

**Mr. Antonio Guterres**  
**Honorable Secretary-General of the United Nations,**  
**Respected Representatives of UN Member States,**

The time has come to declare gender apartheid a crime.

For decades, Iranian women's lives have faced various forms of sex and gender-based discrimination under the shadow of the Islamic Republic government. Systematically and purposefully, the Islamic Republic has advanced the subjugation of women through the use of all instruments and powers of the state, particularly through legislation, perpetuating the denial of women's human rights.

In such circumstances, it's not just women; rather, the entire Iranian society bears the harrowing and irreparable consequences of the deeply ingrained, pervasive discriminations. In a society where half the population is deprived of their natural rights, discussions about achieving democracy, human rights, freedom, and equality seems meaningless.

In countries like Iran and Afghanistan, both Islamic Republic governments and the Taliban have cynically utilized the subjugation of women as a means to further their oppressive agendas and exert control and suppression over the entire society. They exploit religion as a cloak for despotism and authoritarian rule.

This is unfolding amidst the perpetration of an unspeakable atrocity against women, and the world is watching in disbelief. Gender, economic, and social discrimination against individuals based on their sex or gender, executed directly through physical or legal means to relegate individuals to lower positions, is termed gender apartheid. This form of apartheid not only results in social and economic incapacities but also leads to physical and mortal harm.

Therefore, we believe that gender apartheid should be recognized as a form of crime against humanity, similar to racial apartheid. We urgently call upon the international community, under your leadership, to address this urgent matter and take decisive action to end gender apartheid in Iran & Afghanistan. The suffering of Iranian women and society as a whole must not go unnoticed, and concerted efforts are required to ensure justice and equality prevail.

It is expected that the United Nations declare gender and sex apartheid as a crime against humanity in international legal documents. We assert that governments, including the Islamic Republic, have perpetrated such crimes against women based on their gender and sex, and our argument is supported by the government's track record of anti-women policies in political, economic, social, cultural, and educational domains, as well as its discriminatory laws.

Government Laws:

An overview of anti-women laws illustrates the elements of segregation and subjugation of women in Iranian society.

1. Obtaining a passport and traveling abroad requires the legal guardian's permission, which is exclusively in the hands of fathers for daughters and husbands for wives.

The discriminatory law against women, as illustrated by the plight of an Iranian female soccer star, has, for example, resulted in her being prohibited from leaving the country due to a travel ban imposed by her husband. This restriction has, in turn, led to her exclusion from a major sports event—the Asian Football Confederation's women's championship in futsal—where she was poised to compete.

2. Women in Iran are categorically denied the right to study in certain university fields, such as aerospace engineering.

3. Testimony and witness accounts of men in Iranian courts are considered equal to those of two women.

4. The blood money (diah) and inheritance for women are half that of men.

5. Women's entry to sports stadiums has been prohibited for over four decades, with recent minor relaxations not being on par with men's spectatorship rights, and these changes are not implemented in all cities.

6. In Iran, men are allowed to have simultaneous marriages with up to four wives. This number is significantly higher for engaging in temporary marriages, known as "Sigheh." Meanwhile, the punishment for a married woman having a relationship with another man is execution. At this very moment, as this text is being written, a woman named Mitra in Iran is facing a death sentence because her husband has filed a complaint against her for engaging in a relationship outside of marriage. It is worth noting that the man involved with Mitra has been sentenced to lashes.

7. Men in Iran, with legal support, can easily divorce their wives if they face issues like blindness in both eyes. However, women do not have such rights.

8. Various forms of gender-based violence in Iran, coupled with the inadequacy and inefficiency of the legal system to address them, have put women in a precarious situation. This includes street harassment, domestic violence, as well as gender-based violence in workplaces and universities.

9. Marital rape is not only not considered a crime in Iran, but Iranian men can file complaints of "non-compliance" against their wives if the wives are unwilling to engage in sexual relations. The law in this regard favors men and labels women as "non-compliant."

10. Citizenship in Iran is recognized solely through blood ties, and Iranian law grants all the legitimacy of this blood relationship to the father as the legal guardian. Despite a previously passed law in this regard, the rejection of the law again deprives the child resulting from the marriage of an Iranian woman to a foreign man of having identity documents such as a birth certificate.

11. Over the past 45 years, the rate of femicides, especially those attributed to honor killings, has been on the rise in Iran. According to human rights organizations, since March 2023 at least

52 cases of femicide were recorded in Iran, with 20 of them being honor killings. Out of the total of 52 women, 11, or 21%, were under the age of 18. The law and the judiciary in this regard have been inefficient and displayed irresponsible behavior.

12. Enrollment in specialized medical courses and dental assistantship for women in Iran is only possible with the consent of their husbands.

13. Not adhering to the religious hijab laws in Iran will result in up to 74 lashes for women, and these punishments will be further intensified with the approval of the Chastity and Veil Bill.

14. The permission for marriage before reaching the legal age for women in Iran is not an obstacle if deemed appropriate by the father or paternal grandfather. The concerning trend of child marriages in Iran is evident in the statistics. According to the Iranian Statistical Center, during the first three quarters of the year 2022, more than 20,000 cases of marriages involved women under the age of 15, and there were 1,085 births by mothers under 15. In the spring of 2021, the number of marriages involving girls aged 10 to 14 witnessed approximately a 32% increase compared to the previous year. These figures represent only official statistics.

15. The Population Youthfulness Law, with its prohibition of more self-requested abortions and criminalization of it, along with the increase in penalties for doctors, practitioners, and facilitators of abortion, has led to an increase in underground abortions. This situation puts women's lives at risk due to unsafe abortion environments and fear of seeking hospital and clinic services. This is happening while previously freely available contraceptive methods have been collected, and a system for registering pregnancies and monitoring pregnant women in hospitals has been initiated.

16. If a man causes the death of a woman in Iran and the family (legal heirs) seeks retribution according to the principle of qesas, they are required to pay half of the blood money (diyah) of that man. This is due to the legal framework in Iran, where individuals are not considered equal, and the value of one man's life is deemed equivalent to that of two women.

17. The stoning law for a married woman engaging in sexual relations with another man, though not currently implemented in Iran, still places women under the threat of stoning. According to a new policy, courts now execute the stoning sentence as a form of execution.

18. The legal age of religious obligation in Iran for girls is 9 years old, and since then, young girls who are still in childhood are compelled to perform religious obligations such as prayer, fasting, and observing hijab. Despite the religious order for the legal age of obligation being 9 for girls, mandatory hijab in schools is enforced from the age of 6, i.e., upon entering primary schools, by the Ministry of Education.

19. The Iranian Parliament is currently reviewing a legislative proposal aiming to separate textbooks for girls and boys. These textbooks seek to deepen traditional gender roles and confine women within the roles of future wives and mothers.

### **Government Structure:**

Over the past 45 years, despite a significant number of women being eligible for presidential candidacy, the Guardian Council has obstructed their entry into this arena through its interpretations of laws against women. The Guardian Council has consistently been one of the powerful anti-women entities in the government, even rejecting the approval of the bill to accede to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) by the sixth parliament, causing Iranian women to miss an opportunity. Moreover, the Guardian Council has always supported and endorsed anti-women laws and behaviors.

### **Government Behavior:**

1. The government's behavior towards women is a clear example of discrimination, encompassing economic, social, and extensive spheres. By imposing mandatory hijab and dress code criteria, the government jeopardizes women's fundamental human rights and citizenship rights. Women are deprived of access to social, educational, and healthcare services simply because they don't comply with mandatory hijab.

University female students are prevented from continuing their education, and university disciplinary committees and courts suppress female students under the pretext of not observing mandatory hijab. Women are expelled from non-governmental workplaces due to non-compliance with mandatory hijab.

Merchants and businesses, restaurants, and cafes are under government pressure and control to prevent unveiled individuals from entering, and if not complied with, these establishments are sealed. Such behavior leads to the marginalization and increased social isolation of women. The government's intrusion into the private and public lives of women has reached the extent that it even prohibits images of women on their gravestones in cemeteries, threatening to destroy gravestones displaying "indecent" images.

2. The methods of this discriminatory behavior are physically abusive. Physical violence, which leads to severe physical, sexual, and psychological harm and even death, is systematically employed against women. This includes cruel and inhumane punishments such as 74 lashes for not wearing hijab, as recently implemented.

On the other hand, sexual assaults, harassment, and abuse of detained women, severe beatings and fatal violence against women in detention centers, confining protesting women to mental hospitals, and using psychotropic drugs in solitary cells and hospitals are among the government's systematic torture methods against women.

3. The government's behavior towards institutionalizing oppression and discrimination against women is systematically and legally executed. For 45 years, laws against women have been approved as bills in the parliament, confirmed by the Guardian Council, and put on the agenda of the judicial and executive systems. Various government organizations and institutions, with

exorbitant budgets, are employed, and educational and propaganda organizations are utilized from primary to university levels.

In this context, any demand, protest, or resistance against these discriminatory laws and practices, even in the form of civil disobedience in the social sphere, results in violence, imprisonment, and death, adding an extra layer of oppressive pressure to society, especially Iranian women.

While the Islamic Republic system aims to block the civil-political movement by suppressing women's civil organizations, we have witnessed the closure of hundreds of civil offices and the suppression of thousands of women activists in recent decades. Many activists have left the country, and others are either in prisons or under suppression, control, and pursuit. In this path, government entities uniformly and systematically employ force, violence, and poisoning the political-social space, suppressing protest and social movements. Only as an example, according to official statistics released by the Judiciary and the Police Force, in 2023 over two thousand legal cases solely related to the discovery of unveiled women were filed, with 825 resulting in convictions. The world has witnessed the intensification of violent crackdowns by the government against women, illustrated by the tragic killing of Mahsa-Jina Amini 15 months ago due to gender apartheid.

It is noteworthy to mention the current legislation on hijab and modesty, which is currently under consideration in the Islamic Consultative Assembly. This law is explicitly designed to infringe upon women's rights, downgrade women, deepen and extend discrimination and oppression against women, and expand inhumane punishments against women.

4. Implementing these methods aims to demote women to a lower status. The deprivation and punishments imposed on women include a wide range of fundamental social, economic, and basic rights, significantly impacting their economic and socio-political status. Mandatory hijab is meant to control and subjugate women in all social spheres, even in the private realm and within families, with devastating effects on women, families, and society.

**Dear Secretary-General of the United Nations,  
Respected Representatives of UN Member States,**

The 45-year record of the Islamic Republic regime as a religious and authoritarian government, based on sex and gender apartheid, can be well observed in various aspects of laws, government structures, and behaviors that clearly demonstrate the elements of segregation and subjugation of women.

During this period, it is expected that the United Nations, recognizing the systematic discriminations present in laws, policies, and behaviors of governments like Iran and Afghanistan against women, take decisive and immediate action to address them.

It is essential that the United Nations put an end to the systematic gender and sexual apartheid, which results in second-class citizenship for women in countries such as Iran and Afghanistan, by criminalizing these practices.

Failure and neglect in criminalizing these actions allow the perpetrators to go unpunished, leaving the victims without any compensation. This signifies the potential continuation of oppression and discrimination against tens of millions of Iranian and Afghan women and beyond.

**Honorable Representatives,**

Institutionalized oppression, tyranny, and discrimination against women in Iran and Afghanistan are evident and blatant. We, in solidarity with other freedom-loving women and men in Iran, Afghanistan, and around the world, demand the criminalization of gender and sexual apartheid. This is crucial for holding criminal governments, including the Islamic Republic regime and the Taliban, accountable.

We urgently need actions to stop this inhumane and unsafe repression. Criminalizing gender and sexual apartheid, providing a more precise legal definition in international laws, issuing statements condemning gender apartheid systems in Iran and Afghanistan, reflecting the experiences and narratives of women who are increasingly subjected to this destructive tyranny, supporting women's civil institutions in Iranian and Afghan societies, and backing and protecting women's rights defenders suppressed by the regimes are among the necessary measures.

All we need is to amend the draft of the crimes against humanity treaty at the United Nations to include sexual and gender apartheid. It is not a difficult path and is achievable. Women in Iran and Afghanistan are awaiting the immediate attention and action of the United Nations for what has become inevitable.

The time for criminalizing sexual and gender apartheid has come. It is time to rise and stand.

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