



THE SOLACE SUMMIT

WORDS OVER SWORDS

UNITED NATIONS COMMISSION ON THE STATUS OF WOMEN

BACKGROUND GUIDE

AGENDA

Addressing Systemic Gender-Based Discrimination, with Special Emphasis on the Suppression of Women's Rights in Iran

Chairperson: Dhairaya Vasudeva

Letter from the Chairperson

Dear Delegates,

It is my privilege to welcome each of you to this session of the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women. This year, we have chosen an agenda that is heavy, deliberately so: the systemic, legally codified discrimination faced by women in the Islamic Republic of Iran, and the extraordinary human cost that has followed the state's attempts to suppress women who resist it.

This is not a committee where you can afford to arrive with only a surface-level understanding. You are being asked to grapple with questions of state sovereignty versus universal human rights, the limits of international law when a state simply refuses to be bound by it, and the very real, ongoing loss of life that has accompanied this issue well into 2026. I expect you to read beyond this guide, to sit with the discomfort of a topic that does not resolve neatly, and to bring nuance rather than slogans to committee.

At the same time, I want this to be a space where you grow as a speaker and as a thinker. Do not be afraid of a term you do not yet understand, or a legal provision that seems dense on first reading; ask your fellow delegates, ask the Executive Board, and use the research process itself as the point of the exercise. Award or no award, I want you to leave this committee more informed about the world than you were before you sat down.

I am reachable for any questions regarding the agenda, procedure, or your research at any point before and during the conference. I look forward to the debate you will bring to this floor.

Warm regards,

Dhairaya Vasudeva

Chairperson, UNCSW



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About the Committee

The Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) is the principal global intergovernmental body exclusively dedicated to the promotion of gender equality and the empowerment of women. Established by the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) in 1946, the Commission is instrumental in promoting women's rights, documenting the reality of women's lives worldwide, and shaping global standards on gender equality. It played a central role in developing the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW, 1979) and the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (1995), which remains the most comprehensive global policy framework on women's rights.

Each year, the Commission convenes to evaluate progress, identify challenges, and adopt negotiated outcome documents on specific priority themes. Unlike bodies such as the Human Rights Council, the CSW's mandate is developmental and normative rather than investigatory or judicial; it cannot try individuals or states, but it can shape international consensus, pressure member states through resolutions, and refer patterns of concern to other UN organs

A note on precedent: In December 2022, ECOSOC voted to remove Iran from the CSW for the remainder of its 2022–2026 term, citing the government's crackdown on the Woman, Life, Freedom protests. This was the first time in the Commission's history that a member state was expelled. Delegates should treat this as important background, not as a resolved matter for this committee; Iran's removal from CSW membership does not resolve the underlying human rights situation this committee is now asked to address.



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Introduction to the Agenda

Gender-based discrimination is rarely confined to a single law or a single incident; it is usually a structure, reinforced across family law, criminal law, policing, education, and culture, so that no single reform can dismantle it. Iran offers one of the starkest contemporary illustrations of this structure at work. Discrimination against women in Iran is not incidental or the product of uneven enforcement; it is written into the Constitution and the Civil and Penal Codes, and it is actively defended by the state as a matter of religious and political identity.

This committee will examine that legal architecture, the social movements that have risen to challenge it (most visibly the 2022 “Woman, Life, Freedom” movement following the death of Jina Mahsa Amini), the state's documented response to dissent, and the unprecedented events of the winter of 2025–2026, when nationwide protests were met with what independent human rights monitors have described as a mass killing of civilians. Delegates are expected to treat this as a live, unfolding crisis rather than settled history.

As with any CSW agenda, your task is not to design regime change or to adjudicate Iran's domestic politics. Your task is to identify how the international community, through the tools available to a body like the CSW, working alongside the Human Rights Council, UN Women, treaty bodies and member states, can realistically respond to entrenched, state-sanctioned discrimination when the state in question rejects the premise of international oversight.



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II. Classification of Armed Conflicts

The classification of an armed conflict constitutes one of the most fundamental determinations under International Humanitarian Law (IHL), as it establishes the legal framework governing the conduct of hostilities, the protections afforded to affected populations, and the obligations imposed upon the parties involved. While the humanitarian principles underlying IHL apply universally, the specific treaty provisions and legal obligations applicable to a conflict vary depending upon its classification. Consequently, correctly identifying the nature of an armed conflict is essential not only for legal accountability but also for ensuring that humanitarian protections are effectively implemented.

Historically, armed conflicts were predominantly viewed as wars fought between sovereign states. However, the geopolitical transformations of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries have significantly altered the nature of warfare. Contemporary conflicts increasingly involve insurgencies, civil wars, foreign interventions, proxy forces, multinational coalitions, transnational terrorist organisations, and private military companies. These developments have blurred the traditional distinction between interstate and internal conflicts, creating situations in which multiple legal regimes may apply simultaneously. International courts have therefore developed increasingly sophisticated jurisprudence to determine when an armed conflict exists and how it should be classified under international law.

The Geneva Conventions of 1949 establish two principal categories of armed conflict: International Armed Conflicts (IACs) under Common Article 2 and Non-International Armed Conflicts (NIACs) under Common Article 3. Additional Protocols I and II further elaborate upon these classifications while customary international law has evolved to address emerging forms of warfare that were not envisaged when the treaties were originally drafted.



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International Armed Conflict (IAC)

An International Armed Conflict exists whenever there is resort to armed force between two or more sovereign states, regardless of the duration or intensity of hostilities. Common Article 2 of the four Geneva Conventions provides that the Conventions apply "to all cases of declared war or of any other armed conflict" arising between High Contracting Parties, even if one of the parties does not recognise the existence of a state of war. Consequently, the formal declaration of war is legally irrelevant; the mere use of armed force between states is sufficient to trigger the application of International Humanitarian Law.

International Armed Conflicts are subject to the most comprehensive legal protections available under IHL. All four Geneva Conventions apply in their entirety, together with Additional Protocol I for states that are party to it and relevant customary international law. These rules govern the protection of wounded and sick military personnel, prisoners of war, civilians, occupied territories, humanitarian relief operations, medical personnel, journalists, and cultural property. Parties are further required to distinguish at all times between civilians and combatants, direct operations only against lawful military objectives, and refrain from employing methods or means of warfare that cause unnecessary suffering or indiscriminate harm.

Recent examples of International Armed Conflicts include the armed hostilities between the Russian Federation and Ukraine following the events of 2014 and their escalation in 2022, as well as various interstate confrontations in different regions of the world. In such conflicts, violations may constitute grave breaches of the Geneva Conventions, giving rise to individual criminal responsibility and obligations upon states to investigate and prosecute alleged offenders.



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Non-International Armed Conflict (NIAC)

A Non-International Armed Conflict occurs when prolonged armed violence takes place within the territory of a state between governmental armed forces and one or more organised armed groups, or between multiple organised armed groups. Unlike International Armed Conflicts, not every instance of internal violence qualifies as a NIAC. The International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia, in *Prosecutor v. Tadić* (1995), established two cumulative criteria for determining the existence of a NIAC: the intensity of the violence and the degree of organisation demonstrated by the parties involved.

The requirement of intensity distinguishes armed conflicts from internal disturbances, riots, isolated acts of violence, and criminal activities. Factors considered include the duration and frequency of hostilities, the use of heavy weaponry, territorial control, displacement of civilians, casualty figures, and the deployment of organised military forces. Simultaneously, the armed group concerned must possess sufficient organisational capacity, including a command structure, the ability to conduct coordinated military operations, logistical capabilities, recruitment mechanisms, and internal disciplinary procedures.

The principal legal framework governing NIACs consists of Common Article 3 of the Geneva Conventions, Additional Protocol II (where applicable), and customary international humanitarian law. Although these provisions are less extensive than those applicable during International Armed Conflicts, they nevertheless establish fundamental humanitarian guarantees. Persons taking no active part in hostilities must be treated humanely without adverse distinction. Murder, torture, cruel treatment, hostage-taking, humiliating treatment, and summary executions are expressly prohibited.

Most contemporary armed conflicts—including those in Syria, Myanmar, Sudan, Yemen, and parts of the Sahel—are generally characterised as Non-International Armed Conflicts, although many have acquired international dimensions through external military support and foreign intervention.



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