



General Assembly

Distr.: General
14 February 2018

English only

Human Rights Council

Thirty-seventh session

26 February-23 March 2018

Agenda item 4

Human rights situations that require the Council's attention

Written statement* submitted by the Women's Human Rights International Association, a non-governmental organization in special consultative status

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

[2 February 2018]

* This written statement is issued, unedited, in the language(s) received from the submitting non-governmental organization(s).

GE.18-02292(E)



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Request to ensure the rights and safety of the Iranian protesters

In December 2017, a series of mass protests broke out in various cities in the Islamic Republic of Iran. These peaceful protests, which persisted into January 2018, were against economic hardship and corruption and demanded freedom.

Anti-government protests were reported in at least 140 cities. They include major cities such as Tehran, Ahvaz, Arak, Hamedan, Isfahan, Karaj, Kermanshah, Mallard, Mashhad, Qazvin, Qods, Qom, Rasht, Urmia and Zahedan. In addition to large cities, many protests have been held in smaller towns.

These protests are the result of decades-long suppression of the Iranian people. The authorities have systematically imprisoned, tortured and executed their opponents.

In response to the mass protests in Iran, the government of Islamic Republic of Iran acted predictively with an extensive crackdown on its own citizens. Reliable reports suggest that upwards of 50 people were killed by the authorities which attempted to violently put down the protests. Video footage and eyewitness testimonies posted on social media show riot police and security forces using excessive force and firing at the unarmed protesters. Activists have also reported mass raids on the homes of protesters, leading to thousands of arbitrary arrests.

Officials of the Islamic Republic of Iran have confirmed that at least 3,700 protesters have been detained, whilst other reliable sources report that the number of detainees is closer to 8,000. The Islamic Republic of Iran authorities have denied many of the detainees access to their families and lawyers. Thousands of innocent protesters are now at risk of torture and death.

Unfortunately, at least 11 deaths by torture have already taken place. The authorities have acknowledged some of the deaths in custody but ridiculously claim that they had committed suicide.

Hassan Nowroozi, the spokesman for the Legal and Judicial Committee of the Iranian Parliament, said: "Deceased prisoners have died of guilty conscience. The deaths of many of these people in prison may be related to regretting their acts. They realized the ugliness of their acts, and may be that led to their suicide in prison."

On January 2, the Head of the Revolutionary Court in Tehran, Mousa Ghazanfar Abadi, warned that the Ministry of Interior had declared the protests to be illegal and that those who continued to engage in protests would face severe penalties. He threatened that the protest leaders and organizers could be charged with "enmity against God" (*moharebeh*), which is punishable by death.

Eleven protesters are reported to have been killed in custody under torture. This pattern of deaths in custody, many of which are falsely billed as 'suicides', suggests that the authorities seek to brutally eliminate opponents while evading international criticism for official acts of execution.

The crackdown on the Iranian people in these recent protests is extremely alarming as it is reminiscent of the extreme crackdown on the Iranian people during the political turmoil in Iran in the 1980s. In the summer of 1988, the Islamic Republic of Iran authorities executed more than 30,000 political prisoners in just a few months and buried their bodies in secret mass graves. Thirty years on, there has been no investigation of this crime against humanity.

We are deeply concerned about the safety of the several thousand detained protesters whose lives are at risk. Without effective international attention they too could face extra-judicial elimination.

We urge the Human Rights Council to take note of:

- The decades-long non-cooperation of the Islamic Republic of Iran on the issue of human rights

- Systematic suppression and torture used by the government of the Islamic Republic of Iran against its own people
- Systematic extrajudicial execution of political dissidents in Iran
- The continued execution of minors and juvenile offenders in Iran
- The backgrounds of the sitting officials and their involvement in the secret extrajudicial mass executions of prisoners in 1988.

We further urge the Council to take serious action for the release of the detainees of the recent mass protests. We urge the Council to use its authority to ensure non-recurrence of extrajudicial mass executions in Iran and to establish accountability in the place of impunity in Iran. We warn the Council that thousands of protesters are currently at risk of torture and execution.

Background

The government of Islamic Republic of Iran executes more people per capita each year than any other country in the world. The authorities routinely execute minors and juvenile offenders. There have been at least two confirmed hangings of juvenile offenders in Iran in the month of January 2018 alone. Public hangings, where children are allowed to attend as spectators are a common sight. When an Iranian person sees a crane, he or she is as likely to think of executions as of construction. On the other end of the spectrum, some executions are kept completely secret, and the families of those executed are left without any answers.
