

**Government Response to  
Referral of Morteza Sharifi's Petition  
to  
"Limit diplomatic relations with the Islamic Republic of Iran"**

**Presented to the House of Representatives**

**In accordance with Standing Order 256**

# Government response to Referral of Morteza Sharifi’s Petition to “Limit diplomatic relations with the Islamic Republic of Iran”

## Introduction

- 1 The government has carefully considered the Petition Committee’s referral of the petition entitled “Limit diplomatic relations with the Islamic Republic of Iran”. The petition requests that the New Zealand Government:
  - 1.1 Summon the Iranian Ambassador; and
  - 1.2 Limit diplomatic relations with the Islamic Republic of Iran; and
  - 1.3 Promote human rights.
- 2 The government welcomes the Committee’s referral of this petition and we thank the petitioner for bringing this matter to the government’s attention.
- 3 The government responds to the referral of this petition in accordance with Standing Order 256.
- 4 The government has considered the petition as it pertains to New Zealand’s existing foreign policy settings and obligations and responsibilities under international law.

## Requests and government response

- 5 **Request 1:** That the New Zealand Government summon the Iranian Ambassador.
- 6 **Response:** In line with Aotearoa New Zealand’s values based approach to foreign policy, New Zealand government officials regularly meet with the Ambassador of the Islamic Republic of Iran to discuss issues of importance to New Zealand and New Zealanders, including Iran’s breaches of its obligations under the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) and the human rights situation in Iran.
- 7 New Zealand and Iran government officials also hold regular high level consultations, including biennially through our Political and Economic Cooperation Commission Framework (PECC), with the seventh meeting held in September 2020. Aotearoa New Zealand will continue to engage Iran directly on these issues.
- 8 **Request 2:** That the New Zealand Government limit diplomatic relations with the Islamic Republic of Iran.
- 9 **Response:** The New Zealand Embassy in Iran was our first diplomatic mission established in the Middle East in 1975. Despite a number of challenges, the New Zealand Government maintains a constructive relationship with Iran.

- 10 New Zealand's foreign policy is one of engagement and our relationship with Iran allows us to directly express our concerns on matters of importance to New Zealand. Limiting our bilateral relationship will preclude us from this. For instance, as a country that cares deeply about nuclear non-proliferation and disarmament and is also a current member of the International Atomic Agency (IAEA) Board of Governors, New Zealand takes an active interest in developments around Iran's nuclear programme. We express our concerns to Iran directly about their ongoing breaches of its obligations under the JCPOA, and encourage them to return to full compliance.
- 11 The government is also concerned about some of Iran's regional activity, particularly its support for militia groups and the destabilising role it has played in some regional conflicts.
- 12 **Request 3:** That the New Zealand government promote human rights.
- 13 **Response:** The New Zealand government regularly expresses its concerns for the human rights situation in Iran, both bilaterally and in the multilateral fora. Iran and New Zealand agreed to establish a dedicated mechanism for discussing human rights in a direct and constructive manner. The inaugural Iran/New Zealand Human Rights Dialogue was held virtually on the 26<sup>th</sup> May 2021. Both sides had the opportunity to have a frank exchange on areas of mutual interest and concern, including disability rights, gender equality, minority rights and the death penalty. Iran and Aotearoa New Zealand have agreed to hold the Dialogue on a biennial basis.
- 14 New Zealand routinely makes statements on Iran in the Human Rights Council, most recently during the 46<sup>th</sup> Session of the Human Rights Council on the 9<sup>th</sup> March 2021. New Zealand also continues to vote in favour of the resolution on the Situation of human rights in the Islamic Republic of Iran in the United Nations General Assembly Third Committee, most recently in November 2020.
- 15 New Zealand contributed to the last Universal Periodic Review for Iran in December 2019. Our recommendations covered protection against violence and discrimination on the grounds of sexual orientation and gender identity, ceasing the death penalty, encouraging freedom of expression, continuing reform to ensure non-discrimination against women and girls, protecting religious and ethnic minorities and Iran accepting a visit by the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Iran. We continue to maintain these recommendations.

## Conclusion

- 16 Despite some challenges, New Zealand maintains a constructive relationship with Iran. This allows us to hold direct discussions with Iran, express our views and concerns.
- 17 The New Zealand government will continue to adhere to its independent, values based approach to foreign policy. Where Iran's actions are contrary to New Zealand's values, we will continue to express our views both bilaterally and in the relevant multilateral fora.

- 18 The New Zealand government attaches great importance to human rights, which remains a key tenet of New Zealand's foreign policy engagement. We will continue to raise our human rights concerns with Iran where appropriate, including in the Human Rights Council, the UN Third Committee, and through bilateral engagement.