



General Assembly

Distr.: General
XX May 2024

English only

Human Rights Council

Fifty-sixth session

18 July–12 July 2024

Agenda item 2

**Annual report of the United Nations High Commissioner
for Human Rights and reports of the Office of the
High Commissioner and the Secretary-General**

Written statement* submitted by European Centre for Law and Justice, The / Centre Européen pour le droit, les Justice et les droits de l'homme, a non-governmental organization in special consultative status

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[17 May 2024]

* Issued as received, in the language of submission only.

Request that the U.N. Ask Iran to Stop Supporting Terrorism and Attacking Israel as well as Protect Christians from Religious Persecution

1. Introduction

Iran is violating international law both internationally and domestically. Internationally, Iran has funded and is funding terror across the globe. Iran's support of terrorism is most evident in attacking Israel through its proxies. Although Israel defends its civilian population and territorial integrity from terrorist organizations in the Gaza Strip, Syria, Yemen, Lebanon, and elsewhere, former Israeli Prime Minister Bennett was correct in stating that the head of this "octopus of terror" lies in Iran.(1) Iran has now directly acted on its expressed intent to destroy Israel by personally launching over three hundred drones and cruise and ballistic missiles at Israel.(2)

Domestically, Iran is notorious for violating religious freedom and persecuting Christians.(3) In its 2024 World Watch List, Open Doors ranked Iran as the 9th worst country for Christians. Christians in Iran are routinely harassed, arrested, and imprisoned simply for peacefully practicing their faith.(4)

2. Background

It is well known that Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) "trains, funds, arms, and shares intelligence with dangerous proxy forces throughout the Middle East and abroad."(5) A network of these terrorist organizations – Hezbollah, Kata'ib Hezbollah, Hamas, Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ), and the Houthis – is spread across several countries. All of them are actively engaged in an armed conflict with Israel, continuously and indiscriminately attacking Israeli civilian population centers. Since October 7, 2023, with continued Iranian funding and support, these terrorist organizations have renewed their unprovoked attacks against Israel.

In addition to supporting terror abroad, Iran has also arrested 359 Christians from 2021-2023.(6) The government routinely raids house churches, arrests worshippers, and confiscates any religious material.(7) Many Christians who are arrested are charged with "acting against national security" or using "propaganda against the regime."(8) According to Nazila Ghanea, the UN Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief:

It hurts even more for Christians' real "crimes" to be cloaked under false charges such as "acting against national security". Your [real] crime is that you are Christian; your crime is that you have Christian literature; your crime is that you gather with other Christians in house-churches; and your crime is that you converted.(9)

3. Violations

Supporting Terrorism

On April 13, 2024, Iran launched an attack on Israel consisting of thirty cruise missiles, 120 ballistic missiles, and 170 drones.(10) Thankfully, approximately 99% of the missiles and drones were intercepted before detonating in Israel.(11)

On October 7, 2023, Iran-backed Hamas militants invaded Israel in a surprise attack, brutally murdering, mutilating, and sexually assaulting approximately 1,200 Israeli and foreign civilians, as well as taking 250 people hostage.(12) Hossein Salami, the commander in chief of the IRGC, praised this attack by Hamas and called it an "amazing victory."(13) He also stated that "the condition for divine victory is for us to simply be present on the battlefield" because "America will not be able to keep the Zionist regime on life

support.”(14) He further stated that “Gaza is today the grave of America and the Zionist regime.”(15)

In a speech to pro-Houthi media, Amir Ali Hajizadeh, Commander of the IRGC’s Aerospace Forces, used genocidal language when he called on Islamists to “unite to expel ‘Zionists’ and Americans” from the region.(16) He was also behind the January 2024 attack on US forces at Ayn al-Assad base in Iraq.(17) Ali Fadavi, Deputy Commander of the IRGC, cheered on the October 7 attacks on Israel, and also used genocidal language when he called Israel a “cancerous growth [that needs to] disappear[] from the map of the world.”(18)

In addition to supporting terrorist groups in the Middle East, the IRGC also supports President Vladimir Putin’s illegal war against Ukraine by providing lethal war material.(19) The IRGC Quds Force is suspected of carrying out “assassinations in the Netherlands, Sweden, Denmark, France, Germany, Bulgaria, and Cyprus.”(20) Some of these countries have “either arrested or expelled Iranian Government officials implicated in terrorist or assassination plots.”(21)

Religious Persecution

On December 24, 2023, authorities raided the home of Christian convert, Esmail Narimanpour.(22) Authorities searched his home, without a warrant, and confiscated Christian books.(23) Previously, Esmail had been “forced to attend ‘re-education’ classes with an Islamic cleric” following his conversion to Christianity.(24)

On December 11, 2023, the authorities raided a house church meeting and arrested three Christians.(25) Approximately twenty-five Christians, including women and children, were gathered at the house church.(26) Those who were not arrested were forced to fill out forms that inquired about their faith and religious activities.(27) The three individuals who were arrested were taken to their own homes by authorities who then searched their homes.(28)

In September 2023, an Iranian convert was pardoned after spending almost five years in prison for “acting against national security” for his role in organizing house churches.(29) He was also flogged for drinking wine as part of communion.(30)

On August 15, 2023, a Christian man and his wife were arrested while visiting a friend’s house outside of Tehran.(31) Authorities also seized their personal belongings and Christian books.(32) The wife has since been released on bail, while the husband remains imprisoned.(33)

Between June 1 and July 17, 2023, authorities arrested more than sixty-nine Christians across eleven cities in Iran.(34) The vast majority of those arrested are reported to be Christian converts.(35) While many have since been released, those individuals were reportedly required to sign statements that they would refrain from carrying out future Christian activities or they would be forced to attend Islamic re-education classes.(36)

4. Request

It is time for the international community to unite against Iran, a terrorist state, and all of its terrorist proxies, including the IRGC. United Nations Security Council resolutions require targeted financial and other sanctions against entities that sponsor terrorism. The international community must swiftly respond to not only Iran’s funding of terror but its direct attack on Israel.

Additionally, Iran must immediately end its practice of arresting Christians and release all Christians who have been arbitrarily detained for peacefully practicing their faith. We further ask Iran to protect religious freedom for all its citizens. No one should be harassed or imprisoned because of his faith.

1. Sean Boynton, Iran Should ‘Directly Pay the Price’ in Tehran if It Attacks Israel: Ex-Israeli PM, GLOBAL NEWS (Apr. 13, 2024), <https://globalnews.ca/news/10420493/israel-gaza-iran-naftali-bennett-interview/>.
2. Josef Federman & Jon Gambrell, Israel Says Iran Launched More Than 300 Drones and Missiles, 99% of Which Were Intercepted, ASSOCIATED PRESS (Apr. 14, 2024), <https://apnews.com/article/strait-of-hormuz-vessel-33fcffde2d867380e98c89403776a8ac>.
3. World Watch List 2024, OPEN DOORS, <https://www.opendoors.org/en-US/persecution/countries/> (last visited May 14, 2024).
4. Lisa Zengarini, Iran: Harassment Against Iranian Christians Increasing, VATICAN NEWS (Feb. 28, 2023), <https://www.vaticannews.va/en/church/news/2023-02/iran-harassment-against-iranian-christians-increasing.html>.
5. H.R. Res. 288, 118th Cong. (2023), <https://www.congress.gov/118/bills/hres288/BILLS-118hres288ih.pdf>.
6. Faceless Victims: Rights Violations Against Christians in Iran 2024 Annual Report, ARTICLE EIGHTEEN (Feb. 19, 2024), <https://articleeighteen.com/wp-content/uploads/2024/02/Annual-Report-2024.pdf>.
7. Iran, OPEN DOORS, <https://www.opendoors.org/en-US/persecution/countries/iran/>.
8. Lisa Zengarini, Iran: Harassment Against Iranian Christians Increasing, VATICAN NEWS (Feb. 28, 2023), <https://www.vaticannews.va/en/church/news/2023-02/iran-harassment-against-iranian-christians-increasing.html#:~:text=134%20Christians%20arrested%20in%202022%20for%20faith%20related%20issues&text=At%20the%20end%20of%202022,“propaganda%20against%20the%20regime”>.
9. Faceless Victims: Rights Violations Against Christians in Iran 2024 Annual Report, ARTICLE EIGHTEEN (Feb. 19, 2024), <https://articleeighteen.com/wp-content/uploads/2024/02/Annual-Report-2024.pdf>.
10. Josef Federman & Jon Gambrell, Israel Says Iran Launched More Than 300 Drones and Missiles, 99% of Which Were Intercepted, ASSOCIATED PRESS (Apr. 14, 2024), <https://apnews.com/article/strait-of-hormuz-vessel-33fcffde2d867380e98c89403776a8ac>.
11. Id.
12. See Daniel Estrin, 129 Days: How One Israeli Hostage in Gaza Told Stories to Endure Captivity, NPR (Apr. 5, 2024), <https://www.npr.org/2024/04/05/1242824916/israel-hostage-hamas-gaza-luis-har>.
13. N. Katirachi & A. Savyon, Iranian Regime Officials Praise Iran’s Proxies in the Palestinian Resistance and the October 7 Massacres, Call for Eradication of Israel, MEMRI (Dec. 1, 2023), <https://www.memri.org/reports/iranian-regime-officials-praise-irans-proxies-palestinian-resistance-and-october-7-massacres>.
14. Id.
15. Id.
16. Seth J. Frantzman, Iran’s Hajizadeh: We Must Unite to Expel the Zionists and Americans, JERUSALEM POST (Feb. 15, 2020), <https://www.jpost.com/middle-east/irans-hajizadeh-we-must-unite-to-expel-the-zionists-and-americans-617650>.
17. Id.
18. Katirachi & Savyon, supra note 13.
19. H.R. Res. 288, supra note 5.
20. Id.
21. Id.
22. Christmas Arrests for Seven Iranian Christians, OPEN DOORS (Jan. 9, 2024), <https://www.opendoorsuk.org/news/latest-news/christmas-arrests-iran/>.
23. Id.
24. Id.
25. Id.
26. Id.
27. Id.
28. Id.
29. #Place2Worship Campaigner Released After Nearly Five Years in Prison, ARTICLE EIGHTEEN (Feb. 9, 2023), <https://articleeighteen.com/news/12583/>.

30. Id.

31. Iran: Jailed Christians Denied Christmas, ASIA NEWS (Dec. 23, 2023), <https://www.asianews.it/news-en/Iran:-Jailed-Christians-denied-Christmas-59818.html>.

32. Id.

33. Id.

34. At Least 10 Still Detained as Numbers of Arrests and Affected Cities Rise, ARTICLE EIGHTEEN (Aug. 10, 2023), <https://articleeighteen.com/news/13706/>.

35. Id.

36. Id.