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State Violence and Ethnic Persecution: An Analysis of Baloch Executions in Iran, 2024



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1. Abstract

This study examines the extrajudicial executions of Baloch individuals in different prisons of Iran during 2024. The findings reveal systemic patterns of discrimination, ineffective judicial procedures, and socioeconomic marginalisation. The highest number (70%) of individuals extrajudicially executed were bread-winning husbands and fathers, leaving hundreds of their family members, including children, women and elderly people, without any financial and emotional support. Nearly four-fifths were sentenced for drug-related offences—an outcome majorly linked with the systemic suppression of the people, such as the systemic incorporation of the chronic poverty in Sistan and Baluchestan, where the unemployment rate is 70% higher in the country, and cross-border smuggling is systematically left to be the only livelihood of the Baloch people. The report dissects execution trends by marital status, types of accusation, age cohort, prison site, and month. We found that December 2024 saw the most significant spike, likely driven by the backlash against the crackdown amid protests in the Baloch regions and the activities of Baloch armed resistance groups. These data demand urgent international scrutiny of Iran's capital-punishment policies and investment in economic alternatives for marginalised minorities like Baloch.

2. Introduction

Iranian state repression against the ethnic minorities, including Azerbaijanis, Kurds, Arabs and Baluch, is not a new phenomenon. The demand for greater cultural and political rights and recognition is commonly dealt with an iron hand in Iran (Ashari, R. 2011). Marginalisation and discrimination of the ethnic minorities have intensified the sense of identification crisis. Since ethnic conflicts are more prone to political conflicts (Guelke, 2012), however, it would be more powerful and challenge the legitimacy of the State if the division is based on ethnoreligious identity, which will further lead to more violence. A cold negligence from the Iranian State in case of the Baloch people as an ethnoreligious identification and the discriminatory policies had created a grave situation of violence and atrocities (Khan, S. & Laoutides, C. 2024). Baloch has been facing state oppression based on its distinct ethnic and religious identity. The Iranian State has introduced structural violence along with physical violence among the Baloch people. Structural violence does not show up, and according to Galtung (2014), it is imbued in the system as air around us; it is a preprogrammed inequality which institutionalises the bias against certain groups and communities.

The Baloch, a Sunni Muslim ethnic minority numbering approximately 4-5 million, mainly reside in Sistan and Baluchestan. Baloch face Iran's worst socioeconomic indices: extreme poverty, 65 % illiteracy in rural areas, and the country's highest unemployment rate. Smuggling fuel and opiates across the porous Pakistan–Afghanistan frontier provide one of the few income sources. Tehran's response has been an aggressive death-penalty regime that targets Baloch smugglers while leaving trafficking networks' upper echelons untouched.

Baloch in Iran are facing systemic suppression. It has been reported by Human Rights Watch in 2023 that Iran has deployed excessive forces in Zahedan, which is to brutally crush the ethnoreligious identification of the Baloch (HRW, 2023). The number of alleged convictions and executions of the Baloch in Iran is a grave human rights violation. Baloch make up mostly 5% of the Iranian population, whereas the number of alleged convictions and executions among Iranian Balochistan is over 20% to 30% (Dashti, 2017; Rehman, 2014; Amnesty International). Executions are restricted, and their use is considered a violation in many cases in international law (Paust, J.J. 2004). However, the text of universal treaties like ICCPR, international laws and customs do not explicitly prohibit executions. Still, they are moving towards the abolition of executions and restricting it to the most serious crimes, such as

international killings, but meanwhile ensuring fair trials and safeguards (The Death Penalty Project, 2022). However, extrajudicial executions are grave violations of international laws, where individuals are killed outside of any legal framework.

The number of extrajudicial executions in Iran has increased over the years (Schabas 2024). Baloch as an ethnoreligious identity has been the main target of these executions. This report investigates the executions that took place in Sistan and Balochistan in 2024. The executions are studied based on months, location of prisons, alleged charges, age groups and marital status. The results showed that December had the highest number of executions. And the most executions were carried out on false charges related to drugs and murders. In contrast, individuals aged 20-40 years with a married marital status were mainly executed in 2024.

3. Methodology

The data were collected and verified through cross-referencing with online sources from various Iranian and international human rights organisations, including Amnesty International, Rasank (https://rasanknews.com/), Balochistan Human Rights Group (https://bhrg.info/en/), Halvash (https://haalvsh.org/), and the Baloch Activists Campaign. A total of 102 executions were documented—95 of which included complete biographical records, while seven contained incomplete data. The dataset was compiled and analysed using Microsoft Excel and subjected to a one-way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) to identify statistically significant patterns.

4. Results and discussion

The number of extrajudicial executions is increasing every single year in Iran (Schabas 2024). Iran carried out at least 102 executions of Baloch citizens in 2024, according to a consolidated dataset from civil-society monitors. Seven of these cases remain undocumented beyond the fact of execution, reflecting severe transparency gaps. The overwhelming majority (75) were sentenced under the country's Anti-Narcotics Law, which mandates death for trafficking as little as 30 g of heroin. Amnesty International and Iran Human Rights have repeatedly criticised this statute for denying suspects due-process safeguards, such as independent counsel, Farsi-to-Balochi interpretation, and the right to appeal (Amnesty International, 2025; Iran Human Rights & ECPM, 2025). According to reports by Baloch Activists Campaign, Rasank and Halvash trials are often concluded in a single hearing lasting less than an hour, and confessions are frequently extracted under torture.

This report analyses 2024 execution data to uncover demographic patterns and the human cost for families and communities. We also situate these findings in the broader context of ethnic discrimination and the Iranian State's reliance on capital punishment as a tool of social control.

4.1 Marital Status and Impact of These Executions on Families and Children

Of the 95 fully documented cases of Baloch individuals executed in December 2024, at least 61 (60%) were married (Figure 1). These 61 individuals collectively left behind a minimum of 85 children, averaging 3.1 children per family. The executions thus have a far-reaching

humanitarian impact that extends well beyond the individual, affecting spouses, children, and extended family members.

According to civil society organisations such as *Rasank*, the families of executed individuals, particularly widows and children, are provided with no form of state assistance or compensation. Widows often face immediate socioeconomic hardship and are subjected to social stigma due to the circumstances surrounding their husbands' deaths. In the absence of any government welfare mechanisms, families are forced to rely on already impoverished extended family networks or informal community support.

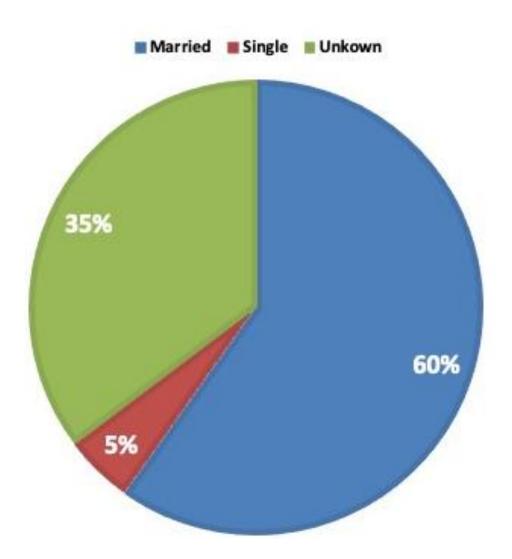


Figure 1: The marital status of the individuals extrajudicially executed in 2024 in Sistan and Baluchestan. The highest number of extrajudicially executed individuals was married people.

Socioeconomic marginalisation is compounded by the forced entry of surviving children into child labour. Multiple credible sources have documented that children of executed Baloch prisoners are frequently engaged in hazardous informal work, including fuel smuggling across the Iran-Pakistan border. This work is not only dangerous but also prevents access to education, entrenching intergenerational cycles of poverty and exclusion. However, Children of individuals sentenced to death or executed have received little attention, despite growing evidence that they experience a uniquely traumatic, deeply complex, and socially isolating form of loss. In many parts of the world—especially where the death penalty is routinely applied these children face severe emotional and social challenges that are often overlooked. Recognising this gap, the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child dedicated its 2011 General Discussion Day to the issue of "Children of Incarcerated Parents." Amnesty International submitted a report emphasising the significant impact a parent's death sentence has on children, particularly in contexts where secrecy surrounds death row detention and executions, practices that frequently violate international standards. The discussion made it clear that the perspectives of these children have long been neglected by both supporters and opponents of the death penalty (Kearney, 2012). The Islamic Republic of Iran has failed to take measures to mitigate the collateral effects of executions on families, especially children, in breach of its obligations under the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) and the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC). The State party's failure to provide support or protection to the surviving family members of executed prisoners constitutes a grave violation of their social and economic rights, as well as the principle of the best interests of the child.

4.2 Alleged Charges and Economic Inequality: A Human Rights Perspective

Of the 102 documented executions of Baloch individuals in the reporting period, 75 were related to drug offences, 21 were for murder/Qisas, and 5 involved vague charges related to "security threats" or "corruption on earth" (efsad fel-arz) (Figure 2). This breakdown reveals patterns not only of legal categorisation but also of systemic inequality, socioeconomic vulnerability, and discriminatory application of criminal law.

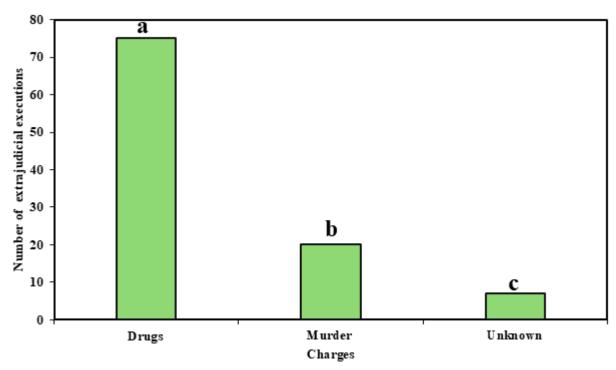


Figure 2: Number of Baloch individuals extrajudicially executed in Iran under various alleged charges in 2024. The highest numbers of executions were reportedly carried out under drug-related and murder charges. Different lowercase letters above the bars indicate statistically significant differences among the months (p < 0.05).

The high number of drug-related executions among Baloch prisoners must be understood within the broader context of structural poverty and geographic marginalisation. Sistan and Balochistan—home to the Baloch ethnic minority—is one of Iran's poorest and most underdeveloped provinces (Alblooshi, S. A. 2018). With poverty rates estimated at 55% or higher, many individuals are forced into illicit economies to survive. The province's location along a central international narcotics corridor, used to traffic Afghan opiates through Iran to global markets, increases the risk of exposure to drug-related activity, especially for those with no access to sustainable livelihoods (Jain, S. 2018).

According to credible documentation by Iran Human Rights, the 2017 amendment to Iran's Anti-Narcotics Law, which raised the thresholds for death-eligible drug quantities, has not been applied consistently, particularly in Baloch cases (Iran Human Rights & ECPM, 2025). While this amendment was intended to reduce the number of executions, in practice, authorities continue to sentence Baloch individuals to death for non-violent drug offences involving quantities below the new thresholds. This inconsistency raises serious concerns of

ethnic discrimination and judicial arbitrariness, both of which violate Iran's obligations under the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), particularly Articles 6 (right to life), 14 (right to a fair trial), and 26 (prohibition of discrimination).

The murder/Qisas cases similarly suffer from a lack of judicial due process. In many cases, Baloch defendants are tried without adequate legal representation, translation, or impartial investigations. The five instances charged under *efsad fel-arz* or "security-related" labels are especially troubling, as these charges are vaguely defined, often politically motivated, and carry mandatory death penalties, despite not meeting the "most serious crimes" threshold under international law.

In sum, the high number of capital punishments among Baloch individuals—particularly for non-violent drug offences—reflects a combination of systemic poverty, discriminatory law enforcement, and failure to meet minimum international fair trial standards. Rather than addressing the root causes of drug trafficking and economic exclusion, the Iranian authorities resort to disproportionate and punitive measures that excessively impact marginalised ethnic communities.

4.3 Age Distribution and Socioeconomic Consequences of State Executions

The age range of the 102 documented Baloch individuals executed in 2024 spans from 21 to 61 years, with an average age of 35.2 years (Figure 3). Notably, over 52% were in their twenties or early thirties (Figure 3), a stage of life considered the most economically productive and socially vital for family and community stability. This demographic trend carries grave implications for the socioeconomic rights of their families and communities. The execution of individuals in their prime earning years results in an immediate and long-term loss of household income, often leaving families—particularly wives, children, and elderly parents—without a breadwinner. This economic vacuum deepens cycles of poverty and exclusion in an already underdeveloped region, where access to education, healthcare, and employment is severely limited.

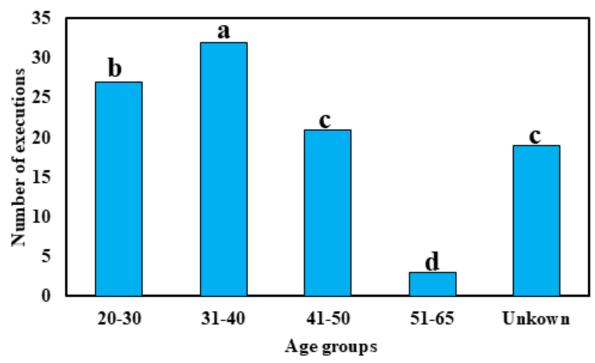


Figure 3: Number of extrajudicial executions in Sistan and Baluchestan in 2024 based on age groups. The age groups 31-40 and 20-30 faced the highest number of executions. Different lowercase letters above the bars indicate statistically significant differences among the months (p < 0.05).

From a human rights perspective, these executions contribute to the collective punishment of families, violating the principles enshrined in international instruments such as the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), which guarantees the right to an adequate standard of living (Article 11) and the right to work (Article 6). The State's failure to provide economic and social support to the families of executed individuals further exacerbates structural discrimination against the Baloch ethnic minority.

Additionally, the targeting of young adult men—who often bear primary responsibility for supporting extended families in Baloch culture—raises concerns about ethnic profiling and indirect discrimination. In many of these cases, the executions occurred without full observance of fair trial guarantees, further compounding the injustice experienced by the victims' dependents.

The broader impact is also demographic. The systematic execution of young men from an already marginalised community contributes to social disintegration, weakens community resilience, and deprives Baloch society of future leaders, workers, and parents. It represents not only a violation of individual rights but also an attack on the social fabric of the Baloch population.

4.4 Regional Origins and Ethnic Targeting

Among the 102 documented cases of executions in 2024, most individuals hailed from Sistan and Baluchestan province, Iran's poorest and most ethnically distinct region. The highest number came from Zahedan (42 cases), followed by Zabol (12), Iranshahr (6), Sarbaz (6), and Khash (5)—all towns with predominantly Baloch populations. This geographic clustering of executions is not incidental. It reflects the systematic overrepresentation of Baloch individuals in capital punishment statistics, which raises urgent concerns about ethnic discrimination in Iran's criminal justice system. While the Baloch comprise only around 5–6% of Iran's total population (Dashti, 2017; Rehman, 2014), they consistently account for a disproportionately high percentage of executions—a trend confirmed by independent monitoring groups, including Iran Human Rights and Amnesty International.

The targeted nature of executions in these specific locations, rather than being spread across the country in line with population distribution or crime rates, points to discriminatory state practices. This violates the principle of non-discrimination under international law, particularly Article 26 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), which prohibits discrimination based on ethnic or national origin. Furthermore, Sistan and Baluchestan suffer from chronic underinvestment, neglected infrastructure, and state security policies that prioritise repression over development. In this context, the use of the death penalty disproportionately against individuals from this region reinforces structural marginalisation and fosters a climate of fear and collective punishment.

The executions also reflect more profound sociopolitical marginalisation of the Baloch people. Baloch individuals are more likely to be subjected to arbitrary arrest, torture, coerced confessions, and unfair trials—often conducted in Farsi without adequate translation or legal assistance, in violation of Article 14 of the ICCPR (right to a fair trial). Many families report

that they were not informed of trial proceedings or execution dates, depriving them of even minimal procedural transparency or avenues for appeal or clemency.

4.5 Execution Sites and Barriers to Oversight

The executions of Baloch prisoners in 2024 took place across 12 different provinces, with the highest numbers occurring in Balochistan (25 cases), South Khorasan (17), Kerman (14), Yazd (10), Hormozgan (7), Razavi Khorasan (6), Fars (4), Alborz (4), Isfahan (3), Golestan (3), Zanjan (1) and Semnan (1) (Figure 4).

This geographical dispersion—often involving the relocation of detainees from their home provinces to distant prisons hundreds of kilometres away—raises serious human rights concerns. Such transfers severely limit access to family visits, legal counsel, and independent monitoring. For families already living in poverty, the long-distance travel required to visit loved ones is often financially and logistically impossible. As a result, prisoners are frequently deprived of regular contact with their families, in violation of Rule 58 of the UN Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners (the Nelson Mandela Rules), which affirms the right of prisoners to communicate with and be visited by family.

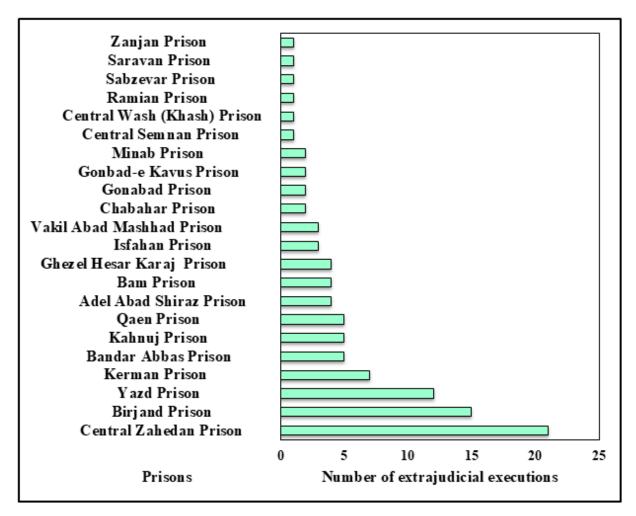


Figure 4: Number of executions that took place in various prisons across Iran in different months of 2024. The highest numbers of executions were recorded in Central Zahedan, Birjand, and Yazd prisons.

Relocation also has the effect of isolating prisoners from public scrutiny and independent observers, including journalists and human rights monitors. Amnesty International has previously documented how such practices facilitate secrecy, reduce transparency, and increase the risk of torture, ill-treatment, and arbitrary execution, mainly when death sentences are carried out without prior notice to lawyers or relatives (Amnesty International, 2025).

Furthermore, executing individuals outside their province of origin disproportionately affects ethnic minorities such as the Baloch, many of whom face language barriers and lack access to

Farsi-speaking legal representatives in distant provinces. This heightens concerns of discrimination and denial of fair trial rights, as guaranteed by Article 14 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR).

The dispersion of executions also appears intended to fragment and suppress collective resistance, making it more difficult for communities and advocacy groups to organise around cases or demand accountability. This strategy of dispersal echoes broader state efforts to marginalise ethnic minority voices and conceal patterns of abuse behind prison walls.

4.6 Monthly Trends in Executions: A Tool of Suppression Amid Political Unrest

The data reveal a sharp increase in executions during October and April (15 executions each) and particularly December (18 executions) of 2024 (Figure 5). Human rights monitors and advocacy groups believe this alarming surge is not coincidental, but rather part of a deliberate and systematic strategy by the Iranian authorities to respond to Baloch protests and Baloch armed resistance groups' operations and to send an alarming message to regions experiencing civil unrest.

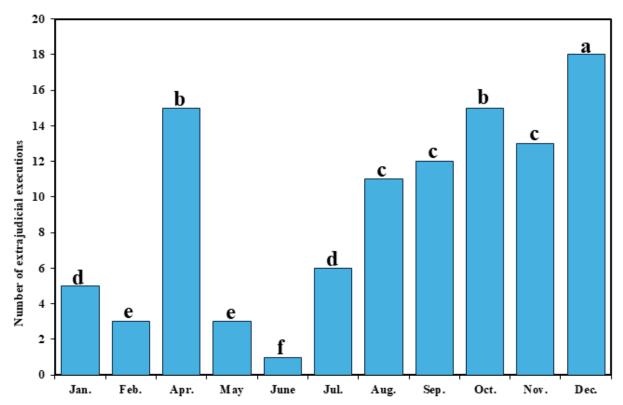


Figure 5: Number of executions of Baloch individuals in different months of 2024. The highest numbers of executions were recorded in December, October, and April. Different lowercase letters above the bars indicate statistically significant differences among the months (p < 0.05).

In December, an increase in executions appears closely linked to the government's efforts to suppress growing protests in Sistan and Balochistan province. Instead of addressing the root causes of the unrest or engaging in meaningful dialogue with the local Baloch population, the Iranian authorities responded with increased use of the death penalty as an instrument of fear and retaliation. The timing and concentration of executions in December suggest a dual motive: fulfilling the judicial targets, a pattern observed in previous years, and reasserting state control through extrajudicial punishment. The majority of those executed were from ethnic and religious minority communities, particularly Baloch prisoners, further highlighting the discriminatory and disproportionate use of capital punishment against marginalised groups.

This pattern reflects a broader trend in the Islamic Republic of Iran, where the death penalty is often used not merely as a form of criminal punishment, but as a political weapon to silence dissent, intimidate communities, and maintain authoritarian control—in flagrant violation of

international human rights law, including Iran's obligations under the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR).

4.7 Uninvestigated Cases: Secret Executions and the Erosion of Transparency and Due Process

At least seven recorded execution cases during the reporting period lack basic identifying information such as age, marital status, or even the charges brought against the accused. This disturbing absence of data is indicative of a broader and deepening pattern in the Islamic Republic of Iran's judicial system: the increasing use of secret trials and unannounced executions, conducted in blatant violation of international standards of transparency, accountability, and the right to a fair trial.

According to Iran Human Rights (IHR) and corroborated by other independent monitoring groups, there has been a sharp rise in secret executions across the country, particularly within prisons located in peripheral provinces such as Sistan and Balochistan. Alarmingly, Baloch prisoners account for approximately 30% of these secret executions, despite constituting a much smaller percentage of Iran's total population. This staggering figure underscores the systemic targeting of ethnic and religious minorities and the use of the death penalty as a tool of discrimination and repression.

These secret executions are typically carried out without:

- Public announcements by judicial authorities,
- Notification to the prisoner's family or lawyer,
- Disclosure of legal charges or trial proceedings,
- The right to appeal or seek clemency.

Families often learn about the execution after the fact, sometimes through unofficial prison sources or when called to collect the body. In several cases, bodies have not been returned at all, depriving families of the dignity of mourning and burial, and perpetuating a cycle of trauma and fear.

Such practices grossly violate Iran's obligations under international human rights law, particularly under the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), to which

Iran is a State Party. Articles 6 and 14 of the ICCPR guarantee the right to life, the right to a fair and public trial by a competent, independent, and impartial tribunal, and the right to be informed promptly and in detail of the charges against an accused.

The use of secret trials and executions represents not only a violation of individual rights but a broader erosion of judicial integrity and the rule of law in Iran. It serves to shield the authorities from public scrutiny, eliminate perceived political threats with impunity, and further marginalise vulnerable populations.

5. Conclusion

The execution of at least 102 Baloch individuals in Iran during 2024, such a high toll, is not merely a criminal justice statistic—it is a humanitarian crisis rooted in state policy. These deaths are not isolated acts of law enforcement; they are the consequence of a deeply discriminatory system that criminalises poverty, punishes ethnic identity, and exploits the death penalty as a tool of fear, marginalisation, and political control.

The vast majority of those executed were not violent criminals or leaders of narcotics networks—they were young men, often fathers and sole bread providers for their families, trapped in a cycle of poverty imposed by decades of underinvestment and state neglect in Sistan and Baluchestan. Their so-called "crimes"—usually small-scale drug transportation—are often acts of desperation, committed in the absence of any viable economic alternatives. Their trials, in many cases, failed the most basic standards of fairness: they were denied access to independent counsel, subjected to torture, denied interpretation into their native Balochi language, and sentenced to death in opaque, fast-tracked hearings. This constitutes a grave breach of due process and violates multiple provisions of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) to which Iran is a State Party.

What is even more disturbing is the Iranian State's use of executions not as a matter of justice, but as an instrument of political strategy. The data show a spike in executions following protests in Baloch-majority areas, suggesting that capital punishment is being deployed as a weapon of collective punishment and social control, sending a violent message to those who dare to speak out. The relocation of prisoners across provinces, denial of access to families and lawyers, and the rising incidence of secret executions reflect an alarming erosion of transparency, due process, and accountability in Iran's penal system.

From a human rights perspective, these practices are indefensible. They represent violations not only of the right to life (Article 6 ICCPR) and fair trial (Article 14), but also of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), the Convention Against Torture (CAT), and Iran's constitutional commitments to equality and dignity. The impact extends far beyond the prison walls: every execution inflicts irreversible harm on spouses, children, and communities already struggling under the weight of economic exclusion and social stigma. The

Baloch children left behind by these state killings are forced into dangerous labour and denied education, deepening cycles of intergenerational poverty and despair.

This is not justice; it is structural violence masquerading as law.

The international community must no longer turn a blind eye to this issue. We call on:

- The Islamic Republic of Iran to immediately impose a moratorium on all executions, particularly for non-violent drug offences; to ensure access to fair trials, independent legal representation, and interpreters; and to end the targeting of ethnic and religious minorities in its judicial and security practices.
- The United Nations and its human rights mechanisms should intensify monitoring and reporting on Iran.
- To use of the death penalty and appoint an independent fact-finding mission focusing on executions of ethnic minorities.
- International donors and development agencies prioritise investment in education, health, and sustainable livelihoods in Sistan and Baluchestan as a means of breaking the structural conditions that fuel criminalisation.
- Civil society organisations amplify the voices of affected families, document abuses,
 and push for justice mechanisms that centre victims and survivors.

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