

Iran: Systemic and Sustained Attacks against Lawyers and the Legal Profession in the Islamic Republic of Iran

Introduction

In recent years, with a sharp escalation since late 2025, lawyers in the Islamic Republic of Iran have been subjected to a sustained campaign of intimidation, harassment, arbitrary arrest and detention, criminal prosecution, professional sanctions, and, in some cases, death in suspicious circumstances. These practices target lawyers for their role in defending protestors, political detainees, and human rights defenders. They undermine the independence of the legal profession and access to justice, in violation of Iran's obligations under the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the UN Basic Principles on the Role of Lawyers. On 23 January 2026, the Human Rights Council adopted resolution S-39/1, extending the mandate of the Independent International Fact-Finding Mission (IFFM) for a further two years and requesting an urgent investigation into violations linked to the protests that began on 28 December 2025.¹

The IFFM's March 2026 report (A/HRC/61/60) documents violations that may amount to crimes against humanity, a sharp rise in executions in 2025, the systematic denial of fair trial rights and access to independent legal counsel, and persistent impunity.² The Special Rapporteur's report to HRC61 (A/HRC/61/59) further documents the scale of the crackdown on the December 2025 protests and the pervasive fear of reprisals faced by those who engage with international human rights mechanisms, a pattern directly borne out by the cases documented below.³

Systematic Targeting and Harassment of Lawyers

The late 2025 and January 2026 protests triggered a sharp intensification of an already existing pattern of harassment. Prosecutorial authorities and security agencies have subjected lawyers to summonses, interrogations without formal charges, surveillance, and threats of criminal prosecution or professional sanctions.

At least 23 lawyers were arrested across eight provinces in direct connection with the protests, many held without disclosed charges.⁴ Shima Ghoosheh, a prominent women's rights lawyer, was arrested on 17 January 2026 and transferred to Ward 209 of Evin Prison. Released on 7 March 2026 on heavy bail of seven billion tomans (approximately USD 42,000), she had been denied effective access to a lawyer of her choice and was not informed of the charges against her.

Criminal cases have been brought against at least 30 further lawyers who have not been detained, on charges including "propaganda against the regime," "assembly and collusion against national security," and "spreading falsehoods," in cities including Rasht, Mashhad, Shiraz, and Tehran. The case of 17 lawyers in Mashhad, collectively summoned following social media commentary on human rights concerns and sentenced by Branch 5 of the

¹ Human Rights Council, Resolution S-35/1, Deteriorating situation of human rights in the Islamic Republic of Iran, especially with respect to women and children, adopted 24 November 2022; Resolution 58/21, Situation of human rights in the Islamic Republic of Iran, adopted 3 April 2025; Resolution S-39/1, adopted 23 January 2026.

² Independent International Fact-Finding Mission on the Islamic Republic of Iran, Report to the Human Rights Council, A/HRC/61/60, 10 March 2026; Consolidated findings of the Independent International Fact-Finding Mission on the Islamic Republic of Iran, A/HRC/61/CRP.2, 13 March 2026.

³ Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Islamic Republic of Iran (Mai Sato), Report to the Human Rights Council, A/HRC/61/59, March 2026.

⁴ Lawyers for Lawyers and partner organisations, End the systematic denial of legal counsel and arrests of lawyers in Iran, 10 February 2026; Human Rights Activists News Agency (HRANA), various reports, January–February 2026.

Revolutionary Court in April 2025, illustrates how criminal proceedings are deployed to deter lawyers from raising due process concerns. One of them, Seyyed Enayatollah Karamati, has since been arrested.⁵ Lawyer Nazanin Salari had a new case opened against her for “spreading falsehoods” after publicly raising concerns about unlawful bail conditions imposed by the Shiraz Prosecutor’s Office.⁶

Arbitrary Arrest, Detention, and Prosecution

Such prosecutions of lawyers raise serious concerns. Prior to the late 2025 protests, seven lawyers were already imprisoned in connection with their professional activities. Lawyer Seyyed Mehdi Karimi-Farsi began serving a one-year sentence for “propaganda against the regime” in January 2026.⁷ Lawyer Taher Naqavi has been detained in Evin Prison since February 2024 on charges including “gathering and collusion against national security.”⁸ Lawyer Mohammadreza Faghihi received a five-year sentence, a two-year travel ban, and a two-year prohibition on practising law.⁹ Lawyer Mohammad Najafi has⁹ imprisoned since 2018.¹⁰

On 29 April 2026, cases were opened against lawyers Amir Raisian and Milad Panahipour at the Tehran Security Prosecutor’s Office, arising from their public reporting on a 19-year-old detainee sentenced to death whose chosen lawyer had been denied access to the case file. Both were formally charged and released on bail.¹¹ Lawyer Nasrin Sotoudeh was arrested on the night of 1–2 April 2026, held at an undisclosed location without prompt family notification, and released on bail on 13 May 2026.¹²

Restrictions under the Note to Article 48 of the Code of Criminal Procedure continue to prevent defendants in security cases from choosing independent lawyers, a practice the FFM has identified among the fair trial violations under investigation. Bahareh Sahraian, a member of the Fars Bar Association, was arrested on 16 May 2026 after appearing before the Shiraz Revolutionary Court on behalf of clients detained during the January 2026 protests, and transferred to Adelabad Prison.

Disbarment, Suspension, and other Professional Sanctions

Iranian authorities impose professional sanctions through procedures lacking transparency, independence, and effective avenues of appeal. Lawyer Behnam Nezadi’s conviction included a one-year practice ban. Lawyer Mohammadreza Faghihi’s sentence included a two-year

⁵ HRANA, Revolutionary Court in Mashhad convicted lawyers on charges of propaganda against the state for representing protesters during the Woman Life Freedom uprising.

⁶ Lawyers for Lawyers, Systematic state persecution of lawyers in Iran continues with fresh round of interrogations and indictments, 18 March 2025.

⁷ Front Line Defenders, Taher Naghavi sentenced to six years in prison, available at: <https://www.frontlinedefenders.org/en/case/taher-naghavi-sentenced-six-years-prison>.

⁸ Front Line Defenders, Mohammad Reza Faghihi begins serving five-year prison sentence, available at: <https://www.frontlinedefenders.org/en/case/mohammad-reza-faghihi-begins-serving-five-year-prison-sentence>.

¹⁰ Lawyers for Lawyers and Center for Human Rights in Iran, Free imprisoned human rights lawyer Mohammad Najafi in Iran, 3 March 2022; World Organisation Against Torture (OMCT), Marking the International Day of the Endangered Lawyer amidst escalating persecution in Iran, 24 January 2025.

¹¹ HRANA, Legal Case Filed Against Lawyers Amir Raisian and Milad Panahipour Following Case Disclosure, 29 April 2026.

¹² FIDH and Ligue pour la défense des droits de l’Homme en Iran (LDDHI), Iran: Human rights lawyer Nasrin Sotoudeh arbitrarily arrested amid intensified crackdown, 3 April 2026; FIDH-OMCT Observatory and LDDHI, Iran: Human rights lawyer Nasrin Sotoudeh released on bail amid ongoing crackdown, 13 May 2026.

prohibition on practising law. Lawyer Hoda Amid was sentenced to eight years' imprisonment and subjected to a practice ban in connection with her women's rights education work.¹³

Suspicious Deaths

Lawyer Khosrow Alikordi, previously imprisoned, disbarred, and subjected to sustained harassment, was found dead in his Mashhad office on 8 December 2025. Authorities attributed his death to a heart attack; CCTV recordings were reportedly confiscated, and information was withheld from the family. More than 80 lawyers called for an independent investigation.¹⁴ His brother and fellow lawyer Javad Alikordi was arrested on 12 December 2025 after speaking at the memorial, transferred to an undisclosed location, and charged with national security offences. Authorities refused to recognise powers of attorney granted to lawyers chosen by the family.

Recommendations

Lawyers for Lawyers and the Centre for Supporters of Human Rights call on the Islamic Republic of Iran to:

- Ensure that lawyers can perform all professional functions freely and independently, without intimidation, harassment, surveillance, prosecution, professional sanction, or improper interference;
- Immediately and unconditionally release all lawyers detained solely for their professional work or the peaceful exercise of their rights to freedom of expression, association, and assembly, and drop all charges against lawyers prosecuted on the same grounds;
- Quash convictions and sentences imposed on lawyers solely for their professional activities or human rights work, and remove related travel bans, practice bans, and other restrictions;
- Guarantee fair trial rights in all cases, including access to a lawyer of one's choosing from the outset and at all stages of proceedings;
- Repeal or amend the Note to Article 48 of the Code of Criminal Procedure and any other laws or practices restricting defendants in security-related cases from choosing independent lawyers;
- Ensure that disciplinary proceedings against lawyers comply with international standards of independence, due process, transparency, proportionality, and the right to appeal;
- Conduct prompt, independent, impartial, and transparent investigations into suspicious deaths and violence against lawyers and ensure accountability for those responsible.

¹³ Lawyers for Lawyers, Systematic state persecution of lawyers in Iran continues with fresh round of interrogations and indictments, 18 March 2025.

¹⁴ Lawyers for Lawyers, International Bar Association's Human Rights Institute (IBAHRI), and Law Society of England and Wales (LSEW), Joint statement expressing concern surrounding the death of Iranian lawyer Alikordi Khosrow and ensuing targeting of lawyers in Iran, 19 December 2025.