



November 30, 2022

His Excellency Volker Türk  
Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights  
Human Rights Council Branch  
United Nations Office at Geneva  
CH-1211 Geneva 10, Switzerland

Your Excellency High Commissioner Türk:

The American Psychological Association (APA) calls for the United Nations Human Rights Council to persevere with its independent process which should include investigative, reporting, and accountability functions to address reports of human rights violations in Iran. APA affirms the rights of Iranian women and girls, particularly their right to live free of persecution as articulated in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) and related conventions, protocols, and treaties. APA further affirms the rights of all Iranian people to protest the death of Mahsa (Jina) Amini and to demonstrate in support of their fundamental rights, guaranteed to all people by the UDHR and the subsequent implementation of related conventions and treaties.

The APA is the largest and oldest scientific and professional association of psychologists in the United States with over 133,000 health services psychologists, applied and academic researchers, and consultant members worldwide. APA's mission is to promote the advancement, communication, and application of psychological science and knowledge to benefit society and improve lives. The Association holds special consultative status with the United Nations (UN) Economic and Social Council, is associated with the Department of Global Communications, and supports teams of volunteer psychologists advocating for human rights at the UN in New York and Geneva.

APA members recognize that psychological science and applications are critical to human functioning at individual and societal levels. Psychologists have a crucial role in supporting global health, well-being, and human rights.

According to human rights monitoring groups, over 300 protesters in Iran have lost their lives,<sup>1</sup> at least 50 of whom have been children,<sup>2</sup> and countless more have endured serious injuries. At

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<sup>1</sup>Human rights activists in Iran. (2022, November 6) *Daily Statistics on Iran Protests*.  
[https://twitter.com/HRANA\\_English/status/1589217985457274880](https://twitter.com/HRANA_English/status/1589217985457274880).

<sup>2</sup> Fassihi, F. (2022, November 14). Stymied by protests, Iran unleashes its wrath on its youth. *New York Times*.  
<https://www.nytimes.com/2022/11/14/world/middleeast/iran-protests-children.html>

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least 14,000 people have been arrested, including many minors.<sup>3</sup> Our colleagues at the Psychology Coalition of NGOs at the United Nations (PCUN) have rightly highlighted that the violence suffered by protesters and detainees is likely to lead to severe distress and other psychological symptoms, including increased risk for suicidality and substance use.<sup>4</sup> Perception of governmental corruption aggravates other mental health conditions, including depression.<sup>5</sup> These war-like experiences can lead to toxic stress and associated harm to physical and mental health throughout the lifespan, particularly for children.<sup>6</sup> Moreover, there have been some reports that protesters have been detained in “psychological institutions” to “reform” them,<sup>7</sup> a clear violation of psychological ethics.

Furthermore, psychological science documents ways in which gender inequality contributes to greater health disparities, with women experiencing poorer health outcomes across their lifespan.<sup>8</sup> The World Health Organization is among the many recognized bodies emphasizing the ways in which gender inequality and discrimination put the health and well-being of women and girls at risk, including through laws and practices that restrict women’s access to resources and power, discriminatory attitudes of communities, high levels of violence, and harmful gender norms.<sup>9</sup> Societal health and well-being are inextricably linked to gender equity, with data indicating that gender equality is a primary driver of sustainable peace and effective peace processes, and evidence of links between structural inequalities and levels of societal violence. Gender equality – including the full participation of all women and men and all people being free of gender and sex discrimination – is required to realize the critical aims of the UN Sustainable Development Goals.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Fassihi, F.. (2022, November 14). Stymied by protests, Iran unleashes its wrath on its youth. *New York Times*. <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/11/14/world/middleeast/iran-protests-children.html>

<sup>4</sup> Garoff, F., Tingshög, P., Suvisaari, J., Lilja, E., & Castaneda, A. E. (2021). Iranian and Iraqi torture survivors in Finland and Sweden: findings from two population-based studies. *European journal of public health*, 31(3), 493-498; Ghahary, N. (2003). Sequelae of political torture: Narratives of trauma and resilience by Iranian torture survivors; Mirzaei, S., Alizadeh, H., Zarei, S. Z., & Wenzel, T. (2021). Psychosocial consequences of widespread of torture and sociopolitical pressure in Iran. *Social Medicine*, 14(1), 37-43.

<sup>5</sup> Zhang Y. (2022). The relationship between corruption perception and depression: A multiple mediation model. *Psychology research and behavior management*, 15, 1943–1954. <https://doi.org/10.2147/PRBM.S370045>.

<sup>6</sup> Samara, M., Hammuda, S., Vostanis, P., El-Khodary, B., & Al-Dewik, N. (2020). Children's prolonged exposure to the toxic stress of war trauma in the Middle East. *BMJ (Clinical research ed.)*, 371, m3155. <https://doi.org/10.1136/bmj.m3155>.

<sup>7</sup> CNN staff. (2022, October 12). Iranian official admits that student protesters are being taken to psychiatric institutions. *CNN*. <https://www.cnn.com/2022/10/12/middleeast/iran-schoolgirls-protests-institutions-intl>.

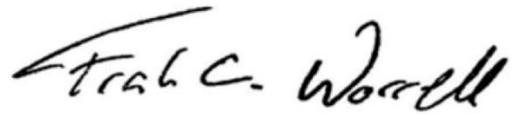
<sup>8</sup> Vigod, S. N., & Rochon, P. A. (2020). The impact of gender discrimination on a woman's mental health. *EClinicalMedicine*, 20, 100311. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.eclinm.2020.100311>; Heise, L., Greene, M. E., Oppen, N., Stavropoulou, M., Harper, C., Nascimento, M., Zewdie, D., & Gender Equality, Norms, and Health Steering Committee (2019). Gender inequality and restrictive gender norms: framing the challenges to health. *Lancet (London, England)*, 393(10189), 2440–2454. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736\(19\)30652-X](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736(19)30652-X)

<sup>9</sup> World Health Organization. (n.d.). *The future we expect: Women's health and gender equality*. World Health Organization. Retrieved November 29, 2022, from <https://www.who.int/news/item/28-06-2021-the-future-we-expect-women-s-health-and-gender-equality>.

<sup>10</sup> Hepp, P., Somerville, C., & Borisch, B. (2019). Accelerating the United Nation’s 2030 Global Agenda: Why prioritization of the gender goal is essential. *Global Policy*, 20(4), 677-685.

The UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Islamic Republic of Iran plays an important role but does not have the power or resources to undertake the necessary work. Thus, APA requests that the Human Rights Council investigate and address violence against protesters seeking to claim their basic rights as guaranteed in international law.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Frank C. Worrell". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, sweeping initial 'F'.

Frank C. Worrell, PhD  
APA President