



A WEB OF IMPUNITY

THE KILLINGS IRAN'S INTERNET SHUTDOWN HID

**AMNESTY
INTERNATIONAL**



Amnesty International is a global movement of more than 7 million people who campaign for a world where human rights are enjoyed by all

Our vision is for every person to enjoy all the rights enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and other international human rights standards.

We are independent of any government, political ideology, economic interest or religion and are funded mainly by our membership and public donations.

© Amnesty International 2020

Except where otherwise noted, content in this document is licensed under a Creative Commons (attribution, non-commercial, no derivatives, international 4.0) licence.

<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/legalcode>

For more information please visit the permissions page on our website: www.amnesty.org

Where material is attributed to a copyright owner other than Amnesty International this material is not subject to the Creative Commons licence.

First published in 2020
by Amnesty International Ltd

INDEX: MDE 13/3308/2020

amnesty.org

**AMNESTY
INTERNATIONAL**



CONTENTS

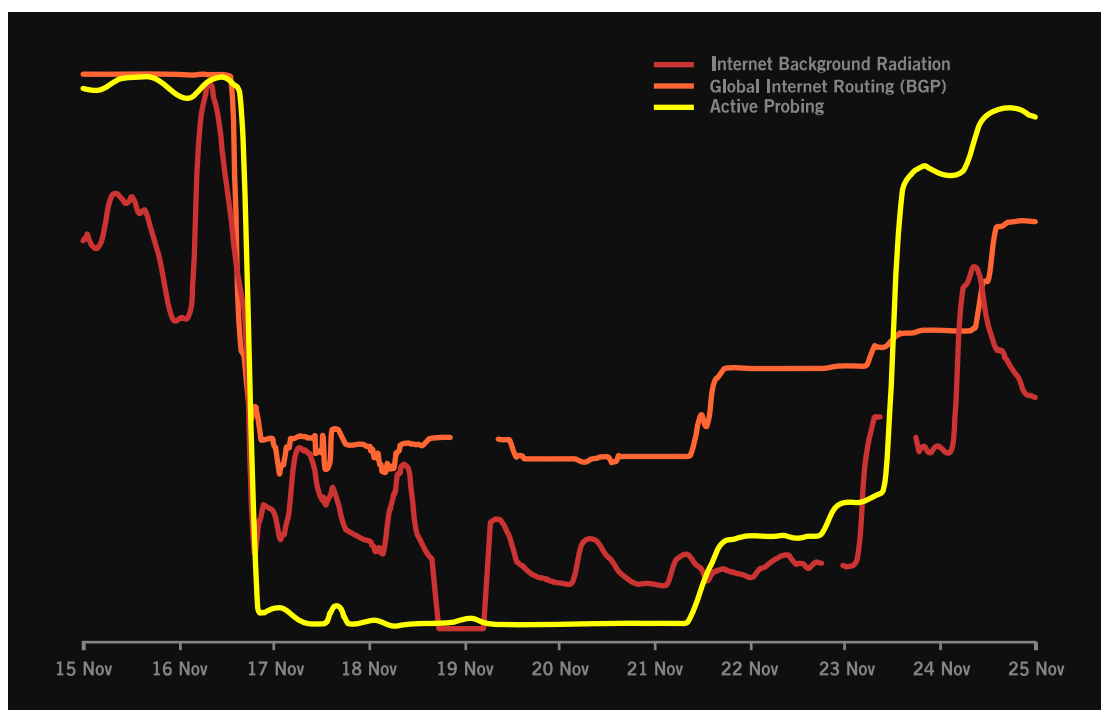
1. 2019 PROTESTS IN IRAN	4
2. INTERNET SHUTDOWN	4
3. UNLAWFUL KILLINGS OF PROTESTERS	5
4. WHAT IS AN INTERNET SHUTDOWN?	5
5. WHAT INTERNATIONAL HUMAN RIGHTS LAW SAYS ABOUT INTERNET SHUTDOWNS	6
6. OUR RECOMMENDATIONS	7

1. 2019 PROTESTS IN IRAN

On 15 November 2019, protests erupted across Iran following the government's overnight announcement of a significant increase in the price of fuel. Demonstrators voiced anger that the measure would crush poor people already struggling amid an economic crisis engulfing the country. Many also chanted slogans calling for a radical overhaul of the political system, including constitutional reforms and an end to the Islamic Republic system, and burned posters of Iran's current and former Supreme Leaders.

2. INTERNET SHUTDOWN

On 16 November, protests intensified in most cities across the country. In response, the Iranian authorities implemented a near-total countrywide internet blackout by ordering different internet service providers (ISPs) to shut down the internet. The Internet Outage Detection and Analysis (IODA) project based at University of California, San Diego, observed steady drops in signals which started in the afternoon. Cellular operators in Iran began to disconnect first at around 2 pm local time, followed by other operators. By 7pm, Iran had descended into darkness.



3. UNLAWFUL KILLINGS OF PROTESTERS

After thousands of hours of relentless fact-finding, Amnesty International recorded and verified the deaths of 304 people killed by the Iranian security services between 15 and 19 November 2019. More than 220 of these deaths took place within 48 hours of the internet shutting down on 16 November.

In Iran, as elsewhere, not only did the shutdown restrict access to information for people inside the country, it also stopped them from being able to share information with the rest of the world, thus obstructing research into the human rights violations and crimes committed, the identities of the perpetrators and the victims, and the real number of deaths.

4. WHAT IS AN INTERNET SHUTDOWN?

An internet shutdown happens when an institution—usually a government—intentionally disrupts the internet or electronic communications, rendering them inaccessible or effectively unusable, for a specific population or within a specific region.

An internet shutdown can be implemented across an entire state or territory, or it can be implemented in specific sub-regions. Authorities may impose the shutdown in a variety of ways. They may slow down the internet to render access ineffective. Alternatively, they may order cellular and other ISPs to shut down services. In Iran, the shutdown was implemented nationwide by the government ordering different providers to shut down access to the world wide web, even as the domestic internet remained online.

5. WHAT INTERNATIONAL HUMAN RIGHTS LAW SAYS ABOUT INTERNET SHUTDOWNS

Articles 19 and 21 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights guarantee the rights to freedom of expression and peaceful assembly. States parties must not block or hinder internet connectivity in relation to peaceful assemblies or to curb freedom of expression. The same applies to geo-targeted or technology-specific interference with connectivity or access to content. States should ensure that the activities of internet service providers and intermediaries do not unduly restrict assemblies or the privacy of assembly participants. Any restrictions on the operation of information dissemination systems must conform with the tests for restrictions on freedom of expression—notably, they should be legal, necessary, proportionate, and time-bound.

The United Nations Human Rights Council Resolution 32/13 of 2016 “condemned unequivocally measures to intentionally prevent or disrupt information online that are in violation of international human rights law.” In addition, in its General Comment 37 on the right to peaceful assembly, the UN Human Rights Committee unequivocally prohibits internet shutdowns that hinder peaceful assemblies.

In a joint report to the Human Rights Council in 2016, the UN Special Rapporteur on the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and association and the UN Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions stressed that the practice of blocking communications can have the effect of impeding the organization or publicizing of an assembly online. They stressed that internet shutdowns rarely satisfy the requirements of necessity and proportionality, rendering them unlawful restrictions of the right to freedom of peaceful assembly.

The blanket and near-total internet shutdown in Iran in November 2019 violated the rights to freedom of expression and peaceful assembly. The shutdown hid serious human rights violations, including killings, cruel and inhumane treatment, and excessive use of force.

6. OUR RECOMMENDATIONS

One year on from the protests, the Iranian authorities persist in their refusal to conduct open, independent and impartial investigations and ensure accountability. In fact, top officials have openly praised Iran's security and intelligence bodies for their role in the brutal crackdown. Given this systematic impunity, Amnesty International is calling on the Iranian authorities to take the following actions:

- Make public all available information and records regarding the number of those killed during the November 2019 protests; their identities and ages; and the location, cause and circumstances of each death;
- Ensure that there are independent and impartial investigations into all of the deaths, and that those suspected of criminal responsibility for the killings of protesters and bystanders during the November 2019 protests are criminally investigated, and, where sufficient evidence exists, are prosecuted in proceedings that conform to international fair trial standards and do not involve seeking or imposing the death penalty;
- Desist from using internet shutdowns that are incompatible with international human rights law to clamp down on human rights in the future;
- Complete a transparent and independent investigation into the shutdown and hold accountable those who were responsible for violating human rights;
- Enact legislation in line with international human rights law that recognizes the fundamental role that the internet plays in the exercise of human rights and

Amnesty International is renewing its calls on member states of the UN Human Rights Council to take the following action:

- Mandate an inquiry into the killings of protesters and bystanders, including children, in the November 2019 protests. The inquiry should report on its findings to the Human Rights Council, and its report should include recommendations on how to ensure Iran upholds its human rights obligations, including in the context of the protests and their aftermath, and on bringing those responsible for ordering, planning, carrying out these serious human rights violations and crimes to justice in fair trials, without recourse to the death penalty.

Shutdowns can rarely be carried out by states alone. Internet service providers play a major role in implementing shutdowns. Amnesty International is calling on ISPs operating in Iran to:

- Ensure that they operate in a manner that respects all the human rights of their users, including the right to freedom of expression, association, and peaceful assembly, when responding to orders from state authorities on internet shutdowns.
- Conduct human rights due diligence, including detailing the risks of complying with network disruption requests. Such assessments should be made public.
- Exercise their leverage with the Iranian authorities to demand information on the legal basis of internet shutdown requests, including asking for explanations on how the shutdowns would comply with international human rights laws.
- Publish public transparency reports on network shutdown requests from authorities in Iran and notify customers when a network disruption is imminent.

**AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL
IS A GLOBAL MOVEMENT
FOR HUMAN RIGHTS.
WHEN INJUSTICE HAPPENS
TO ONE PERSON, IT
MATTERS TO US ALL.**

© Amnesty International 2020

First published in 2020
by Amnesty International Ltd

INDEX: MDE 13/3308/2020

[amnesty.org](https://www.amnesty.org)

