

REPRESSION AND VIOLENCE AGAINST IRAN'S BALUCHI MINORITY

RECOMMENDATIONS TO BEST SUPPORT CIVIL SOCIETY AND
SOCIAL MOVEMENTS

BY: [MIAAN GROUP](#), [HAALVSH](#) AND [FEMENA](#)

INTRODUCTION

This memo provides an overview of the human rights situation in Iran's Sistan and Baluchistan province, where the Baluchi ethnic and religious minority has faced severe repression and violence by the Iranian security forces, especially since September 2022 and the start of the Women Life Freedom uprising.

The memo draws on information from various sources, such as reports from human rights organizations, activists, eyewitnesses, and media outlets. It aims to raise awareness about the plight of the Baluchi people and to offer some recommendations for action by relevant stakeholders.



The death of Jina "Mahsa" Amini, who died in custody following her arrest by Iran's "morality" police on September 13, 2022, sparked nationwide outrage leading to widespread protests, including in Sistan and Baluchistan province. The protesters in this province also voiced demands for justice following the [reported](#) rape of a 15-year-old girl by a local police commander in the city of Chabahar. The response by Iranian security forces to these demonstrations was marked by excessive force, resulting in unlawful killings, injuries, and arrests, as well as allegations of torture.

- A particularly violent event was witnessed on September 30, 2022, also referred to as "Bloody Friday." On this day, Iranian security forces used severe violence to repress protesters in Zahedan, the provincial capital, and in the nearby city of Khash. Forces reportedly used live ammunition, metal pellets, and teargas against protesters, bystanders, and worshippers alike, leading to numerous casualties. As [reported](#) by the Haalvsh, at least 103 people were killed in Zahedan and 18 in Khash on this day.

The violence did not abate following the events of "Bloody Friday." Iranian authorities have since engaged in further acts of repression, including executions under dubious charges, arbitrary home raids, targeted activist arrests, and alleged torture of detainees.

- Currently, six Baluchi citizens arrested in connection to the protests have been [issued death sentences](#) and are awaiting an appeals ruling.¹
- There have been [at least](#) 26 executions of Baluchi citizens for narcotics related crimes, and/or murder since April 29 alone, according to reports from Haalvsh, which has led efforts to shed light on grave human rights abuses, including trials which do not meet due process standards and result in heavy prison or execution sentences.



¹ Names of Baluchi individuals sentenced to death: Shoab MirbaluchZehi Rigi, 19 years old; Mansour Dehmardeh, 23 years old; Ebrahim Narouei, 25 years old; Nizamuddin Hout, 21 years old; Mansour Hout, 27 years old; Kambiz Kharoot, 22 years old.

- The people of Zahedan and other cities in Baluchistan have [continued](#) their protests for over 25 weeks in a row, demanding justice for the victims of state violence and an end to the death penalty.

The Role of Baluchi Women in the Protests

Baluchi women have demonstrated remarkable courage and resilience by actively participating in protests, in spite of confronting various forms of oppression and discrimination, both as women and as members of the marginalized Baluchi ethnic group. Their participation is complicated by the harsh reprisals from the security system, and the societal expectations stemming from cultural beliefs and discrimination.

- Reports indicate that women released from detention, often after posting high bail amounts, face backlash from their families due to the economic burden associated with their release. In many cases, families refuse to publicize the arrest and detention of female protesters, avoiding even the dissemination of their pictures, out of fear of negative community reactions. While it is believed that a high number of women have been detained for organizing or participating in protests, the names of only 22 women protesters have been made public to date.
- Widespread [poverty in the province](#), which disproportionately impacts Baluchi women, adds to the hardship faced by women who have lost their primary earners to arrest or death.

Despite the harsh conditions they face, Baluchi women have shown remarkable courage and resilience in organizing various forms of peaceful resistance and protest. Their resistance efforts have multiple goals: to seek justice for the victims of state violence, such as Jina Mahsa Amini and the 15-year-old Baluchi girl raped by a police commander; to express their grievances against the economic and social problems that plague their region, such as poverty, unemployment, lack of education opportunities, child marriage and cultural rights violations; and to challenge the patriarchal powers and structures that oppress and marginalize them.

- Rights groups have [highlighted](#) how the participation of women in protests in Sistan and Baluchistan province is a rare and significant act of defiance. Baluchi



women have joined men in protests nonetheless and have demanded accountability and fundamental changes to the political system. Donned in the full body black veil, also known as the chador, Baluchi women have led protests, [chanting](#), “Whether with hijab or without it, onwards to revolution.”

- Baluchi women's acts of releasing videos of themselves engaging in actions that are considered taboo or against the norm in their society has also been a significant form of protest and resistance. By showing themselves removing their hijabs or [dancing](#) - actions that are considered defiant of prevailing cultural norms - these women are not only demanding justice from the government but are also challenging the societal expectations imposed on them by a patriarchal system, which often restricts women's behavior, appearance, and activities.

However, these women activists confront specific challenges and risks related to their gender. They allegedly have been [subjected to sexual violence](#) by security forces during arrests or detentions, torture and forced confessions, and unfair trials often leading to lengthy prison terms.

- In light of these alarming risks, some Baluchi women human rights defenders have been compelled to flee Iran for neighboring countries, where they await relocation. Women human rights defenders in Sistan and Baluchestan Province will require substantial support as they continue to champion the cause of women’s rights in an environment fraught with danger.

Plight of Stateless Baluchis

Statelessness in the Sistan and Baluchistan province of Iran presents a significant humanitarian crisis, even though precise numbers are hard to pin down due to the absence of official data. Unofficial estimates suggest that [upwards](#) of 100,000 Baluchis in Iran are stateless, lacking fundamental rights and services, subjected to numerous daily hardships, and often facing exploitative practices and arbitrary detentions.

The protests that have rocked the country since September 2022 have put the stateless Baluchis in a precarious situation. They face difficulties in proving their identity and accessing legal protection, especially when they are arrested or killed by



the authorities. Moreover, they have limited options to escape violence and persecution, as they lack the necessary documents to cross borders legally.

- Detentions pertain to the arbitrary arrests and imprisonment of stateless Baluchis involved in or supporting the protests. Human rights organization Haalvsh reports at least 843 arrests during these protests in the province, including 22 women and a certain number of children; many of these detainees are believed to be stateless.²
- Denial of services involves systemic discrimination and exclusion that hinders stateless Baluchis from accessing basic rights and services, including education, healthcare, social security, and legal aid.

Stateless Baluchis face numerous specific challenges. For instance, lack of nationality documentation due to factors like poverty, illiteracy, discrimination, and displacement is a widespread issue. Such individuals are also particularly susceptible to exploitation and abuse, and are often excluded from political participation and decision-making processes.

Stateless Baluchis in Iran also live under the constant threat of deportation to neighboring countries like Pakistan or Afghanistan.

- Several [recent cases](#) underscore this harsh reality. On May 10, authorities arrested Molla AbdulAziz OmarZehi, voided his birth certificate just weeks later on May 27, and then deported him to Afghanistan. Similarly, Reza and Abdulraoof Rakhshani were also deported due to their lack of birth certificates.
- In December 2022, authorities [threatened](#) 15-year-old Khaled Baranzehi, who is stateless, with deportation. These incidents highlight the hostile environment stateless Baluchis are forced to endure, with the constant threat of expulsion hanging over them.



² The list of detainees has been compiled by Haalvsh, which will publish the list in a future report. The pdf version of the list is available upon request.

Moreover, recent legal changes in Iran have further complicated the situation. A law permitting women to pass on their nationality to their children, adopted on a trial basis in 2020, was [repealed](#) in November 2022.

Despite its flaws, this law provided a potential pathway for some stateless Baluchis to obtain legal recognition as Iranian citizens and obtain birth certificates. The repeal of this law threatens to increase the number of stateless individuals in Iran, particularly in regions like Sistan and Baluchistan.

Executions in Sistan and Baluchistan Province

The Iranian government has reportedly escalated the use of capital punishment since late April 2023, a disturbing trend particularly noticeable in Sistan and Baluchistan province. Human Rights Watch has [noted](#) that Iran carried out at least 60 executions between late April and early May 2023 alone. Many of these were the result of unfair trials or were for charges that should not carry the death penalty under international law.

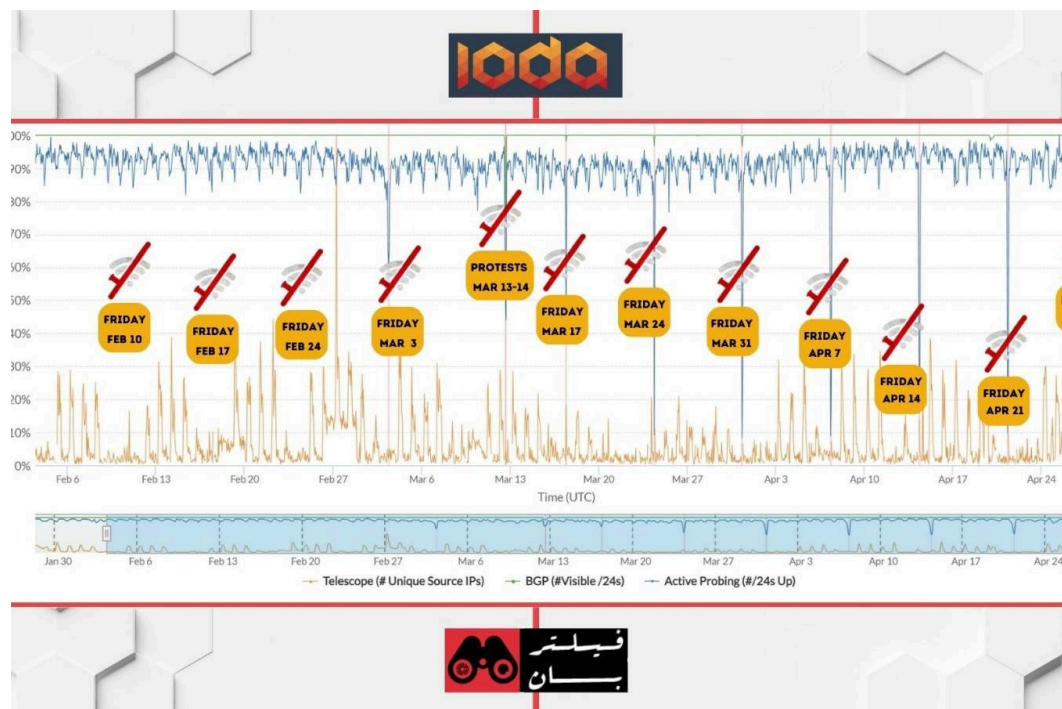
- Haalvsh [reports](#) that the Iranian authorities executed at least 20 individuals in Sistan and Baluchistan province — 18 men and 2 women — on charges related to drug trafficking within a six-day period from April 29 to May 4.
- These executions highlight the disturbing disregard for human rights and due process in the country, with authorities frequently leveraging capital punishment as a tool for maintaining control and suppressing dissent.

Internet Throttling

The Iranian authorities have used severe internet throttling as a means of repression and censorship in Sistan and Baluchistan province. This has involved deliberately slowing down or blocking internet traffic to limit people's access to information and communication. The authorities have employed this tactic to suppress protests and hide human rights violations not only in Sistan and Baluchistan province, but also throughout Iran. The internet restrictions are especially severe every Friday, when protesters have regularly gathered in the province since the September 30 "Bloody Friday" killings.



A network monitoring group, Filter.watch, has reported that the internet shutdowns in Sistan and Baluchistan province have been more frequent and longer than in any other region in Iran. Moreover, 24 civil society organizations have appealed to the International Telecommunication Union (ITU) and its Secretary-General to condemn the internet shutdowns in Iran and urge the Iranian government to stop them. They have also asked the ITU to consider the impact of such internet shutdowns on the affected communities in its annual report rankings.



A graph depicting the pattern of increased internet throttling every Friday.



Role of Religion and Molavi Abdolhamid in Organizing Demonstrations

Molavi Abdolhamid Ismaeelzahi, traditionally not a vocal critic of the Iranian government, has evolved into a significant figure in organizing protests in Sistan and Baluchistan after the "Bloody Friday" massacre on September 30, 2022. As a respected Sunni cleric and the director of Jamiah Darul Uloom Zahedan, his

influence spans his thousands of religious students and among the broader Sunni public in the region.

- His statements and demands related to the human rights situation in the province, including a call for a referendum and a new constitution have received much attention. He has also [criticized](#) the very foundation of the establishment, the "unification between religion and state", saying that "religion should not be exploited to give credit to an Islamic state... Islamic states will only be legitimate at the time a majority of people want them."
- Molavi Abdolhamid enjoys respect among many Baluchis and other Iranians, but he also faces criticism and reservations from some Baluchi women's groups and human rights groups. They have challenged his discriminatory views on women and his initial support for the Taliban in Afghanistan, which he has since backtracked on. These groups also caution Iranians against relying on religious figures as the main leaders of protests or political change.

Recommendations

The human rights situation in Sistan and Baluchistan is grave and urgent, and requires immediate action from the international community to uphold and protect the rights of the Baluchi people. Based on the evidence presented, we urge global stakeholders to consider the following strategic actions:

1. **Pressure the Iranian Government to End Executions:** Use diplomatic means to pressure the Iranian government to end executions of Baluchis and other Iranians involved in protests or accused of trafficking and other various offenses. Impose targeted sanctions on individuals responsible for human rights violations. Condemn the use of the death penalty, particularly against Baluchi activists and protesters, and call for a moratorium on all executions in Iran. Demand that Iranian authorities respect the right to life and due process of all detainees, and ensure that they are not subjected to torture or other ill-treatment.
2. **Promote Gender and Racial Equality:** Encourage the repeal of all laws that discriminate against women, and stress the importance of gender equality in all aspects of Iranian society. Additionally, the Iranian government should be



pressured to comply with its international human rights obligations including the “International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination” toward securing adequate rights for all its citizens regardless of their ethnicity.

3. **Condemn Violent Crackdowns:** EU authorities should do much more to draw attention to the plight of Baluchi people by naming the victims of state violence and publicly condemning the brutal actions of Iranian authorities against peaceful protestors.
4. **Advocate for Accountability:** Advocate for transparency and accountability in the Iranian justice system, particularly focusing on holding those responsible for ordering or carrying out unlawful killings to account and pressuring Iranian authorities to allow defendants unfettered access to independent legal representation of their own choosing.
5. **Call for the Release of Detainees:** Urge the immediate and unconditional release of all those arbitrarily detained or forcibly disappeared in connection with the protests, and ensure they have access to legal representation. Among them are prisoners of conscience who have been imprisoned solely for peacefully exercising their rights to freedom of expression, association and assembly.
6. **Support Human Rights Defenders:** Extend emergency financial aid and institutional support to human rights defenders, including women human rights defenders. For those facing threats or needing to leave the country, provide visas and opportunities for respite, fellowships or relocation.
7. **Encourage Iran to actualize the commitments of the [UNHCR's "End Statelessness Campaign" by 2024 and reinstate nationality law.](#)** As a participant in this initiative, Iran must be held accountable to its pledges in tackling statelessness and maintaining human rights standards. Similarly, encourage Iran to reinstate the nationality law, which allows women to pass on nationality to their children.
8. **Investigate International Human Rights Crimes:** The UN Fact-Finding Mission on Iran should be encouraged to look into how Iranian authorities knowingly facilitated international human rights crimes against ethnic minorities, including the Baluchi community.



This report is the result of a collaborative effort between Miaan Group, Haalvash, and FEMENA. Miaan Group empowers Iranian human rights activists and civil society groups, and supports minority rights and digital rights in the country. Haalvsh is led by former prisoners who investigate and report on human rights abuses affecting Iran's Baluchi minority. FEMENA advocates for the rights and empowerment of women in the Middle East and North Africa.