

# URGENT ACTION

## KURDISH ACTIVIST AT RISK OF IMMINENT EXECUTION

Humanitarian worker and human rights defender Pakhshan Azizi, from Iran's oppressed Kurdish minority, is at risk of imminent execution. On 5 February, her lawyers were notified that Branch Nine of the Supreme Court rejected her request for judicial review. In July 2024, a Revolutionary Court sentenced her to death following a grossly unfair trial solely in relation to her peaceful humanitarian and human rights activities. In January 2025, the Supreme Court upheld the sentence. Her allegations of torture and other ill-treatment were never investigated.

### TAKE ACTION: WRITE AN APPEAL IN YOUR OWN WORDS OR USE THIS MODEL LETTER

*Head of judiciary, Gholamhossein Mohseni Ejei, c/o Embassy of Iran to the Union Nations in Geneva  
Chemin du Petit-Saconnex 28, 1209 Geneva, Switzerland*

*Dear Mr Gholamhossein Mohseni Ejei,*

*Humanitarian aid worker and human rights defender **Pakhshan Azizi**, 40, from Iran's oppressed Kurdish ethnic minority, is at risk of imminent execution after Branch Nine of the Supreme Court rejected her request for judicial review on 25 January, and notified her lawyers of their decision two weeks later on 5 February 2025. She had filed a request for judicial review after Branch 39 of the Supreme Court upheld her conviction and death sentence in early January 2025. Her conviction, which included "armed rebellion against the state" (baghi), was solely in relation to her peaceful human rights and humanitarian activities, including her work between 2014 and 2022 providing humanitarian support to women and children displaced following attacks by the Islamic State (IS) armed group and sheltering in camps in northeast Syria. The Revolutionary Court, which convicted and sentenced her to death in July 2024, cited as "evidence" of criminal activity Pakhshan Azizi's 2009 arrest, as a university student, at a protest against the execution of an Iranian Kurdish man; and her support to families seeking truth and justice for the unlawful killings of their loved ones during 2022 nationwide protests. Pakhshan Azizi is being held in the women's ward of Tehran's Evin prison.*

*According to informed sources, following her arrest in August 2023, Pakhshan Azizi was subjected to torture and other ill-treatment, including gender-based violence, was repeatedly told that she had no right to live and threatened with execution in order to compel her to make forced "confessions" of having ties to Kurdish opposition groups, which she repeatedly denied. Pakhshan Azizi's trial in 2024 was grossly unfair. She was denied adequate time and facilities to prepare her defence. She was only permitted a few phone calls with her chosen lawyers about three weeks before her trial commenced, and met with them for the first time at trial. In addition, the courts have repeatedly failed to present any credible evidence of her alleged membership in Kurdish opposition groups. Branch 39 of the Supreme Court even erroneously claimed in its ruling that she was a member of the IS, and Branch Nine alleged her membership in the Kurdistan Democratic Party of Iran by citing state media reports as proof.*

***I urge you to immediately halt any plans to execute Pakhshan Azizi, quash her conviction and death sentence, and release her immediately and unconditionally, as she is held solely for her peaceful humanitarian work and human rights activism. Pending her release, provide her with adequate healthcare and regular access to family and lawyers; protect her from further torture and other ill-treatment; and order an independent, effective and impartial investigation into her torture allegations, bringing anyone suspected of criminal responsibility to justice in fair trials without resort to the death penalty. Also, immediately establish an official moratorium on executions with a view to abolishing the death penalty.***

*Yours sincerely,*

## ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

On 4 August 2023, agents from the Ministry of Intelligence arbitrarily arrested Pakhshan Azizi in Tehran and transferred her to section 209 of Evin prison, which is under the control of the Ministry of Intelligence, and held her there in prolonged solitary confinement for five months without access to a lawyer and her family. Pakhshan Azizi was tried before Branch 26 of the Revolutionary Court over two trial sessions on 28 May and 16 June 2024. In addition to convicting Pakhshan Azizi of “armed rebellion against the state” (*baghi*), the Revolutionary Court also sentenced Pakhshan Azizi to four years in prison on the national security related offence of “membership of an opposition group [against] the country (PJAK) [Free Life Party of Kurdistan]”. In its ruling upholding Pakhshan Azizi’s conviction and death sentence in early January 2025, Branch 39 of the Supreme Court asserted, without citing any evidence, that Pakhshan Azizi was a member of the Islamic State (IS) armed group. In a screen shot on X (formerly Twitter) from 6 February 2025, one of her lawyers posted about the ruling of Branch Nine of the Supreme Court rejecting Pakhshan Azizi’s request for judicial review, noting: “It is astonishing that this time, Branch Nine not only failed to correct the [aforementioned] mistake made by Branch 39 but also made another error by considering Ms. Pakhshan Azizi as a member of the [Kurdistan] Democratic [Party of Iran]”. In the verdict, Branch Nine of the Supreme Court did not present any evidence of her membership with the Kurdistan Democratic Party of Iran, only referencing reports by Tasnim News Agency, which is affiliated with the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps. Amir Raesian further wrote that “these mistakes, all occurring within a single case, are not merely simple errors; rather, they indicate that the case was not even properly reviewed by the... [lower court] judges!” Pakhshan Azizi has repeatedly denied being a member of any Kurdish opposition group, and according to informed sources, provided the courts extensive evidence documenting her humanitarian work supporting women and children displaced following attacks by the IS and sheltering in camps in northeast Syria, including from the Kurdish Red Crescent and a Swiss humanitarian aid organization. In an interview with Iranian media on 24 July 2024 after the verdict was issued against Pakhshan Azizi, Amir Raesian reiterated that “not only has Ms [Pakhshan] Azizi never taken up armed operations, but ... from 1394 [2015/2016 on Georgian calendar] in effect because of the crimes of Da’esh [IS], she went to the area of Rojava [north-east] Syria, and due to being a social worker, she helped refugees and victims [of IS].” In the same interview, her lawyer also stated that “Even in the verdict itself, there is also no reference to any armed operations or armed confrontation involving Ms [Pakhshan] Azizi with any Iranian governmental or non-governmental entity.”

In reprisal for Pakhshan Azizi’s ongoing human rights activism from prison, authorities opened two new cases against her and have been denying her in-person family visits since early July 2024. They only permit her visits communicating through a glass screen and a phone, referred to as “cabin visits” in Persian, thereby denying physical contact with loved ones. In mid-August 2024, according to an informed source, authorities opened a case against Pakhshan Azizi for “rioting in prison” in connection to her activism surrounding the 2024 presidential elections in Iran. In a separate case, in October 2024, a criminal court in Tehran sentenced Pakhshan Azizi to six months in prison for protesting along with several others in the women’s ward of Evin prison against the authorities’ intensified use of the death penalty.

In the aftermath of the “Woman Life Freedom” uprising, Iranian authorities have intensified their use of the death penalty to instil fear among the population and tighten their grip on power. This escalation includes the use of the death penalty against oppressed ethnic minorities, including Baluchis and Kurds. At least two other woman, Kurdish dissident [Verisheh Moradi](#) and human rights defender [Sharifeh Mohammadi](#), are also under sentence death after Revolutionary Courts convicted them of “armed rebellion against the state” (*baghi*) in separate cases. In 2024, the authorities continued their execution spree, including against protesters, dissidents and ethnic minorities, again executing hundreds of people, many arbitrarily after grossly unfair trials held before Revolutionary Courts. Amnesty International opposes the death penalty in all cases without exception. The death penalty is a violation of the right to life as proclaimed in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the ultimate cruel, inhuman and degrading punishment. Ethnic minorities in Iran, including Kurds, face widespread discrimination, curtailing their access to education, employment, adequate housing and political office. Continued underinvestment in regions populated by ethnic minorities exacerbates poverty and marginalization. In 2024, security forces unlawfully killed and injured with impunity scores of unarmed Kurdish cross-border couriers (*kulbars*) between the Kurdistan regions of Iran and Iraq. Amnesty International has also repeatedly [documented](#) how the Iranian authorities target individuals from Iran’s Kurdish ethnic minority for arbitrary arrest and detention based on their real or perceived support for or association with Kurdish parties, and do not provide sufficient evidence of their direct or indirect involvement in internationally recognizable offences.

**PREFERRED LANGUAGE TO ADDRESS TARGET:** Persian, English, or your own language.

**PLEASE TAKE ACTION AS SOON AS POSSIBLE UNTIL:** 16 May 2025.

Please check with the Amnesty office in your country if you wish to send appeals after the deadline.

**NAME AND PREFERRED PRONOUN:** Pakhshan Azizi (her/she).

**LINK TO PREVIOUS UA:** <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/mde13/8585/2024/en/>.