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Human rights situations that require the Council's attention

Joint written statement* submitted by Women's Human Rights International Association, France Libertés : Fondation Danielle Mitterrand, non-governmental organizations in special consultative status, International Society for Human Rights, a non-governmental organization on the roster

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[23 August 2023]

* Issued as received, in the language of submission only.



Urgent Call for International Action against Impunity and Executions in the Islamic Republic of Iran

We would like to draw the attention of the United Nations Human Rights Council to the critical need for immediate international intervention to address the culture of impunity and the alarming surge of executions in the Islamic Republic of Iran. Drawing attention to the dire human rights situation, we call for collective action to protect the lives and rights of the Iranian people.

In recent years, tragic events have highlighted the urgent need to address impunity in the Islamic Republic of Iran. The case of 22-year-old Mahsa Amini, from the Islamic Republic of Iran's Kurdish minority, who died in custody after being arrested for violating the dress code, serves as a stark example. On 16 September 2022, her death sparked widespread protests demanding justice. The protests quickly evolved into a broader movement demanding political change, an end to repression, and respect for basic human rights.

Instead of addressing the protesters' legitimate concerns, the authorities responded with repression, including violent crackdowns and the use of excessive force. This campaign of repression has led to over 750 deaths on the streets or in prisons.

The Escalating Wave of Executions

In less than two years since Ebrahim Raisi assumed office as President, the Iranian authorities have executed no less than 1200 individuals. Shockingly, this number includes at least 38 women and eight individuals who were minors at the time of their alleged offenses.

In 2022 alone, 578 executions were reported, with an additional nearly 500 executions recorded since January 2023. The actual numbers are feared to be much higher due to the secretive nature of these executions.

Recent months have witnessed at least seven Iranians executed for their involvement in anti-government protests.

Of grave concern is the sudden spike in executions, particularly in May 2023, when executions occurred at a rate of one person every five hours. This surge included the execution of Majid Kazemi, Saeed Yaghoubi, and Saleh Mirhashemi, who were arrested for participating in protests and were executed for the charge of 'Moharebeh,' or 'Waging war on God.'

The city of Maragheh witnessed a public execution on 25 May 2023, which was not only an attempt to instil fear but also constituted an act of collective torture and a severe violation of human rights. There have been at least six such public executions in 2023, all of which have been reported in the state media.

More protesters remain on death row, facing imminent execution as a result of their participation in the ongoing demonstrations.

Role of the Revolutionary Guards

The Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) has been at the forefront of suppressing these protests. Extensive evidence, including leaked IRGC directives, points to their central role in quelling demonstrations. The paramilitary Basij, plainclothes agents, and the State Security Forces all operate under the command of the IRGC.

Widespread Arrests and Repression

Over 30,000 peaceful protesters have been arrested since the protests commenced, demonstrating the breadth of those impacted by the crackdown. Women, children, lawyers, human rights defenders, and activists have all been targeted.

Weaponizing Criminal Procedures and Death Penalty

Anyone caught taking part in the protests is quickly labelled as an “enemy to confront”, “terrorist”, or “foreign agent attempting to destabilise the Islamic Republic of Iran.” Both the head of the Judiciary and the President have emphasised the need to act “without leniency” against protesters.

Criminal proceedings and the death penalty are being weaponised by the Iranian Government to punish individuals participating in protests and to strike fear into the population so as to stamp out dissent, in violation of international human rights law, United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights Volker Türk said on 10 January 2023.

“The weaponization of criminal procedures to punish people for exercising their basic rights – such as those participating in or organizing demonstrations - amounts to state sanctioned killing”, Türk said.

Ongoing Poison Attacks and Impunity

The authorities are also suspected of orchestrating ongoing poison attacks on girls' schools across the Islamic Republic of Iran, resulting in the hospitalisation of thousands of girls since November 2022.

Unwavering Impunity Stemming from the 1988 Massacre

The impunity with which the Iranian authorities commit these acts is partially rooted in the international community's failure to take substantial action against their previous major crimes. Notably, the 1988 mass extra-legal executions and enforced disappearances of upwards of 30,000 political prisoners have gone largely unaddressed.

The 1988 massacre took place based on a 'fatwa,' or religious edict, by the Islamic Republic of Iran's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, which specifically sought to annihilate the main opposition group People's Mojahedin Organisation of Iran (PMOI or MEK). Members of other groups were also targeted in a second wave. Victims were secretly buried in mass graves across the country. Their families never had the chance to say goodbye to their loved ones; nor were they even notified that their loved ones were going to be executed.

Current Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi was at the time Deputy Prosecutor of Tehran and a member of the 1988 'Death Commission' in the capital that sent thousands of prisoners to their death.

Neither Raisi nor any other official have ever been held accountable for their role in the 1988 massacre, which according to the UN Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances (WGEID) constitutes an ongoing crime.

In its report to the 51st session of the Human Rights Council, A/HRC/51/31, dated 12 August 2022, the WGEID stated: “The Working Group reiterates the concerns expressed about the ongoing concealment of burial sites of those forcibly disappeared and allegedly executed between July and September 1988 across the country. The Working Group recalls that an enforced disappearance continues until the fate and whereabouts of the individual concerned is established and repeats its support for an international investigation on the matter.” (1)

The government continues to pressure victims' relatives to remain silent about the 1988 massacre.

Authorities are preparing new trumped-up charges against political prisoner Maryam Akbari-Monfared who had sought accountability for the state murder of her siblings during the 1988 massacre. The new charges could lead to an extension of the duration of her unlawful imprisonment.

Ms. Akbari-Monfared is currently serving the final 18 months of her 15-year sentence. She has been repeatedly harassed and subjected to various physical and psychological tortures in prison simply for making an official request from the Judiciary of the Islamic Republic of Iran to explain the circumstances of her siblings' execution during the 1988 massacre. She had even been told that she will not be released until she retracts her call for accountability over the murder of her siblings in the massacre.

On 1 July 2023, Ms. Akbari-Monfared was summoned to the Courthouse of Evin Prison, where she was arraigned on five new charges.

Demand for Accountability

Over the past four decades, the Iranian authorities have committed crimes against humanity and acts that amount to genocide. These include the massacre of Iranian Kurds, the mass execution of political prisoners in the 1980s, as well as the massacres that occurred in 1988, November 2019, and since September 2022, targeting unarmed protesters. Key figures in the current leadership, such as Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei, President Ebrahim Raisi, Judiciary Chief Gholam Hossein Mohseni Eje'i, and Parliament Speaker Mohammad Bagher Ghalibaf, have been directly involved in these actions since the 1980s. Given their extensive history of mass murder and crimes against humanity, it is imperative for the international community to isolate and hold the Iranian authorities accountable for their crimes.

A Call for Immediate Action

While the establishment of the Fact-Finding Mission on the Islamic Republic of Iran is commendable, its timeline for presenting its findings leaves protesters and citizens facing imminent execution without effective recourse.

We urge the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) to investigate all the executions carried out in the Islamic Republic of Iran in the past year and to take effective action to help put an end to these killings.

We urge the Human Rights Council to support accountability for those responsible for major crimes in the Islamic Republic of Iran, such as the 1988 massacre and the execution of current-day protesters.

HANDS OFF CAIN Pax Christi Australia Association des Femmes Iraniennes en France (AFIF)
Comité de soutiens aux Droits de l'Homme en Iran (CSDHI), NGO(s) without consultative status,
also share the views expressed in this statement.

1 - <https://undocs.org/en/A/HRC/51/31>