

## **Position paper for humanitarian actions for Iran**

After the in-custody death of Mahsa Zina Amini in September of 2022, there have been ongoing protests in Iran, which have received continuous media attention internationally. People all over the world have been showing their solidarity with the brave young women (and men) who are taking to the streets to protest the repressive regime in Iran. Simultaneously, we are observing growing violence by the authorities. Many Iranians have been injured, arrested, tortured, raped, or killed, and executed in the past decade. This state violence has intensified over the past couple of months. The state has locked up public figures, lawyers, journalists, scholars, union members, teachers, students and others from many different backgrounds and professions. The level of brutality and unlawful convictions, already high in Iran, has become even more visible because of the recent actions by the regime. This is the time for urgent actions that provide specific support for human rights and women rights activists under attack in Iran. There is also an urgent need to create safe passage and safe havens for activists fleeing to Europe as well as those already inside Europe (in this case the Netherlands).

In addition to an independent international investigation by the UN to document the brutalities of the regime and targeted sanctions oriented towards human rights abusers in Iran (instead of general sanctions that primarily and adversely impact the population), the specific focus of this position paper is a call for the Netherlands to set an example by creating a long-term and cohesive safe haven policy for Iranian activists and their families inside and outside Iran. In the past decades there have been profession-oriented actions for activists around the world: Pen International for writers, Scholars at Risk for scholars and journalists, and sanctuary or shelter cities or ICRON residency programs (also mainly for writers, scholars and artists). Despite the importance of these actions, they are rather fragmented and have often short-term impact. There is a need for a more sustainable and coordinated action in which governmental, non-governmental, and other societal actors join forces to support activists from all backgrounds and their families inside and outside Iran.

There is a need for an infrastructure that connects all the existing initiatives and efforts so that we can learn from the lessons of the past and also rethink the limitations of such actions. What we have learned from earlier experiences is that most actions are short-term (often with a maximum of one or two years) after which the activists need to go back to their homeland, which is most probably not yet safe enough. There have been some examples in which the combined efforts by different organizations in Europe (like PEN, SAR together with universities and other NGOs) have enabled longer-term stays for activists in Europe. This kind of successes are often invisible, scattered, and random. Yet, human rights support needs to be integrated and thoughtful. For that reason, we propose the following concrete actions:

- 1) Create an infrastructure of significant (national and international) actors with past experience in supporting activists and provide necessary support for this infrastructure to work as a linchpin between different actors and their resources to provide a cohesive and durable support network for those in need of safe haven.
- 2) Do not limit the focus of the infrastructure to certain professions, since human rights oriented actions should include all activists who are in danger regardless of their education, profession, or social status in their homeland.
- 3) Provide necessary legal support for the infrastructure so that all possibilities (different residence policies in addition to asylum) could be considered for the long-term safety of the activists

- 4) Activists who are residing in Europe need to be consulted regularly by formal international, national, and local institutions to consider the necessary support for their families and their fellow activists in jail or in danger.
- 5) It is essential to adjust the *ambsbericht* (official report by the state) about Iran based on the current highly dangerous situation in the country. This document has direct consequences for asylum seekers from Iran and the return policy of IND, which requires a categorical approach to asylum seekers from Iran and reconsideration of asylum applications that have been rejected.
- 6) It is crucial that asylum seekers with a status in the Netherlands have the possibility to fast-track a family reunion procedure for all children regardless of their age. It is well documented that the state of Iran subjects family members left behind to abuse and imprisonment. The specific case of an activist family shows how important it is to provide safety for all family members.
  - A female activist applied for asylum with her son in July 2018 and family reunion for her husband and her daughter in December 2019. In November 2021, her husband received a temporary residency permit but the application of the daughter was rejected. Her husband did not want to leave the daughter due to the extreme unsafe situation in Iran (especially for young people) and stayed in the country to await the result of the appeal of the objection. Unfortunately, on the 21<sup>st</sup> of November her husband was taken from his house and killed some days later. Now they are intimidating the daughter, saying that her father committed suicide. This is just one of many heart-breaking stories, which shows the role of the in IND in this whole process.
- 7) Many Iranian-Dutch people cannot invite their families and close friends to the Netherlands because of the very strict visa policy of the IND regarding individual applications. It is crucial in these troubling times that Dutch citizens with an Iranian background feel that their concerns regarding their families and friends are taken seriously and that their invitations for family members and close friends be handled thoughtfully.

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