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**STATEMENT BY MR. JAVAID REHMAN
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ON THE SITUATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS IN THE ISLAMIC
REPUBLIC OF IRAN**

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Mr/Madam Chair,

Excellencies, distinguished delegates, ladies and gentlemen,

I thank you for the opportunity to address the Third Committee of the General Assembly following my appointment as Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Islamic Republic of Iran. I have a deep respect for Iran, and was honoured to take up this appointment.

I address you today amidst mounting challenges for the Government of Iran, for its people, and for the international community which should be met by a constructive response which places international human rights law at its heart. I will elaborate on this message today.

Excellencies,

As you are aware, I was appointed following the sudden passing of my predecessor Asma Jahangir. I pay tribute to her significant and lasting contribution to human rights.

Following my appointment, I wrote to the Government to seek its cooperation and to request an invitation to visit the country. I reiterated my intention to seek constructive engagement during subsequent meetings with Government representatives. I welcome and value the cordial exchange of views during these meetings. The Government also provided extensive comments on my first report. I hope to build on this engagement.

The report before you was prepared during the initial stage of my mandate. It therefore does not aim to present an exhaustive picture of the human rights situation in Iran today, but instead sets out the methodology I will seek to employ, and presents some consistently documented issues of concern which I will seek to address in the course of my mandate. I met with various interlocutors including during a visit to Geneva in August. I also reviewed documentation received from various sources, reports of the international human rights mechanisms, and documentation and comments prepared by the State. I thank all those who provide information to my mandate which I will continue to review in accordance with the methodology set out in my report.

The report summarises issues which I will seek to address in the course of my mandate, some of which I will describe today. I will also highlight important developments since the finalisation of the report. In this regard, I wish to express my deepest condolences to the victims and their families, and to the Government and people of Iran, following an attack in Ahvaz last month, which reportedly left a number of people including children dead. I condemn the attack. Those responsible should be brought to justice in full compliance with international human rights law, including the right to a fair trial.

Excellencies,

In the report before you, I welcome the decision by Iran to amend its drug-trafficking law. Whilst expressing an urgent need for a transparent and fair review, I note that many death sentences have been amended as a result to lesser punishments, and the number of those executed in relation to drug offences has markedly reduced. I also reiterated concerns with respect to the violation of the right to life and the adherence to due process standards in Iran, in particular for juvenile offenders. It was thus with deep sadness and alarm that I report that Zeinab Sekaanvand was executed just three weeks ago in Iran. She was the fifth juvenile offender executed this year, and had been convicted of murdering her husband in 2012 when she was 17 years old. Claims that she was coerced into confessing to the killing, had been beaten following her arrest, and was a victim of domestic violence were reportedly not adequately examined during her trial.

Such executions continue despite the amendments to the Islamic Penal Code in 2013 which were also welcomed by observers at the time. The amendments allow judges to pronounce alternative sentences for juvenile offenders if there is uncertainty about their mental development at the time of the crime, or if they had not realized the nature of the crime committed. There are numerous other juvenile offenders currently on death row, including Mohammad Kalhori, Mehdi Khazaeian, Mohammad Haddadi and Pouria Tabaei. Last month, the Supreme Court confirmed the death sentence for another juvenile offender, Saleh Shariati, who was aged 16 years old at the time of his alleged crime.

I appeal to the Iranian authorities to abolish the practice of sentencing children to death, and to commute all death sentences issued against children in line with international law.

A further long-standing concern highlighted in my report relates to the treatment of religious and ethnic minorities in Iran, including the Bahá'í community. Three Kurdish prisoners, Zanyar and Loghman Moradi and Ramin Hossein Panahi were executed last month, amidst serious concerns that they had not received fair trials and had been tortured in detention. I call upon the Government to afford all people in the country equal rights, including during all stages of criminal proceedings, as set out in article 19 of the Constitution of Iran.

Excellencies,

The challenges facing people in Iran these past months have been illustrated by numerous protests across the country. The protests at the beginning of the year led to the death of some protestors following a crackdown by security forces. According to reports, the protests were fuelled by discontent relating to falling living standards, high inflation, widespread unemployment, and the allocation of public resources, as well as perceived underinvestment and marginalisation in the border regions and provinces. These are issues which I hope to address further in the context of the enjoyment of economic and social rights. I am also worried by the possible negative impact of sanctions on the enjoyment of such rights, and will also seek to assess this impact in the course of my mandate. The Special Rapporteur on the negative impact of unilateral coercive measures on the enjoyment of human rights also raised concerns in this regard.

Excellencies,

In the coming months, it will be important for the Government to both address the grievances underlying the protests and also safeguard the right to freedom of association and assembly. In this respect, I remain concerned about the fate of those arrested during the protests, and call upon the Government to ensure that all those imprisoned for peacefully exercising their freedom of opinion and expression are released.

I am also concerned by the arrest and imprisonment of those who have publically protested against compulsory veiling. Others who have advocated for the rights of women such as Dr. Farhad Meysami have also been arrested. Recently, I received very concerning reports about his health situation after he began a hunger strike in August in protest against his arrest and the restrictions placed upon his choice of legal counsel.

In challenging times, the right to freedom of opinion, expression, and access to information are all the more important. It was thus with concern that I learned that the social network Telegram was banned in May. I am also deeply disturbed by continuing reports of intimidation directed against media workers inside and outside of the country, including those working for the Persian Service of the British Broadcasting Company.

I am also gravely concerned by the recent arrests and treatment of a number of human rights defenders, other civil society actors, and lawyers in Iran. In June, the human rights lawyer Nasrin Sotoudeh was arrested, and last month her husband Reza Khandan was also arrested. They were charged with national security offences and have been imprisoned. I also received worrying reports of the denial of access to necessary medical treatment and the ill-treatment of a number of prisoners, including Narges Mohammadi who was accorded a brief three-day furlough last month; Mohammad Ali Taheri; Zeynab Jalalian; Ahmadreza Djalali; and Abdolfattah Soltani amongst others. In May, the Working Group on Arbitrary Detention found that the deprivation of liberty of Arash Sadeghi was arbitrary and called for his release whilst drawing attention to the urgent risk of harm to his health.

It is also worth recalling that the Working Group issued an opinion last month concluding that the deprivation of liberty of foreign national Xiyue Wang was arbitrary. This follows concerns consistently raised about the arbitrary deprivation of liberty of a number of dual and foreign nationals in the country.

Excellencies,

Before ending my statement, I wish to express regret that some of my colleagues will not present their report in person this year owing to the rejection of limited proposed scheduling changes. I hope this situation will improve.

I will conclude by underlining my belief that respect for human rights should be at the heart of a response to the challenges faced today. Accordingly, I reiterate my desire to engage with

the Government and to build upon the cordial cooperation extended to me thus far despite potentially diverging views, including on the mandate itself.

In this respect, I will do my utmost to constructively provide the Government and relevant interlocutors with information, analysis, and recommendations aimed at supporting incremental and positive change in the protection of human rights in Iran. This, I firmly believe, is a goal that we all share.

Thank you,