



June 2018

**Submission to the foreign affairs parliamentary committee inquiry into the FCO's human rights work: Iran's harassment and persecution of BBC Persian Service journalists in London and their families in Iran**

- The National Union of Journalists in the UK and Ireland (NUJ) are submitting this evidence to the committee on behalf of NUJ members working at the BBC Persian Service.
- We welcome this parliamentary inquiry into the Foreign and Commonwealth Office's (FCO) human rights work, and we would like to assist the committee where possible. We can provide further information on request.
- We would be grateful to be able to provide oral evidence to the committee as part of this inquiry.

**Summary**

- For the first time in its history, the BBC has made an appeal to the United Nations (UN) Human Rights Council (HRC) in Geneva about protecting the human rights of BBC journalists and their families. This unprecedented move comes in response to years of persecution and harassment by the Iranian authorities.
- In 2017 the Iranian authorities escalated their actions by launching a criminal investigation into 152 current and former BBC Persian journalists, accusing them of conspiracy against national security. A court inside Evin prison in Tehran published the names and details of the 152 and imposed an asset freeze on all of them. This was an unprecedented collective punishment of journalists in Britain by the government of Iran and represents an attempt to muzzle journalists beyond Iran's borders.
- The BBC together with the National Union of Journalists and legal experts from Doughty Street Chambers have launched a joint campaign to defend BBC Persian journalists and urge Iran to stop the targeting, persecution and harassment.
- The campaign has continually called on the FCO, politicians and other influential figures to raise these issues with the Iranian authorities. The campaign has also enlisted the support of the UN special rapporteurs, on Iran and freedom of expression, to pursue the matter in their work and in their correspondence with the Iranian authorities. We continue to urge the FCO to call on Iran at every opportunity to end its harassment and persecution, and drop the criminal investigation and asset freeze.
- Senior BBC representatives and NUJ members have written to President Hassan Rouhani, the foreign minister Mohammad Javad Zarif, and UK-based ambassador Hamid Baeidinejad, calling on them to use their influence to help stop the targeting of BBC journalists and their families. There has been no response so far. We have also repeatedly asked the foreign secretary, Boris Johnson, to meet with the BBC staff affected so that they can brief him in person about their experiences of being targeted and the impact it has had on them and their families.
- We would urge members of the foreign affairs parliamentary committee to offer support to BBC Persian journalists and their families in their endeavour and to help us raise the issue with the government and other bodies at every opportunity.

## **BBC Persian Service**

1. The BBC Persian Service was launched in 1940 and it is one of the oldest of the BBC's non-English language services. In 2009, the BBC launched BBC Persian Television to complement its existing radio and online service, which is broadcast by satellite and is available online for the 100 million Persian speakers in Iran, Afghanistan and Tajikistan.
2. BBC Persian reaches an estimated international audience of 18 million every week and has won awards for its impartial coverage of events in Iran, including from the Association for International Broadcasting for its election coverage in 2009.
3. BBC Persian draws upon the BBC's global newsgathering operation and has journalists in key locations such as Beirut, Dushanbe, Irbil, Istanbul, Kabul, New York and Washington.
4. The service is available online, on TV and radio, and it connects with audiences via social media. For example, the service has 4.3m followers on Facebook, 2m followers on Instagram, 1.3m followers on Telegram messenger service and 1m followers on Twitter. The website [bbcpersian.com](http://bbcpersian.com) is the BBC's award-winning 24-hour online news and information service for Persian-speaking internet audiences.
5. As well as news and analysis, BBC Persian TV delivers a wide range of original factual programmes as well as music, arts and culture, science and technology, and sports. The original documentaries broadcast by the channel highlight the very best of Iranian and Afghan documentary-making.

## **The targeted harassment of BBC Persian journalists and their families**

6. When it was announced that the BBC was to expand the service and launch BBC Persian TV, many Iranian journalists applied for BBC jobs that were advertised openly on the BBC Persian website. At the time of the recruitment round in 2008 journalists employed by the BBC in London were able to travel to and from Iran without restriction, both to visit their family and for the purposes of reporting. After the launch of BBC Persian TV in 2009, Iranian officials were reported as saying the channel was a "security threat" and that "necessary" steps would be taken in response.
7. The first major wave of attacks against BBC Persian journalists started on the day of the presidential election in Iran in 2009. During the vote, the Iranian government attempted to jam the satellite broadcasts of BBC Persian TV. When the street protests started, Iranian news organisations started to run stories claiming that BBC Persian was inciting the protests, including the violent protests. In addition, the Iranian state television service interviewed protesters who said that BBC Persian TV had influenced them to take to the streets.
8. Less than a week after the election in 2009, the Iranian authorities started to expel foreign media correspondents from the country including the BBC correspondent in Tehran. At this time many BBC Persian staff became fearful of traveling to Iran because of the risk of arrest and they still feel unable to return to Iran today. As a consequence, many have not seen their families for almost a decade.
9. Since the elections in 2009, there have been repeated episodes of satellite jamming, which has coincided with key political events and/or followed BBC coverage of significant events. BBC Persian Television and BBC World News (the English-language channel) have both been jammed.
10. There have also been repeated incidents of harassment and intimidation against BBC Persian staff, their families or those accused of having links with them. For example, in September 2011, the Iranian authorities arrested 6 filmmakers and accused them of working for the BBC Persian Service. The arrests came one day after the service showed a documentary on Iran's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Khamenei.
11. One of the tactics employed against the journalists is the creation and spread of malicious and defamatory 'fake news' aimed at undermining the reputation of key BBC Persian staff. For example, in 2013, one BBC

Persian presenter was attacked by a newspaper in Iran, being falsely accused of infidelity, prostitution and "inappropriate relations".

### **The collective punishment of BBC journalists and their families**

12. In summer 2017, the Iranian government commenced a criminal investigation against journalists working for the BBC's Persian Service in London, alleging their work is a crime against national security. This has been accompanied by an asset-freezing injunction preventing 152 named individuals, comprising mainly of current and former BBC Persian staff, from buying or selling property inside Iran. The vast majority of those named individuals are UK nationals.
13. The injunction was initially set to remain in place until 20 December 2017 when the authorities would determine whether the criminal charges would be brought. However, the injunction continues to apply pending a later decision.
14. This recent escalation (the criminal investigation and assets freeze) raises grave concerns about the personal safety and human rights of BBC Persian Service journalists, and it has led to an urgent appeal by the BBC to the UN and international community.
15. The harassment has included cases of arbitrary arrest and detention of family members related to BBC Persian staff, the confiscation of family members' passports and travel bans imposed on family members attempting to leave Iran (the bans have been imposed in order to prevent them from seeing their relatives working for the BBC Persian Service). Other examples of harassment have included surveillance, and the spread of fake, defamatory news stories designed to undermine the reputation of BBC Persian staff and their families.

### **The impact on journalists**

16. The NUJ chapel at BBC Persian have conducted a staff survey of those named on the asset-freezing injunction in order to determine its impact. In addition, personal testimony from affected journalists has been collected and anonymised for the purposes of the UN complaint and to raise awareness.
17. The survey results show there has been a concerted attempt to have a chilling effect on freedom of speech, and demonstrates a distinct pattern of persecution. The personal experiences and testimony of staff clearly shows the restrictions that have been placed on their ability to exercise their basic human rights.
18. Many of the BBC Persian staff have expressed an understandable and legitimate concern about the risk of further harassment and reprisals if they speak out – and for this reason, we are concerned that the survey results are only a partial picture of the actual impact of the harassment and persecution. Nevertheless, of the 96 responses (from the 152 people listed on the injunction), the results of the survey reveal that:
  - 86 of the survey respondents had suffered harassment themselves
  - 45 said their parents had been questioned/interrogated by the authorities
  - 40 said their brother or sister had been questioned/interrogated by the authorities
  - 47 said their friends had been questioned/interrogated by the authorities
  - 44 reported they had been threatened
  - 10 said that people closely associated with BBC Persian staff had been jailed
  - 34 said they had lost elderly parents and were unable to see them before they died
  - 48 said they had lost loved ones and were unable to see them before they died
  - 59 said they had been attacked in the press with false and defamatory allegations
  - 58 said they had been attacked on social media with false and defamatory allegations
  - 44 had been accused of sexual impropriety
  - 69 said the injunctions had affected their inheritance
  - 43 said the injunction had affected their rights to property.

19. When journalists started to work for BBC Persian there was no indication that there would be detrimental ramifications -

"...I applied for a feature producer job in BBC Persian. My only aim was to do TV production in a professional environment like BBC where I could learn and develop more skills. I had no idea I wouldn't be able to go back home and did not see any of the harassments and problems coming. In short, I did not sign up for any of this but also when I left home I was not prepared for any of this."

20. The threat of family members being taken in for questioning is an arbitrary and menacing form of intimidation. Many family members of BBC Persian staff have been called in several times. At each of the interrogations, family members were urged to ask their relatives in London to stop working for BBC Persian.

"My dad has been interrogated many times by the authorities in Iran. Each time it has lasted up to 5 hours. He used to be very anxious about it. Every time his phone rang he used to think it was the authorities wanting to ask him over to the ministry of information for interrogation."

21. At least 44 BBC Persian staff members have said their family members have lost their jobs or businesses as a result of the intimidation carried out by the Iranian authorities. Family members' "business certificates" have been threatened with being revoked, putting at risk their livelihood and their ability to conduct their business. Others have been refused or denied jobs, sometimes the explicit reason that has been stated has been their connection with a BBC journalist.

22. Many BBC Persian staff have spoken of the emotional trauma they have suffered as the result of not being able to see their family and, in particular, not being able to attend to parents and other relatives who are ill, or be present at their parents' death. Their inability to attend funerals and properly grieve their loss alongside other family members has been particularly traumatic. One journalist has said:

"I constantly live in the fear that something might happen to my mother or father and I cannot be there for them".

23. The Iranian intelligence agencies have also confiscated the passports of some BBC Persian journalists' parents in an attempt to prevent them from travelling to Britain or a third country to meet as a family. Others have reported how their parents were arbitrarily stopped and taken in for questioning after family visits had taken place in the UK or in another country. One journalist said that the travel ban imposed on their family was explicitly linked by the judge to the journalists' work at the BBC -

"[The judge], clearly told my father that my work as a journalist for the BBC is the reason why my parents were banned from leaving the country. He said although my parents haven't committed the 'crime' themselves, but they had the power to stop me."

24. Surveillance of telephone communications further interrupts contact between family members. As one journalist explained:

"For a long period - almost a year - I couldn't even talk freely to my family on the phone. My parent's telephone line was tapped. The Iranian authorities were listening to all their conversations. Not only with me but anyone else they were talking to on the phone. My father would call me from pay as you go mobile phone registered [in another name]. He would change them regularly."

25. One journalist explained how private conversations between his relatives over the telephone abroad would be reported back to his parents by anonymous callers. In another incident, his brother received an anonymous call and was played a recording of a conversation that the BBC Persian staff member had on the phone with their mother. He explained that it:

"was rather a show of force, to prove how closely my family members were under surveillance, and how they could be harassed at any time."

26. Another journalist explained how his father, when interrogated in Iran, would be given specific details of where the journalist had been in London. These actions by the authorities has the effect of interfering with the right to privacy and family life and it is clearly intended to place further pressure upon BBC Persian staff to stop their work as BBC journalists.
27. The threats faced by BBC Persian staff, making it impossible for them to safely return to Iran, combined with the prevention of travel by family members who remain in Iran, has had a deleterious effect upon their privacy and ability to have a family life. As one journalist explained:

"This means that my children haven't met most of their Iranian relatives and they only know them through Skype. My 4-year-old daughter gets upset when she sees her cousins at my parents' house in Tehran while all she gets is a blurred picture on a monitor."

28. Another journalist has said:

"I could not be with my family during their sadness or their happiness for about a decade. I can't even recognise my family's new generation".

29. A third journalist said:

"I lost my father six years ago...and every single day I think about the fact I couldn't be there to hold his hand and say goodbye."

30. Some journalists said they avoid contact with family members in order to protect them from the harassment. Others reported that some friends and family had cut off their relationship in order to avoid being harassed or losing work and business opportunities. As one journalist said:

"[s]ome relatives and friends have cut their relationship fearing it might be dangerous for them. And I don't blame them."

31. In addition, many journalists themselves have been individually targeted. At least ten people have been jailed in Iran because of their connection with the BBC Persian Service, including a former BBC employee who had resigned and returned home to Iran, with jail terms varying between two to six weeks.
32. Many BBC Persian staff report suffering psychological and emotional trauma due to the concerns they have about the safety of their family members in Iran, with reports of depression and anxiety arising from their concern that, at any moment, their family may be targeted or physically harmed.
33. BBC Persian service journalists have also reported feeling physically unsafe and threatened even while living abroad, worried for their own safety as well as for their family's safety when living abroad. Some BBC Persian staff have been approached at home in London by unidentified Farsi-speaking men. The stress has taken its toll on the health of some of the staff and their families. One journalist explained:

"...even here in London, we do not feel safe. Anytime we receive a phone call from an unknown number we feel alarmed. Almost all of us are constantly under cyber-attack. Time to time, when we think somebody is following us, we feel alarmed that s/he might be an Iranian agent."

34. The persecution and public attacks on women working at BBC Persian has often been sexualised. Of the 44 BBC Persian staff who reported being accused in the Iranian media of having extramarital relations or other sexual impropriety, the great majority are women. In one case, the media in Iran extensively reported a fake news story that the head of BBC Persian Service was having an affair with one of the presenters.

35. Some of the fake news stories about women journalists have involved graphic allegations, and in one instance a woman journalist was accused of being a lesbian, which is a crime in Iran, and the accusation was alongside a series of photo-shopped pictures shared online and on social media. Pornographic pictures have also been photo-shopped with the face of a BBC Persian reporter and sent to her teenage son. Several women reporters told us that these kind of public, sexual allegations were having an adverse impact not just upon them personally, but also for their families in Iran.
36. In addition, the 59 staff members who said they had been attacked in the press in Iran had been accused of being spies for the British government, being enemies of Iran and/or belonging to a Jewish or Baha'i conspiracy.
37. In respect of the injunction, 69 of the 96 respondents said they are likely to be disinherited and 43 said they have been unable to sell property in Iran. It is common in Iran for parents to transfer family property to their children before they pass away.
38. One reporter explained that her parent's home was listed as being in her name, which has left her worried the authorities may confiscate their family home, prevent her parents from selling the home to use the funds towards their retirement and/or leave her parents homeless.
39. A number of BBC Persian staff have also reported that their siblings have also been unable to conduct any form of transaction in relation to their share of the family inheritance because of the injunction and that their widowed mothers are unable to benefit from the family estate. Many BBC Persian staff remain concerned about the impact this could have on the rest of their family.
40. One journalist said:
- "for example -God forbid- my father dies, my mother/siblings will not be able to access their inheritance, too."
41. For others, the injunction took effect during the process of sale of jointly-owned family property and their family was required to pay a fine because they were forced to withdraw from the sale. Targeting the assets of journalists and their families should be considered a serious escalation of harassment towards family members in Iran.
42. One journalist has said:
- "...when it comes to inheritance, basically, the injunction locks and freezes the whole process, not only for us, but also for my siblings and other members of my family. In other words, not only affects me, but also my family members as well. Apart from financial loss and effect, it has also caused a huge amount of stress and pressure on me, as all the time, I remember that my family members are under pressure and are losing or being prevented their money, just because of me and my job as a BBC journalist. Moreover, we believe that the Iranian authorities might go further and extend the injunction and freeze to other members of our families as well, or extend the prosecution to them."
43. Additionally, staff have raised the concerns that, even if they were to bow to pressure and leave the BBC, they will not avoid persecution. One journalist explained:
- "With this recent list and seeing the names of many people who are not working for the BBC anymore on there, I realised even if I leave the BBC to be able to visit home and be with my family, the problem will not be solved."
44. In another example, a male BBC journalist has said about the Iranian media:

"They have accused me of undermining Iran's national security and even of collaborating with foreign intelligence agencies. I am sure that if I get back to Iran I will be imprisoned based on these false allegations. My wife too, does not dare to go back to Iran. We are not sure if she will get arrested, but it is quite possible that the authorities will interrogate my wife and prevent her from leaving Iran."

45. In addition to the personal testimony compiled for the BBC's UN appeal (cited above), a group of NUJ members have given permission to the union to share their personal testimony and experiences as follows:
- a. "Shortly after the 2009 election uprising against the election results, my mother was diagnosed with cancer but I decided not to go back. Despite arrests of several journalists I returned but arrived a few hours too late. Four months earlier, my father had passed away. I was able to return to London but grappled with a severe depression for three years. The recent court order has practically deprived me of my assets and inheritance."
  - b. "First the officials summoned my dad and asked him to stop me from working for the BBC. Later, police stormed our house, confiscated my mother and brother's passports. My other brother was refused to run for the town council and later was temporarily banned from teaching at the university. For a while they were insisting on visiting me in a neighbouring country like Armenia 'just to have a chat'. Several attempts were made to hack my accounts. Fake stories were published claiming I was gay and an online harassment campaign started. And, now the asset freeze."
  - c. "What seemed at first a temporary restriction on us visiting Iran has turned to exile. My brother suffers from a chronic illness and in the past 7 years I have not been able to do anything but stare at my cell phone screen watching my parents melt away with pain. The nightmare of my parent's falling ill or dying without me having the chance to say goodbye has left me with no peace of mind. I have faced continuous online harassment by the Iranian cyber army. They have called me a spy and made unsubstantiated claims against my father."
  - d. "The harassment of my family members began in 2012. First my ex-husband who was in Iran was summoned to the intelligence service and had his passport confiscated. He was told to ask me to leave the BBC or he will divorce me. My niece studying in London and living with me was the next target. During her visit to Iran her passport was taken away and during several sessions with officials she was continuously asked about my life and my work. The trauma was so much that she has not returned to Iran since. Then they contacted my sister and questioned her every few months. My father had put a flat in my name but now he is not able to sell it if he needs the money."
  - e. "One of my parents was working for a regulatory government agency for over two decades, becoming a top expert in their field representing Iran in international forums. But soon after I joined the BBC the pressure and intimidation started. The security department of the agency falsely accused my parent of revealing national secrets, threatening to fire my parent and then prosecute them. Soon they forced my parent out of the job and did not even allow my parent to work in private firms active in that field."
  - f. "Completely fabricated and false stories about my personal life were planted on regime's propaganda websites. My father was summoned to the intelligent ministry and my uncle who is a well-known academic was prevented from continuing in his profession. But what upset me the most was when my son became the focal point. I received emails threatening my son, then just 10-11. They said they knew where his school was and they would kill him. Police confirmed that the emails were sent from Iran."
  - g. "In January 2012, security forces went to my parents' house and arrested my younger sister without any explanations. The day after, I had a message on my Facebook page from my sister who was in jail. We started a conversation and she said her interrogator wants to talk to me. I was terrified. He

wanted to know details about the inner workings of the BBC Persian Service. I told him I am not a spy. My sister was kept in solitary confinement for 17 nights."

46. The union is also aware that in one case in Iran, the elderly mother of a journalist was questioned at night by men in balaclavas, during which time she was forced to face the wall. The interrogators warned her that her son's life was at risk in London. In another case, a six-year old girl was called in for questioning regarding her sister working for the BBC and the sister of a TV presenter was kept in Iran's Evin prison in an attempt to blackmail the journalist to leave the BBC. When that didn't work, the presenter in London was asked by the sister's interrogator to work as a spy for the Iranian government.

## Appeal to the UN

47. In October 2017, the BBC World Service filed an urgent appeal with the UN Special Rapporteur on freedom of expression, David Kaye, and the late UN Special Rapporteur on human rights in Iran, Asma Jahangir. The grounds for the appeal were that BBC Persian staff were being targeted because of their work as journalists for the BBC.
48. The urgent appeal set out that the details of the harassment and arbitrary arrests, and the imposition of measures against journalists such as the criminalisation of their work, restrictions on freedom of movement, financial sanctions and the deprivation of property rights - each constituting separate human rights violations.
49. In response, David Kaye and Asma Jahangir said in a joint statement:

"We are concerned at recent reports that the action has now escalated to direct targeting of family members of BBC Persian staff. The measures are clearly aimed at targeting the BBC and at preventing journalists from continuing their legitimate work with BBC Persian."

50. When the BBC raised these issues at the UN Human Rights Council in March 2018, BBC Persian journalists addressed the council and one of them said:

"I joined the BBC Persian Service in 2008 for which I moved from Iran to the UK. To me, it was an easy decision. I think most journalists would dream about working for one of the most reputable news organizations in the world. More importantly, I wanted to be able to report freely, without being censored, without being told what to write and what not to write, without being worried about arrest or punishment, or possible risks for my family. But little did I know that the Iranian authorities won't leave me alone, even when I am outside the country. The intimidations started in 2009. Soon after the disputed presidential election which we covered like any other story at the BBC. But the Iranian authorities started to systematically harass us. The list is long. Many relatives were called in for interrogations from 90 year old fathers to 10 year old sisters; they were threatened that they would lose their jobs, pensions, right to travel, or that their child might be accidentally killed in a car crash in London. The authorities wanted to threaten us; that although we are not in Iran, they still have access to our loved ones back at home.

My case unfolded in May 2013, I called my elderly father on his mobile phone, and he immediately asked me to call him on my uncle's land line. I instantly knew that something was up. My father didn't want to speak on his phone because he was worried it might be bugged. He said he had been interrogated for a few hours. They wanted to know about me and my husband. They wanted my address and my phone number. They threatened that if I didn't give up my job, there would be consequences.

And there were... five months later, as he was about to board a flight to London to come and visit my new born child, his passport was confiscated. My mother's passport was also confiscated two weeks later, upon her return to Iran. For months, I didn't know whether I would ever get to see them again. I couldn't go home and they couldn't leave. For months, we didn't know how long our nightmare



was going to last. We spent most of that year in front of skype. Every time I hung up, I ran to my bedroom, away from my child, to cry.

Finally, after months of my parents going to every Intelligence Ministry's office and Courthouse, they managed to get an appointment with the Judge. In fact the judge said he watches BBC Persian and that I was a good reporter, but that my parents had to stop me. My father said: she never listened to me as a teenager; there is no way she would listen to me now. The judge said: you raised her, you can stop her. It was then that we found out that my parents were under a one year travel ban. Of course I couldn't believe it until I saw them again at the end of that year. This chapter of my story had a relatively happy ending.

Sadly, it hasn't been true for many of my colleagues. In one case, a mother was diagnosed with cancer, and her condition deteriorated so quickly that she was unable to travel to a third country to visit her son. She died in front of Skype. She raised my colleague as a single mum. He wasn't even able to carry her coffin...

In another case, a father had a stroke and developed dementia. He couldn't understand why his favourite daughter didn't go to visit him. Every time my colleague phoned, her father asked: when are you coming, I miss you! And the nightmare is always with us.

Every time a parent dies, we get together in London and hold a service in the memory of our colleagues' loved one in Iran. We do this, to offer support for a friend facing their painful loss simply because it is too dangerous to go home and mourn with those gathered around the grave. I personally fall into depression every time a colleague loses a loved one. I know one day, sooner or later, it will be my turn.

More recently, the asset freeze has created trouble for many colleagues. It effectively freezes inheritance for their entire family – no-one can buy or sell any assets connected to a BBC Persian named member of staff. This punishment is far reaching it's having a devastating effect on our brothers, our sisters and our wider families. The guilt we feel about the difficulties we've created for our relatives is difficult to describe.

My colleagues and I want our lives back. We want to be able to do our job without fear. My colleagues and I should not have to report threats to the police or look over our shoulders in London. We should not have to worry about sending our children to school on their own.

We want to be able to return to our country safely and to see our families. We want to be able to do all the things you take for granted: visit our parents, see our aunts and uncles, go to family weddings and to family funerals. We want to be able to visit our sick relatives before they die. I want my child to be able to see the country and to visit their grandparents – and to know their Iranian heritage.

We don't want our families to suffer because of our choice of profession – and just because we work for the BBC. The asset freeze is preventing many of our family members from benefiting from their lifetime of hard work and from passing it on to their children. This is an unacceptable sanction because of our work as journalists.

This is not just about our fundamental rights and those of our families – this is about the right to freedom of speech. It is about the right of Iranian citizens and the international community to receive objective and impartial information about current events in Iran as well as events around the world – free from the influence of the authorities. We are here to ask for your help. This abuse must come to an end.

Journalism is not a crime."

## Human Rights Council references to BBC Persian

51. The [Secretary-General's report](#) on the situation of human rights in the Islamic Republic of Iran (A/HRC/37/24) to HRC37 specifically mentioned the persecution of BBC Persian staff and their families and the fact that:

"special procedure mandate holders issued a statement calling upon the Islamic Republic of Iran to cease all legal action against the BBC staff and their families, and to end the use of repressive legislation against independent journalism, whether affiliated to the BBC or not."

52. The treatment of BBC Persian was also raised in the late [Asma Jahangir's report](#), she reports being "disturbed" by the accounts provided to her by BBC Persian staff.

53. In Iran's first formal response to the UN about BBC Persian, it said:

"The contents of this paragraph are based on inaccurate information and despite the detailed information on the freedom of journalists and the media, and the development of the volume of their activities and their number, in response to the previous report of the Special Rapporteur, the general allegations have been repeated, in absence of verification, without mentioning their sources. Allegations which are raised in these two paragraphs, without verification are not acceptable. In the Islamic Republic of Iran, in relation with communication media, the legal framework is observed and in accordance with current laws and regulations, any offence defined by the legislation, shall be met with legal constraints, after fair trial. The regulatory or arbitrary deterrent in this regard is based on the commission of a criminal act. Also the claim of harassment and threats against the family of the Iranian staff of the BBC News Agency is incorrect: because on the assumption that a person has committed a crime, in terms of the principle of personal prosecution and punishment for the perpetrator, taking action against his/her family is not conceivable.

It should be noted that 156 foreign media outlets in Iran, including BBC English and Arabic number 310 Active journalists, one third of whom are foreign nationals active in Iran.

On the other hand, it should be noted that the Persian BBC institute is not an independent media network, and its financial and political affiliation with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the British security agencies has been very serious and it has been challenged repeatedly even by British citizens. The political record of this network is obvious to all in the creation of social and political crises and colour revolutions in the opposition countries of the West. In the Islamic Republic of Iran, this network had committed several destructive activities beyond the sphere of media activities, especially in the sedition years 1998 and 2008, through the dissemination of false information, disturbing public opinion, insulting sanctities, provoking ethnicity and strengthening the circles of overthrow and terrorism, which resulted in serious criticism of the activities of this network in the country. Therefore, with regard to the continuation of such destructive activities beyond the media, the judge of the Prosecutor's Office issued a temporary judicial order to ban some of the BBC staff and their relatives activities, for further investigation, considering the traces discovered of suspected financial transactions of some employees and affiliates of this network."

54. During the HRC session in Geneva in March, the UK ambassador made a forceful statement in session about BBC Persian, calling upon Iran to drop the criminal case and immediately halt the persecution of BBC. We have fully welcomed the ambassador's support and wish to continue to collaborate at the UN level to call on Iran to stop targeting BBC journalists and their families.

## Working with the FCO, parliamentarians and UK representatives

55. The BBC, supported by the NUJ and Doughty Street Chambers, continues to ask the FCO, politicians and other influential figures to continue to call on the Iranian authorities to stop targeting BBC Persian journalists and their families, we are asking that UK government officials continue to raise these issues especially when visiting Iran or hosting Iranian representatives in the UK.

56. We are also seeking to work with the FCO, politicians and other influential figures to raise these issues on the international stage including at the UN, and to specifically to call upon Iran to drop the criminal investigation and asset freeze.
57. At the moment the asset-freezing injunction remains in place, the criminal investigation remains ongoing and BBC Persian staff and their families continue to have their rights violated.
58. We would encourage members of the foreign affairs parliamentary committee to support BBC Persian journalists and their families in seeking to stop the targeting and harassment.
59. We respectfully request that the committee raises these issues with the FCO, secretary of state and government ministers and seek a commitment that stopping the targeting and harassment is made a top priority as part of the FCO's human rights work.