



**PRESS RELEASE  
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**Urgent Appeal Filed with United Nations Experts concerning Iran’s Threats to BBC Persian Journalists**

Today, 18 December 2020, an Urgent Appeal has been filed with three United Nations experts on behalf of all BBC Persian staff. The Appeal details serious and credible death threats made to BBC Persian journalists in recent months, and further harassment of both BBC Persian staff and their families, including freezing of journalists’ assets and online attacks. It also highlights the fact that Iran has taken extra-territorial action – including within Europe – against individuals considered to be critical of the Iranian authorities.

The Iranian authorities have been systematically targeting BBC Persian journalists in the UK, and their families in Iran, since the service launched satellite television in 2009. The targeting and harassment escalated in 2017, when the Iranian authorities started criminal investigations into the activities of journalists and other staff working for BBC Persian, alleging their work constituted a crime against Iran's national security.

In tandem, the Iranian authorities introduced an injunction to freeze the assets of 152 named individuals – predominantly current and former BBC Persian staff – preventing them from buying, selling or inheriting property in Iran. The vast majority of those named are also UK nationals.

Over the past year, there has been a further escalation of harassment, following BBC Persian reporting on the unrest in Iran and government crackdowns on protests, and reporting on the government’s management of the Covid-19 pandemic.

In March 2020, BBC Persian presenter Rana Rahimpour [addressed the UN Human Rights Council](#), outlining the death threats and other threats made to her and her family. Four UN Special Rapporteurs issued a [statement](#) on 11 March 2020, noting that: “*Journalists working for the BBC Persian Service and other Farsi-language news outlets outside Iran have faced threats, criminal investigations, unlawful surveillance, freezing of assets, defamation and harassment by Iranian authorities. Several journalists have also been targeted for going public about the harassment and seeking protection from the UN.*” In relation to the death threats, they said: “*These allegations are extremely concerning and if confirmed, would indicate that*

*the Iranian authorities are prepared to use force extra-territorially, in violation of international law."*

However, today's Urgent Appeal makes clear that the harassment of BBC Persian journalists and their families have continued, and that more credible threats, including death threats, have been made in recent months. It has been filed with the UN Special Rapporteur on the Promotion and Protection of the Right to Freedom of Opinion and Expression, the UN Special Rapporteur on Human Rights in Iran, and the UN Special Rapporteur on Extrajudicial, Summary or Arbitrary Executions.

Barristers **Caoilfhionn Gallagher QC** and **Jennifer Robinson**, who act for the BBC World Service in respect of the threats and harassment against BBC Persian staff by Iran, said:

*"It is a matter of grave concern that BBC Persian journalists are receiving death threats simply for doing their jobs. These cross-border threats to the lives and security of journalists are particularly chilling given Iran's execution of journalist Ruhollah Zam earlier this week. Many more BBC Persian journalists are enduring other forms of systematic harassment, including threats to them and their families, their assets being frozen and abuse online. We call on the international community to condemn these threats and actions in the strongest terms, and to take robust action to ensure that BBC Persian journalists can report without fear."*

The BBC, NUJ and Doughty Street Chambers continue to engage with the international community and urge the Iranian authorities to cease all action against BBC Persian staff and their families.

**Jamie Angus, Director of the BBC World Service Group**, said:

*"We welcome the UN's consistent support for BBC Persian staff and their families and their condemnation of attacks on individuals by the Iranian authorities. We will continue to make our case to the world community until this completely unacceptable harassment ends."*

**Michelle Stanistreet, NUJ general secretary**, said:

*"The campaign of harassment against journalists by the Iranian authorities must stop, our members at the BBC Persian Service and Iran International continue to be subjected to horrendous intimidation. Last week the veteran editor-in-chief of Iran-e-Farda magazine, Kayvan Samimi, began his three-year prison term in Tehran and journalists' representatives including the International Federation of Journalists and the Association of Iranian Journalists have condemned his illegal imprisonment."*

*Journalism is not a crime. The Iranian government must stop targeting journalists and their families. The authorities will never be effective in their attempts to stop quality journalism or reporting in the public interest."*

**Ends.**