



# General Assembly

Distr.: General  
14 February 2020

English and French only

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## Human Rights Council

### Forty-third session

24 February–20 March 2020

Agenda item 4

Human rights situations that require the Council's attention

**Joint written statement\* submitted by Nonviolent Radical Party, Transnational and Transparty, a non-governmental organization in general consultative status, Women's Human Rights International Association, Edmund Rice International Limited, non-governmental organizations in special consultative status, International Educational Development, Inc., International Society for Human Rights, non-governmental organizations 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.

[03 February 2020]

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\* Issued as received, in the language(s) of submission only.



## Thousands of detained protesters in the Islamic Republic of Iran at risk of secret massacre

Thousands of people who took part in recent anti-government protests in the Islamic Republic of Iran are at serious risk of being secretly executed or tortured to death in the country's prisons.

Since the protests began in November 2019, the authorities have carried out the bloodiest crackdown on protesters since the Islamic Revolution in 1979.

Seventeen UN human rights experts announced on 20 December 2019:

We are shocked at reports of the ill-treatment of those detained during the protests that took place in November 2019, and deeply disturbed that the reported use of excessive force by the Iranian security forces led to an untold number of casualties, including deaths.

Reports suggest that detainees are being tortured or are suffering other forms of ill-treatment, sometimes to extract forced confessions. Some are also reportedly being denied medical treatment, including for injuries caused by the security forces' use of excessive force, and are being held in overcrowded detention centres. Some are being held incommunicado or subjected to enforced disappearances.<sup>1</sup>

Reuters reported on 23 December 2019: "After days of protests across Iran last month, Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei appeared impatient. Gathering his top security and government officials together, he issued an order: Do whatever it takes to stop them. ... About 1,500 people were killed during less than two weeks of unrest that started on Nov. 15."<sup>2</sup>

More than two months after the crackdown began, the authorities have yet to provide any death toll for the protests.

UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Michelle Bachelet on 6 December 2019 expressed alarm at the continuing lack of transparency about casualties and the treatment of thousands of detainees, as well as continuing arrests reported to be taking place.

The OHCHR pointed out that at least 7,000 people have reportedly been arrested in 28 of Iran's 31 provinces since mass protests broke out on 15 November, and the High Commissioner said she is "extremely concerned about their physical treatment, violations of their right to due process, and the possibility that a significant number of them may be charged with offences that carry the death penalty, in addition to the conditions under which they are held."

"Many of the arrested protesters have not had access to a lawyer, meaning due process is not being respected,"<sup>3</sup> Bachelet said.

More recently, some human rights groups have announced that as many as 12,000 protesters have been arrested. Iranian officials have threatened to execute detained protesters.

"We have caught all the mercenaries who explicitly confessed that they are mercenaries of the U.S. and the MEK," Ali Fadavi, deputy commander of Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps, told reporters in Tehran on 24 November 2019, referring to the main opposition group. "The judicial system will give them the maximum punishment", Fadavi said, the ISNA news agency reported.<sup>4</sup>

On live TV on 14 January 2020, Ahmad Alamolhoda, the representative of the Iran's Supreme Leader in Khorasan Razavi Province, described the anti-government protesters as the enemy's "fifth column" and said they should be executed after drumhead trials.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=25449&LangID=E>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-iran-protests-specialreport/special-report-irans-leader-ordered-crackdown-on-unrest-do-whatever-it-takes-to-end-it-idUSKBN1YR0QR>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=25393&LangID=E>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.isna.ir/news/98090301481/>

According to human rights group<sup>5</sup> Iran Human Rights Monitor (Iran HRM), security forces and plainclothes agents have taken away many of the wounded protesters from hospitals.

"Iranian officials have been accused of stealing bodies from morgues and spiriting away injured patients from hospitals to downplay the scale of their crackdown on recent protests", Britain's Mail Online reported on 23 November 2019.<sup>6</sup>

Reports from various Iranian cities indicate that after arresting, torturing and murdering protesters, the Revolutionary Guards (IRGC) Intelligence threw their bodies into dams and rivers.

Furthermore, as protests persisted, Iranian authorities implemented a week-long near-total shutdown of internet services,<sup>7</sup> stopping nearly all means of online communications for people inside the Islamic Republic of Iran, to preclude the sharing of images and videos of deadly violence being used by security forces.

The Iranian authorities have a history of massacring their opponents and covering up the evidence.

In the summer of 1988, the Iranian authorities massacred 30,000 political prisoners based on a fatwa by Supreme Leader Ayatollah Khomeini. His decree called for the execution of all political prisoners affiliated to the People's Mojahedin Organisation of Iran (PMOI or MEK) who remained loyal to the organisation. 'Death Commissions' were formed sending political prisoners who refused to abandon their beliefs to execution. Political prisoners affiliated to other groups were executed in a second wave about a month later. The victims were buried secretly in mass graves.

An investigation in 2017 by London-based NGO, Justice for the Victims of the 1988 Massacre in Iran (JVMI), uncovered the identities of 87 Death Commission members.<sup>8</sup> Many still hold senior positions in the Iranian judiciary or government. They include Judiciary Chief Ebrahim Raisi and Justice Minister Alireza Avaei. Raisi is leading the Judiciary's present-day crackdown on protesters.

On 25 July 2019, in an interview with the state-run Mosalas magazine, Mostafa Pour-Mohammadi, Advisor to the Judiciary Chief and a former member of the Death Commissions, defended the 1988 massacre and said newly-caught PMOI activists would face the capital punishment.<sup>9</sup>

## International recognition of the 1988 massacre

In December 2018, Amnesty International published a 201-page report "*Blood-soaked secrets: Why Iran's 1988 prison massacres are ongoing crimes against humanity*"<sup>10</sup> calling on the UN to set up an independent investigation to help bring those responsible for these abhorrent crimes to justice.

The previous Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Islamic Republic of Iran, Asma Jahangir, informed the General Assembly:

Between July and August 1988, thousands of political prisoners, men, women and teen-agers, were reportedly executed pursuant to a fatwa issued by the then Supreme Leader, Ayatollah Khomeini. A three-man commission was reportedly created with a view to determining who should be executed. The bodies of the victims were reportedly buried in unmarked graves

<sup>5</sup> <https://iran-hrm.com/index.php/2019/12/17/clear-evidence-of-crimes-against-humanity-committed-during-iran-protests-in-november/>

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-7718093/Iranian-officials-spiriting-away-injured-demonstrators-hospitals.html>

<sup>7</sup> <https://netblocks.org/reports/internet-disrupted-in-iran-amid-fuel-protests-in-multiple-cities-pA25L18b>

<sup>8</sup> <https://iran1988.org/new-report-published-1988massacre-iran-evidence-crime-humanity/>

<sup>9</sup> <https://youtu.be/uAo6w1QOFqw>

<sup>10</sup> <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/mde13/9421/2018/en/>

and their families never informed of their whereabouts. These events, known as the 1988 massacres, have never been officially acknowledged.”

Over the years, a high number of reports have been issued about the 1988 massacres. If the number of persons who disappeared and were executed can be disputed, overwhelming evidence shows that thousands of persons were summarily killed. Recently, these killings have been acknowledged by some at the highest levels of the State. The families of the victims have a right to know the truth about these events and the fate of their loved ones without risking reprisal. They have the right to a remedy, which includes the right to an effective investigation of the facts and public disclosure of the truth; and the right to reparation.<sup>11</sup>

On 26 February 2018, Secretary General António Guterres told the Human Rights Council:

OHCHR continued to receive letters from families of the victims who were summarily executed or forcibly disappeared during the events of 1988. ... The Secretary-General remains concerned by the difficulty the families faced in obtaining information about the 1988 events and the harassment of those continuing to advocate for further information related to these events.<sup>12</sup>

UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Zeid Ra’ad Al Hussein, told NGOs on 9 March 2018:

The 88 massacre, the allegations of the massacres in 88, the summary executions and enforced disappearances of thousands of political prisoners – men, women and children – we have received a great deal of information from you. ... And the recommendations have been made to the national authorities to investigate independently and impartially of course given all the attention given to this by the victims’ families.

### **Time for international action**

On behalf of our respective NGOs, we appeal to the Human Rights Council to take urgent action to end the impunity enjoyed by Iranian officials and prevent the massacre of detained protesters. Leaders of the Iranian government must face justice for committing crimes against humanity in the massive suppression and bloodshed of recent months.

The UN must immediately dispatch fact-finding missions to investigate the cases of those killed or imprisoned since the November protests.

Furthermore, we believe that until the international community holds the perpetrators of the 1988 massacre to account, Iran’s authorities would continue to be emboldened to further crack down with impunity on present-day protesters. Iranian officials construe silence and inaction by the international community as a green light to continue and step up their crimes.

We therefore call on the Human Rights Council to set up a commission of inquiry into the 1988 massacre and achieve justice for the victims of that crime against humanity.

We urge High Commissioner Michelle Bachelet to support the launch of independent fact-finding missions into the 1988 massacre and the recent slaughter of anti-government protesters.

Furthermore, we appeal to the UN Special Procedures, in particular the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Islamic Republic of Iran, Javaid Rehman, and the Special Rapporteur on the promotion of truth, Fabian Salvioli, to investigate Iran’s 1988 massacre as part of their mandates.

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<sup>11</sup> <https://undocs.org/A/72/322>

<sup>12</sup> [https://www.ohchr.org/EN/HRBodies/HRC/RegularSessions/Session37/Documents/A\\_HRC\\_37\\_24.docx](https://www.ohchr.org/EN/HRBodies/HRC/RegularSessions/Session37/Documents/A_HRC_37_24.docx)

HANDS OFF CAIN Nouveaux Droits de l'Homme (France) Justice for Victims of 1988 Massacre in Iran (JVMI) Association des femmes iraniennes en France Comité de soutien aux droits de l'homme en Iran (France) Associazione delle Donne Democratiche Iraniane in Italia Association of Anglo-Iranian Women in the UK Iran Libero e Democratico (Italia) Iranian youth association in Switzerland Association des Réfugiés politiques en France Associazione Medici e Farmacisti Democratici Iraniani in Italia Association des jeunes Iraniens pour la démocratie et la liberté-Luxembourg Association IranRef (Belgique) Iranska Kvinnosamfundet i Sverige (Sweden) Anglo-Iranian Professionals Association of Iranian Political Prisoners-UK NGO(s) without consultative status, also share the views expressed in this statement.