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Democracy, human rights and the rule of law in Iran

Report[1]
Committee on Political Affairs and Democracy
Rapporteur: Mr Max LUCKS, Germany, Socialists, Democrats and Greens Group

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1. Reference to committee: Doc. 16328, Reference 4932 of 26 January 2026.

A. Draft resolution[2]

1. The brutal suppression of nationwide protests in the Islamic Republic of Iran that began in December 2025, characterised by mass murders, grave, widespread and systematic human rights violations, has marked a new dark chapter in the pattern of repression conducted by Iranian authorities against citizens seeking to exercise their fundamental rights.

2. Against a broader regional context marked by protracted conflicts and recurrent escalation, the Parliamentary Assembly underlines the importance of upholding international rules and norms intended to protect civilians, preserve peace and ensure the peaceful resolution of disputes.

3. The escalation into armed conflict with joint Israel-United States strikes on Iran that began on 28 February 2026 has further heightened uncertainty and instability in an already fragile regional environment. Military strikes and retaliatory actions have extended beyond the immediate theatre of operations, affecting neighbouring States, disrupting critical infrastructure and trade routes and contributing to a broader climate of insecurity with global repercussions.

4. In this context, the Assembly emphasises that the worsening regional situation must not divert attention from the plight of the Iranian population. The convergence of internal repression and external conflict has compounded the suffering of civilians, who continue to bear the consequences of both systematic human rights violations and the wider impacts of instability, including airstrikes, internal displacement, economic disruption and a lack of access to essential services.

5. This situation has been further intensified by the imposition by the Iranian authorities of widespread restrictions on communications, including internet shutdowns and the obstruction of independent reporting and international scrutiny. Such measures not only restrict fundamental freedoms but also serve to conceal violations and undermine efforts to establish accountability.

6. Within this broader pattern of repression, the deeply alarming use of the death penalty on an extensive and escalating scale gives rise to continued serious concern. The Assembly condemns in the strongest terms its appalling application in the Islamic Republic of Iran, including in connection with protest-related activities and broadly defined national security charges and following proceedings that fall short of international standards of due process and fair trial guarantees.

7. The Assembly deplores the large-scale arrest and detention of individuals for exercising their rights to freedom of expression, assembly and peaceful protest. The arrest and reported ill-treatment of Narges Mohammadi, Nobel Peace Prize laureate, are emblematic of the sustained repression targeting human rights defenders, journalists and political dissidents and the efforts to deny Iranian citizens any democratic space.

8. The repressive practices extend beyond the borders of the Islamic Republic of Iran. Intimidation, surveillance, harassment, hostage taking, assassinations and acts of violence targeting members of the Iranian diaspora, journalists and individuals perceived as critical of the Iranian authorities demonstrate a disturbing and unacceptable practice of transnational repression taking place within Council of Europe member States.

9. The Assembly further states its alarm at the continuation and acceleration of malign activities and hybrid actions attributed to Iranian actors, including attempts to intimidate and divide societies and to target, in particular, Jewish communities.

10. Recent attacks in the United Kingdom, including the terrorist incident of 29 April 2026 in Golders Green that targeted and killed two Jewish individuals, as well as a broader pattern of antisemitic violence, have underscored the seriousness of these threats, and links between these attacks and the Islamic Republic of Iran and its proxies are under continued investigation. Such developments highlight the wider security implications posed by the Iranian hybrid activities and their impact on democratic space and social cohesion within Council of Europe member States.

11. Recalling its Resolution 2570 (2024) “The situation in Iran and the protection of Iranian human rights defenders in Council of Europe member States”, the Assembly considers that the Iranian regime, through its nuclear ambitions and its network of regional proxies, also by sponsoring international terrorism, is a major actor in the destabilisation of the Middle East region and beyond. As a provider of weapons to the Russian Federation to sustain its war of aggression against Ukraine, as well as its widespread hybrid threats in Council of Europe member States, the Iranian regime also poses a significant threat to European security.

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2. Draft resolution adopted unanimously by the committee on 20 May 2026.

12. While international diplomatic efforts to establish and maintain a ceasefire between the Islamic Republic of Iran, Israel and the United States, are to be welcomed, mediation has largely prioritised security and geopolitical considerations, whereas human rights concerns have not been sufficiently integrated into diplomatic processes. Lasting peace and stability cannot be achieved in the absence of respect for human rights, democracy and the rule of law.

13. Despite the challenges faced, Iranian civil society continues to mobilise, including human rights defenders, journalists, women's rights activists and other democratic actors who, in defiance of sustained repression and at great personal risk, advocate for fundamental rights, dignity and democratic change. The Assembly emphasises the importance of supporting these voices and ensuring that they remain visible and engaged in international discussions on the future of Iran.

14. The Council of Europe, as the key European organisation protecting and promoting democracy, human rights and the rule of law, should play a significant role in guiding and supporting its member States when it comes to developing co-ordinated human rights-based relations with Iran to allow the people of Iran to exercise their fundamental rights freely and to determine their own future without repression.

15. In light of the above considerations, as regards human rights, democracy and the rule of law in Iran, the Assembly:

15.1. condemns in the strongest terms the brutal, murderous and systematic repression of nationwide protests that began in December 2025, including the use of excessive and lethal force against protesters, mass arrests, torture and other serious human rights violations;

15.2. further condemns the intensification of repressive measures since the escalation of armed conflict in February 2026, including the expansion of coercive practices and the death penalty under the pretext of national security;

15.3. pays tribute and expresses its solidarity with the Iranian people, who have repeatedly taken to the streets to protest for their right to determine their own future;

15.4. recalling its Resolution 2651 (2026) "Towards the universal abolition of the death penalty in all circumstances" and its opposition to the death penalty in all places, calls for the immediate establishment of a moratorium on the use of the death penalty in the Islamic Republic of Iran, with a view to its full abolition;

15.5. demands the immediate and unconditional release of all individuals detained for exercising their rights to freedom of expression, assembly and peaceful protest, and in this regard, calls on Council of Europe member States to urgently mobilise diplomatic efforts to secure the immediate release of Nobel Peace Prize laureate Narges Mohammadi and ensure that she receives appropriate medical care;

15.6. strongly condemns the use of torture, ill-treatment and other forms of coercion, and calls on the Iranian authorities to comply fully with their obligations under international human rights law;

15.7. denounces the unjust detention of European and dual-national citizens by Iran and calls for an immediate halt to the practice of hostage diplomacy;

15.8. calls on Council of Europe member States to support international mechanisms aimed at documenting human rights violations in Iran and preserving evidence, with a view to ensuring future accountability;

15.9. encourages the use of available legal frameworks, including universal jurisdiction where applicable, to investigate and prosecute serious human rights violations.

16. With regard to support to Iranian civil society and democratic voices, the Assembly:

16.1. reaffirms that it is for the people of Iran to determine their own future and underlines the importance of ensuring that their voices are not silenced or marginalised;

16.2. calls on Council of Europe member States to strengthen support for Iranian civil society, including human rights defenders, journalists, women's rights activists and other democratic actors;

16.3. encourages the development of platforms for dialogue and engagement with representatives of Iranian civil society and democratic opposition, including through parliamentary, academic and civil society exchanges, with an objective of regular dialogue in the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe;

16.4. calls for increased efforts to ensure that Iranian voices remain visible and meaningfully engaged in international discussions concerning the future of the country;

16.5. underlines the importance of maintaining access to information and communication tools, particularly in situations where restrictions on communications limit the exercise of fundamental freedoms;

16.6. calls on Council of Europe member States to provide protection mechanisms and safe pathways for individuals at risk, including human rights defenders, journalists and other civil society actors forced to leave the country.

17. As regards Iranian hybrid actions and malign activity in Europe, the Assembly:

17.1. expresses grave concern at the pattern of transnational repression attributed to Iranian authorities and associated actors, including acts of intimidation, surveillance, harassment and violence targeting individuals within Council of Europe member States;

17.2. calls for strengthened co-operation between law enforcement, intelligence and judicial authorities in order to identify, prevent and counter such activities effectively;

17.3. urges member States to ensure the effective protection of individuals at risk, including members of the Iranian diaspora, journalists, human rights defenders and other persons engaged in public or political activity;

17.4. calls for the enhanced protection of communities and institutions targeted by threats and violence, including Jewish communities and organisations, as well as media outlets and civil society spaces;

17.5. calls for the development of appropriate and proportionate measures against individuals and entities involved in acts of transnational repression, including, where applicable, through targeted sanctions and judicial proceedings.

18. As regards international engagement with the Islamic Republic of Iran, the Assembly:

18.1. welcomes ceasefire initiatives and mediation efforts, including those facilitated by Pakistan between the United States of America and Iran;

18.2. calls for human rights, democracy and the rule of law to be fully integrated into all diplomatic engagement with Iran;

18.3. underlines that separating security considerations from human rights risks undermining both, and reiterates that lasting peace and stability cannot be achieved in the absence of respect for fundamental rights;

18.4. encourages a consistent and co-ordinated approach among member States that reflects the principles of democratic security and avoids treating human rights as secondary to short-term geopolitical considerations.

B. Explanatory memorandum by Mr Max Lucks, rapporteur[3]

1. Introduction

1. Since the outbreak of nationwide protests on 28 December 2025, the Islamic Republic of Iran has been at the centre of a rapidly deteriorating international and regional environment. The subsequent escalation into armed conflict in February 2026, involving military action by Israel and the United States of America against Iran, has further destabilised the region, with wide-reaching global repercussions.

2. Iranian attacks against the territories of Gulf States, on unarmed commercial shipping, and against critical civilian infrastructure have demonstrated the widening reach of the conflict, further underscored by the blockade of the Strait of Hormuz and the entry of Iranian drones and ballistic missiles into the airspace of several Council of Europe member States.

3. The ramifications of the conflict have illustrated the extent to which actions outside of the framework of international rules and norms entails contributing to wider global instability, including heightened geopolitical tensions, economic disruption and increased uncertainty in global energy, pharmaceutical, and fertiliser markets.

4. While this conflict has significantly affected the broader international situation, attention must be maintained on developments within Iran itself. The situation of the Iranian population, and in particular the plight of those militating for the respect of human rights and fundamental freedoms, remains a matter of urgent concern that requires sustained international scrutiny.

5. The nationwide protests that began in late December 2025, initially driven by profound socio-economic grievances, rapidly evolved into a mass movement expressing widespread dissatisfaction with the political system. Demonstrations mobilised diverse segments of society, with demands extending beyond economic reform to encompass calls for regime change.

6. These demonstrations have been met with a level of repression characterised by grave, widespread and systematic human rights violations. Reports from multiple international sources indicated that the authorities have resorted to excessive and lethal force, mass arrests, torture, and other coercive measures in an effort to suppress dissent.

7. The internal situation saw a marked acceleration following the imposition of a total internet, mobile and landline communications shutdown on 8 January 2026. This was accompanied by reports that the Iranian Supreme National Security Council instructed security forces to carry out a decisive crackdown aimed at bringing the protests to an end.

8. The restriction of communications has significant consequences, both in limiting the ability of individuals to organise and express dissent, and in obstructing the documentation and verification of human rights violations.

9. Credible reports have estimated that the human cost of the crackdown has been extremely high, with thousands of protesters reportedly killed, and many more injured or arbitrarily detained.

10. The pretext of heightened security tensions in the context of the conflict with Israel and the United States has been used by Iranian authorities to justify further restrictions on fundamental freedoms and the intensification of coercive measures, including the use of capital punishment by hanging, torture and limitations on communication, assembly and expression.

11. The tighter repression since the beginning of the conflict is consistent with the shifts in the internal balance of power within Iran since airstrikes killed Iran's Supreme Leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei in February 2026. These airstrikes triggered elite consolidation and a shift towards security-centric decision-making, resulting in increased governing dominance by the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps.

12. These developments are consistent with a broader pattern whereby periods of protest in Iran have been met by increased internal repression. The convergence of mass internal unrest and external conflict has amplified this dynamic, and demonstrates a system that silences dissent, shields perpetrators from responsibility, and denies victims and their families their rights to truth, justice and reparations.

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3. The explanatory memorandum is drawn up under the responsibility of the rapporteur.

2. Scope of the report

13. The Parliamentary Assembly has strengthened its focus on the internal situation in the Islamic Republic of Iran in response to the repression that accompanied mass anti-government protests that began in 2022 following the death of Jina Mahsa Amini. Those events marked a significant moment of mobilisation within Iranian society and highlighted longstanding structural violations of human rights standards.

14. In 2024, in its Resolution 2570 (2024) "The situation in Iran and the protection of Iranian human rights defenders in Council of Europe member States", the Assembly emphasised the importance of solidarity with the people of Iran in the face of systematic repression.[4] In my accompanying explanatory memorandum, I examined both the internal dynamics of repression within Iran and the implications beyond its borders, including transnational repression faced by Iranians living in exile in Europe and European citizens of Iranian origin or descent who are critical of the Iranian regime.

15. The Assembly has further stressed in its Resolution 2642 (2026) "Political crisis in the broader Middle East: the need to protect human rights and the rights of all minority groups" that the rapid escalation of internal political crises in the Islamic Republic of Iran has raised urgent questions on the protection of human rights.[5]

16. Since the protests began in December 2025, the level and intensity of repression in Iran have entered a phase on heightened severity. Widespread demonstrations that called for freedom, dignity, and democracy were met with the use of excessive and lethal force.

17. In this context, I introduced a motion for a resolution in January 2026 to ensure that the Assembly maintains a sustained focus on the internal human rights situation in Iran. It is essential that the plight of individuals seeking to exercise their fundamental rights is not overshadowed or forgotten amid wider geopolitical developments in the region. This work looks to complement the ongoing work of the Committee on Political Affairs and Democracy under the report "Situation in the Middle East".

18. The report will look at international responses to the heightened repression, as well as avenues for strengthening European solidarity with Iranian citizens while countering efforts of the Iranian authorities to extend the reach of their repression to European soil.

19. The report further aims to contribute to a consistent, values-based European approach, reaffirming the central importance of human rights, democracy and the rule of law, while supporting international efforts to ensure accountability for violations and justice for victims.

20. In the preparation of this report, the committee held a hearing with the participation of Ms Mina Khani, Board Member of Hengaw Organization for Human Rights, and Ms Mahnaz Shirali, political analyst, as well as with Mr Luigi Di Maio, EU Special Representative for the Gulf region, and Mr David Khalfa, Co-director of the Observatory for North Africa and the Middle East at the Foundation Jean-Jaurès to exchange on the dynamics of the region.

3. Human rights, democracy and the rule of law in Iran

21. Deliberate obstruction by the Iranian authorities has significantly hindered independent reporting and internation scrutiny. The Independent International Fact-Finding Mission on the Islamic Republic of Iran, established by the United Nations Human Rights Council, has been denied access throughout its mandate. Viewed in conjunction with recurring internet shutdowns and restrictions on communications, this has created an environment in which a fully verified account of the scale of repression in the country remains difficult to establish.[6]

22. Prior to the protests that began in December 2025, the human rights situation in Iran was characterised by systemic repression affecting a broad range of fundamental rights. These included freedom of expression, assembly and association, limitation on political participation, and the use of legal and judicial mechanisms to control dissent. The absence of effective safeguards or due process in the court system has contributed to a climate in which violations are carried out with impunity.

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4. Resolution 2570 (2024).
5. Resolution 2642 (2026).
6. See, for example, United Nations Human Rights Council, Report of the independent international fact-finding mission of the Islamic Republic of Iran, 10 March 2026.

23. The widespread use of the death penalty, of arbitrary detention, the targeting of civil society actors and the application of punitive measures, including torture and ill-treatment, against individuals perceived as opposing the authorities are all prominent features of this system of control. These practices have had a disproportionate impact on ethnic and religious minorities in the country, while groups such as women and girls have continued to face structural discrimination and heightened vulnerability to repressive practices.

24. These longstanding gross human rights violations were further intensified in the context of the protests that began in December 2025. The developments that followed indicate a marked escalation both in the scale of violations and in the range of measures employed by the authorities to suppress dissent.

3.1. December 2025 protests

25. Following a severe economic crisis and the collapse of the Iranian rial to its lowest historical level against the US dollar in late December 2025, pressure on merchants to price goods led to their closure of various commercial hubs in Tehran by shopkeepers in protest at soaring prices.[7]

26. Longstanding economic challenges of high inflation, stagnant wages and the rising cost of living contributed to the rapid spread of protests across the country. Within days, demonstrations were reported in multiple provinces, reflecting the depth of public discontent.

27. This protest movement constituted the fifth nationwide protest cycle in Iran in less than a decade. The demands of the protesters were wide-ranging and not uniform. They included calls for economic reforms and more political rights, while some protesters called for fundamental political change, the end of the current regime, and the cessation of Iranian support for armed groups in the Middle East.[8]

28. The response of the Iranian authorities reflected methods observed in previous cycles of unrest, but with a level of intensity and scale that raises particularly serious concern.

29. Initial responses from the authorities combined administrative measures, political communication and repression. Across the country, government offices, schools, universities, banks and administrative agencies were closed under the pretext of energy saving measures during cold weather. Security forces utilised counterinsurgency measures in violently dispersing demonstrations and beginning mass arrests.

30. As the protests spread across the country, Iranian authorities intensified this repression. Reaching its peak between 8-10 January 2026, security forces used live ammunition in shotguns, rifles and heavy machine guns to shoot at crowds of protesters.

31. Figures to establish the scale of the repression remain difficult to verify due to the combination of a communications blackout and steps such as prohibiting bereaved families from organising funerals.[9]

32. Despite the difficulties in establishing precise estimates for those killed or injured in the protests by Iranian security forces, the preliminary investigations of the United Nations independent international fact-finding mission to the Islamic Republic of Iran have suggested that killing took place on a staggering scale.[10]

33. Iranian authorities acknowledge that at least 3 000 people were killed,[11] while the Human Rights Activists News Agency was able to confirm on 23 February 2026 the deaths of 6 488 protesters, with an additional 11 744 cases under review and not included in confirmed totals. Separate to the number of protesters killed, 236 children were killed by security forces.[12] Reports have suggested that the final death toll could be as high as 30 000.[13]

34. The magnitude of the violence was also reflected in the number of injured civilians, with some 25 000 civilians estimated to have been injured in the course of the suppression of the protests.[14]

35. Over 53 000 arrests were made by Iranian authorities, while 11 053 summonses were documented as a further mechanism for exerting legal pressure beyond those formally detained.

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7. Middle East Institute, Analysis, 6 January 2026.
8. UK Parliament, Iran protests 2026, Research Briefing, 30 January 2026.
9. United Nations Human Rights Council, Report of the independent international fact-finding mission of the Islamic Republic of Iran, 10 March 2026.
10. Idem.
11. Khabara Online, National Security Analytical Statement, 1 February 2026.
12. HRANA, Report: The Crimson Winter, 23 February 2026.
13. Time Magazine, “Iran protest death toll could top 30,000 according to local health officials”, 25 January 2026.
14. Idem.

3.2. Death penalty

36. Prior to the December 2025 protest movement, the continued and extensive use of the death penalty remained a matter of the most serious concern. For many years, Iran has remained first worldwide in executions per capita. This trend continued in 2025 with at least 1 639 people executed, a 68% increase compared to 2024, and the highest number of executions recorded in the country since 1989.[15]

37. The continued increase in executions follows the "Woman, Life, Freedom" protests of 2022 and has been a systematic tool by the Iranian authorities for instilling fear and deterring further dissent, and with many sentences passed after grossly unfair trials absent of due process guarantees.

38. Trials are routinely marked by the denial to defendants, their lawyers or their families access to court documents, a denial to the right to meaningful appeal, to a choice of lawyer, while sentences are reported to be passed on the basis of "confessions" obtained under torture.[16]

39. The June 2025 Twelve-day war between Iran and Israel led to the accelerated use of the death penalty and led to expedited emergency legislation that was passed by Iran's parliament in October 2025 that expanded the application of the death penalty further again, automatically classifying espionage and "co-operation with a foreign government" as offences that lead to the death penalty.

40. This trend of widening and expediting death penalty sentences at times where Iranian national security interests were threatened has been demonstrated following the December protest movement and the renewal of conflict with Israel and the United States in February 2026.

41. Accelerated procedures under grossly unfair trials have been applied to political prisoners arrested in January 2026 following the protests. Reports suggest that at least 22 political prisoners were executed by hanging between 17 March and 27 April 2026, with ten of the executed prisoners those arrested following the protests.[17] Two individuals were hanged during this period for alleged espionage-related charges, including Kourosh Kivani, an Iranian-Swedish citizen.

3.3. Arbitrary detention and torture

42. The effective criminalisation of dissent in Iran has been recorded in previous waves of protest. The renewal of this practice with the arrest of 53 000 protesters has confirmed the astonishing scale that this method is used by the Iranian security apparatus. These arrests have been accompanied by allegations of torture and gender-based violence by security forces.

43. Similar to the acceleration of the use of the death penalty in times of conflict, the Twelve-Day war and conflict with Israel and the United States in February 2026 have aggravated the use of arbitrary detention and torture.

44. Since 28 February 2026, over 4 000 individuals are estimated to have been arrested on national security related charges in Iran. Speaking on 29 April, United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, Volker Türk, called for the respect of non-derogable rights after detainees had been forcible disappeared, tortured, or subjected to cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment.[18]

45. This followed co-ordinated action to suppress dissent in June 2025, with statements made by the spokesperson of the Police Command of the Islamic Republic of Iran suggesting that 21 000 individuals were arrested between the start of the Twelve-day war and 12 August 2025.[19]

3.4. Freedom of assembly and association

46. The widespread repression has sought to stifle dissent. These efforts have created particularly intense pressure on Iranian civil society which has only intensified in 2026.

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15. Iran Human Rights (IHRNGO) and ECPM (Together Against the Death Penalty), 18th Annual Report on the Death Penalty in Iran, February 2026.
16. United Nations Human Rights Council, Report of the independent international fact-finding mission of the Islamic Republic of Iran, 10 March 2026.
17. Centre for Human Rights in Iran, Report, 30 April 2026.
18. Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, Press Release, 29 April 2026.
19. United Nations Human Rights Council, Report of the independent international fact-finding mission of the Islamic Republic of Iran, 10 March 2026.

47. Targeting a wide range of activists, journalists, lawyers, academics, and independent organisations, as well as their families, security and intelligence bodies conducted systematic efforts to suppress dissent through 2025. This has included arbitrary detention, enforced disappearance, torture, unfair trials, flogging, fines, surveillance, harassment, interrogations, travel bans, asset freezes, property confiscation or suspension from education or employment against those seeking to exercise their rights to freedom of expression, association and peaceful assembly.[20]

48. The arrests of prominent human rights defenders such as Nobel Peace Prize laureate Narges Mohammadi are prime examples of this. Arrested on 12 December 2025, Ms Mohammadi has been sentenced to seven and a half years of imprisonment for offences including "assembly and collusion against national security".[21]

49. Overall, a clear and concerning trend has been firmly established. Iranian civil society is not only being controlled but systematically fragmented, intimidated, and isolated from the international public. Despite a continuing willingness to protest and sporadic mobilisation, many actors are now operating under conditions that increasingly hinder long-term engagement and intimidate new generations.

3.5. Structural dynamics

50. This generalised repression has been shaped and intensified by a number of structural dynamics. These relate both to the impact of State measures on specific groups and to the methods employed by the authorities to reinforce control and limit accountability.

51. Ethnic and religious minorities remain particularly exposed to repressive practices. Reports indicate that members of minority communities, including Kurds, Baluchis, Baha'is and Christians, have been disproportionately affected in the context of protest-related repression and security operations. In several instances, the use of force by State authorities has been reported to be especially severe in regions predominantly inhabited by minority populations, reflecting longstanding patterns of marginalisation and discrimination.

52. Women and girls continue to face systemic discrimination under the legal and political framework of the Islamic Republic. Their prominent role in protest movements, particularly since the "Woman, Life, Freedom" protests of 2022, has been met with targeted forms of repression. These have included arrests, harassment and the enforcement of restrictive legal provisions, further limiting their participation in public life and their enjoyment of fundamental rights. Efforts continue to implement the "Hijab and Chastity" law, with over 97 500 public warnings issued during Iran's New Year in 2025 for non-compliance.[22]

53. In parallel, the suppression of dissent and the commission of serious human rights violations have been facilitated by strict control over communications. The imposition of a near-total internet blackout in response to the protests has left large parts of the population digitally isolated. While such measures hinder the ability of individuals to organise and communicate, they also obstruct the documentation of violations and limit independent verification by international observers. The use of communication shutdowns as a tool of repression has therefore contributed to the creation of an information vacuum and reinforced impunity.

54. This widespread repression operates beyond the borders of Iran. Iranians continue to be subjected to threats, harassment, intimidation, assassination and other forms of repression outside of the country. This transnational repression poses a continuing and serious security threat to Europe. These operations conducted by Iranian State agents and their proxies has targeted the Iranian diaspora as well as wider targets, including in particular the Jewish community.[23]

55. This policy of transnational repression was made clear by the Office of the Iranian Prosecutor General in March 2026, who released a statement to say that threatened the Iranian diaspora with the confiscation of their property and other punishments, including possible execution if found to have "co-operated with the enemy", including alleged support for Israel, the United States or other actors hostile to the interests of Iran.[24]

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20. See, for example, Amnesty International, Report: Iran, 2025.
21. United Nations Human Rights Council, Report of the independent international fact-finding mission of the Islamic Republic of Iran, 10 March 2026.
22. United Nations Human Rights Council, Report of the independent international fact-finding mission of the Islamic Republic of Iran, 10 March 2026.
23. G7 Rapid Response Mechanism, Statement on Iranian Transnational Repression and Other Malign Activities, 12 September 2025.
24. Time, "Tehran Warns It Will Confiscate Property of Iranians Abroad Who Back US Strikes", 9 March 2026.

4. Continued regional destabilisation

56. As noted in the Assembly's Resolution 2570 (2024) on "The situation in Iran and the protection of Iranian human rights defenders in Council of Europe member States", Iran is both one of the most influential stakeholders in the Middle East, and is a major actor contributing to the destabilisation of the region. This includes via its support to Hamas in Gaza, Hezbollah in Lebanon, the Houthis in Yemen, and its fierce stance against Israel and its denial of that country's right to exist.

57. This destabilising role has been demonstrated further in its actions in response to the conflict with Israel and the United States. In response to joint attacks launched by Israel and the United States on 28 February 2026, Iran attacked States not party to the conflict in the Gulf as well as launching attacks on unarmed commercial shipping, and against critical civilian infrastructure.

58. It has also been shown by the persistent cross-border operations carried out against the Kurdistan Region of Iraq, with over 695 Iranian drone and missile attacks on the bases of Kurdish opposition groups between 28 February and 29 April 2026.[25] In addition to military strikes, Iran also uses indirect channels of influence through proxy militias in Iraq to exert pressure on the Kurdish Regional Government, placing a lasting strain on the security situation in the border region.

59. Beyond the immediate region, the security risks posed by Iran have also been underlined by abetting Russia in its war of aggression against Ukraine via the provision of drones, missiles and ammunition, by its hybrid threats and malign cyber activities in Europe, and in its support that had been provided to the Venezuelan dictatorship.

5. International engagement and the place of human rights in negotiations

60. The outbreak of the conflict on 28 February 2026 has added a further layer of complexity to the situation. While the military objectives of the parties to the conflict fall outside the scope of this report, the consequences for the civilian population are significant. The combined effects of State repression followed by conflict have further deteriorated living conditions, including through damage to critical infrastructure and essential services. This has accelerated internal displacement, and has cascading impacts on health, education, and economic participation.

61. Attempts to consolidate internal control during the conflict has seen Iranian authorities resort to the wider use of coercive means, further restricting civic space and undermining fundamental rights.

62. The diplomatic efforts to draw an end to the conflict have included within the framework of the Pakistan-mediated Islamabad Talks of 11-12 April. The focus of these negotiations has been dominated by the pressing security concerns on issues related to nuclear activity, regional security and conflict de-escalation, including sanctions, maritime security and the regional situation.

63. In this context, the place accorded to human rights and democracy in Iran has remained limited. While concerns related to the human rights situation in Iran have been raised by a number of participating actors, they do not constitute a central component of the negotiation framework.

64. The separation of security considerations from human rights risks overlooking the interdependence between peace, stability and the protection of fundamental rights. As repeatedly affirmed by the Assembly, lasting security cannot be achieved in the absence of respect for human rights, democracy and the rule of law. Conversely, the systematic violation of these principles constitutes, in itself, a source of instability.

65. Ensuring that human rights considerations are meaningfully integrated into international engagement with Iran is therefore not only a normative imperative, but also a necessary condition for sustainable peace and security.

6. Call for action

66. The gross human rights violations and continuing crisis in Iran has had a devastating impact upon Iranian citizens. There are three main avenues for engagement that Council of Europe member States should consider for supporting a democratic future for the people of Iran.

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25. Chatham House, "Political deadlock has left Iaq's Kurdistan Region dangerously exposed amid Iran war", 29 April 2026.

6.1. Solidarity with the people of Iran

67. The situation of the population in Iran requires sustained and increased international attention. Despite recurring protest movements, severe repression and persistent human rights violations, public and political attention in many European States has remained uneven and reactive. This limited visibility risks further exacerbating the imbalance between State authorities and civil society actors in Iran.

68. A key element of any effective international approach lies in the strengthening of independent documentation and accountability mechanisms. Continued support for initiatives within the United Nations Human Rights Council, including investigative and evidence-preservation mandates, remains essential to ensure that violations are properly recorded and may, in due course, give rise to accountability.

69. At the same time, greater attention should be given to the protection of individuals at risk, in particular human rights defenders, journalists and civil society actors. Ensuring access to protection mechanisms, including safe pathways and support structures for those forced to leave the country, is an important component of a broader response.

70. The ability of civil society actors in Iran to communicate and organise remains a critical issue. Restrictions on digital access, including internet shutdowns and surveillance, significantly limit the exercise of fundamental rights. In this context, efforts aimed at supporting secure access to information and communication tools are of particular importance.

71. More broadly, the development of sustained links between European and Iranian civil society actors, including through academic, cultural and professional exchanges, may contribute to strengthening resilience and fostering longer-term engagement.

72. Finally, it is important that human rights considerations are not treated as secondary to short-term security or geopolitical concerns. As reflected in the principle of democratic security, respect for human rights, democracy and the rule of law constitute an essential component of sustainable peace and stability and should therefore remain central to international engagement with Iran.

6.2. Supporting Iranian democratic voices

73. It should be up to the people of Iran to determine their future. The targeting of protesters, human rights activists, political dissidents, minority communities and women through brutal repression aims to crush dissent both within Iran and beyond its border.

74. In this context, ensuring that such voices are not silenced remains an important consideration for Council of Europe member States The perspectives of those directly affected by repression, including individuals in exile, can contribute to a more sustained and informed engagement with the situation in Iran.

75. In this regard, consideration may be given to facilitating dialogue with representatives of Iranian civil society and democratic opposition, as well as to exploring avenues for supporting their activities, including through technical and institutional co-operation. Governments should actively promote civil society networks between Iran and Europe, which could include scholarship programmes, exchange initiatives, cultural co-operation and support for independent media projects.

76. The Council of Europe and its Parliamentary Assembly have extensive experience in supporting democratic development and transition processes. This includes the promotion of legal standards, institutional co-operation and the strengthening of frameworks based on human rights, democracy and the rule of law.

77. Such experience may provide a useful reference point in supporting the aspirations of Iranian citizens, particularly in relation to the development of inclusive, rights-based and democratic processes.

78. As a platform for dialogue, the Parliamentary Assembly may also contribute by providing opportunities for exchange among the representatives of Iranian civil society and democratic actors, thereby helping to sustain engagement beyond periods of crisis.

79. The institutional expertise of the Council of Europe can and should serve democratic aspirations of Iranian citizens as they seek to pave the way for just, inclusive and democratic processes that bring freedom and dignity to all Iranian citizens.

6.3. Ensuring the safety of the Iranian diaspora in Europe

80. Activities linked to the Iranian authorities have raised serious concerns regarding security within Europe, including incidents involving intimidation, surveillance and violence targeting Iranian dissidents and other individuals perceived as critical of the regime. Such incidents, together with threats against certain communities and institutions, point to a pattern of transnational repression rather than isolated events.

81. These actions require an urgent and decisive approach. Continued transnational threats have underlined the importance of effective co-operation among Council of Europe member States in addressing security challenges. Enhanced information-sharing and co-ordination between relevant authorities may contribute to the identification and disruption of networks and activities associated with such forms of repression.

82. Particular attention should be given to the protection of individuals at risk, including members of the Iranian diaspora, journalists, human rights defenders and others engaged in public or political activity. Ensuring that such individuals can exercise their rights safely within Europe remains an important consideration.

83. European States must take the threat to Jewish and Iranian diaspora political institutions seriously as a related security issue. Synagogues, media outlets, and meeting places of diaspora groups require enhanced protection and closely co-ordinated security measures by police and intelligence services.

84. Legal frameworks available within member States, including those allowing for the prosecution of serious crimes under international law, may also play a role in addressing impunity. The principle of universal jurisdiction should be used to contribute to reinforcing accountability and deterrence.

85. More broadly, security in Europe and human rights violations in Iran are not separate policy areas. Addressing human rights globally and protecting democratic space within Europe are mutually reinforcing objectives.

7. Conclusion

86. The developments examined in this report highlight the gravity and persistence of gross human rights violations in the Islamic Republic of Iran, as well as their broader implications for regional stability and for Europe. The people of Iran are the key to a secure world, a secure Middle East, and a secure Europe.

87. In this context, the importance of a coherent and values-based approach among member States becomes evident. Ensuring that human rights, democracy and the rule of law remain central to engagement with Iran is consistent with the principle of democratic security, which underlines the interdependence between the protection of fundamental rights and lasting stability.

88. Sustained engagement with Iranian civil society, with democratic opposition, human rights defenders and activists is key for solidarity, as well as for the preparation of a democratic future for Iran.

89. This highlights the need for strategic foresight. The Council of Europe should develop a structured platform for Iran’s future that is not limited to current government structures but explicitly includes Iranian civil society and exile communities. The goal would not be direct intervention, but rather the preparation of institutional and legal foundations for potential transformation processes.

90. This structured platform for dialogue would give visibility to Iranian voices without reducing them to moments of crisis. The Council of Europe could thus become a place where scenarios for political transformation are considered over the long term.