



Menschenrechtszentrum für die Opfer des Fundamentalismus

Human Rights Center for the Victims of Fundamentalism

The condition of political prisoners and environmentalist activists in Iran

A report to the United Nations Universal Periodic Review
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Summary:

On July 12, 2018—During a speech in March 2018, Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei claimed that no one in Iran is imprisoned for their thoughts, expressions, or personal choices. That’s not true. The Islamic Republic of Iran has hundreds of political prisoners including human rights lawyers, activists, and ethnic and religious minorities. “Some unfair individuals take advantage of free speech and say that there is no freedom in the country, and foreigners repeat this propaganda, while in the country there is freedom of thought, freedom of speech and freedom of choice. Today, no one under the Islamic Republic is pursued or put under pressure for being opposed to the government in their thoughts or views, and there is no intention to do this.”

The situation of political prisoners and environmental activists in Iran is in a dire situation demanding international attention and intervention. The dismal record of the Islamic Republic of Iran in dealing with political prisoners has been on the decline and has worsened every year. Despite the fact that the Islamic Republic of Iran has been condemned 63 different times by United Nations and other International humanitarian organizations for lack of respect for human rights but the leaders have not taken any steps in improving the lives of political prisoners in Iran.

Introduction:

Already deprived of any access to clean, drinking water and food, the absence of adequate beds are also robbing political prisoners of any sleep.

The cells’ windows are covered by metal sheets, making even breathing difficult. While inmates held in other parts of the prison have access to in-person family visits and telephone calls, such accommodations are no longer available to political prisoners. Earlier this month a number of prisoners were punished for practicing their right to a peaceful protest in launching hunger strikes, and thus forced into solitary confinement.

To add insult to injury, the prisoner's quarters were checkered with closed circuit security cameras and audio surveillance devices. This has taken away any sense of privacy from the prisoners, even in private cells and bathrooms, mounting to a flagrant rights violation.

Such situations leave no conclusion possible other than the authorities' intention to completely cut off these political prisoners from the outside world. Officials also seek to restrict, to any extent possible, any information leak regarding their regular ordeals.

One of the results of this type of crack down has been the prison medical clinic becoming far busier as more political prisoners are transferred due to rapid health deteriorations. A number of these cases are in need of dire medical care in outside facilities. The prison warden, however, is refusing the authorization of such hospital transfers.

"The horrendous conditions at Raja'i Shahr and other prison point to a pattern of cruel and inhumane treatment that has repeatedly characterized Iran's ruthless attitude to prisoners in its custody," Magdalena Mughrabi, Deputy Middle East and North Africa Director for Amnesty International, is quoted in the organization's statement on this subject.

Such circumstances leave no other choice but resorting to hunger strike for political prisoners. Iranian law allows the state to confiscate properties under certain conditions, leaving citizens with no means of legal recourse.

According to the regulations for the implementation of Article 11 of Iran's Constitution, the domestic properties of Iranian expatriates with proven ties to anti-state groups are subject to confiscation. The regulations add that their heirs in Iran can claim these properties "only if they do not have proven ties" with anti-state groups.

Article 19 of the same regulations exempt "a modest residence and the family's furniture" from confiscation and explicitly states that the court "should ensure that dependent family members are provided adequate means to live."

Government confiscation of properties belonging to political prisoners including religious minorities is not uncommon in Iran(1).

Male political prisoners:

We will try to point out a few of the cases of prominent political prisoners in Iranian jails given that this report does not have the capacity of covering all significant cases of prisoners of conscience in Iran.

Gholamreza Khosravi(2) a political prisoner, was arrested in Kerman, 2007, and was sentenced to 3 years imprisonment and 3 years suspended prison in charge of relation with MEK, but during serving this sentence, according to an unlawful process, his case again was activated and he is convicted to death penalty. This court verdict was verified by the Supreme Court.

Mr. Khosravi was subsequently executed and his only crime was he had contributed money to an opposition T.V broadcasting abroad.

Rasoul Bodaghi, according to HRANA News Agency Tehran province appeals court upheld the sentence of three year for Rasoul Bodaghi imprisoned teacher in Ward 7 of Evin prison. Mr. Bodaghi after serving a six year the Revolutionary Court sentenced him to 3 years imprisonment under the title of "Acting against national security"(3)

Esmail Bakhshi is an Iranian political prisoner, trade unionist, and a founding member and spokesman for the independent Workers Union of Haft Tappeh Sugarcane Agro Industrial Company in the Khuzestan Province of Iran. Iranian labour rights activist Esmail Bakhshi, who was rearrested on 20 January after speaking out about beatings and other abuse he suffered in detention in late 2018, is at grave risk of further torture. Haft tapeh(sugar-cane) workers stopped working for more than three weeks in protest against non-payment of their wages and privatization of the company.(4),(5)

Arzhang Davoodi

Iranian prisoner of conscience Arzhang Davoodi(6), already in prison for nearly 11 years, has now been sentenced to death on a new charge of "enmity against God", in relation to his peaceful political activism and writings. Iranian writer and poet Arzhang Davoodi learned from his lawyer on 20 July 2014 that he had been sentenced to death for his alleged membership and support of banned group People's Mojahedin Organization of Iran (PMOI). The sentence was imposed despite an apparent lack of evidence and after grossly unfair proceedings. He had been given less than an hour on 3 June to present his defense before a Revolutionary Court in the southern city of Bandar Abbas, which relayed it to a Revolutionary Court in Karaj, responsible for issuing the

death sentence. Neither Arzhang Davoodi nor his lawyer were allowed to appear before the court which issued the verdict.

Saeed Masouri, political prisoner in Rajai Shahr prison in Karaj(7) is serving his 16th year of his life sentence without furlough and no prospect of freedom. The father of the political prisoner has been deprived of meeting his son since one year ago due to his old age and the long distance he has to travel to the prison.

According to the report of Human Rights Activists News Agency (HRANA), Saeed Masouri, despite having endured sixteen years in prison has no hope of being freed. The new Islamic Penal Code is silent and vague regarding granting freedom or parole to prisoners sentenced to life imprisonment.

Soheil Arabi (8), a 33-year-old photographer and social media activist, was arrested by Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC) on November 7, 2013, for comments he had posted on his Facebook page. Judge Siamak Modir Khorasani cited the Facebook posts as evidence of “insulting the prophet” — a charge that can incur capital punishment — in Branch 76 of Tehran’s Criminal Court.

Arabi’s lawyers subsequently appealed to Branch 36 of Supreme Court, pleading Article 263 of the Islamic Penal Code. While Article 262 recommends the death sentence for those who insult the prophet, Article 263 reduces the death sentence to 74 lashes for defendants whose statements “have been under coercion or mistake, or in a state of drunkenness, or anger or slip of the tongue, or without paying attention to the meaning of the words.

Zanyar Moradi, Loghman Moradi and Ramin Hossein-Panahi, three Iranian Kurdish political prisoners, were reportedly executed on the morning of Saturday, September 8th in Karaj’s Rajai Shahr Prison(9). Three Kurdish political prisoners now lay buried in an undisclosed location after being executed in secret on September 8th on murder charges never proven in Tehran criminal court, sparking outrage from their families, attorneys, and the human rights community at large.

Without notifying their lawyers or loved ones, prison authorities hanged to death Zanyar Moradi, Loghman Moradi, and Ramin Hossein Panahi, contravening [both Iranian and international law] by seizing and interring their bodies in a location yet unknown to their families.

Female political prisoners in Iran

Maryam Akbari Monfared born on December 14, 1975 is an Iranian human rights activist. Three of her brothers and one of her sisters were executed during the 1988 mass executions in Iran.

Monfared was arrested on 31 December 2009 and was forcibly disappeared for five months. She was detained in solitary confinement for the first 43 days of her imprisonment, and interviewed without access to a lawyer. The lawyer assigned to her by the Iranian government only met and

spoke to her during the trial, which consisted of a single hearing of less than one hour. She was sentenced to 15 years in prison by the Branch 15 Revolutionary Court in Tehran in May 2010, which condemned her for "enmity against God" (*moharebeh*).

Zeynab Jalalian is a Kurdish Iranian political activist serving a life term in Khoy Prison. Arrested in 2007, she was originally sentenced to death (later commuted) by the Supreme Court in November 2009 on the charges of "enmity with God" and cooperation with the Party of Free Life of Kurdistan (PJAK). Zeynab has been subject to torture and constant harassment during her detainment according to a letter she wrote shortly before her court hearing. Despite a serious deterioration in her health, she has been denied adequate medical attention and is in critical condition. Her jailers have ignored advice from doctors that she receive medical treatment outside of prison. Since December 24 2018, Zeynab has been denied family visits.

Nasrin Sotoudeh, an internationally renowned human rights lawyer jailed in Iran, has been handed a new sentence of 38 years in prison and 148 lashes.

Sotoudeh, who has represented opposition activists including women prosecuted for removing their mandatory headscarf, was arrested in June and charged with spying, spreading propaganda and insulting Iran's supreme leader, her lawyer said.

She was jailed in 2010 for spreading propaganda and conspiring to harm state security – charges she denied – and was released after serving half of her six-year term. The European parliament awarded her the Sakharov human rights prize. Mohammad Moqiseh, a judge at a revolutionary court in Tehran, said on Monday that Sotoudeh had been sentenced to five years for assembling against national security and two years for insulting the country's supreme leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, the official Islamic Republic News Agency reported.

Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe

An employee of the Thomson Reuters Foundation, she has been in jail since April, 2016. She has both British and Iranian citizenship, and wanted to visit family in Iran with her two-year-old daughter. She is accused of participating in efforts "to cause the soft toppling of the Islamic Republic." Her foundation, which educates journalists worldwide, has called the allegations groundless.

Atena Daemi is an anti-death penalty campaigner and a women's rights activist serving a seven-year prison sentence in Iran for her peaceful activism. Her crime? Handing out anti-death penalty leaflets and criticizing Iran's execution record on social media.

In 2014, aged 26 years, Atena was blindfolded and arrested outside her home. For the first 28 days of her detention, she was held in a cell infested with insects and with no toilet. She said her interrogators offered to grant her easier access to the toilet in exchange for her "co-operation". Unfortunately, this was just the beginning of Atena's mistreatment.

Narges Mohammadi

Narges Mohammadi is a human rights activist. In May, 2016 she was sentenced to 16 years in prison, although her work is seen as peaceful. At the end of June, she began a hunger strike after authorities restricted telephone contact with her young son and daughter. After 20 days on hunger strike, she was granted permission to speak once a week with her children.

Environmental rights activists deaths and imprisonment

According to Amnesty international report at least 63 environmental activists and researchers were reportedly arrested in 2018(9). Without providing evidence, the Iranian authorities accused a number of them of collecting classified information about Iran's strategic areas under the pretext of carrying out environmental and scientific projects. At least five were charged with "corruption on earth", which carries the death penalty.

The fact that Iran's authorities are harassing and intimidating wildlife conservationists with fabricated charges is another chilling example of how peaceful activities are considered 'criminal' by the Iranian authorities.

In January 2018, Seyed-Emami, the 63-year-old founder of the Persian Wildlife Heritage Foundation, was taken to the notorious Evin prison as part of a crackdown on a group of environmental activists, many of whom worked for his organization.

Two weeks later, the authorities told his family that Seyed-Emami had killed himself, but that claim has been met widespread skepticism, especially as it comes after similar deaths in custody of a number of other prisoners in recent months that have remained unexplained. Iran's judiciary has described him as an agent of the CIA and Mossad who had used the wildlife foundation as a cover to collect information about the country's missile bases. Little if any

evidence has been provided in public to back that allegation, or the claims that he took his own life in jail.

In January, at least nine activists were detained in mass arrests of environmentalists carried out by the Revolutionary Guards. At around the same time, Kaveh Madani, deputy head of Iran's environmental protection organization, was detained for 72 hours before eventually leaving the country to live in exile. But at least eight other environmentalists remain in jail.

The five environmentalists are Houman Jowkar, Taher Ghadirian, Morad Tahbaz, Sepideh Kashani and Niloufar Bayani. Tahbaz, who is Iranian-American, was a CEO of the group. Bayani has a history of working with the UN, including for projects in Afghanistan. She returned to Iran, her birthplace, last June to join the PWHF.

After the death in custody of Seyed-Emami, the Revolutionary Guards went on defensive to extremes to prove that something was wrong, especially when the government had announced that they haven't done anything wrong.

The three other environmentalists who have not been charged with corruption on earth, but whose fate are unclear are Amir Hossein Khaleghi, Sam Rajabi and Abdolreza Kouhpayeh.

Abbas Jafari Dolatabadi, the Tehran prosecutor, told reporters that the detained activists are accused of using environmental projects as a cover to collect classified strategic information, providing no evidence for the allegation. It's not clear how an environmental conservation group can get access to classified information. Several Iranian officials, including Issa Kalantari, the head of the Department of Environment, have said that the Rouhani administration's investigation did not find any evidence that they are spies. No lawyer or family member has been told about the exact charges against the activists or has reviewed their cases.

More than a year of pre-trial detention with no clear charges and no access to a lawyer is an unusually long time even by Iran's dismal due process standards. It's hard not to conclude that the authorities are struggling to gather enough evidence to charge them with any recognizable crime.

Recommendations:

1. Political prisoners must have the right of being represented by a lawyer.
2. Lawyers representing political prisoners must not be intimidated or persecuted for representing their clients.
3. Prisoners must have access to medical care and medicine
4. Prisoners must be given regular family visits.
5. The use of torture and intimidation techniques to acquire false confessions of prisoners must end,
6. Environmentalists, deserve the utmost support and fullest protection by the United Nations and international humanitarian organizations.

Footnotes:

1. <https://iranhumanrights.org/2019/03/political-prisoners-family-faces-homelessness-in-iran-due-to-state-confiscation-of-properties/>
2. <https://www.en-hrana.org/gholamreza-khosravi-executed-today-morning>
3. <https://www.en-hrana.org/appeals-court-upheld-rasoul-bodaghis-imprisonment-sentence#more-15310>
4. <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/mde13/9745/2019/en/>
5. <https://cfppi.org/2018/12/04/1126/>
6. <https://www.refworld.org/docid/53d23af34.html>
7. <https://www.en-hrana.org/saeed-masouri-serving-16th-year-prison>
8. <https://www.en-hrana.org/soheil-arabi-sentenced-to-prison-and-exile>
9. <https://www.en-hrana.org/political-executions-zanyar-loghman-moradi-and-ramin-hosseini-panahi-hanged-to-death>