

Iran, a textbook case for the veto initiative

Why the situation in Iran falls within the Franco-Mexican initiative on veto restraint, and how to bring it in



Iranian advocacy organisation
for democratic transition
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Summary

On 17 September 2026, two things happened a few hours apart. In Geneva, the Independent International Fact-Finding Mission on Iran submitted to the Human Rights Council a report concluding that the Iranian authorities had committed crimes against humanity in suppressing the January 2026 protests. In New York, Russia and China vetoed a draft resolution on Iran supported by eleven members of the Security Council. On a single day, the Council displayed both the gravity of the situation and its structural inability to address it.

Since 2022 the Security Council has heard testimony on the repression in Iran, in an Arria-formula meeting on 2 November 2022 and in an open briefing on 15 January 2026. It has never put a single text on the subject to a vote. Not for lack of established facts, but because the veto is assured in advance. DORNA calls this the anticipated veto: a block that need not be cast to take effect.

The Franco-Mexican initiative, joined by the United Kingdom on 22 September 2026 and supported by 128 states, targets precisely those mass atrocity situations in which the Council is paralysed by a permanent member. Iran meets the conditions and is never mentioned. DORNA proposes to close that gap through four measures: listing Iran among the initiative's reference situations; recognising the anticipated veto as a form of blockage within the spirit of the commitment; opening the Council, through the Arria formula, to Iranian society and to the UN mechanisms documenting the facts; and using the General Assembly debate that now follows every veto to raise the Iranian case.

1. Context: one day, two findings

On 17 September 2026 the Fact-Finding Mission submitted its report. It concludes that many of the gross violations committed during the January 2026 crackdown amount to crimes against humanity: murder, imprisonment, torture and other inhumane acts. It documents the killing of at least 221 children, some as young as two, fire from elevated positions across all 31 provinces, tens of thousands of arbitrary arrests, at least 29 men executed between March and August 2026 after expedited trials, five of them publicly, more than 70 people at imminent risk of execution, including five women and three boys, and a nationwide internet blackout imposed on 8 January and maintained for more than five months, the longest on record. On the human toll, High Commissioner Volker Türk spoke in January of thousands killed, children among them; the Iranian authorities acknowledged more than 3,000 deaths, and Special Rapporteur Mai Sato noted civil society estimates running to tens of thousands.

On the same 17 September, at the Security Council, a US draft extending for one year the Panel of Experts of the 1737 Committee, which monitors Iran-related sanctions, received eleven votes. Russia and China vetoed it; Pakistan and Somalia abstained. The text concerned the nuclear file, not the repression. It follows the Russian and Chinese veto of 7 April 2026 against a draft by Gulf states

on freedom of navigation through the Strait of Hormuz, rejected by the same split. The rule that governs the Council whenever Iran is on the table is constant: a majority of eleven, a guaranteed block.

2. Analysis: the anticipated veto

The Franco-Mexican initiative, launched in 2015, proposes that the five permanent members commit voluntarily and collectively not to use the veto when the Council addresses genocide, crimes against humanity or large-scale war crimes. On 22 September 2026 the United Kingdom joined it, through Foreign Secretary Ed Miliband, becoming the second permanent member to sign. It is complemented by the code of conduct of the ACT group (Accountability, Coherence and Transparency), adopted in 2015 at Liechtenstein's initiative, and by General Assembly resolution 76/262 of 26 April 2022, which requires an Assembly debate within ten working days of any veto.

These instruments rest on a common foundation: the responsibility to protect, adopted by all member states in paragraphs 138 and 139 of the 2005 World Summit Outcome, at the close of the debate opened by Kosovo in 1999 and by the 2001 report of the International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty. Paragraph 139 gives the Security Council the responsibility to act collectively, in a timely and decisive manner, when a state manifestly fails to protect its population from genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity. The Franco-Mexican initiative exists so that the veto does not stand in the way of that responsibility. The Fact-Finding Mission's finding of crimes against humanity places the situation in Iran squarely within the scope of paragraph 139. The question put to the Council is therefore not the nature of its response, which is for the Council to deliberate, but its ability to deliberate at all.

These instruments reason from the veto actually cast: a resolution is tabled, put to a vote, blocked, then debated. The Iranian case shows a different and more common configuration, and a less visible one. Since the 2022 crackdown, which the Fact-Finding Mission had already characterised as crimes against humanity in March 2024, the Council has heard briefers and civil society representatives, but no member has put to a vote any text on the repression in Iran. The facts are established by UN bodies themselves. Majorities exist, as the votes of 7 April and 17 September show. What is missing is the prospect of adoption. The veto operates before the vote, by deterring the tabling.

This configuration has three consequences. It makes the block invisible, since no trace of it remains in the Council's record and the debate provided for by resolution 76/262 is never triggered. It denies victims the minimal recognition a formal vote provides. And it strips the initiative of its reach in the cases where it is most needed, because a commitment not to cast a veto protects no one if the text is never presented.

The Iranian case has one further feature that makes it a textbook case. The demands carried by Iranian society since September 2022, equality, the rule of law, an end to coercion over women, are the ones the states supporting the initiative say they defend. This is not a distant situation the Council would be discovering, but a movement whose claims are already aligned with the principles of the Charter.

3. DORNA's position

DORNA is a non-partisan organisation working to structure a democratic transition in Iran. It does not ask the Security Council to decide the country's political future, which belongs to Iranians. It asks that crimes committed against the Iranian population be handled by the Council under the same rules as other mass atrocity situations, and that the Franco-Mexican initiative stop overlooking the case that best illustrates its purpose.

The relevant question is no longer whether the situation in Iran falls within the initiative, but how to bring it in operationally, without waiting for a vote no one will call.

4. Recommendations

To France and Mexico, coordinators of the initiative. List Iran among the reference situations cited when promoting the initiative, alongside Ukraine and Gaza, from the next meeting of supporters. Horizon: fourth quarter of 2026.

To the 128 signatory states. Adopt, in the next collective declaration, language recognising that anticipated blockage of the Council, where it prevents the tabling of any text on a situation documented by UN mechanisms, falls within the spirit of the commitment. Horizon: 2027.

To the Council's rotating presidencies, starting with Greece in October 2026. Convene an Arria-formula meeting on the human rights situation in Iran, on the model of the meeting of 2 November 2022, hearing the Fact-Finding Mission, the Special Rapporteur and representatives of Iranian society. The Arria formula requires no vote and cannot be vetoed.

To member states, under resolution 76/262. Use the General Assembly debate following the 17 September vetoes to state that the Council's blockage on Iran is not confined to the nuclear file, and extends, by anticipation, to the repression documented by the Fact-Finding Mission.

To the ACT group and its coordinators. Include the Iranian case in the follow-up of the code of conduct, documenting situations where the absence of a text put to a vote stems from an anticipated veto.

To the European Union and the European External Action Service. Make Iran's inclusion in the initiative a point of the member states' common position at the Council, and carry it in dialogue with elected members.

To Iranian civil society and the diaspora. Express, in a joint and non-partisan text, Iranian society's support for the Franco-Mexican initiative. A people that itself asks that the veto no longer shield those who repress it is the argument the initiative does not yet have. DORNA offers to coordinate that text.

5. What DORNA brings

DORNA makes available to delegations and relevant services a chronology of Council votes and blockages on Iran since 2022, continuously updated on Iran Observatory, together with a synthesis of the findings of UN mechanisms. It stands ready to facilitate contact with representatives of Iranian society for an Arria meeting, with due regard for the security of those involved.

The Iranian case does not ask the Franco-Mexican initiative to change its nature. It asks for it to be applied where it is most expected. DORNA calls on France, Mexico, the United Kingdom and the signatory states to take it up during this General Assembly session, and offers to coordinate the

sequence described above with them.

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