

Briefing: For peace, democracy and human rights in Iran



Background

- A number of mass street protests over the last few years, in particular the large scale protests and uprising following the murder of 22-year-old Mahsa Amini in the hands of the so called 'morality police', has put the ruling theocratic dictatorship in an irreversible confrontation with the majority of the people in Iran.
- The standard of living of the Iranian people continues to fall with widespread poverty and a sharp increase in the divide between the rich and the rest of the society. This dire situation is intensifying the people's confrontation with the ruling dictatorship which is unwilling and incapable of solving the many crises in the interest of the majority.
- Worker's protests and industrial strikes are on the rise and are met by the regime's brutality. Trade unionists are routinely charged under fake accusations of 'espionage' or 'endangering national security' and are often subject to brutal treatment - including torture.
- Independent trade union activity in Iran is banned and dangerous. However, independent trade union activists continue to operate, despite the extremely dangerous backdrop of severe reprisals from the regime. The regime has deployed its security forces to intimidate labour and pension activists; violently break up their gatherings; and arrest and prosecute trade union leaders and prominent activists on spurious 'national security' charges.
- Several such figures have been subjected to repeated and extended terms of imprisonment - including Esmail Abdi, the Secretary General of the Iranian Teachers' Trade Association (ITTA).
- Trade unionists account for the largest contingent of Iran's political prisoner population - with ITTA activists believed to comprise the largest number among them.

Human rights abuses

- The so called 'morality police' have been resurrected, resuming street patrols, arresting and beating women with increasing ferocity to enforce 'hijab', the Islamic headscarf. However, many Iranian women continue to resist the reactionary dictates of the theocratic regime concerning their freedoms. The Women, Life, Freedom movement remains a force on the streets of Iran.
- In an attempt to suppress criticism, the regime is stepping up its campaign of intimidation. Recently it sentenced Toomaj Salehi, 33, a rapper from Iran to death. He was originally arrested in September 2022 and spent 252 days in solitary confinement and was tortured. Renowned film director Mohammad Rasoulof was recently sentenced to eight years in prison and flogging. He has since managed to flee Iran before his arrest.
- According to United Nations (UN) sources, in 2023 the rate of executions increased by 43% when at least 834 people were executed.
- The theocratic regime is discredited and despised in the eyes of the people. It is unable to gain its social base, thus over the last few years it has intensified oppression and an atmosphere of fear.

International Response

- The Committee for the Defence of the Iranian People's Rights (CODIR) has been co-ordinating calls for the release of all political prisoners in Iran and an end to arbitrary arrest and torture. Trade unions in Britain including UNITE, UNISON, UCU, NEU, RMT, NASUWT and GFTU actively support CODIR's initiatives.

- The IndustriALL Global Union - which represents more than 50 million workers across mining, energy, and manufacturing sectors in more than 141 countries - has expressed its solidarity with workers at oil and gas fields in Southern Iran, who have launched coordinated strikes demanding better pay and conditions of service.
- In Britain, the RMT union has expressed solidarity with the striking Iranian workers.
- The National Education Union (NEU) has actively campaigned for the release of imprisoned teachers in Iran including their counterparts in the ITTA.
- The European Union (EU) and its member states have urged the Iranian authorities to stop the violent crackdown against peaceful protests, cease resorting to arbitrary detention as a means of silencing critical voices, and release all those unjustly detained.
- UN experts have strongly condemned several recent executions and warned that executions following flawed trials were tantamount to arbitrary deprivation of life under international law.

Priority Demands

- An immediate end to the ongoing executions and the use of the death penalty in Iran.
- The immediate and unconditional release of all those detained solely on account of their participation in the recent protests, labour and trade union activism, and independent journalism - as well as all political prisoners and prisoners of conscience in Iran.
- Iran to recognise the right to free independent trade union activity without fear of arrest or persecution pursuant to the relevant provision in the Iranian Constitution as well as ILO Conventions 87 and 98.
- Iranian government to immediately cease all violence against protesters and ensure full and open investigations against the perpetrators of such abuses.
- Iranian government to end the practice of 'vetting' all prospective parliamentary candidates and lift all bans on opposition political parties and their activities.

About Liberation:

Liberation opposes new forms of imperialism, or “neocolonialism” that intervenes and lays waste to the global south, perpetuating economic exploitation, inequality and racism. We work to address the legacies of colonialism. Democracy, human rights, peace and social justice are central to our goals. We reject foreign interventionism and militarism. We support popular sovereignty. We believe international solidarity and co-operation are the means to make a better world. Our main focus is Britain’s former colonies and the Anglo-American sphere of influence.

Liberation organises public meetings to raise awareness of current events and stimulate action. We run seminars, webinars and other educational activities. We work with UK parliamentarians to influence UK foreign policy and engage at an international level through the UN Human Rights Council. We publish a quarterly journal, and comment and analysis on relevant matters on our website, giving voice to progressive popular organisations in the Global South.