

**39th Special Session of the Human Rights Council
on the deteriorating situation of human rights in the Islamic Republic of Iran**

**Statement by Mai Sato
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and on behalf of the Coordination Committee of Special Procedures**

Geneva

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Mr. President, distinguished delegates, and representatives of civil society,

It is my honour to address you today, on behalf of the Coordination Committee of the Special Procedures and my mandate.

On 28 December 2025, severe economic hardships ignited demonstrations across Iran that became a nationwide movement spanning all regions, with men and women from diverse ethnic and religious groups demanding political change.

What distinguishes democratic governance from authoritarian rule is that people can exercise the right to peacefully demand such change, and authorities must engage with these demands rather than suppress them.

Iranian authorities have responded with violence. The situation deteriorated dramatically on 8 January 2026. On this day, authorities implemented a near-total internet and telecommunications shutdown.

The ongoing internet shutdown prevents international witnessing of atrocities while disrupting peaceful protest coordination. This digital siege has caused immense anguish for families inside and outside of Iran unable to confirm their loved ones' safety.

The death toll remains contested due to the shutdown, enabling authorities to control information flow. Authorities have reported over 3,000 deaths including security forces, while some civil society estimates go up to tens of thousands, though these figures cannot

be verified. The staggering discrepancy demonstrates how the shutdown has obscured the true scale of events. I have also received reports that authorities are coercing families to falsely claim deceased relatives were Basij members allegedly killed by protesters, as well as forcing payments for body retrieval—cruel practices that compound grief with extortion.

Mr. President,

The dangerous rhetoric labelling peaceful protesters as ‘terrorists’, ‘rioters’, or ‘mercenaries’—the same narrative deployed during the 2022 protests—seeks to justify brutal crackdowns and ignores this uprising’s domestic, organic nature. The Supreme Leader and President have called for harsh action, with the Head of the Judiciary demanding expedited prosecutions without leniency.

Lethal force by authorities can only be used as a last resort to protect life and must be legal, necessary, and proportionate. I’ve received countless videos capturing what appears to be the use of lethal force against unarmed protesters, in violation of these principles.

The use of excessive force and the death penalty against peaceful protesters demonstrates clear disregard for the right to freedom of assembly and expression, and the right to life. Even without executions, sentencing protesters to death is unlawful and designed to silence dissent.

Tens of thousands of individuals, including schoolchildren, have reportedly been detained nationwide without legal counsel or family contact, with raids also conducted in hospitals. I’ve received information of detainees being coerced into making false confessions broadcast on television, reinforcing the State’s narrative that protesters are dangerous criminals.

Civic space has faced further restrictions, including media closures and intimidation of lawyers, journalists, and activists. The crackdown may soon extend to economic persecution with proposals to confiscate assets of celebrities and business owners for supporting the protest.

Despite immense personal risk, the Iranian people persist in their demands. What we are witnessing continues Iran’s long history of mass movement. However, the scale of violent repression we are seeing today is among the most severe in its brutality and scope in its recent history.

Mr. President,

Now is the time for the international community to respond and to support the people of Iran in their pursuit for fundamental rights and accountability.

As Special Rapporteur, I will—in coordination with the OHCHR and the Fact-Finding Mission—continue monitoring the situation and provide an update on the overall human rights situation at the next Council session. It is important to keep in mind that these protest-related violations occur within the context of Iran’s broader human rights

situation. For example, executions for homicides, drug-related offences and espionage have continued during the protests. Accordingly, I reiterate my request for a country visit.

Mr. President,

I am deeply concerned by the current situation and stress the need for thorough investigation including potential violations of international criminal law and international human rights law. I respectfully urge this Council to empower the Fact-Finding Mission to investigate these protest-related violations to ensure accountability.

The Iranian people have shown extraordinary courage in speaking truth to power—now the international community must respond with the urgency and commitment this situation demands.

Thank you.