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IRAN: ATTACKS BY THE ISLAMIC REPUBLIC AGAINST THE KURDS

19 JULY 2026

Methodology

This report was prepared by the **Geneva Kurdish Human Rights Centre** with limited resources. It is based on communication with human rights defenders in the Kurdish regions of Iran, interviews with local residents and civilians living in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq—particularly in Erbil and Sulaymaniyah—and a review of reports published by international and Kurdish human rights organizations. The report also draws upon statements, findings, and assessments issued by the **Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR)** regarding the human rights situation in Iran.

Due to the highly restrictive nature of the Iranian state, the suppression of independent information, and severe limitations on access to affected areas, obtaining reliable information remains extremely difficult. Consequently, the violations documented in this report represent only a portion of the human rights abuses believed to have occurred. Available evidence indicates that Kurds and other ethnic and religious minorities continue to face systematic repression, including arbitrary detention, torture, unlawful killings, and other serious human rights violations.

Introduction

The human rights situation in the Islamic Republic of Iran continues to be a matter of serious concern for the United Nations, international human rights organizations, and civil society.

These concerns include restrictions on fundamental freedoms, limitations on political participation, suppression of dissent through the criminal justice system, arbitrary detention, executions, allegations of torture, and discrimination against ethnic and religious minorities.

The current situation reflects long-standing structural problems related to governance, accountability, judicial independence, and the protection of fundamental human rights.

According to reports published by international human rights organizations, pressure on political activists, journalists, human rights defenders, women's rights advocates, members of ethnic



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minorities—particularly Kurds—and individuals participating in peaceful protests has intensified in recent years.

This report examines major human rights violations and political developments affecting **Iranian Kurdistan (Rojhilat)** and the **Kurdistan Region of Iraq** during the period **2025–2026**.

Information gathered from United Nations mechanisms, international human rights organizations, and independent sources indicates that Iran's longstanding human rights problems have significantly worsened. Restrictions on freedom of expression, arbitrary detention, violations of fair trial guarantees, allegations of torture, and the extensive use of the death penalty demonstrate a serious deterioration in the country's human rights situation.

Numerous reports indicate that security pressure against protesters, journalists, women's rights activists, human rights defenders, and members of ethnic minorities intensified throughout 2025 and 2026. Military and security operations also increased in predominantly Kurdish, Baluchi, and other minority-populated areas, resulting in widespread arrests, harsh prison sentences, and, in some cases, executions.

Human Rights Situation in Iranian Kurdistan

Kurdish communities in Iran have long experienced discrimination and restrictions in political, cultural, economic, and social life.

Human rights organizations have documented allegations concerning:

- Arbitrary arrests of Kurdish activists;
- Restrictions on cultural and linguistic rights;
- Prosecutions based on broadly defined national security charges;
- Executions of Kurdish political prisoners;
- Military pressure in border areas;
- Economic marginalization of border communities.

The provinces with significant Kurdish populations include **Kurdistan, Kermanshah, West Azerbaijan, and Ilam**, where security tensions remain persistent.

According to Kurdish human rights organizations, Iranian security forces have carried out operations targeting Kurdish activists, environmental campaigners, journalists, and members of civil society.

Iranian authorities generally justify these measures as necessary to address national security threats. However, human rights organizations emphasize that national security concerns cannot justify collective punishment, discrimination, or violations of fundamental rights and freedoms.



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Cross-Border Military Operations

The report also examines Iran's cross-border military operations against Iranian Kurdish opposition groups located in the **Kurdistan Region of Iraq**.

According to documented incidents, Iranian missile and unmanned aerial vehicle (UAV) attacks have affected not only locations associated with opposition groups but also civilian areas in and around **Erbil (Hewlêr), Sulaymaniyah (Silêmanî), Bazyan, Chamchamal, Pirmam, Akre,** and nearby communities.

Explosions, fires, and repeated military strikes have significantly disrupted civilian life, creating widespread fear and insecurity among local residents.

During the reporting period, numerous UAV and missile attacks were recorded across different parts of the Kurdistan Region. Most incidents occurred in the governorates of **Erbil and Sulaymaniyah**, particularly around **Pirmam, Akre, Bazyan, and Chamchamal**.

According to statements issued by local authorities, media outlets, and regional officials, these attacks caused explosions, fires, and heightened security concerns among the civilian population.

The attacks occurred amid escalating regional military tensions, increasing fears that civilian areas and autonomous territories could become affected by conflicts extending beyond their borders.

The **Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG)** has repeatedly stated that the Kurdistan Region is not a party to wider regional conflicts and that attacks on its territory threaten civilian safety, economic stability, and regional peace.

Cross-Border Military Operations

At the time this report was prepared, verified information regarding casualties and material damage remained limited.

According to information obtained from local sources, **UAV and missile attacks targeted several locations in Sulaymaniyah Governorate on 17 July 2026.**

One of the reported incidents occurred in the **Tasluja** area of Sulaymaniyah, where several explosions were followed by a large fire. Local sources reported significant damage; however, the full extent of the destruction had not yet been officially assessed when this report was finalized.



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According to local sources:

- A UAV crashed in the **Bazyan** area, including near a football field.
- In **Chamchamal**, another UAV crash sparked a fire that burned approximately **15 hectares** of land.

These incidents caused widespread fear among local residents and heightened concerns regarding unexploded ordnance and the dangers posed by military activities in close proximity to civilian areas.

Sulaymaniyah Governor **Heval Abubakir** condemned the attacks, emphasizing that the Kurdistan Region is not a party to regional conflicts. He also urged residents to avoid areas where explosions had occurred until security authorities completed their investigations.

From the perspective of international humanitarian law, the presence of explosive remnants in civilian areas poses a serious threat to life and property. Deliberate or indiscriminate attacks affecting civilians may constitute violations of international humanitarian law and therefore require prompt, impartial, and independent investigation.

UAV Activity Around Erbil

Between **17 and 18 July 2026**, numerous UAVs were reportedly detected approaching **Erbil** and its surrounding areas.

According to local security authorities, air defense systems were activated, and several UAVs were intercepted before reaching their intended targets.

Reported incidents included:

- Explosion sounds resulting from intercepted UAVs were heard across different parts of Erbil.
- Residents experienced significant fear and uncertainty because of the repeated explosions and the evolving security situation.
- At the time this report was completed, there was no confirmed information regarding civilian casualties or major property damage.

Previous UAV attacks targeting locations associated with international forces and diplomatic facilities in Erbil have further heightened security concerns. These incidents underscore the continuing risks faced by diplomatic missions, civilian infrastructure, and surrounding communities.



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Attacks Affecting Pirmam and Akre

According to local sources, UAV activity also affected the **Pirmam** and **Akre** areas.

Reported incidents included:

- Several UAVs crashed in or near populated areas.
- A large fire broke out in Pirmam after the crash of a UAV.
- Local authorities had not released a comprehensive assessment of the resulting damage when this report was prepared.

These incidents have increased anxiety among local residents, particularly because the affected locations are situated close to civilian communities.

The use of UAVs in or near populated areas presents significant humanitarian risks, as such weapons may fail to adequately distinguish between military objectives and civilian objects. Under international humanitarian law, all parties to an armed conflict are obligated to take every feasible precaution to minimize civilian harm.

Available information also indicates that settlements hosting **Iranian Kurdish refugees** and members of Iranian Kurdish opposition groups remain vulnerable to future attacks. This situation raises serious humanitarian concerns, particularly for women, children, older persons, and other vulnerable populations.

Impact on Border Communities

Evidence also suggests that civilians living in border regions continue to be affected by the actions of Iranian security forces.

Human rights organizations have documented incidents in which shepherds grazing livestock near the border and **kolbers** (cross-border porters) were killed after being shot by Iranian security forces.

These incidents raise serious concerns regarding Iran's compliance with international human rights standards governing the protection of the right to life and the lawful use of force.

The developments documented in this report demonstrate that the situation extends far beyond an internal security matter. Rather, it represents a broader human rights and humanitarian crisis requiring sustained attention from the international community.



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Accordingly, this report recommends:

- An immediate halt to executions;
- An end to arbitrary detention;
- Guarantees of judicial independence and fair trial rights;
- Enhanced protection of civilians;
- Full compliance with international humanitarian law during cross-border military operations;
- Strengthened cooperation with United Nations human rights mechanisms.

Missile Strike on a Kurdish Political Organization

On **17 July 2026**, a missile strike targeted a facility associated with the **Komala – Kurdistan Toilers' Organization of Iranian Kurdistan** in the Sulaymaniyah Governorate.

According to statements issued by Kurdish political organizations, **nine members of the organization were killed** in the attack.

The incident further illustrates the continuing security risks posed by cross-border military operations and highlights growing concerns regarding the protection of civilians and politically affiliated individuals located within the Kurdistan Region of Iraq.

Fair Trial and Judicial Independence

One of the principal concerns identified by international human rights organizations relates to the independence and functioning of Iran's judiciary, particularly in politically sensitive cases.

According to numerous reports, individuals accused of political activities, national security-related offenses, or human rights advocacy have frequently faced judicial proceedings that raise serious concerns regarding compliance with international fair trial standards.

Reported concerns include:

- Arrests carried out without sufficient judicial oversight or transparency;
- Limited or delayed access to independent legal counsel;
- Closed or highly restricted court proceedings;
- Allegations of forced or coerced confessions;
- Prolonged pretrial detention;
- Restrictions on communication with family members.

International human rights law, including **Article 14 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR)**, requires States to guarantee fair and impartial judicial



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proceedings for all individuals, regardless of their political opinions, ethnic background, religion, or social status.

Human rights organizations have expressed particular concern regarding judicial proceedings involving Kurdish activists, political prisoners, women human rights defenders, and individuals prosecuted on broadly defined national security charges.

Reports concerning political prisoners further indicate that some detainees have experienced restrictions on family visits, telephone communication, and access to adequate medical care. Where such restrictions are imposed arbitrarily or as a form of punishment, they may constitute violations of international standards governing the treatment of persons deprived of their liberty.

The Death Penalty

The continued use of the death penalty in the Islamic Republic of Iran remains one of the country's most serious human rights concerns.

According to international human rights organizations, Iran continues to rank among the countries carrying out the highest number of executions worldwide. Particular concern has been expressed regarding the application of capital punishment against protesters, political activists, members of ethnic minorities, and individuals convicted of national security-related offenses.

In **January 2026**, the **United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights** reiterated concerns regarding the extensive use of the death penalty worldwide and emphasized that capital punishment must never be used as a tool of political repression or intimidation.

Human rights organizations have also reported that some individuals sentenced to death may not have received trials consistent with international standards of due process.

Reported concerns include:

- Limited access to legal representation;
- Alleged reliance on forced confessions ;
- Lack of transparency in judicial proceedings;
- Criminal prosecution of individuals for the peaceful exercise of freedom of expression or political opinion.

Under international law, the death penalty is subject to the strictest legal safeguards. In accordance with the **International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR)**, where capital punishment has not been abolished, it may be imposed only for the "most serious crimes" and only after proceedings that fully comply with international fair trial standards.



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Whenever allegations of political motivation, discrimination, torture, or serious procedural violations arise, independent and impartial review mechanisms should be available.

The "Jin, Jiyan, Azadi" Movement

The "**Jin, Jiyan, Azadi**" ("**Woman, Life, Freedom**") movement has become one of the most significant social and political movements in contemporary Iranian history.

The movement emerged following the death of **Jina Mahsa Amini** while in the custody of Iran's morality police in **September 2022**. It subsequently evolved into a nationwide movement advocating for women's rights, fundamental freedoms, equality before the law, and greater political accountability.

According to human rights organizations, demonstrations brought together broad segments of Iranian society, including women, students, workers, members of ethnic minorities, and civil society activists.

Reports concerning the authorities' response to peaceful demonstrations include allegations of:

- Excessive use of force;
- Arbitrary detention of protesters and activists;
- Restrictions on internet access and communication platforms;
- Intimidation of families of those killed or detained;
- Criminal prosecution of demonstrators and individuals expressing solidarity with the movement.

Human rights organizations have further documented allegations that security forces used lethal force against peaceful protesters in a number of incidents.

International human rights law guarantees the rights to **freedom of peaceful assembly** and **freedom of expression**. States are obligated to respect, protect, and facilitate the exercise of these rights while ensuring that any restrictions are lawful, necessary, and proportionate.

Human Rights Violations Affecting Kurdish Prisoners and Activists

Human rights organizations continue to document cases involving Kurdish political prisoners, activists, and members of civil society in Iran.



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According to reports published by Kurdish human rights monitoring organizations, **Werîşe Muradî**, a Kurdish political prisoner held in **Evin Prison**, has been subjected to restrictions on communication with her family and limitations on family visits following judicial decisions.

According to available reports, these restrictions were imposed after her refusal to attend certain court hearings and in connection with her previous involvement in civil protest activities.

Restrictions on prisoners' communication with their families, legal counsel, and procedural safeguards raise serious concerns under international standards governing the treatment of persons deprived of their liberty.

Human rights organizations have documented additional cases involving Kurdish detainees who have reportedly experienced:

- Arbitrary detention;
- Failure to promptly inform families of their whereabouts;
- Restrictions on access to legal representation;
- Deteriorating physical and psychological health while in custody.

International law requires that all persons deprived of their liberty be treated with humanity and dignity. These obligations are reflected in the **United Nations Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners (the Nelson Mandela Rules)**.

Pressure on Women Human Rights Defenders

Civil society organizations have reported increasing pressure on women activists, journalists, artists, and human rights defenders across Iran.

Reported measures include:

- Summons issued by judicial authorities;
- Restrictions on professional and public activities;
- Surveillance and monitoring;
- Arrests related to online expression or participation in peaceful campaigns.

According to human rights organizations, women engaged in human rights advocacy often face both gender-based discrimination and politically motivated prosecution.

The protection of women human rights defenders is an essential component of the international human rights framework and should be guaranteed without discrimination.



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Killings of Kurdish Kolbers

Among the groups most affected by ongoing repression in Iranian Kurdistan are **kolbers**—cross-border porters who transport goods across mountainous frontier areas, often because of severe economic hardship and the lack of alternative employment.

According to reports, **Zanyar**, a 27-year-old Kurdish kolber from the **Sardasht** area, was allegedly shot and killed by Iranian security forces near the **Tete border area in Hawraman**.

According to available information:

- He was reportedly shot while engaged in cross-border trade activities.
- No prior warning was allegedly given before the shooting.
- He died at the scene from gunshot wounds.

For many years, human rights organizations have expressed concern regarding the repeated use of lethal force against kolbers operating in economically marginalized border regions.

Numerous Kurdish kolbers have reportedly been killed or seriously injured by Iranian security forces while carrying out activities necessary for their livelihoods.

Whenever civilians are killed during law enforcement or border security operations, independent investigations should determine :

- Whether the use of force was lawful, necessary, and proportionate;
- Whether adequate warnings were provided before force was used;
- Whether the victim posed an imminent threat;
- Whether those responsible can be held accountable through effective judicial mechanisms.

Arbitrary Arrests and Enforced Restrictions

Human rights organizations continue to report the arrest and prosecution of Kurdish activists, cultural figures, and members of civil society throughout Iran.

According to available reports, arrests have been linked to activities including:

- Participation in peaceful demonstrations;



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- Online expression and social media activity;
- Human rights advocacy;
- Participation in memorial ceremonies for individuals killed during protests;
- Alleged political affiliations.

In several documented cases, families reported significant difficulties obtaining information regarding detained relatives, including:

- Their legal status;
- Their place of detention;
- Their physical and mental condition.

Such practices raise serious concerns regarding transparency, protection against arbitrary detention, and the right to a fair trial.

International human rights standards require that every person deprived of liberty:

- Be informed promptly of the reasons for arrest;
- Have immediate access to legal counsel;
- Be protected against enforced disappearance and incommunicado detention.

Case of Perya Ferûxî

According to information provided by human rights organizations, **Perya Ferûxî** was arrested and later sentenced to **five years' imprisonment**.

Reports indicate that, at the time of her detention, the authorities did not publicly disclose a detailed legal basis for the charges against her.

She had previously been detained during demonstrations associated with the "**Jin, Jiyan, Azadî**" ("**Woman, Life, Freedom**") movement.

Any criminal proceedings arising solely from peaceful protest or the expression of political opinions should be assessed in light of international standards protecting freedom of expression, freedom of peaceful assembly, and due process guarantees.

Conditions in Evin Prison

Human rights organizations continue to express concern regarding detention conditions in **Evin Prison**, where many political prisoners and individuals charged with national security-related offenses are held.



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Reported concerns include:

- Restrictions on telephone communication;
- Denial of family visits;
- Limited access to adequate healthcare;
- Psychological pressure;
- Prolonged isolation.

According to available reports, several Kurdish prisoners have experienced restrictions on communication with their relatives.

Among the individuals whose cases have been documented are:

- Şîwa Îsmailî;
- Merziye Farisî;
- Berûx Teqîpûr;
- Zara Sefayî;
- Îlahe Foladî.

Human rights organizations have also reported deterioration in the health of some detainees and delays in providing necessary medical treatment.

International standards require that all persons deprived of liberty be protected from torture and other cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment or punishment, and that they receive adequate and timely medical care.

Conclusion

The findings presented in this report indicate that the human rights situation in the Islamic Republic of Iran continued to deteriorate throughout **2025–2026**, particularly in relation to political repression, the extensive use of the death penalty, restrictions on fundamental freedoms, and military operations affecting Kurdish-populated areas.

Available evidence suggests that Kurdish communities remain disproportionately affected by arbitrary detention, unfair judicial proceedings, executions, restrictions on cultural and political rights, and cross-border military operations.

The report further highlights the humanitarian consequences of missile and UAV attacks affecting civilian areas within the **Kurdistan Region of Iraq**, as well as continuing concerns regarding the protection of refugees, border communities, and other vulnerable civilian populations.



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In light of these findings, the report calls upon the international community to:

- Strengthen monitoring of the human rights situation in Iran;
- Support independent international investigations into alleged human rights violations;
- Urge the Iranian authorities to end arbitrary detention, torture, and the use of the death penalty in violation of international standards;
- Ensure full compliance with international humanitarian law during cross-border military operations;
- Enhance cooperation with United Nations human rights mechanisms;
- Promote accountability and effective remedies for victims of human rights violations.

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