

Religious freedom group asks for UN inquiry into Iran's crackdown

by [Yonat Shimron](#)

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People chant slogans during a protest over the death of a woman who was detained by the morality police, in downtown Tehran, Iran, on September 21. (AP Photo)

The US Commission for International Religious Freedom called on the Biden administration Friday to establish a [commission of inquiry](#) at the United Nations to examine Iran's brutal suppression of protests.

A wave of demonstrations described as a widespread rebellion have spread across Iran following the September 16 death of Mahsa Amini. The 22-year-old Iranian woman died in the custody of the morality police after she was arrested on charges of not obeying the hijab law that requires women to cover their heads.

But the commission was particularly concerned with the deaths of Sunni worshippers at the hands of the Iranian security forces on September 30. (Iran is a majority Shiite nation, and Sunni Muslims are a religious minority.)

The massacre in the city of Zahedan is home to the ethnic Baluch (sometimes spelled “Baloch”) minority. Protesters emerging from prayers at the Great Mosalla prayer complex shouted anti-government slogans when they were confronted by security forces firing into the crowd. The New York Times [reported](#) the community may have been protesting the alleged rape of a young girl by a police officer.

Amnesty International reported that up to [82 people](#) may have been killed; 66 during the September 30 riot and 16 more in separate incidents in the city since then.

“Iran’s use of excessive and lethal force against protesters asserting their religious freedom is a deplorable violation of international law for which there must be full accountability,” said Nury Turkel, chair of the USCIRF.

The victims of the Islamic Republic’s crackdown are not limited to religious minorities. Iran’s Committee to Protect Children’s Rights cited the killing of [28 children](#) or adolescents by security forces during or connected to demonstrations in which many protesters stripped off their hijab in defiance of the ruling clerics.

The USCIRF recommended in its 2022 [report](#) that Iran be designated a country of concern by the US State Department for its systematic and egregious religious liberty violations.

Human Rights Watch has documented videos showing security forces using shotguns, assault rifles and handguns against protesters. The organization has compiled a list of [47 individuals](#) killed, most by bullets.

The protests rocking Iran are considered the most serious since 2009.

United Nations commissions of inquiry are designed to bring to light situations of serious violations of international human rights law.

The US is one of 47 nations on the UN’s Human Rights Council, the main inter-governmental body within the United Nations system responsible for addressing situations of human rights violations.

In April, the Human Rights Council established a commission of inquiry into violations of human rights as a result of the Russian invasion of Ukraine. —Religion News Service