.[61] However, women and girls in Iran today still face challenges in accessing the right to quality education, such as harmful and discriminatory gender stereotypes, gender-based violence, and multidimensional poverty.

The chemical poisoning of schoolgirls across Iran could be considered a gender-based violation of the right to education by the state, on top of direct physical harm to their health. Human Rights Groups such as Amnesty International have argued that these are "chemical gas attacks deliberately targeting girls' schools in Iran", resulting in the schoolgirls falling ill and being unable to attend school.[62] Parents have also resorted to keeping their daughters at home out of fear.[63]

However, state media dismissed such claims and claimed that the schoolgirls' symptoms could be attributed to stress, "mass hysteria," or an attempt by students to avoid exams.[64]

Furthermore, girls and women in Iran are being barred from accessing education services if they do not follow the Islamic dress code, with the justification of "creating a positive and constructive discourse among students on the issue of Islamic culture and beliefs"[65] and "creating a correct and positive attitude and beautiful thinking about the culture of chastity and hijab among students"[66]

On top of these examples, there are many other cases of gender-based violence committed primarily by the state but also by other actors in Iran. For instance, many women have reported to the Center for Human Rights in Iran (CHRI) of instances where they have been assaulted in public or barred from using a public service because they were not wearing a hijab.[67]

The Suppression of Freedom of Expression

As of February 2023, 15,000 Iranian protesters had been arrested and an estimated 350 have been executed.[68] While, in February, many of those arrested during the riots were granted amnesty, not all were released and the repressive system in Iran continues. The crackdown on protesters represented a denigration of one of the most fundamental principles of freedom of expression: freedom of assembly. The motives for Khamenei to allow amnesty for the prisoners after instituting such a crackdown remain unclear, but they are certainly not a sign of reversal Khamenei's enforcement of a strict interpretation of Sharia law and a firm grasp on power.

Khaemenei's firm grasp on power is carried out by Iran's morality police who are tasked primarily with enforcing laws regarding dress and behaviour on women. It was this force that reprimanded Masha Amini for not properly wearing her hijab, as they have done with so many women, and the alleged maltreatment that she suffered was at their hands inside a prison managed by this force. The government believes that such forces as the morality police are necessary to ensure that the Islamic cultural values that are so important to the Iranian nation and Iranian culture are upheld and that Iranian society is cohesive, homogenous and harmonious. After three months of protests the morality police were shut down, a signal of a small victory for the protesters, but the hijab laws remain in place.[69]

It is important also to note here that many of the women protesting are not protesting against their own religion as many of them continue to be devout Muslisms. Instead, they are protesting against their inability to choose their faith for themselves and to express their faith in a way that feels true to who they are. The protesters believe that freedom of religion is a fundamental right and therefore the choice to wear a hijab is a deeply personal one and not one that can be decided by the state on behalf of the citizenry. Therefore, while some would choose not to wear their hijabs given the choice, others would continue to wear them and merely want to be able to freely choose to wear them in the way that they want.[70]

Khameini's decision to shut down social media represents another fundamental challenge to the freedom of expression that is the fundamental right of all humans. It means that the citizens of Iran are unable to communicate with the outside world, raise awareness about the issues that are plaguing the country, and receive outside help. Nevertheless, Iranians have found ways around this media shutdown and have been able to communicate with the Western world. This has led to worldwide condemnation of the government and the morality police, particularly from Western countries, who have long been critical of Iran and other Middle-Eastern countries' Islamic religious laws.[71]

Expected Points of Discussion

Sanctions and other punitive measures

Many countries around the world have taken steps to condemn the Iranian government's treatment of women and of protesters. The United States released a wave of sanctions against high ranking government officials including many in the morality police.[72] Sanctions have also been implemented by other Western powers including Canada and the European Union.[73] However, while sanctions remain a consistent weapon in the arsenal of Western powers and have a history of implementation in Iran, they remain controversial and often have mixed results. Sanctions can cripple the economy of a country which often leaves the ordinary citizenry, in this case those that the Western world hopes to stand up for, poorer and more desperate than before. Additionally, sanctions often do not achieve their desired outcomes as they do not provide sufficient incentivization to change the practices of regimes.[74]

Human rights or Foreign Interference

In the context of Iran, sanctions are a particularly complex subject as many see them as an extension of the Western imperialism that has long plagued Iran. Although it was never formally colonized, during the colonial period, Britain established a monopoly over Iran's tobacco and oil trade. When an Iranian leader tried to nationalize their oil sale, he was removed by the CIA and British government. The West then puts in place a puppet dictatorship focused on Westernizing the country. It is emerging from this context that Iran becomes an Islamic republic and distances itself from the West.[75] Because of tense history, some see Western intervention in this issue of hijab wearing as another attempt by the West to force their ideals onto a country whose cultural systems are fundamentally different from those of the West. For example, the United States has recently decided to allow American tech firms to expand business in Iran in the hopes of bringing internet access back to its people. Therefore, delegates must think about to what extent their proposed solutions represent meaningful aid to the people of Iran or just an extension of Western imperialism. If sanctions are to be the main penalty, how can delegates avoid perpetuating the oppression of the Iranian people? What can delegates do to ensure such sanctions are effective?

Universal Human Rights vs Cultural Sensitivity

Another point of contention here among nations is the existence of the hijab law itself.[76] While most would agree that the primary problem is the violence occurring against peaceful protestors on the streets of Iran, this does not address the question of whether the hijab ban should exist at all. While many UN Special Rapporteurs including those on Iran, freedom of expression, and freedom of religion have condemned this law in its entirety saying that it oppressed women and increased violence against them[77]. However, some Muslim countries believe that this is a manifestation of Iran's own cultural norms and beliefs and that in Muslim countries human rights should be interpreted within the context of the country's own religious morals.[78] This can be seen, for example, in the Arab Charter on Human Rights which permits countries to 'positively discriminate' against women in accordance with Shari'ia law.[79] Understandings of human rights such as this have been criticized by the UN and others who see an enshrinement of differential treatment for women based on religion as a dangerous loophole for gender oppression and religious fundamentalism.[80] Meanwhile, prominent Muslim human rights activists see their religion as inextricably tied to their concept of human

rights through Islam's understanding of righteousness, pacificity, and communal ties, and therefore believe that, in the Middle East, human rights must be implemented in the context of Islam in order for them to be truly effective and meaningful.[81]

Fact finding mission and investigations

Additionally, the HRC has created a fact-finding mission to investigate the human rights violations taking place after deeming the internal investigations conducted by the Iranian government to be insufficient. Activists and human rights defenders welcomed the mission, as it would create a mechanism where evidence of state oppression and violence could be documented and filed, making prosecution in international courts more likely.[82] However, here too complications arise.[83] Delegates must consider how such an investigation aligns with the principles of national sovereignty and to what extent it is up to a state to decide for itself the moral conduct of its own citizens. Furthermore, delegates will need to consider next steps based on the findings of such a mission. How will the HRC respond to the results? How will it operate within the confines of its mandate and mechanisms? Is international prosecution a possible and practical solution?

Key Stakeholders / Blocs

Western States: US, UK, Canada, EU

These states have imposed sanctions on the morality police and top military and government officials in Iran due to what they see as an oppressive hijab law as well as the violent and brutal crackdown on protesters and their freedom of speech.[84] Please note, many of these states already have myriad sanctions in place against Iran due to a history of Western imperialist intervention, Iranian anti-Western sentiment and terrorism, and tensions over nuclear technology.[85]

These states also have a long history of involvement in Iran and in the Middle East in general and therefore will have a vested interest in this dispute and will be focused on advancing their own conceptions of human rights as well as their own agenda.[86]

The Middle East

It is understandable why Iran's neighbouring countries have generally been reluctant to take any action regarding the protests, considering the region's complex political and religious relations between each other.

Egypt

Egypt participated in the 2023 US-led Summit for Democracy in Warsaw, where discussions of advancing gender equality and women's "political and civic participation" took place.[87] Egypt also receives large amounts of military aid from the United States and therefore will need to be careful not to ostracize its Western allies. At the same time, Egypt is known for brutal and repressive crack downs on political dissidents and freedom of speech. Egypt has also been strengthening ties with the Iranian government, which reflects its ambivalence towards the situation.[88]

Saudi Arabia

Despite being a devout Islamic nation, Saudi Arabia is, relatively speaking, much more progressive in terms of women's rights and liberties. Strict dress codes and mandatory gender segregation was abolished in recent years as part of the country's law reforms.[89] Saudi Arabia also funds Iran International, a London-based media channel that has been regularly reporting on the Iranian protests in Iran. Due to this, the Iranian government has accused the Kingdom of interfering in Iran's internal affairs. However, Saudi Arabia has its own accusations of human rights violations most notably the killing of a Saudi-American journalist. These issues have caused a rift between the United States and Saudi Arabia, one which Saudi is hoping to repair in order to continue to secure lucrative economic and military agreements with the United States. Lastly, Saudi Arabia has recently restored diplomatic relations with Iran signaling a step towards greater cooperation between the nations.[90]

Other major states

China

China has been a steady partner of Iran for decades. At the time when protests erupted in Iran, similar protests against the government were happening in China. Therefore, in an attempt to maintain a grip on power for both regimes, China voted against the Western led UNHRC resolution on Iran. China and Iran have also increasingly become close trading partners, an alliance that is particularly useful for Iran as it attempts to mitigate the economic

blow caused by Western sanctions. The two nations are also close military allies and often run joint military exercises.[91]

Russia

Russia and Iran also share a close relationship. Because each nation has been heavily sanctioned and ostracized from the Western-led international community, the nations have come to rely on each other. Iran has supplied weapons and military technology to Russia to aid in its war against Ukraine, while some US intelligence shows that Russia is advising Iran on strategies for suppressing Iranian protests.[92]

Turkey

Turkish citizens, both liberal and conservative, are quite supportive of the movement. However, the government is reluctant to get involved or issue any strong statements. Turkey does have a different cultural understanding when it comes to veiling which is based more on individual choice. This is because of a more nuanced cultural history as well as because of Turkey's significant ties to the West.[93]

Questions a resolution could address

- To what extent can the United Nations intervene or take action in the name of upholding human rights without infringing upon national sovereignty?

- How do delegates make sense of the tension between universal and culturally specific human rights? Should all countries follow the conception of human rights championed by the West? Or is some interpretation necessary to ensure that human rights make sense in each context? Where is that line drawn?

- What actions can the UNHRC take to address and alleviate the violence and oppression faced by women and girls in Iran as soon as possible? How can this committee go further than what has been achieved in the special session last year?

- How can delegates work with Iran and its allies to ensure that the Iranian government cooperates rather than shuts out UN efforts?

- What kind of position do delegates opposed to Iran's conduct want to take? Do they want to penalize and ostracize the government? Or will they choose to draw them closer in the hopes of fostering compromise and cooperation?

- What is the role of sanctions moving forward as a response to Iran's human rights violations? How do delegates view this option in light of the contentious history of sanctions in Iran? ● International guidelines and frameworks on eliminating gender-based violence, policing public protests peacefully and lawfully, and upholding fundamental human rights already exist, and some are even legally binding. How can the international community make sure that such guidelines and frameworks are being respected and followed?

- What kind of role can publication/ media coverage of the issue play in addressing the protests in Iran? How should the international community condemn and further bring a halt to the ongoing violations of human rights in the country/ region?

- How do we investigate whether such progress has occurred? What can the international community do to continue to allow women's rights to progress in Iran?

Extra reading

Social media accounts that have been mentioned or still report on Iran:

1. 1500tasvir
    a. Twitter (English translations): https://twitter.com/1500tasvir_en
    b. Twitter (Original Persian account): https://twitter.com/1500tasvir
2. Middle East Eye
    a. The website: https://www.middleeasteye.net/countries/iran
    b. Instagram: https://www.instagram.com/middleeasteye/
3. Amnesty International/ Amnesty Iran
    a. The website: https://www.amnesty.org/en/location/middle-east-and-north-africa/iran/
    b. Amnesty Iran (Instagram): https://www.instagram.com/amnestyiran/
    c. Amnesty International (Instagram): https://www.instagram.com/amnesty/
4. Middle East Matters: https://www.instagram.com/middleeastmatters/
5. The Independent Centre for Human Rights in Iran (CHRI): https://www.instagram.com/centerforhumanrights/

More Information on the UNHRC Special Session on Iran:

1. Brief Article on the Content Discussed:

    https://www.ohchr.org/en/news/2022/11/high-commissioner-human-rights-councils-special-session-iran-must-stop-violence
2. Official UN Meeting Summaries:

    https://www.ungeneva.org/en/news-media/meeting-summary/2022/11/selon-une-estimation-prudente-le-nombre-de-morts-seleve-ce-jour
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3. The Full Text of the Resulting Resolution:

    https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/G22/602/10/PDF/G2260210.pdf?OpenElement

Resources on Understanding Iran's History:

1. Iran-US Relations: https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-24316661
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