

Iran Human Rights Documentation Center

# **State of Coercion: The Situation of Sunni Muslims in Iran**

January 2022

## Table of Content

Executive Summary .....	4
Introduction.....	4
1 State of Coercion .....	6
2 Cases of Human Rights Abuses due to Religious Beliefs .....	8
2.1 Hassan Amini .....	8
2.2 Ebrahim Ahrari Khalaf.....	10
2.3 Hamed Ghazbani .....	12
2.4 Mohammad Omar Mollazehi .....	15
2.5 Danial Babayani Khajenafas .....	17
3 Cases of Execution for Advocating Sunnis' Rights .....	20
3.1 Bahman Shakouri .....	20
3.2 Nasser Sobhani.....	21
3.3 Qudratullah (Abdulhaq) Jafari .....	22
4 Cases of Execution on National Security Charges .....	23
4.1 Molana Khalilullah Zarei and Molana Salaheddin Seyyedi.....	26
4.2 Molavi Amanullah Balochi and Abdulrahim Kohi .....	26
5 Cases of Extrajudicial Murders inside Iran .....	26
5.1 Sheikh Mohammad-Saleh Zeyaiee.....	27
5.2 Ahmad Mirin Sayyad Baluchi.....	28
5.3 Mamousta Mohammad Rabiee.....	29
5.4 Abdulaziz Majd .....	31
5.5 Hossein Barazandeh .....	31
5.6 Extrajudicial Killings of Sunni Seminaries' Students.....	32
5.7 Suspicious Fatal Car Accidents.....	32
5.8 Other Cases of Plausible Extrajudicial Murders of Sunni Clerics .....	33
6 Assassinations of Sunni Clerics Living Abroad .....	34
6.1 Molana Abdulmalik Molazadeh.....	34
6.2 Molavi Abdalnaser Jamshidzahi .....	35
6.3 Molavi Nooruddin Gharibi Kerdar.....	35
6.4 Molavi Mosa Karampour .....	35

6.5	Molavi Abdulghani Shahouzahi.....	36
6.6	Molana Mohammad Ebrahim Safizadeh.....	36
7	Cases of Enforced Disappearance .....	38
8	Cases of Forced Exile .....	38
9	Cases of Imprisonment of Sunni Clerics .....	38
9.1	Ahmad Moftizadeh.....	39
9.2	Molavi Fazlurahman Kohi .....	40
10	Restrictions Imposed on Sunni Clerics .....	40
11	Destruction and Closure of Sunni Mosques and Schools .....	42
12	Violation of International Laws .....	44
12.1	Right to Life .....	44
12.2	Due Process Rights Including Right to a Fair Trial and Access to Justice .....	45
12.3	Torture, Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment.....	45
12.4	Right to Freedom of Thought, Conscience, and Religion.....	46
12.5	Right to Education and Work.....	47
	Conclusion .....	47
	Methodology.....	48

## Executive Summary

According to Article 12 of the Constitution of the Islamic Republic, the Twelver Ja'fari school of Islam is the official religion of the country, and this principle will remain "eternally immutable."<sup>1</sup> The very same article also states that adherents of the four major Sunni schools are free to practice their faiths, and that in localities where they are in the majority, local ordinances would be in accordance with their religious beliefs.<sup>2</sup> Sunni Muslims are by far Iran's largest religious minority.

Nevertheless, Sunnis have been subjected to discriminatory and suppressive policies and practices since the early years after the 1979 revolution. The Constitution excludes Sunni Iranians from holding the presidency by mandating that the holder of that office should believe in the state religion.<sup>3</sup> Also, there is an implied understanding that the Supreme Leader and members of the Guardian Council should be Shi'a clerics. Not surprisingly, Iranian Sunnis, by law and by practice, have been barred from many key sectors of Iranian politics. Sunnis are not appointed as government ministers or provincial governors, even in provinces with significant Sunni populations.

In addition to being politically excluded, Iran's Sunnis face considerable and widespread infringements on their ability to practice their religious faith freely. Shi'a proselytizing is encouraged, while Sunni teachings and literature are largely restricted in the public arena. The government not only bans Sunnis from building new mosques in major cities, including Tehran, but also has demolished and confiscated several Sunni mosques and seminaries across the country. The Islamic Republic also fails to make adequate investments in provinces with large Sunni population.

Since the 1979 revolution, several Sunni religious leaders have been killed in circumstances that suggest the involvement of the authorities in their deaths. Iranian intelligence officials have also taken aim at senior Sunni religious leaders and restricted their activities. Many ordinary Sunni citizens have been accused of acting against national security and sentenced to death or long-term imprisonment in grossly unfair trials. The Islamic Republic has followed a misleading line of propaganda by which it emphasizes the brotherhood between Sunni and Shi'a citizens. In reality, however, it has systematically discriminated against Sunni Iranians.

## Introduction

The Islamic Republic's discriminatory policies and practices have done tremendous damage to the Sunni community throughout the past four decades. Severe poverty and injustice have become so widespread in Sunni-majority areas of the country that even a number of officials have acknowledged the government's failure to provide for Sunni citizens. In her criticism of the

---

<sup>1</sup> Qanuni Assasi Jumhuri Islami Iran [Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran] 1368 [1989], art.12, [https://rc.majlis.ir/fa/content/iran\\_constitution](https://rc.majlis.ir/fa/content/iran_constitution) Twelver Ja'fari Shi'a Islam refers to the largest of the three Shi'i groups extant today. They believe that the succession to the Prophet Mohammad must remain in his family for specific members who are designated by a divine appointment. See *Twelver Shi'ah*, Encyclopedia Britannica, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Twelver-Shia>

<sup>2</sup> Qanuni Assasi Jumhuri Islami Iran [Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran] art.12.

<sup>3</sup> *Id.*, art.115.

government's inaction in supporting families whose breadwinners have been executed on drug charges, Shahindokht Molaverdi, a vice president in former President Hassan Rouhani's government, stated "In Sistan and Baluchestan, we have a village where all the men of that village have been executed. Today, their survivors are potential smugglers, both to seek revenge for their fathers and provide for their families, but there is no support for these people."<sup>4</sup>

Iranian Sunnis primarily reside in the provinces of Sistan and Baluchistan, Hormozgan, Bushehr, Fars, Kerman, Kurdistan, Kermanshah, West Azerbaijan, Ardabil, Gilan, Golestan, North and South Khorasan, as well as Tehran and Alborz.<sup>5</sup> In addition, there is a Sunni community in Khuzestan Province, many of whom have converted from Shi'a to Sunni Islam.<sup>6</sup> The majority of Iranian Sunnis live close to Iran's borders, where employment opportunities are limited and people generally have little access to economic resources.<sup>7</sup> For this reason, smuggling has become the only way of earning a living for many people in these areas.

Conditions of severe poverty and lack of employment opportunities in Sunni-majority areas have caused a number of Sunni citizens to migrate to other parts of the country, including Shi'a religious cities of Qom and Mashhad, to seek a better life.<sup>8</sup> Shi'a clerics, however, have viewed it suspiciously and as an attempt by Sunnis to take over Shi'a holy centers and to spread Wahhabism.<sup>9</sup> In recent years, several senior Shi'a clerics also have publicly stated that they are concerned about Sunni population growth compared with the Shi'a majority.<sup>10</sup>

A group of Iranian Sunnis have historical affiliations with Sufi orders, such as Naqshbandi and Ghaderi orders.<sup>11</sup> They often have refrained from engaging in politics.<sup>12</sup> Despite this, in the early years after the 1979 revolution, vigilantes attacked Sunni Dervish orders and their places of worship.<sup>13</sup>

---

<sup>4</sup> *Mūlāvirdī: Tamāmī Mardān Yīk Rūstā Dar Sīstān Va Balūchistān I'dām Shudihand* [Molaverdi: All the Men of a Village in Sistan and Baluchestan Have Been Executed], Radio Farda (Feb. 24, 2016), <https://www.radiofarda.com/a/o2-molaverdi-execution-in-iran/27570491.html>

<sup>5</sup> Ehsan Houshmand, *Āhli Sunat Irān*, Shafaqna.com (Sept. 3, 2017), <https://fa.shafaqna.com/news/442090/>

<sup>6</sup> *Āfzāyīsh Fishār Hā Bar Fa 'ālān Āhli Sunat Khūzistān* [Increasing Pressure on Sunni Activists in Khuzestan], Melliun Iran (Apr. 22, 2014), <https://melliun.org/iran/39551>

<sup>7</sup> Ehsan Fattahi, *Āhli Sunat Irān (Dirūz, Imrūz, Fardā)* [Sunnis of Iran (Yesterday, Today, Tomorrow)], Melliun Iran (Oct. 31, 2016), <https://melliun.org/iran/106122>

<sup>8</sup> Ali Ashraf Fathi, *Shāh Bīyt Taqrīb Be Sabki Khurāsānī, Chirā "Āhli Sunat Mashhad" Mas'lih Sāz Shudih?* [The Punchline of Approximation in Khorasani Style: Why "Sunnis of Mashhad" Have Become an Issue?], mobahesat.ir (Dec. 5, 2017), <https://mobahesat.ir/15408> See also Ali Afshari, *Khāminihīy Va Āhli Sunat, Raftār Dūgānih Yā Narmish Maghta ī* [Khamenei and the Sunnis, Double Behavior or Occasional Tolerance], Radio Farda (Sept. 16, 2017), available at <https://www.radiofarda.com/a/khamenei-sunnis-double-standard-behavior/28738202.html> (discussing settlement of Sunni communities in Shi'a religious cities in recent years).

<sup>9</sup> *Hushdār 'alam ālhudā Darbārih Āfzāyīsh Jam 'iyat Āhli Tasanun Dar Mashhad* [Alamolhoda's Warning about Increasing the Sunni Population in Mashhad], Radio Farda (Dec. 11, 2014), <https://www.radiofarda.com/a/f1-shia-imam-warns-about-increasing-number-of-wahabis-and-sunnis-in-iran/25380185.html>

<sup>10</sup> *Id.* See also Taher Shirmohammadi, *'alī Yūnesī Dastyār Vīzhih Rūhānī Barāy Āqaliyat Hā Chi Khāhad Kard?* [What will Ali Younesi, the Special Assistant of Rouhani, Do for the Minorities?], Deutsche Welle Persian (Apr. 10, 2013), available at <https://bit.ly/3nPR2bg> (discussing Shi'a clerics' point of view about increasing the Sunni population in Iran).

<sup>11</sup> Houshmand, *supra* note 5.

<sup>12</sup> Mohsen Kadivar, *Jafāy Jumhūrī Islāmī Bi Āhmad Muftīzādih* [Persecution of Ahmad Moftizadeh by the Islamic Republic], Kadivar.com (Apr. 29, 2018), <https://kadivar.com/16486/>

<sup>13</sup> Houshmand, *supra* note 5.

This report first discusses the situation of the Sunni community through the past four decades. In the second section, the accounts of witnesses interviewed by the Iran Human Rights Documentation Center (IHRDC) demonstrate the current context in which Sunni citizens have been denied their basic human rights. In the third section, cases of execution of Sunni citizens on the charge of propagating Wahhabism will be discussed. The report then examines cases of execution for alleged national security offenses in the fourth section. The fifth and sixth sections of the report will discuss in detail the extrajudicial murders of Sunni clerics in Iran and abroad. The seventh and eighth sections will examine cases of forced disappearances and forced exiles of Sunni clerics. The report then scrutinizes the government's restrictive policies against Sunni clerics and the destruction and closure of Sunni mosques, in the ninth and tenth sections, respectively. Finally, the report discusses how the government's policies and practices with respect to Sunni citizens violate Iran's international human rights commitments.

## 1 State of Coercion

Many Iranian Sunnis supported the 1979 revolution, hoping that the new government would end widespread poverty and inequality in Sunni provinces.<sup>14</sup> Their optimism, however, faded away when the Islamic Republic's Constitution set Shi'a Islam as the official religion of the country. Several influential Sunni clerics, including Mamousta Ezzedin Hosseini, who was Mahabad's Sunni Friday prayer imam, and Molavi Abdulaziz Molazadeh, the Friday prayer imam of Sunnis in Zahedan, openly distanced themselves from the government.<sup>15</sup> In addition, several Sunni scholars and activists formed religion-oriented political groups.

In 1980, a group of Sunni religious reformers created a group called *Jamā'at Da'vat Va Eşlāḥ* [Congregation of Invitation and Correction].<sup>16</sup> Also in 1981, prominent Sunni scholar Ahmad Moftizadeh and several other clerics established the Central Council of Sunnis, also known as *Shams*, which was a congregation of Sunni religious scholars from all around the country.<sup>17</sup> *Shams* was founded with the aim of promoting unity between the Shi'a and Sunni communities and defending the rights of Sunnis of Iran. The activities of this religious initiative were banned shortly after its second congress in August 1982. Many of its founders and members were arrested and accused of having connections with armed opposition groups.<sup>18</sup>

The relationship of the Islamic Republic with the Sunni community has been particularly complex. Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, the founder and first Supreme Leader of the Islamic Republic, was more tolerant towards Sunnis compared to other conservative Shi'a senior clerics. He also advocated for unity among Islamic sects and initiated the "Islamic unity week," which refers to a week-long celebration held every year between two dates of the birthday of the

---

<sup>14</sup> Fattahi, *supra* note 7.

<sup>15</sup> STEPHANE A. DUDOIGNON, *THE BALUCH, SUNNISM AND THE STATE IN IRAN: FROM TRIBAL TO GLOBAL* 220 (2017).

<sup>16</sup> *Sāyiti Rasmī Jamā'at Da'vat Va Eşlāḥ* [Official Website of the Congregation of Invitation and Correction], *IslahWeb*, <http://www.islahweb.org/> (Last visited Jan. 12, 2022).

<sup>17</sup> Ehsan Mehrabi, *40 Sāl Bāzdāsh, I'dām va Tirūr Rūḥānīyūn Ahli Sunat; Āz Muftizādih Tā Kūhī* [40 Years of Arrest, Execution, and Assassination of Sunni Clerics; From Mostizadeh to Kohi], *IranWire* (Oct. 3, 2020), <https://iranwire.com/fa/features/41691>

<sup>18</sup> Kadivar, *supra* note 12.

Prophet Mohammad, according to the Shi‘a and Sunni traditions. On the other hand, however, Ayatollah Khomeini established the Islamic Republic based on the theory of *Velayat-e Faqih*, or Guardianship of the Jurist, which institutionalized discrimination against Sunni citizens. In addition, the Islamic Republic’s efforts to advance the Shi‘a dominance and promote the Shi‘a Supreme Leader as the leader of the Islamic world have fueled sectarian animosities between the government and Sunni citizens.<sup>19</sup>

Sunnis have been unofficially barred from high-level government positions such as minister or provincial governor in the past four decades. During the presidency of Mohammad Khatami (1997-2005), who had based his campaign on a reform program promising implementation of a democratic and more tolerant society, only a few Sunni citizens were appointed as mid-level administrators in the provinces of Sistan and Baluchistan, Kurdistan, Kermanshah, and West Azerbaijan.<sup>20</sup>

The situation of Sunnis worsened after former President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad took power.<sup>21</sup> In 2005, Yaqub Mehrnahad, a human rights activist in Sistan and Baluchistan Province, was executed on fabricated charges.<sup>22</sup> The pressure against Sunni clerics and religious activists also mounted after the Supreme Council of the Cultural Revolution enacted “the Statute of State Council for Planning the Sunni Theological Schools” in October 2007.<sup>23</sup>

In 2013, former president Hassan Rouhani appointed Ali Younesi as the President’s assistant for the affairs of ethnic and religious minorities. He was assigned to promote the rights of religious and ethnic minorities at different levels.<sup>24</sup> Despite initial hopes, however, no meaningful improvement was made with respect to Sunnis’ conditions, and only a few Sunni citizens have been appointed to mid-level government positions. In 2015, Saleh Adibi, a Sunni citizen, was named as Iran’s ambassador to Vietnam and Cambodia.<sup>25</sup> In 2018, Homeira Rigi, a Sunni woman from Sistan and Baluchistan Province, was appointed as Iran’s ambassador to Brunei.<sup>26</sup>

In an unprecedented order, Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei, who is also the commander-in-chief of the armed forces, appointed Admiral Shahram Irani as the commander of the Navy in August 2021. Irani is the first Sunni citizen who has ever been selected to a high-ranking military

---

<sup>19</sup> Ali Afshari, *Khāmīnihiyy Va Āhli Sunat, Raftār Dūgānih Yā Narmish Maghṭa ī* [Khamenei and the Sunnis, Double Behavior or Occasional Tolerance], Radio Farda (Sept. 16, 2017), <https://www.radiofarda.com/a/khamenei-sunnis-double-standard-behavior/28738202.html>

<sup>20</sup> Houshmand, *supra* note 5.

<sup>21</sup> *Fishār Hāy Maḡhabī Va Qatl Fa‘ālīyn Balūch Dar Zamān Āḡmadīnijād* [Religious Pressures and Murder of Baluchi Activists During Ahmadinejad’s Presidency], Sahab (Jul. 23, 2020), <https://bit.ly/2XehWye>

<sup>22</sup> *One Person’s Story; Ya’qub Mehrnahad*, Abdorrahman Boroumand Center for Human Rights in Iran, <https://www.iranrights.org/memorial/story/40798/yaqub-mehrnahad> (Last visited Jan. 12, 2022).

<sup>23</sup> Sahab, *supra* note 21.

<sup>24</sup> Taher Shirmohammadi, ‘*alī Yūnesī Dastyār Vīzhih Rūhānī Barāy Āqalīyat Hā Chi Khāhad Kard?* [What will Ali Younesi, the Special Assistant of Rouhani, Do for the Minorities?], Deutsche Welle Persian (Apr. 10, 2013), <https://bit.ly/3nPR2bg>

<sup>25</sup> *Nakhustīn Safīr Kurd Sunnī Dar Jumhūrī Islāmī Irān Manṣūb Mishavad* [The First Sunni Kurdish Ambassador of the Islamic Republic of Iran is Appointed], BBC Persian (Sept. 2, 2015), [https://www.bbc.com/persian/iran/2015/09/150902\\_103\\_iran\\_diplomat\\_sunni](https://www.bbc.com/persian/iran/2015/09/150902_103_iran_diplomat_sunni)

<sup>26</sup> *Humayrā Rīgī Haftih Āyandih Dar Maḡal Māmūriyat Khūd Huḡūr Mīyābad* [Homeira Rigi Will Be at Her Mission Location Next Week], Nasim News (Mar. 3, 2019), <https://bit.ly/3AuB4XC>

position in the Islamic Republic's history.<sup>27</sup> The ideological structure of the Islamic Republic suggest that the policy against appointing Sunni citizens to high office has been pushed by the conservative wing of the government and traditional Shi'a establishment who have been suspicious of the Sunni community.<sup>28</sup>

There are dozens of cases in which Shi'a clerics have insulted the Sunnis' religious beliefs.<sup>29</sup> In recent years, a number of Ayatollahs have warned about "the increasing expectations and population of Sunnis" in Iran.<sup>30</sup> In April 2014, Ayatollah Nasser Makarem Shirazi, a conservative Shi'a cleric in the Qom Seminary, demanded that the government impose restrictions on Sunni citizens' purchasing of property in Iran.<sup>31</sup>

## 2 Cases of Human Rights Abuses due to Religious Beliefs

In the following section, the accounts of witnesses interviewed by IHRDC will be presented to illustrate how the Islamic Republic's oppressive and discriminatory actions have impacted Iranian Sunnis.

### 2.1 Hassan Amini

Hassan Amini is a prominent Sunni cleric and the manager of Imam Bukhari Seminary in Sanandaj. He, alongside Ahmad Moftizadeh, founded Maktab-e Qur'an in Sanandaj in 1977. Although Amini supported the 1979 revolution, he soon realized that the Islamic Republic was not the fair and just Islamic system he had expected. He later became the Shari'a ruler of Kurdistan. In this position, Amini adjudicated disputes in matters of personal life, such as family and probate, in accordance with Sunni Islamic jurisprudence.<sup>32</sup>

After the adoption of the Islamic Republic's Constitution, which declared Shi'a as the official religion of the country, Ahmad Moftizadeh, and a group of Sunni scholars, including Amini, established the Central Council of Sunnis, or *Shams*, in Tehran in April 1981. *Shams* advocated for "the elimination of injustice and oppression in ethnic, religious, and socio-economic levels." Shortly after the first anniversary of *Shams'* establishment, its members and supporters were targeted by the government.<sup>33</sup>

---

<sup>27</sup> Syed Zafar Mehdi, *Iran Appoints First Sunni High-ranking Commander as Navy Chief*, Anadolu Agency (Jul. 17, 2021), <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/middle-east/iran-appoints-first-sunni-high-ranking-commander-as-navy-chief/2338442>

<sup>28</sup> 'alī Yūnesī, *Mushāvir Ra'īs Jumhūr Irān Ki Zīr Fishār Muḥāfiẓih Kārān Āst, Kīst?* [Who is Ali Younesi, the Assistant of the President of Iran, Who is Under Pressure from Conservatives?], BBC Persian (Mar. 14, 2015), [https://www.bbc.com/persian/iran/2015/03/150314\\_112\\_iran\\_younesi](https://www.bbc.com/persian/iran/2015/03/150314_112_iran_younesi)

<sup>29</sup> Witness Statement of Danial Babayani Khajenafas, Iran Human Rights Documentation Center (Apr. 29, 2020), <https://bit.ly/3nfhkTZ>

<sup>30</sup> Taher Shirmohammadi, *Āfzāyīsh Entiqād Mutaqābil Rūḥānīyān Sunī Va Shi'a Dar Irān* [Increasing Mutual Criticism of Sunni and Shi'a Clerics in Iran], Deutsche Welle Persian (May 22, 2014), <https://bit.ly/3texaz7>

<sup>31</sup> Siavash Ardalani, *Khaṭar Efrāṭi Garī Sunī Dar Irān; Vāridātī Yā Khūdjūsh* [The Danger of 'Sunni Extremism' in Iran; Imported or Spontaneous?], BBC Persian (Jan. 22, 2014), [https://www.bbc.com/persian/iran/2014/01/140122\\_110\\_ma\\_iran\\_sunni\\_extremism](https://www.bbc.com/persian/iran/2014/01/140122_110_ma_iran_sunni_extremism)

<sup>32</sup> Witness Statement of Hassan Amini, Iran Human Rights Documentation Center (Sept. 23, 2021), <https://bit.ly/3FbdhhC>

<sup>33</sup> *Id.*



On August 17, 1982, about three hundred members and supporters of *Shams* were arrested by the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (“IRGC”) in different cities. On the very same day, Amini was also taken into custody. IRGC forces showed no warrant and transferred him to their detention center in Sanandaj. He was held there for about five months. As Amini explained, the interrogators were mostly obsessed with the reason of his disagreement with the new government’s actions, which they claimed were based on Islam. Sunni rights activists including him, however, believed that the Islamic Republic is a Shi’a government with no respect for other schools of Islam. The members and supporters of *Shams* were kept separate from other inmates in prison, as the officials were afraid that “we proselytize them and they would be attracted,” Amini added.<sup>34</sup>

In 1982, Hassan Amini and a group of *Shams* members and supporters were put on trial at the Revolutionary Court in Sanandaj. Under one indictment, 18 defendants were accused of revolting against the government. According to Amini, IRGC members were present during the trial and openly threatened the defendants. In one incident, Mamousta Farooq Farsad objected to the intimidating presence of IRGC members. He told Judge Qadami, who presided over the trial, that an IRGC member sitting next to him stated that he will be sent to exile, while he had not been convicted yet. The judge, however, ignored his objection.<sup>35</sup> Mamousta Farooq Farsad later died under suspicious circumstances in exile in the mid-1990s. It is believed that he was one of the victims of the Chain Murders of Iranian intellectuals and political opponents by a group of the Ministry of Intelligence (MOI) agents.<sup>36</sup>

During the trial, Amini and other defendants spoke in their defense, which was not welcomed by the judge and made him upset. He sentenced them to long-term imprisonment. Amini received a sentence of 15 years. He was held in Dizelabad prison in Kermanshah for a while and then was transferred to a prison managed by the IRGC in Semnan, which was imprisonment in exile. After a year, he was sent back to the IRGC detention center in Sanandaj, also known as Shahramfar Base.<sup>37</sup>

As Amini has described, although he was not physically tortured in prison, he was denied access to basic necessities such as a heating system. The authorities insisted that members and supporters of *Shams* must pledge to cease from further activities related to *Shams*’ agenda. Following an international outcry orchestrated by Sunni religious leaders, members and supporters of *Shams* were released around the mid-1980s. Amini spent more than three years behind bars.<sup>38</sup>

After being released from prison, Amini resumed his religious and social activities, including his role as the popularly appointed Shari’a ruler of Kurdistan. Without having any official title and authority, Amini has been the Shari’a ruler among Sunni citizens in Kurdistan. During the 1980s

---

<sup>34</sup> *Id.*

<sup>35</sup> *Id.*

<sup>36</sup> *Payām Zindānīyān Āhli Sunat Darbārih Shahādat Kāk Fārūq Farsād Dar Jaryān Qatl Hāy Zanjīrihiyy [Message from Sunni Prisoners about the Martyrdom of Kak Farooq Farsad During the Chain Murders]*, Kalameh (Jun. 14, 2018), <https://www.kalameh.tv/1397/03/5150/>

<sup>37</sup> *Id.*

<sup>38</sup> Amini, *supra* note 32.

and the early 1990s, security forces regularly summoned Amini to Tehran. They met him in unofficial settings such as hotels, and they often threatened him. In recent years, such meetings have continued in Kurdistan. According to Amini, interrogators are often upset about his public criticism of the government.<sup>39</sup>

In 2009, Hassan Amini was arrested at Tehran's airport as he was returning from the UAE. During his time abroad, Amini had an interview with Nour TV, which is a private satellite TV channel covering the news of Iranian Sunnis. He was interrogated for several hours, and his passport was confiscated and never returned. Several months later, he was arrested in Zahedan, where he had gone to attend *Khatm-e Bukhari*, which is the annual graduation of Sunni seminary students. He was held in prison for about ten days and his case was sent to the Special Clerical Court in Mashhad. This case was later sent to the Special Clerical Court's branch in Hamedan and is still pending. Amini also has another open case in Hamedan court that is related to his statements in support of Sunni prisoners who were executed last year.<sup>40</sup> Since the confiscation of his passport in 2009, Amini has been banned from leaving the country.

## 2.2 Ebrahim Ahrari Khalaf

Ebrahim Ahrari Khalaf has been a teacher in schools of Sistan and Baluchistan Province. When he was twenty years old and had just started his work as a teacher, he decided to stand for the rights of Sunnis. In 1985, he sent several letters to the Sunni representatives of Sistan and Baluchistan Province in the Iranian Parliament, asking them to impeach Ali Khamenei, the then president.<sup>41</sup> During one of his Friday prayer sermons in 1985, Ali Khamenei talked about the early history of Islam in such a way that was considered biased and offensive among the Sunni community.<sup>42</sup> Ahrari Khalaf never received a response to his letters.<sup>43</sup>

A few months later, during a town hall meeting attended by a number of government officials, including members of the parliament and IRGC commanders, Ahrari Khalaf publicly addressed his concerns about discrimination against Sunni citizens. According to Ahrari Khalaf, the meeting's atmosphere became tense when the people present at the meeting applauded his speech and the authorities concluded the meeting.<sup>44</sup>

In the aftermath of this public meeting, Ahrari Khalaf was placed under house arrest for a while and then interrogated by MOI agents. Although he was released shortly afterwards, the Ministry of Education transferred him to a remote and underprivileged rural area for about two years.<sup>45</sup> Teachers in Iran are hired and assigned to different schools by the Ministry of Education. The

---

<sup>39</sup> *Id.*

<sup>40</sup> *Id.*

<sup>41</sup> Witness Statement of Ebrahim Ahrari Khalaf, Iran Human Rights Documentation Center (Jul. 9, 2020), <https://bit.ly/3mfjFNh>

<sup>42</sup> *Id.* See also *Khuṭbah Hāy Namāz Jum'ih Tihrān [Tehran's Friday Prayer Sermons]*, khamenei.ir (Apr. 12, 1985), available at <https://farsi.khamenei.ir/speech-content?id=21774> (discussing Ali Khamenei's Friday prayer sermon in April 1985, in which he talked about the life and death of Imam Musa Kazim, the seventh Imam in Twelver Shi'a Islam, and his relationship with his Sunni counterparts from the Shi'a point of view).

<sup>43</sup> Ahrari Khalaf, *supra* note 41.

<sup>44</sup> *Id.*

<sup>45</sup> *Id.*

very same governmental body has the power to relocate teachers to different cities, which is done based upon arbitrary directives and the totality of the circumstances.<sup>46</sup> Ahrari Khalaf said he never received an official letter regarding his relocation.<sup>47</sup>

Ahrari Khalaf suffered serious health issues from malnutrition and lack of basic necessities during his time in the underprivileged village. Despite this, he developed a friendship with local people and counseled them in religious matters. This issue, however, worried the security forces that resulted in his second arrest. After that, Ahrari Khalaf was banned from teaching, and instead was assigned to administrative positions for about three years. He was interrogated many times by the *Herasat* of the Education Department.<sup>48</sup>

The term *Herasat*, which means “protection,” refers to MOI offices in state agencies, organizations, and universities in Iran. These offices are tasked with identifying potential security threats. *Herasat* officials reportedly surveil employees, act as informants, and influence hiring and firing practices.<sup>49</sup>

Ahrari Khalaf indicated that he was under security forces' surveillance for years. Even his family and friends were interrogated about his activities when he was pursuing his academic education at the University of Mashhad in the early 1990s. Despite this, after the security forces' attack on Makki Grand Mosque in Zahedan in January 1994, he contacted BBC Persian radio and described what he had witnessed on the day of the attack. A few months later, Ahrari Khalaf was arrested and transferred to the MOI detention center in Zahedan. He was interrogated for fifteen days, during which his family was not aware of his whereabouts.<sup>50</sup>

The interrogation sessions didn't have a determined time ... [They] asked about every issue. [They] had a piece of printed paper that contained many photos of different people ... [The agents] put them in front of me and asked, ‘Do you know this [person]? Write about him!’ How about that one? ... I was charged with several counts; ranging from ideological offenses to armed confrontation ... I was not physically beaten, but I was in a very difficult mental condition. The fact that they were trying to drag other people into the charges against me put a lot of psychological pressure ... I was put in a special cell, where there was not even a way to commit suicide! I could not notice the passage of time ... Terrifying sounds, such as the sound of mourning, were consistently played through speakers ... [In addition] I had to be blindfolded all the time, even inside the cell.<sup>51</sup>

The interrogators placed Ahrari Khalaf under extensive pressure to confess against himself and other people, including Molavi Abdolhamid, the Friday prayer Imam of Zahedan. When he asked interrogators for an attorney, they ridiculed him. Interrogators also tried to persuade him to

---

<sup>46</sup> *Naql va Intiqālāt Mu'alimān Dar Chi Sharāyitī Emkān Pažīr Āst? [Under What Conditions Teachers' Relocation Is Possible?]*, moallemirani.com (Jan. 23, 2021), <http://moallemirani.com/44171>

<sup>47</sup> Ahrari Khalaf, *supra* note 41.

<sup>48</sup> *Id.*

<sup>49</sup> Saeid Golkar, *Iran's Coercive Apparatus: Capacity and Desire*, Washington Institute for Near East Policy (Jan. 5, 2018), <https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/irans-coercive-apparatus-capacity-and-desire>

<sup>50</sup> Ahrari Khalaf, *supra* note 41.

<sup>51</sup> *Id.*

cooperate with them by offering lucrative benefits. Due to his deteriorating physical and mental conditions, Ahrari Khalaf eventually accepted to make a televised confession, which was never broadcasted.<sup>52</sup>

Ahrari Khalaf was sent to the Zahedan Revolutionary Court, where he described its judges as puppets of security forces. “As soon as Judge Baqeri saw me, he started insulting the Sunnis’ beliefs ... [After all of that] he said, ‘what is your name?’ I didn’t respond because the interrogator had already told me that the judge has no power [in my case],” Ahrari Khalaf added. He was released from prison a few days after his family posted bail, but he remained under interrogators’ pressure.<sup>53</sup>

[Once in a while] I was summoned and interrogated. When I refused to cooperate with [MOI agents], they said, ‘If you cooperate, [then] your [problem is solved]. [Because] the Revolutionary Court is under our control! ... [But] if you don’t cooperate, the Revolutionary Court will not make a decision on your case!’ ... In the meantime, the Revolutionary Court summoned me to trial every three months. When I went there, the judge informed me that the MOI hasn’t responded to their inquiry yet.<sup>54</sup>

After about one year, the Revolutionary Court sentenced Ahrari Khalaf to six months’ imprisonment and fifty lashes. As Ahrari Khalaf explained, he was in constant fear because security forces’ harassment has continued over the years and even outside the country and until the present day. He left Iran for Malaysia in 2011 to avoid further persecution.<sup>55</sup>

### 2.3 Hamed Ghazbani

Hamed Ghazbani is a young Sunni citizen whose life was severely impacted by the Islamic Republic’s repressive actions against Sunnis. In May 2016, he was arrested by a group of MOI agents in his clothing boutique in Bander-e Genaveh, a port city in Bushehr Province. The agents briefly showed him an arrest warrant, but they searched his boutique and his house without presenting any court order. In MOI’s office in Bandar-e Genaveh, Ghazbani was told that his arrest was because of his activities in social media, including his blog that had not been updated for years. After a few hours, he was transferred to the MOI detention center in Bushehr.<sup>56</sup>

On the very first night of my stay in the Bushehr detention center, before being interrogated, I was beaten by two persons. I don’t know what their reason was for beating me. Maybe they wanted me to feel the gravity of the situation and understand where I was! ... From early morning until about ten to eleven at night, a loud radio sound was continuously playing in the cell. [They] had adjusted the sound that way to cause psychological distress to the detainee.<sup>57</sup>

---

<sup>52</sup> *Id.*

<sup>53</sup> *Id.*

<sup>54</sup> *Id.*

<sup>55</sup> *Id.*

<sup>56</sup> Witness Statement of Hamed Ghazbani, Iran Human Rights Documentation Center (Apr. 27. 2020), <https://bit.ly/3Czmyyj>

<sup>57</sup> *Id.*

During the interrogations, Ghazbani was charged with several offenses, including insulting the founder of the Islamic Republic Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, insulting Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei, acting against national security through publishing some content on the Internet, and insulting Shi'a sacred values. The basis of his first accusation was publishing a caricature of Ayatollah Khomeini and a critical article about one of his fatwas in a blog. "According to this fatwa, [a man] is permitted to have sexual pleasure through touching the body of an infant in any way. This fatwa has been mentioned in one of Khomeini's books and I only shared it," Ghazbani added.<sup>58</sup>

In his blog, Ghazbani had also posted several photos of slogans against Khamenei that were written on walls and some videos of the 2009 protests. In addition, he had uploaded a number of videos of Shi'a clerics' speeches in which they talked about Sunnis in a very offensive manner. Those videos and photos were available everywhere on the Internet. Moreover, MOI agents accused Ghazbani of the crime of *Sabb-e Nabi* because of a joke about Imam Naqi [the Tenth Shi'a Imam] that he had sent in a private message to one of his friends several years ago.<sup>59</sup> According to Article 262 of the Islamic Penal Code ("IPC") of 2013, insulting the Prophet Mohammad or other Prophets or Shi'a Imams and holy figures constitute *Sabb-e Nabi*, which is punishable by death.<sup>60</sup> MOI agents threatened that he will be executed or sentenced to life in prison for this crime.<sup>61</sup>

In the face of such prospects, as the saying goes, I gave up! That was the first time in my life that I set foot in such places ... I accepted to confess against myself and to cooperate with [MOI] agents after being released from prison ... The interrogator told me, 'If you want that we remove this charge [*Sabb-e Nabi*] and mitigate your punishment ... you should write down whatever I say and sign it.'<sup>62</sup>

The interrogators also advised Ghazbani not to retain an attorney because as they claimed, "the court and its ruling" were in their hands and the judge does not have any power. After about ten days of interrogation in the MOI detention center, Ghazbani was transferred to the Bushehr Central Prison, which he described as an "awful" place.<sup>63</sup>

There was no place for sleeping and also no air conditioning. In that hot weather of Bushehr, there was only one air conditioning for about one hundred and fifty people [in the ward]. There was not even a faucet there. They had put only one faucet in the bathroom so I couldn't drink enough water during the time that I was there.<sup>64</sup>

After about two months, Ghazbani was released on bail from prison. Despite interrogators' advice, he tried to hire an attorney, but no one accepted his case, as the local attorneys were

---

<sup>58</sup> *Id.*

<sup>59</sup> *Id.*

<sup>60</sup> The Islamic Penal Code consists of crimes and punishments of *hudud*, *qisas*, *diyat*, *ta'zirat*, the security and correctional measures, requirements and barriers of criminal responsibility and the rules that apply to them.

<sup>61</sup> Ghazbani, *supra* note 56.

<sup>62</sup> *Id.*

<sup>63</sup> *Id.*

<sup>64</sup> *Id.*

afraid of getting involved in a national security case. Consequently, Ghazbani remained unrepresented during the trial at the Revolutionary Court in Bandar-e Genaveh.<sup>65</sup>

Judge Ahmad Naserzadeh ... didn't give me a chance to speak in my defense at all. I didn't have an attorney either. The entire court session lasted for about five to six minutes. After that, they took me to another room and handed me a piece of paper, and said, 'If you have any defense, write it there. We will consider it.' I don't think that [the judge] has even looked at that paper of my defenses.<sup>66</sup>

Despite interrogators' promises, Hamed Ghazbani was sentenced to nine years' imprisonment, five years of which was enforceable. This was due to Article 134 of the IPC, which provides that in cases of offenses punishable by *ta'zir*, where the offenses committed are not more than three counts, only the most severe punishment shall be enforced.<sup>67</sup>

Interrogators reached out to him and claimed the court was not supposed to issue such a sentence and they would reduce it at the appeals court. They also invited him to a meeting at the MOI local office, where Ghazbani saw interrogators' faces without masks for the first time. They asked him to go to Dubai and stay with his wife's uncle, who was then the manager of Nour TV. This private satellite TV channel, which is based in Dubai, covers news about Iranian Sunnis. Interrogators also instructed him to seek employment at Nour TV, as their goal was to identify Nour TV's staff, financial resources, and followers in Iran.<sup>68</sup>

I was arrested only two or three months after my marriage. One of the interrogators told me, 'We were waiting for you to get married, and then catch you because otherwise, you weren't useful for our cause.' During the [next] two years, I was under pressure from the interrogators, who were threatening me, and on the other hand, promising that they would halt the court's judgment and give me money. They called at inconvenient times to talk about it [cooperation with them] ... They harassed me a lot.<sup>69</sup>

When Hamed Ghazbani did not cooperate with MOI agents, the court of appeals refused his case. Hoping to be helped in his pleading, Ghazbani reached out to local leaders, including Bandar-e Genaveh Friday prayer Imam and members of a Sunni political group [*Jamā'at Da'vat Va Eşlāh*]. Those attempts, however, went nowhere and interrogators' intimidation continued.

---

<sup>65</sup> *Id.*

<sup>66</sup> *Id.*

<sup>67</sup> "In the cases of offenses punishable by *ta'zir*, where the offenses committed are not more than three, the court shall impose the maximum punishment provided for each offense; and if the offenses committed are more than three, [the court] shall impose more than the maximum punishment provided for each crime provided that it does not exceed more than the maximum plus one half of each punishment. In any of the abovementioned cases, only the most severe punishment shall be executed and if the most severe punishment is reduced or replaced or becomes non-executable for any legal reason, the next most severe punishment shall be executed. In any case where there is no maximum and minimum provided for the punishment, if the offenses committed are not more than three, up to one-fourth, and if the offenses committed are more than three, up to half of the punishment prescribed by law shall be added to the original punishment." See Qanuni Mojazat Islami [Islamic Penal Code], Tehran 1392 [2013], art. 134, <https://www.ilo.org/dyn/natlex/docs/ELECTRONIC/103202/125190/>

<sup>68</sup> Ghazbani, *supra* note 56.

<sup>69</sup> *Id.*



He appealed again but his case was dismissed. As he did not want to cooperate with the MOI, he remained with no choice but to serve five years in prison based on fabricated charges. To avoid this situation, he left Iran in 2018.<sup>70</sup>

## 2.4 Mohammad Omar Mollazehi

Mohammad Omar Mollazehi is a graduate of Manba‘ al-‘ul ūm Seminary in Sarbaz, Sistan and Baluchistan Province. Upon graduation in 2003, he joined the staff of the same seminary and developed a career of teaching and preaching for religious rights among the youth in his home village of Nasirabad. Since the early years of his activities, he was subjected to harassment and intimidation by intelligence forces. He was summoned to the MOI offices and interrogated frequently.<sup>71</sup>

After 2009, I was told that I must show up at the MOI [local office] every month and sign [an attendance book] there. [MOI agents] said, ‘If you want to go to another city from your hometown, you should call and ask for permission that you’re traveling.’ In response, I told them that I can’t do that! But anytime that I couldn’t show up, [MOI agents] contacted me [and said], ‘You didn’t make it.’<sup>72</sup>

As Mollazehi has stated, the pressure against him mounted as his advocacy efforts for Sunnis’ rights scaled up. On different occasions, MOI agents called him from unknown numbers and instructed him to go to their offices. At least once Mollazehi was summoned to the MOI office in Zahedan, where he was asked to sit at a table, facing a wall. He could not see the interrogators as they sat behind him. During the interrogation sessions, he was usually questioned about certain topics, such as any connections to foreign countries.<sup>73</sup>

Although Mollazehi was not beaten, he was threatened and insulted by MOI agents. “[They] said, ‘The whole world is afraid [of us] and obedient! ... You’re nobody and if we want, we can arrest and detain you. The Ministry of Intelligence is such a place that people are shaking when they pass by [our buildings].’” Mohammad Omar Mollazehi was never formally charged with any offenses.<sup>74</sup>

The people of Nasirabad, which is a small village on the outskirts of Sarbaz in Sistan and Baluchistan Province, have been subjected to the government’s repressive actions in recent years.<sup>75</sup> In May 2008, a group of its residents, including Ayoub Bahramzehi, Mollazehi’s brother-in-law, were arrested after they confronted security forces who intended to arrest several

---

<sup>70</sup> *Id.*

<sup>71</sup> Witness Statement of Mohammad Omar Mollazehi, Iran Human Rights Documentation Center (Oct. 4, 2021), <https://bit.ly/3yJLS44>

<sup>72</sup> *Id.*

<sup>73</sup> *Id.*

<sup>74</sup> *Id.*

<sup>75</sup> Untold Stories of Nasirabad - Interview with Mohammad Omar Mollazehi, HRANA (Feb. 9, 2015), <https://www.en-hrana.org/interviews/untold-stories-nasirabad-interview-mohammad-omar-mollazehi/>

locals without showing any warrant.<sup>76</sup> In March 2009, two other residents of Nasirabad were executed on the charge of cooperation with rebellious groups. Molana Khalilullah Zarei and Molana Salaheddin Seyyedi, both teachers in the local seminary, had been denied access to a fair trial.<sup>77</sup>

Ayoub Bahramzahi was released on bail after a while but was arrested again on April 19, 2010.<sup>78</sup> On the very same day, when Bahramzahi was taken into custody, a young man from the village named Dora Shahdoust was shot to death by intelligence forces.<sup>79</sup> Despite the evidence indicating that security forces had shot Shahdoust directly, there are no reports that Iranian authorities have prosecuted or disciplined the responsible individuals. In April 2012, another resident of Nasirabad village was shot and killed by security forces in the streets. Naeem Talatuf and several other young religious activists in the village had been under security forces' pressure to curtail their activities.<sup>80</sup> There is no evidence of a thorough investigation into his murder.

Ayoub Bahramzahi, who had been accused of *moharebeh* (waging war against God), was hanged alongside 15 other Baluch prisoners in October 2013. Their executions were carried out shortly after Jaish ul-Adl attacked an Iranian army outpost and killed 14 soldiers. Jaish ul-Adl is a jihadist militant organization in southeastern Iran.<sup>81</sup> Mohammad Marzieh, Zahedan's Public and Revolutionary Prosecutor at the time, later stated that 16 Baluch prisoners, whom he referred to as "the villains connected to anti-government groups," were executed in "retaliation of" Jaish ul-Adl's attack.<sup>82</sup>

Ayoub had been sent to exile [from Zahedan] to Hamedan prison, where he was executed. We [his family] didn't know that he was executed. [The authorities] didn't even give us [a chance] to meet [him] for the last time. Through the mass media and the TV, we [got to know] that 16 individuals, including Ayoub, had been executed. [After that] we reached out to Zahedan Prosecutor's Office to inquire [about Ayoub's situation]. [The officials in the Prosecutor Office] not only didn't provide a right answer, but also insulted us! Eventually after several hours of sending us to the MOI office, back and forth, [they] told us that Ayoub had been executed in Hamadan and buried there.<sup>83</sup>

---

<sup>76</sup> *Yik Sarguzasht: Āyōūb (Āḥmad) Bahrāmzehī*, Abdorrahman Boroumand Center for Human Rights in Iran, <https://www.iranrights.org/fa/memorial/story/-7867/ayub-ahmad-bahramzahi> (Last visited Jan. 12, 2022). See also Mollazehi, *supra* note 71 (discussing the family connection between Mollazehi and Bahramzahi).

<sup>77</sup> *Taṣvīrī Az 'umq Fāji 'ih Rūstāy Naṣīrābād; I'dām, Tirūr, Bāzdāsh* [A Picture of the Depth of the Tragedy in Nasirabad village; Execution, Assassination, Arrest], Baluch Campaign (May 1, 2016), <https://bit.ly/3C0kGP3>. See also *Mūlavī Khalīlullāh Zārī 'ī* [Molavi Khalilullah Zarei], Mashrooteh.com (Jan. 23, 2020), available at <https://bit.ly/3lhOr72> (discussing the date of execution).

<sup>78</sup> Abdorrahman Boroumand Center for Human Rights in Iran, *supra* note 76.

<sup>79</sup> Baluch Campaign, *supra* note 77.

<sup>80</sup> *Id.* See also *Sinārūīyy "Naṣīrābād" Dar "Kūh Van" Dar Ḥāl Tīkrār Hast* ["Nasirabad's" Scenario Is Being Repeated in "Kuh Van"], Baluch Campaign (Aug. 13, 2016), available at <https://bit.ly/3E1idVb> (discussing the details about Naeem Talatuf).

<sup>81</sup> Abdorrahman Boroumand Center for Human Rights in Iran, *supra* note 76.

<sup>82</sup> *Id.* See also *Dādsitān Zāhidān Yīkī Az Chihri Hāay Nāqīz Ḥuqūq Bashār Balūchistān Taghyīr Kard* [Zahedan's Prosecutor, One of the Human Rights Violators of Baluchistan, Was Removed from Office], Baluch Campaign (Nov. 23, 2016), available at <https://bit.ly/3C52CUa> (discussing the position of Mohammad Marziyeh).

<sup>83</sup> Mollazehi, *supra* note 71.



On January 4, 2015, IRGC intelligence forces raided Nasirabad village. About 30 individuals, including Sunni clerics and students, were arrested. It was after the assassination of a Basij member and a teacher for which the Iranian government blamed two militant groups in Sistan and Baluchistan Province.<sup>84</sup> On that day, IRGC intelligence forces poured into Mohammad Omar Mollazehi's house in search of him. They presented no warrant but searched everywhere and confiscated a number of Mollazehi's belongings. As he had gone to a nearby town, he was not arrested then. His brother, Abubaker Mollazehi, however, was detained and held in prison for the next four years. Shortly after the raid, Mohammad Omar Mollazehi had to cross the border to Pakistan to avoid further persecution. He eventually settled in the United Arab Emirates.<sup>85</sup>

## 2.5 Danial Babayani Khajenafas

Danial Babayani Khajenafas is a social media activist who advocates for the rights of Sunnis and Turkmens residing in Iran. Turkmens are an ethnic group living mainly in the northern and northeastern regions of Iran. Turkmens speak a Turkic language and are mostly Sunni Muslims.<sup>86</sup>

As Babayani Khajenafas described in an interview with IHRDC, Sunni children experience religious discrimination for the first time in primary school. It is common for Sunnis' beliefs and narrations of the early history of Islam to be insulted and ridiculed by the general public because sometimes they are different from and contrary to Shi'a religious teachings.<sup>87</sup>

The school textbooks, particularly the religious teaching books, are in a form that propagates the Shi'a, not Sunni, beliefs. [It seems that] we Sunni Muslims have no right to examine our own religious beliefs or at least learn their basics at school. Sunni students must read and take Shi'a religious education textbooks in final exams or even in the university entrance exam.<sup>88</sup>

As there was no opportunity to learn about the Sunni religious teachings in public schools, Danial Babayani Khajenafas decided to attend a Qur'an school, which was managed by Sunni clerics in his hometown of Gonbad-e Kavous. As Babayani Khajenafas described, the Qur'an school had a "complete educational environment," and children could learn the Qur'an and Sunni jurisprudential rulings in their mother tongue. But soon, affiliation with this school caused him some trouble.<sup>89</sup>

At that time, I was in the middle school and fourteen years old ... The deputy school principal pulled me aside one day and said, 'Which Qur'an school do you go to? What are you taught? What rules do they teach you?' Several days later, three or four people came and took me to the school office and officially interrogated me. They wanted to know more about what we were taught. They asked, 'Who are the

---

<sup>84</sup> HRANA, *supra* note 75.

<sup>85</sup> Mollazehi, *supra* note 71.

<sup>86</sup> See *Turkmen*, Encyclopedia Britannica (Sept. 27, 2012), <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Turkmen-people>

<sup>87</sup> Babayani Khajenafas, *supra* note 29.

<sup>88</sup> *Id.*

<sup>89</sup> *Id.*

teachers? Why should I be interested in such things? What books are taught? What are their beliefs?’ Later on, I found out that those persons were members of IRGC intelligence in the region.<sup>90</sup>

Danial Babayani Khajenafas suffered more serious discrimination because of his religion when he was admitted into Gorgan University. Babayani Khajenafas stated that he could not rent a house in the city of Gorgan because landlords would not rent to Sunni tenants. As the university’s dorms were also full, Babayani Khajenafas had to travel a distance of about 95 kilometers (59 miles) between Gonbad-e Kavous and Gorgan every day. Moreover, he was banned from attending one of his classes, which its subject was the physics of magnetism, because he objected to the professor’s offensive words about the Rashidun Caliphs (Abu Bakr, Umar, and Uthman).<sup>91</sup>

Only I protested and said [to the professor] that the statements you used are in fact offensive to our [Sunni] beliefs ... Apparently, the professor took it personally, and at the beginning of every class, she guided me to the exit door and said, ‘I am sorry! I cannot accept you in the class. You could come at the end of the semester and take the final exam.’ I participated in the exam at the end of the semester, but because I had not attended the class and only had a booklet, I failed.<sup>92</sup>

Hoping to raise awareness of discrimination against Sunnis, including in schools and universities, Danial Babayani Khajenafas and a group of Turkmen rights activists organized several peaceful protests in front of the governor’s office in Gonbad-e Kavous in 2013. Around the same time, he was active in local newspapers and online magazines that covered the news about Turkmens. Such activities, however, were not without cost.<sup>93</sup>

In August 2013, Babayani Khajenafas was arrested by IRGC intelligence agents. They showed him a warrant issued by the head of the Justice Department in Golestan Province and then searched his whole house. During their search, which took several hours, Babayani Khajenafas was beaten and interrogated.<sup>94</sup>

They searched the refrigerators and even inside of the napkin box! My parents were out of town; they had gone to Tehran, and no one was at home ... [The agents] said, ‘Do you have a gun? Where is your gun? You have the ideas of Salafi Islam! You’re Wahhabi! You have to show us your weapon! Where did you hide the bombs?’ I said that I don’t have any guns! All I have done has been civic activities. At most, I wrote a few articles, which have been published in local papers or on my Facebook or blog ... I was shocked when the agents made such a charge against me in our house.<sup>95</sup>

---

<sup>90</sup> *Id.*

<sup>91</sup> *Id.*

<sup>92</sup> *Id.*

<sup>93</sup> *Id.*

<sup>94</sup> *Id.*

<sup>95</sup> *Id.*

IRGC intelligence agents confiscated a number of his personal belongings, including his books, movies, and his research paper about religious beliefs. Then they transferred him to a secret detention center, where he was held for about ten days. During this time, his family was not aware of his whereabouts.<sup>96</sup>

Babayani Khajenafas, who was eighteen years old at the time, was accused of insulting the sacred values of Islam in social media and working for Turkey's National Intelligence Organization because he was fluent in Turkish. He was tortured to give the passwords of his email and social media accounts. His resistance to the demands of interrogators ended after he was taken to a mock execution.<sup>97</sup>

It was about four o'clock in the morning ... Suddenly, several people came into my cell. One of them said, 'Haji! This one is ready. Call a cleric for the funeral prayer. If he has anything to say, he could say that to the cleric.' I figured out that they wanted to execute me! I was taken to a completely dark environment, [where] a gallows had been erected and under it, there was a chair. [The agents] put me on the chair and threw the rope [around] my neck. [They] said, 'He's an opponent of the government. He's a Wahhabi and a Salafi. He has been in contact with foreign governments and is accused of espionage for Turkey and the Saudi government. He has also been sentenced to death' ... Meanwhile, another agent came close to me and said, 'Come on! Accept [your guilt] and sign [the confessions]!' I told him I don't know anything! The first agent told him 'What are you talking about! It's not your business! Go out!' ... Suddenly someone kicked the chair from under my feet. I hung in the air. I was suffocating. In that state, I saw the death in front of my eyes.<sup>98</sup>

Although the interrogators lowered him from the gallows after a few seconds, the shock of this incident made Danial Babayani Khajenafas confess to anything that they wanted. Interrogators assured him that cooperation with them would result in his release from prison. Nevertheless, Babayani Khajenafas was not freed and was later charged with several offenses based on his confessions. Several days later, he was taken to the prosecutor's office. "The prosecutor's deputy asked me: 'Do you accept the charges against you?' I responded yes, of course! I accept all of them ... He said, 'You idiot, do you even know what your charges are?' After that, Babayani Khajenafas was transferred to an official prison and was released on bail after about twenty days.<sup>99</sup>

In November 2013, the Revolutionary Court in Gonbad-e Kavous sentenced him to 23 months' imprisonment on the charges of disseminating propaganda against the Islamic Republic, insulting Ayatollah Khomeini, and having a collection of pornographic movies. He was also fined because of having an ordinary satellite dish and receiver at home. "The judge told me, 'Look, my son! I'm an employee and I'm excused. I was told by those above me to punish you with

---

<sup>96</sup> *Id.*

<sup>97</sup> *Id.*

<sup>98</sup> *Id.*

<sup>99</sup> *Id.*

imprisonment, but I know that you're a victim,"" Babayani said. During his trial, he did not have an attorney.<sup>100</sup>

After about seven and a half months in prison, Babayani Khajenafas was pardoned and released. IRGC intelligence's intimidation, however, continued afterward. Interrogators often contacted him and traced his activities. Moreover, Babayani Khajenafas was dismissed from the university he attended due to the security forces' pressure. In February 2015, Danial Babayani left Iran for Turkey.<sup>101</sup>

### 3 Cases of Execution for Advocating Sunnis' Rights

The Islamic Republic government has a pattern of persecution and abuse against those who convert from Shi'a Islam to other religions, including Christianity, the Bahá'í Faith, and Sunni Islam. The following section details cases of Sunni citizens who were sentenced to death because of disseminating Sunni Islam and advocating for Sunnis' rights.

#### 3.1 Bahman Shakouri

Bahman Shakouri was born in a Shi'a family in Talesh, Gilan Province, but later converted to Sunni Islam.<sup>102</sup> In the fall of 1980, Shakouri, who was the Secretary General of *Shams*, was executed in secret. Ayatollah Mohammad Mohammadi Gilani, Shari'a ruler of Tehran, had accused Shakouri of apostasy because of his conversion to Sunni Islam.<sup>103</sup> In December 1980, the Mojahed magazine published a letter that Bahman Shakouri had sent to his family from Evin prison.<sup>104</sup>

On March 29, 1980, they took me to the court. The head of the court [the Shari'a ruler of Tehran at the time] Ayatollah Mohammadi Gilani, alongside the prosecutor's representative and Judge Mirfendereski, who presided over the trial, and Ayatollah [Hossein-Ali] Nayeri and a Pasdār [a member of IRGC] beat me a lot. Then [they] took my bag and my Qur'an and ordered that I must be flogged with 75 lashes and Pasdārān [members of IRGC] competed with each other to beat me.<sup>105</sup>

---

<sup>100</sup> *Id.*

<sup>101</sup> *Id.*

<sup>102</sup> *Zindānīyān Sīyāsī I'dām Shudih Bi Dasti Jumhūrī Islāmī [Political Prisoners Executed by the Islamic Republic]*, Balatarin (Aug. 14, 2020), <https://www.balatarin.com/permlink/2020/8/14/5378418>

<sup>103</sup> Iraj Mesdaghi, *Muhammadī Muhammadīyī Gilānī Jināyatkārī Dar Libāsi "Mu'alim Akhlāq"* [Mohammad Mohammadi Gilani a Criminal Dressed as an "Ethics Teacher"], PezhvakeIran.com (July 30, 2017), <https://www.pezhvakeiran.com/maghaleh-87576.html>

<sup>104</sup> *Shalāq Qabl Az I'dām Dar Tihrān: Yik Fa'al Sīyāsī 75 Żarbih Dar Zindān Khūrd [Flogging Before Execution in Tehran: A Political Activist Received 75 Lashes in Prison]*, 105 Mujāhid Magazine (Jan. 13, 1981), <https://www.iranrights.org/fa/library/document/2281>

<sup>105</sup> *Id.*

In an open letter published in March 1981, Ahmad Moftizadeh, a prominent Sunni religious scholar, specifically mentioned the execution of Bahman Shakouri as an example of “the bad faith of defenders of the continuation of differentiation against Sunnis.”<sup>106</sup>

### 3.2 Nasser Sobhani

Nasser Sobhani was an influential Sunni cleric and thinker in the Kurdish community in Iran. For a short period of time, he was among the supporters of the Islamic Republic but soon parted ways with the new government due to differences on a variety of issues, including the declaration of Twelver Ja’farī school as the official religion of the country in the Constitution.<sup>107</sup>

In 1980, Sobhani joined the *Jamā‘at Da‘vat Va Eṣlāḥ* (Congregation of Invitation and Correction) and reached its leadership after a while. In the midst of activities promoting Sunnis’ rights in the early years after the 1979 revolution, he became very close to Ahmad Moftizadeh, the prominent Sunni scholar, and joined *Shams*.<sup>108</sup> During a meeting with Ayatollah Khomeini, Sobhani openly criticized the repressive actions of the new government. He called Khomeini a “liar.”<sup>109</sup> After that meeting, Sobhani and his family had to live in hiding in different cities for years.<sup>110</sup>

Sobhani went to Sanandaj in June 1989, where he was arrested by security forces in the home of Mamousta Farooq Farsad, another Sunni cleric. Despite many efforts, his family were not allowed to meet him in prison. Nasser Sobhani was executed on March 19, 1990, in Sanandaj Prison.<sup>111</sup> The charges against him, which led to his arrest and execution, have never been established.<sup>112</sup> There are, however, some rumors that he was sentenced to death because he had stated that Ayatollah Khomeini was an “apostate” during his interrogations.<sup>113</sup>

After about two months, authorities informed his brother that he had been executed and buried. His family were warned not to hold a funeral.<sup>114</sup> The death sentence of Nasser Sobhani was signed by Minister of Intelligence, Ayatollah Mohammad Reyshahri.<sup>115</sup> In response to objections to this execution, he later stated “Nasser Sobhani didn’t even have a pistol to defend himself, but he had a weapon that was much more effective than any military armament. His weapon was a pen in his hand. May his pen be broken, which we did it.”<sup>116</sup>

---

<sup>106</sup> Kadivar, *supra* note 12.

<sup>107</sup> Javad Motevali, *The Forgotten Tragedy of a Sunni Scholar Who Believed in the Islamic Republic*, IranWire (Nov. 9, 2020), <https://iranwire.com/en/features/7972>

<sup>108</sup> *Mukhtaṣarī Az Zindigī Ostād Shahīd Nāṣir Subḥānī [A Brief Biography of Martyred Master Naser Sobhani]*, Eslahe.com (Aziz Sadeghi Ashab, trans., Feb. 12, 2019), <https://bit.ly/3naaBsE>

<sup>109</sup> Motevali, *supra* note 107.

<sup>110</sup> Sadeghi Ashab, *supra* note 108.

<sup>111</sup> Motevali, *supra* note 107.

<sup>112</sup> Sadeghi Ashab, *supra* note 108.

<sup>113</sup> Amini, *supra* note 32.

<sup>114</sup> Motevali, *supra* note 107.

<sup>115</sup> *Id.*

<sup>116</sup> *Rayshahrī: Nāṣir Subḥānī Rā I’dām Kardīm Chūn Qalamash Burandihtar Az Har Silāḥī Būd [Reyshahri: We Executed Naser Sobhani Because His Pen Was Sharper Than Any Other Weapon]*, Justice for Iran (Aug. 3, 2015), <https://justice4iran.org/persian/reports/rayshahrisobhani/>



Figure 1 - Nasser Sobhani, seated the left (unknown date)

### 3.3 Qudratullah (Abdulhaq) Jafari

Qudratullah Jafari, also known as Abdulhaq, was a young Sunni cleric in Khorasan Province. Jafari, who had graduated from an Islamic University in Pakistan, publicly criticized the leaders of the Islamic Republic. After a trip to Kurdistan Province in the early 1990s, he was arrested and transferred to Evin prison in Tehran. He was accused of disseminating Wahhabism and was severely tortured in prison. In February 1991, he was executed in Mashhad prison.<sup>117</sup> When his elderly father went to the prison to visit him, Qudratullah Jafari's body was handed over to him.<sup>118</sup> There is no information publicly available about his trial.

Molavi Mohammad Ebrahim Safizadeh, a Sunni scholar who was assassinated by unknown assailants in Afghanistan in 2019, stated that he and seven other Sunni clerics, including Qudratullah Jafari, were held at the same ward of Vakilabad prison in Mashhad. "After the execution of Molla Qudratullah Jafari, I was alone in the prison, and that was the worst time of my imprisonment," Safizadeh said.<sup>119</sup> Also, in an interview with IHRDC, Ebrahim Ahrari Khalaf referred to Qudratullah Jafari.

<sup>117</sup> Mohammed Abdul Latif Ansari, *GUL HĀY PAR PAR (SHUHADĀY ĀHLI SUNAT IRĀN) [PERISHED FLOWERS (MARTYRS OF IRANIAN SUNNI CITIZENS)]*, Aqeedeh.com, <https://new.aqeedeh.com/en/book/content/view/1603/55829> See also *Barkhī 'ulamā Va Andīshmandānī Ki Tavasūt Jumhūrī Eslāmī Tirūr Va Yā I'dām Shudand [Some Religious Scholars and Thinkers Who Were Assassinated or Executed by the Islamic Republic]*, Ahlesonnat.com (Jan. 23, 2016), <https://bit.ly/3nnycrU> (discussing the date of his execution).

<sup>118</sup> Khaled Asqalani, *BALKI GUMRĀH SHUDĪ (TARJUMIH FĀRSĪ KĪTĀB BAL ŽĪLAT; NAQDĪ BAR KĪTĀB ... ĀNGĀH HIDĀYAT SHUDAM) [YOU HAVE GONE ASTRAY (PERSIAN TRANSLATION OF THE BOOK BAL ŽĪLAT; A CRITIC OF THE BOOK THEN ... I HAVE BEEN GUIDED)]* 22 (Asadullah Mosavi, trans., unknown date), Aqeedeh.com, [http://aqeedeh.com/book\\_files/pdf/fa-old/balkeh-gomrah-shodi-PDF.pdf](http://aqeedeh.com/book_files/pdf/fa-old/balkeh-gomrah-shodi-PDF.pdf)

<sup>119</sup> *Tirūr Yik Rūhānī Sunī Irānī Dar Āfghānistān; Pāy Hukūmat Irān Dar Mīyān Āst? [Assassination of an Iranian Sunni Cleric in Afghanistan; Is the Iranian Government Involved?]*, IranWire (May 19, 2019), <https://iranwire.com/fa/features/31181?ref=specials>



When I was studying at Mashhad University, one of my close friends was Molla Quadratullah Jafari. A graduate of the Abu Bakr [Islamic] University in Pakistan, he was arrested on the night of his wedding, and later was executed on the charge of disseminating Wahhabism. He neither waged armed war [against the government] nor engaged in political or partisan activities. He just didn't want to flatter the Iranian government.<sup>120</sup>

#### 4 Cases of Execution on National Security Charges

Executions of Sunni prisoners because of national security charges have been among the most egregious human rights abuses of the Iranian government in recent years. Many Sunni citizens have been prosecuted with serious charges, such as *moharebeh*, or waging war against God, which is punishable by death. These executions often have not been adequately documented, and because of the government's intentional lack of transparency, it is difficult to obtain credible information and examine wrongful convictions.

Although the Islamic Republic has constantly claimed that executed Sunni prisoners had ties with extremist militant groups and they were prosecuted only for this reason, many of these prisoners have insisted that they were targeted merely because of their religious activities.<sup>121</sup> In August 2016 alone, the Iranian government executed 25 Sunni prisoners.<sup>122</sup> They were often detained in solitary confinement for prolonged periods and were subjected to torture in order to confess.<sup>123</sup> Shahram Ahmadi, a Sunni preacher, was one of these prisoners. Although he had not taken up arms against the government, he was charged with *moharebeh*.<sup>124</sup> Under Iran's Islamic Penal Code ("IPC") of 2013, the crime of *moharebeh* requires the actual drawing of a weapon by the defendant.<sup>125</sup> Ahmadi, who was arrested in 2009, was convicted while the previous version of the IPC was in effect. Under that version, the mere membership in an armed group could result in a conviction on the charge of *moharebeh* whether or not the defendant had personally drawn a weapon.<sup>126</sup>

---

<sup>120</sup> Ahrari Khalaf, *supra* note 41.

<sup>121</sup> *Namiḥ/ Zindāniyān Āhli Sunat Dar Irān: Ijāzih Nadahīd Mā Rā Bukushand!* [Letter/ Sunni Prisoners in Iran: Don't Let Them to Kill Us!], Kurdpa (Aug. 3, 2013), <https://bit.ly/3nzaEA1>

<sup>122</sup> Haidar Khezri, *Many Birds, One Stone: Why Did Iran Execute 25 Sunni Kurds in August 2016?* Open Democracy (Feb. 21, 2017), <https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/north-africa-west-asia/many-birds-one-stone-why-did-iran-execute-25-sunni-kurds-in-august-2016/> The names of the executed individuals were Kaveh Veisi, Keyvan Momenifard, Adel Barmashti, Behrouz Shanazari, Edris Nemati, Taleb Maleki, Voria Qaderifard, Keyvan Karimi, Shahram Ahmadi, Farzad Honarjou, Bahman Rahimi, Mokhtar Rahimi, Yavar Rahimi, Kaveh Sharifi, Arash Sharifi, Ahmad Nasiri, Mohammad Gharibi, Omid Mahmoudi, Omid Peyvand, Amjad Salehi, Pouria Mohammadi, Shahou Ebrahimi, Ali Araqi, Hekmat Araqi, and Hamze Araqi.

<sup>123</sup> *Four Years Passed: Details of Enforcing the Execution of 25 Sunni Kurdish Prisoners in an Interview with one of their Cell-mates*, Kurdistan Human Rights Network (Aug. 2, 2020), <https://kurdistanhumanrights.org/en/three-years-passed-details-of-enforcing-the-execution-of-25-sunni-kurdish-prisoners-in-an-interview-with-one-of-their-cell-mates-2/>

<sup>124</sup> Madyar Saminejad, *Yik Zindāni Āhli Sunat Kurd Dar Āstāniḥ I'dām* [A Kurdish Sunni Prisoner on the Verge of Execution], Radio Zamaneh (Nov. 7, 2015), <https://www.radiozamaneh.com/244303/>

<sup>125</sup> Qanuni Mojazat Islami [Islamic Penal Code], art.279.

<sup>126</sup> Qanuni Mojazat Islami [Islamic Penal Code], Tehran 1370 [1991], art.186, <https://iranhrdc.org/islamic-penal-code-of-the-islamic-republic-of-iran-book-one-book-two/#31>

Nevertheless, according to Article 10(b) of the IPC of 2013, if a new law is more favorable to a convicted defendant, the court is required to reduce the punishment in favor of the convicted individual in accordance with the new statute.<sup>127</sup> Despite this provision and Ahmadi's consistent denial, Iran's Supreme Court affirmed his death sentence, and he was executed in August 2016. His younger brother, Bahram Ahmadi, was arrested when he was only 17 years old. Similarly, he was accused of membership in an extremist Sunni group. Bahram Ahmadi was later executed for a crime that the government alleged he had committed when he was a minor.<sup>128</sup>

In violation of Iranian law, which requires that the attorney for a person who is to be executed should be notified at least 48 hours prior to the execution, the attorneys for the 25 Sunni prisoners were not notified of their impending executions on time.<sup>129</sup> The bodies of the executed Sunni prisoners were not returned to their families for burial, and they were not allowed to hold memorial services for them.<sup>130</sup>

In 2015, twelve Sunni citizens, many of whom were originally from Golestan Province, were arrested by MOI agents. They were held in solitary confinement for 10 to 12 months. Hamid Rastbala, Kabir Saadat-Jahani, Mohammad-ali Arayesh, Farhad Shakeri, Issa Eid Mohammadi, Abdulhakim Azim Gargij, Taj Mohammad Khormali, and Abdulrahman Gargij were accused of *baghy* (armed rebellion) through membership in the Salafi group of "al-Furqan" and the "National Solidarity Front of Iranian Sunnis."<sup>131</sup> The Iranian government considers these two groups as terrorist organizations.<sup>132</sup> Al-Furqan group has been active in Sistan and Baluchistan and South Khorasan provinces between 1992 to 2014. The National Solidarity Front of Iranian Sunnis has not been active since 1997.<sup>133</sup>

---

<sup>127</sup> Qanuni Mojazat Islami [Islamic Penal Code], art.10(b).

<sup>128</sup> *Nāmih Pidar Shahrām Va Bahrām Āhmadi Bi Mas'ūlīn* [Letter of the Father of Shahram and Bahram Ahmadi to the Authorities], HRANA (Mar. 24, 2014), <https://bit.ly/3CLU2yo>

<sup>129</sup> Ayin Nameh Nahveh Ejraye Ahkam Hudud, Salbe Hayat, Ghat-e Ozv, Qisas Nafs va Ozv va Jarh, Diyat, Shalaq, Tabeed, Nafye Balad, Eqamat-e Ejbari va Mane Az Eqamat Dar Mahal Ya Mahal Haya Moayan-Mosavab [Regulatory Code on Sentences of Qisas, Stoning, Crucifixion, Execution, and Flogging], Tehran 1398 [2019], art. 7(8) and 43(h), <http://qavanin.ir/Law/PrintText/265340>

<sup>130</sup> HRANA, *supra* note 128.

<sup>131</sup> *Şudūr 9 Hukm I'dām Va 45 Sāl Zindān Barāy 12 Zindānī Sunī Mazhab Dar Mashhad [Issuance of 9 Death Sentences and 45 Years Imprisonment Sentences for 12 Sunni Prisoners in Mashhad]*, HRANA (Aug. 9, 2020), <https://www.hra-news.org/2020/hranews/a-26088/>

<sup>132</sup> *Hizbi ālfurqān [al-Furqan Group]*, Habilidadian.ir, <https://www.habilidadian.ir/fa/%D8%AD%D8%B2%D8%A8%E2%80%8C%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%81%D8%B1%D9%82%D8%A7%D9%86.html> (Last visited Jan. 12, 2022). See also *Payām Jibhi Hambastigī Milī Āhli Sunat Dar Rābiṭih Ba Shahādat Mūlavī 'abd al-raūf Rīgī [The Message of the National Solidarity Front of Iranian Sunnis with Regard to the Martyrdom of Molavi Abdur Rauf Rigi]*, Jebheahlesonnat1.blogspot, available at [http://jebheahlesonnat1.blogspot.com/2016/08/blog-post\\_35.html](http://jebheahlesonnat1.blogspot.com/2016/08/blog-post_35.html) (Last visited Jan. 12, 2022) (discussed an obituary published by the National Solidarity Front of Iranian Sunnis for the killing of a Jaish ul-Adl's leader by the Iranian government. Jaish ul-Adl is a Salafi jihadist militant organization that operates mainly in southeastern Iran).

<sup>133</sup> *I'dām Sih Zindānī Sunī Mazhab Dar Mashhad; Panj Zindānī Dīgar Dar Khaṭar I'dām [Execution of Three Sunni Prisoners in Mashhad; Five Other Prisoners at Risk of Execution]*, Radio Farda (Jan. 2, 2021), <https://www.radiofarda.com/a/iran-executes-three-sunni-activists-mashhad/31030410.html> See also *I'dām Sih Zindānī Āhli Sunat Dar Mashhad Bi Etihām 'uẓvīyat Dar Hizbi ālfurqān [Execution of Three Sunni Prisoners in Mashhad on the Charge of Membership in 'al-Furqan Group']*, BBC Persian (Jan. 2, 2021), available at <https://www.bbc.com/persian/iran-55515987> (discussing that the Iranian government recognizes al-Furqan group as a terrorist organization).



In 2019, Judge Mahmoud Davoodabadi, head of the Mashhad Revolutionary Court, sentenced Rastbala, Saadat-Jahani, Arayesh, Shakeri, Eid Mohammadi, Azim Gargij, Khormali, and Gargij to death. This sentence was based on unsubstantiated claims that they had affiliations with two inactive opposition groups. All defendants were denied access to the attorney of their choice and a fair trial.<sup>134</sup> It should be noted that some of the defendants were 10 to 12 years old when al-Furqan group and the National Solidarity Front of Iranian Sunnis had operations in eastern parts of Iran.<sup>135</sup>

In a July 2020 letter, Rastbala described the torture he was subjected to during his interrogation and the security officials' pressure on him to make a televised confession. "Several of us [Sunni prisoners] were sexually abused by spraying pepper spray on our testicles and anus," he wrote in a part of his letter. He also had been threatened with arrest, torture, assassination, and rape of his family members.<sup>136</sup> In December 2020, Rastbala, Saadat-Jahani, and Arayesh were executed. The execution took place suddenly and without giving prior notice to the prisoners' families and their attorneys.<sup>137</sup> There is no report on the final fate of the cases of other Sunni prisoners who were sentenced to death.

In September 2020, Iran's Supreme Court rejected the appeals of seven Sunni prisoners for the second time. In 2016, Anwar Khezri, Kamran Sheikhe, Khosro Besharat, Davood Abdullahi, Farhad Salimi, Qasem Abesteh, and Ayoub Karimi were convicted of acting against national security, disseminating propaganda against the government, and *efsad-e fel-arz* (sowing corruption on earth) at Branch 28 of the Revolutionary Court, and sentenced to death. The trial was presided over by Judge Moghiseh. According to the statements issued by a number of these prisoners, they were subjected to mistreatment in prison and sentenced to death only based on forced confessions extracted under torture. Although the Supreme Court had overruled their death sentence due to the lack of sufficient evidence in 2017, it upheld the Revolutionary Court's ruling again in 2020.<sup>138</sup>

There are dozens of cases of execution of Sunni prisoners in similar circumstances. As the government does not allow its allegations against Sunni defendants to be publicly scrutinized in any meaningful judicial process, it is reasonable to conclude that the measures taken against Sunnis serve a security purpose rather than a judicial one.

In the section below, two cases of execution of Sunni clerics who were accused of *moharebeh* will be discussed.

---

<sup>134</sup> HRANA, *supra* note 131. See also Atlas Zendan Haye Iran [Iran Prisons' Atlas], Mahmoud Davoodabadi's profile, available at <https://ipa.united4iran.org/fa/judge/568/> (Last visited Jan. 12, 2022) (discussing the position of Judge Davoodabadi).

<sup>135</sup> Radio Farda, *supra* note 133.

<sup>136</sup> *Shikanjih Va Bilā Taklīfī; Panjumīn Sāl Ḥabs Ḥamīd Rāstbāla Dar Zindān Vakīl Ābād Mashhad [Torture and Uncertainty; Hamid Rastabala's Fifth Year in Vakilabad Prison in Mashhad]*, Melliun Iran (Aug. 8, 2020), <https://melliun.org/iran/238570>

<sup>137</sup> *Ḥamīd Rāstbāla, Kabīr Sa'ādat-Jahānī Va Moḥammad-Alī Ārāyīsh; Sih Zindānī Sunī Mazhab Dar Mashhad I'dām Shudand [Hamid Rastbala, Kabir Saadat-Jahani, and Mohammad-ali Arayesh; Three Sunni Prisoners Were Executed in Mashhad]*, HARANA (Jan. 1, 2021), <https://www.hra-news.org/2021/hranews/a-28139/>

<sup>138</sup> *Tih-rān: Rad Darkhāst I'ādih Dādrisī 7 Zindānī 'aqīdatī Maḥkūm Bi I'dām Az Sūyi Dīvān 'ālī Kishvar [Tehran: Rejecting the Appeal Request of 7 Prisoners of Conscience Sentenced to Death by the Supreme Court]*, kurdistanhumanrights.org (Sept. 12, 2020), <https://kurdistanhumanrights.org/fa/?p=14140>

#### 4.1 Molana Khalilullah Zarei and Molana Salaheddin Seyyedi

Molana Khalilullah Zarei was a Sunni cleric in Sistan and Baluchistan Province. In May 2008, IRGC intelligence agents arrested him and Salaheddin Seyyedi, another Sunni cleric.<sup>139</sup> They were accused of “cooperation with rebellious groups,” “possession of firearms with the intention of *moharebeh*,” and “disturbing the public opinion and disseminating propaganda against the government.” Molana Khalilullah Zarei was severely tortured and forced to confess. He was sentenced to death by the Zahedan Revolutionary Court, presided over by Judge Abolfazl Mahgoli.<sup>140</sup> Judge Mahgoli is notorious for issuing death sentences in trials that often last only a few minutes, blatantly ignoring torture, and violating the defendants’ due process rights.<sup>141</sup> Khalilullah Zarei and Salaheddin Seyyedi were executed in March 2009.<sup>142</sup>

#### 4.2 Molavi Amanullah Balochi and Abdulrahim Kohi

In 2015, Molavi Amanullah Balochi and Abdulrahim Kohi, two Sunni religious activists, were arrested and accused of *moharebeh* and acting against national security through cooperation with terrorist organizations. They were severely tortured to confess guilt. The Zahedan Revolutionary Court sentenced them to death in 2019.<sup>143</sup>

### 5 Cases of Extrajudicial Murders inside Iran

From the late 1980s to the mid-1990s, the execution of Sunni citizens under the pretext of cooperation with jihadist or Salafi armed groups was underway. Simultaneously, the extrajudicial murder of Sunni religious leaders was at its peak. Extrajudicial killing refers to some form of state action that constitutes a violation of the general recognition of the right to life embodied in every major human rights treaty.<sup>144</sup> Allegations that MOI agents were involved in the killings of Sunni clerics were so prevalent that Saeed Emami, the MOI deputy minister in the mid-1990s, had to deny them at a public meeting in Bu-Ali Sina University in Hamedan.<sup>145</sup>

---

<sup>139</sup> *Mūlavī Khalīlullāh Zārī ī [Molavi Khalilullah Zarei]*, Mashrooteh.com (Jan. 23, 2020), <https://bit.ly/3lhOr72>

<sup>140</sup> *Mūlavī Khalīlullāh Zārī ī [Molavi Khalilullah Zarei]*, YouTube (Jan. 25, 2021), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=t8zCYmmNWwc> The confessions of Molana Khalilullah Zarei and Salaheddin Seyyedi that were extracted under torture were later broadcasted in the local state TV in Sistan and Baluchistan Province. See *I’dām Dū Rūḥānī Āhli Sunat Dar Zāhidānī [Execution of Two Sunni Clerics in Zahedan]*, Iranhr.net (Mar. 3, 2009), available at <https://iranhr.net/fa/articles/1243/>

<sup>141</sup> Atlas Zendan Haye Iran [Iran Prisons’ Atlas], Abolfazl Mahgoli’s profile, <https://ipa.united4iran.org/fa/judge/185/> (Last visited Jan. 12, 2022).

<sup>142</sup> Mashrooteh.com, *supra* note 139.

<sup>143</sup> *Gavāhī Mūlavī Būdan Āmānullāh (Āmīn) Balūchī Va ‘abdurahīm Kūhī Ki Bi I’dām Maḥkūm Shudand [The Certificate of Being Molavi (a Religious Rank) for Amanullah (Amin) Balochi and Abdulrahim Kohi Who were Sentenced to Execution]*, Kalemeh.TV (Sept. 17, 2019), <https://www.kalemeh.tv/1398/06/14772/>

<sup>144</sup> United Nations, Fact Sheet No. 11 (Rev. 1), Extrajudicial, Summary or Arbitrary Executions, <https://perma.cc/57DF-G57X> [hereinafter United Nations Fact Sheet No. 11.] See also William J. Aceves, *When Death Becomes Murder: A Primer on Extrajudicial Killing*, 50.1 COLUM HUM RTS L. REV. 116-184 (2018). (discussing the discrete elements of extrajudicial killing under international law).

<sup>145</sup> Iraj Mesdaghi, *Sa’id Imāmī “Sarbaz Rāstīn Islām” Ki Būd Va Chi Kard? Who Was Saeed Imami, the True Soldier of Islam, and What Did He Do?* PezhvakeIran.com, (Nov. 30, 2016), <https://www.pezhvakeiran.com/maghaleh-82900.html>

## 5.1 Sheikh Mohammad-Saleh Zeyaiee

Sheikh Mohammed-Saleh Zeyaiee was a prominent Sunni cleric and a graduate of the Islamic University of Madinah, in Saudi Arabia. In 1981, he established a Sunni seminary in Bandar Abbas, Hormozgan Province, and became the Friday prayer Imam of the Sunni community in the city.<sup>146</sup> Zeyaiee was a well-known critic of the Islamic Republic.<sup>147</sup> In 1981, he was arrested because of an interview with a Kuwaiti newspaper in which he talked about the government's oppression of Sunni citizens.<sup>148</sup> He was sentenced to death, but he was released after a while. There is no information publicly available about his trial.<sup>149</sup>

Zeyaiee was tortured during his detention and continued to be harassed by security forces even after he was released from prison. Following the execution of Dr. Ali Mozaffarian, one of the Sunni religious leaders in Shiraz in 1992, pressure against Sheikh Zeyaiee intensified and he was summoned for interrogation by MOI agents in Tehran every month.<sup>150</sup> In mid-July 1994, he was called for interrogation in the city of Lar, in Fars Province. Five days later his body was found.<sup>151</sup> According to reports, his head was severed from his body and one of his legs and one of his arms were amputated. The authorities declared that he was killed in a car accident. Despite this allegation, his body was not found next to his car, which had no sign of any damage from an accident.<sup>152</sup> After that, half of the Sunni seminary that Sheikh Zeyaiee had built in Bandar Abbas was converted into a public park.<sup>153</sup> There is no evidence of a thorough investigation into his death.

---

<sup>146</sup> *Qurbānīyān Qatl Hāy Zanjīrihiyy Dākhil Kishvar; Mu'arifi Qurbānīyān Qatl Hāy Zanjīrihiyy Jumhūrī Islāmī Dar Sāl Hāy 1367 Tā 1377: Shīykh Muḥammad- Ṣālīḥ Žīyāyī* [Victims of the Chain Murders inside the Country; Introducing the Victims of the Chain Murders by the Islamic Republic between 1988 to 1998: Sheikh Mohammad-Saleh Zeyaiee], Balatarin (Jan. 11, 2019), <https://www.balatarin.com/permlink/2019/1/11/5013527>

<sup>147</sup> *Hāj Muḥammad Žīyāyī* [Haj Mohammad Zeyaiee], Abdorrahman Boroumand Center for Human Rights in Iran, <https://www.iranrights.org/fa/memorial/story/-3355/haji-mohammad-ziaie> (Last visited Jan. 12, 2022).

<sup>148</sup> Massoud Noghrehkar, 'alayih Farāmūshī Jināyat Hāy "Marḥūm Khumanī"- Bakhshi Pāyānī [Against Forgetting the Crimes of "Late Khomeini" - Last Part], PezhvakeIran.com, <https://www.pezhvakeiran.com/maghaleh-24831.html> (Last visited Jan. 12, 2022).

<sup>149</sup> Abdorrahman Boroumand Center for Human Rights in Iran, *supra* note 147.

<sup>150</sup> *Id.* Dr. Ali Mozaffarian, an orthopedic physician, was born in a Shi'a family in Fars Province, but later converted to Sunni Islam. For many years, he was known as the Sunni prayer imam in Shiraz. In November 1991, he was arrested by MOI agents. According to some reports, Mozaffarian was tortured in prison and pressured to convert back to Shi'a Islam. He was accused of spying for Iraq and Saudi Arabia, adultery, and insulting Shi'as beliefs. Mozaffarian was hung in August 1992. See *Zindānīyān Sīyāsī I'dām Shudih Bi Dasti Jumhūrī Islāmī* [Political Prisoners Executed by the Islamic Republic], Balatarin (Aug. 13, 2019), <https://www.balatarin.com/permlink/2019/3/12/5055972>

<sup>151</sup> Noghrehkar, *supra* note 148.

<sup>152</sup> Abdorrahman Boroumand Center for Human Rights in Iran, *supra* note 147.

<sup>153</sup> Balatarin, *supra* note 146.



Figure 2 - Sheikh Mohammed-Saleh Zeyaiee, the first person from the left in front of the image (unknown date)

## 5.2 Ahmad Mirin Sayyad Baluchi

Ahmad Mirin Sayyad Baluchi was a Sunni scholar and a graduate of the Islamic University of Madinah in Saudi Arabia. He described himself as a Wahhabi Muslim.<sup>154</sup> Sayyad established a Sunni seminary and a mosque in his hometown in Sistan and Baluchistan Province. In 1988, he was arrested and transferred to Evin prison in Tehran.<sup>155</sup> He was held in prison for about five years, four months of which was in solitary confinement.<sup>156</sup> It is not clear that he had a trial as there is no information publicly available in this regard.

In 1995, Ahmad Sayyad went to UAE for about two months. After returning to Iran, he was arrested by MOI agents at Bandar Abbas Airport.<sup>157</sup> A few days later, his body was found in a public square in the city of Minab, in Hormozgan province.<sup>158</sup> According to some reports,

<sup>154</sup> *Āḥmad Sayyād [Ahmad Sayyad]*, Rasekhood (Nov. 8, 2011), <https://rasekhood.net/mashahir/show/603589/%D8%A7%D8%AD%D9%85%D8%AF-%D8%B3%DB%8C%D8%A7%D8%AF>

<sup>155</sup> DUDOIGNON, *supra* note 15 at 224.

<sup>156</sup> *Qurbānīyān Qatl Hāy Zanjīrihiyy Dākhil Kishvar; Mu'arifi Qurbānīyān Qatl Hāy Zanjīrihiyy Jumhūrī Islāmī Dar Sāl Hāy 1367 Tā 1377: Duktur Āḥmad Ṣayād [Victims of the Chain Murders inside the Country; Introducing the Victims of the Chain Murders by the Islamic Republic between 1988 to 1998: Dr. Ahmad Sayyad]*, Balatarin (Nov. 28, 2019), <https://www.balatarin.com/permlink/2018/11/28/4980117> See also *Duktur Āḥmad Ṣayād Balūchī Ma'rūf Bi Mūlavī Āḥmad Mīrīn - Balūchistān Chābahār [Dr. Ahmad Sayyad Baluchi Known as Molavi Ahmad Mirin - Baluchestan Chabahar]*, Aqeedeh.com, <https://bit.ly/3zhDCXH> (Last visited Jan. 12, 2022) (discussing that Ahmad Sayyad was held in solitary confinement for about four months).

<sup>157</sup> Balatarin, *supra* note 156.

<sup>158</sup> Rasekhood, *supra* note 154.

Sayyad was killed by MOI agents.<sup>159</sup> Signs of suffocation were seen on his body.<sup>160</sup> Despite this, no clear investigation was conducted, and no one was held accountable for his murder. His murder during the period in which Iran's intelligence apparatus assassinated numerous dissidents, including religious leaders, increases the possibility that he had been killed by security forces.

### 5.3 Mamousta Mohammad Rabiee

Mamousta Mohammad Rabiee was a prominent Sunni cleric and an influential leader in the Kurdish community in Iran.<sup>161</sup> He, alongside Ahmad Moftizadeh, played a leading role in the negotiations with a group of high-ranking Islamic Republic officials who went to Kurdistan after the widespread uprising of Kurdish political parties in western Iran.<sup>162</sup> In 1979, he was appointed as the Friday prayers Imam for Sunnis in Kermanshah.<sup>163</sup>

In 1996, the TV series Imam Ali was broadcast from state TV. This series portrayed the caliphate of the first Shi'a Imam according to Shi'a narratives, which provoked protests in the Sunni community.<sup>164</sup> During the Islamic Unity Conference in Tehran in 1996, Mamousta Rabiee criticized this TV series.<sup>165</sup> He also sent a letter to the authorities warning them about the consequences of sectarian conflict between Shi'a and Sunnis.<sup>166</sup>

On December 2, 1996, Mamousta Rabiee disappeared on his way to the Kermanshah local TV station. His body was later found next to his car, while his turban was placed under his head and his glasses and robe were on his chest.<sup>167</sup> The body was autopsied without the consent of his family and the cause of death was declared to be a heart attack. Security officials pressured Mamousta Rabiee's family to accept the autopsy results and did not allow them to hold a

---

<sup>159</sup> Ali Jeyhun, *Guzārish Chand Qatl; Az Tūmāj Va Oviysī Tā Firīydūn Farukhzād Va Kāzīm Rajavī* [Report about Several Murders; From Toomaj and Oveissi to Fereydoun Farrokhzad and Kazem Rajavi], BBC Persian (Nov. 24, 2018), <https://www.bbc.com/persian/iran-features-46328034>. See also *Murūri Bar Qatl Hāy Zanjīrihiyy Pas Az Haft Sāl. Bakhshi Panjum: "Sāyir Qatl Hā"* [A Review of the Chain Murders after Seven Years. The Fifth Section: "Other Murders"], Radio Farda (Nov. 26, 2005), <https://www.radiofarda.com/a/313893.html> (discussing that MOI agents were more obsessed with the Sunni clerics, such as Ahmad Sayyad, who were graduates of religious schools in Saudi Arabia).

<sup>160</sup> Asqalani, *supra* note 118 at 21.

<sup>161</sup> Ehsan Fattahi, *21 Sāl Az Qatl 'allāmiḥ Rabī'ī Guzash! (Qatl Hāy Zanjīrihiyy) [21 Years Passed after the Murder of Allameh Rabiee! (Chain Murders)]*, IranGlobal (Dec. 2, 2017), <https://iranglobal.info/node/63397>

<sup>162</sup> Jalal Jalalizadeh, *Yādī Az Māmūstā Mulā Muḥammad Rabī'ī* [Remembrance of Mamousta Mullah Mohammad Rabiee], SunniOnline, <http://sunnionline.us/farsi/2018/12/15161> (Last visited Jan. 12, 2022). See also *Muḥammad Rabī'ī*, Abdorrahman Boroumand Center for Human Rights in Iran, <https://www.iranrights.org/fa/memorial/story/71619/mohammad-rabii> (Last visited Jan. 12, 2022) (discussing the negotiations with the Islamic Republic's delegates).

<sup>163</sup> Fattahi, *supra* note 161.

<sup>164</sup> Jeyhun, *supra* note 159.

<sup>165</sup> Hawri Yousifi, *The Increasing Pressure on Yarsanis, One of the Largest Religious Minorities in Iran*, IranWire (Nov. 24, 2020), <https://iranwire.com/en/features/8125>

<sup>166</sup> *Muḥammad Rabī'ī*, Abdorrahman Boroumand Center for Human Rights in Iran, <https://www.iranrights.org/fa/memorial/story/71619/mohammad-rabii> (Last visited Jan. 12, 2022).

<sup>167</sup> Fattahi, *supra* note 161.



memorial service for him.<sup>168</sup> When the news of Mamousta Rabiee's murder was disseminated, a wave of protests swept through different cities in Kermanshah Province. The police and security forces violently suppressed the people who were demanding justice for him, which left two persons dead, and dozens wounded.<sup>169</sup>

According to Aisha Mafakheri, the wife of Mamousta Rabiee, Rabiee was interrogated many times by MOI agents before his death.<sup>170</sup> In an interview with the media, she described how MOI agents intimidated Mamousta Rabiee in one of his last interrogations.<sup>171</sup>

[He said] 'God had mercy that I came back alive today ... They didn't take me to the MOI's office; [they] took me out of the city, to a basement near Bisotun (a city in Kermanshah). When they got in the car, they pulled the curtains of the car and took me [there] and asked strange questions. I thought that I would die this time and I would not come out alive.'<sup>172</sup>

On the day that Mamousta Rabiee disappeared, he had a long telephone conversation with an MOI agent before leaving his house.<sup>173</sup> On the very same day, he called his wife around 5 pm but she could not recognize him.<sup>174</sup>

Suddenly I realized that it was Mr. Rabiee. I screamed! I said where are you? Why are you like this? He said, 'You don't know. I am very tired ... I'm very sad ... My car was brought by a man named Abbas Ramsari; I am in Dizelabad (a prison in Kermanshah)' ... His voice was very muffled. I said Dizelabad for what reason? He said, 'The car was brought to Dizelabad ... Bring my daughter [with yourself] to talk.' I said you were healthy when you went out. He said 'No, I'm very ill' ... The phone [then] was hung up ... We searched the whole city of Kermanshah until 9:30 pm ... [When the body was found] The signs of injection on his leg were visible. There were [also] marks on his neck.<sup>175</sup>

After the revelations about the Chain Murders of Iranian intellectuals and political opponents by a group of MOI agents between 1988 and 1998, different sources mentioned Mamousta Rabiee

---

<sup>168</sup> Abdorrahman Boroumand Center for Human Rights in Iran, *supra* note 166.

<sup>169</sup> *Shānzdahumīn Sālgard Tirūr Māmūstā Moḥammad Rabī'ī Tavasūṭ Māmūrān Vizārat Eṭilā'āt [The 16th Anniversary of the Assassination of Mamousta Mohammad Rabiee by Ministry of Intelligence Agents]*, ANF Persian (Dec. 3, 2012), <https://anfpersian.com/tzh-h/shnzdhmyn-slgrd-trwr-mmwst-mhmd-rby-y-twst-m-mwrn-wzrt-tl-t-10068> See also *Mu'āvin Āval Āḥmadīnijād Mutaham Āval Parvandih Qatl Mulā Muḥammad Rabī'ī [Ahmadinejad's Vice President the First Accused in the Murder of Mullah Mohammad Rabiee]*, PeykeIran.com (Jul. 17, 2011), available at <https://www.peykeiran.com/Content.aspx?ID=35607> (discussing the casualties in the protest).

<sup>170</sup> Jeyhun, *supra* note 159.

<sup>171</sup> Abdorrahman Boroumand Center for Human Rights in Iran, *supra* note 166.

<sup>172</sup> *Id.*

<sup>173</sup> Fereshteh Ghazi, *Ghatl Hāy Zanjīrihiyy; Jināzih Māmūstā Rabiee Rā Ki Piydā Kardand, Hanūz Garm Bud [Chain Murders; The Body of Mamousta Rabiee Was Still Warm When They Found Him]*, Radio Farda (Dec. 6, 2020), <https://www.radiofarda.com/a/30986628.html>

<sup>174</sup> *Id.*

<sup>175</sup> *Id.*

as one of the victims.<sup>176</sup> Despite this, and his family's insistent demand for a thorough investigation, no inquiry has ever been conducted by the government and no one was held accountable.<sup>177</sup>



Figure 3 - Middle of the picture from left: Mamousta Rabiee, Ahmad Moftizadeh, Ayatollah Mahmoud Taleqani, Ayatollah Mohammad Beheshti, Ali-Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani, and Abolhassan Banisadr (1979)

#### 5.4 Abdulaziz Majd

According to some reports, Abdulaziz Majd, a Sunni citizen and professor at Zahedan University, was killed by MOI agents in 1996.<sup>178</sup> After a critical speech about the Imam Ali TV series, he was abducted. His dead body was later found next to the MOI office in Zahedan.<sup>179</sup>

#### 5.5 Hossein Barazandeh

Hossein Barazandeh was a religious thinker and an outspoken critic of the theory of *Velayat-e Faqih*, or Guardianship of the Jurist.<sup>180</sup> Some reports indicate that he had converted to Sunni

---

<sup>176</sup> Abdorrahman Boroumand Center for Human Rights in Iran, *supra* note 166. See also *Khushūnat Va Tirūr Dar Kurdistan (Violence and Assassination in Kurdistan)*, Deutsche Welle Persian (Sept. 30, 2008), available at <https://bit.ly/3ErfdTj> (discussing that Emadeddin Baghi, an Iranian investigative journalist, has claimed that Saeed Emami, the MOI deputy minister in the mid-1990s, was behind the murder of Mamousta Rabiee).

<sup>177</sup> Abdorrahman Boroumand Center for Human Rights in Iran, *supra* note 166.

<sup>178</sup> Jeyhun, *supra* note 159. See also Halimeh Hassansouri, *Māh Nāmih Sīyāsī Va Madanī Qudrat Haq [Political and Social Magazine of the Power of Right]*, Irane-Agah (Dec. 6, 2020), <https://bit.ly/3AeTBak> (discussing the year that Dr. Majd was killed).

<sup>179</sup> Iraj Mesdaghi, *‘lī Falāḥīyān Jināyatkāri Ki Az Pardih Bīrūn Mī Āyad [Ali Fallahian, a Criminal Who Comes Out of the Curtain]*, PezhvakeIran.com (Jul. 18, 2017), <https://www.pezhvakeiran.com/maghaleh-87308.html>

<sup>180</sup> *Qurbānīyān Qatl Hāy Zanjīrihiyy Dākhl Kishvar; Mu‘arīfī Qurbānīyān Qatl Hāy Zanjīrihiyy Jumhūrī Islāmī Dar Sāl Hāy 1367 Tā 1377: Muhandis Ḥussīn Barāzandih [Victims of the Chain Murders inside the Country; Introducing the Victims of the Chain Murders by the Islamic Republic between 1988 to 1998: Engineer Hossein Barazandeh]*, Balatarin (Nov. 6, 2018), <https://www.balatarin.com/permlink/2018/11/6/4964394>

Islam or had an affiliation with the Sunni community.<sup>181</sup> His name has been mentioned among the victims of the Chain Murders of Iranian intellectuals and political opponents that were committed by a group of MOI agents during the 1990s.<sup>182</sup> His body was found in Mashhad on January 6, 1995.<sup>183</sup> There is no report indicating that an investigation has ever been conducted on his murder.

## 5.6 Extrajudicial Killings of Sunni Seminaries' Students

Shamsuddin Kayani was a young student in the Sunni Seminary of Zahedan. He disappeared in March 2000. He was later found under a bridge outside the city of Zahedan. His body showed signs of torture, including burn marks.<sup>184</sup> There is no report indicating that an investigation has ever been done conducted on his death. In February 2015, Mamousta Mohammad-Saleh Alimoradi, a young Sunni cleric, was shot to death by unknown persons in Kermanshah. His murder has remained unsolved until the present day.<sup>185</sup>

## 5.7 Suspicious Fatal Car Accidents

Molana Mohammad Ebrahim Damani was a prayer imam and teacher at a Sunni seminary school in Iranshahr, Sistan and Baluchistan Province. He was an outspoken critic of the Islamic Republic's discriminatory policies against Sunni citizens. Damani was arrested three times. In total, he spent about ten years behind bars on charges of disseminating propaganda against the Islamic Republic and acting against national security.<sup>186</sup> In July 2001, he was killed in a car accident that reportedly seemed to be staged.<sup>187</sup>

---

<sup>181</sup> *Haqi I'tirāz Nadārīd [You Have No Right to Object]*, AhleSonnat.com (Jan. 3, 2016), <https://ahlesonnat.com/%D8%AD%D9%82-%D8%A7%D8%B9%D8%AA%D8%B1%D8%A7%D8%B6-%D9%86%D8%AF%D8%A7%D8%B1%DB%8C%D8%AF/> See also Reza Amiri, *Tirūr Bi Nāmi Khudā [Assassination under the Name of God]*, Radio Pars (Nov. 28, 2016), available at <http://www.radiopars.org/?tag=%D8%B1%D8%B6%D8%A7-%D8%A7%D9%85%DB%8C%D8%B1%DB%8C&paged=3#> (discussing Hossein Barazandeh as one of the Sunni religious scholars who were killed by the Islamic Republic).

<sup>182</sup> Shahed Alavi, *Qatl Hāy Hukūmatī Dar Jumhūrī Islāmī Bi Ravāyat Āmār; Nām Hāyyi Ki Farāmūsh Nimīshavand [Government Murders in the Islamic Republic Based on Statistics; The Names That Are Not Forgotten]*, Aasoo.org (Feb. 1, 2019), <https://www.aasoo.org/fa/articles/1807> (discussing that Hossein Barazandeh was a victim of the Chain Murders. Abdullah Nouri, the Minister of Interior in Mohammad Khatami's first term cabinet, stated in his trial that MOI agents killed Barazandeh).

<sup>183</sup> *Qatl Hāy Mashkūk Va Zanjūrihiyy Dar Irān/Rūydād Hāy Muhum Sāl 1373 [Suspected and Chain Murders in Iran/Important Events of 1994]*, Shahrvand.com (Feb. 16, 2012), <https://shahrvand.com/archives/23924>

<sup>184</sup> *Qurbānīyān Shikanjih Va Marg Hāy Mashkūk Dar Jumhūrī Islāmī; Shamsuldīn Kīyānī [Victims of Torture and Suspicious Deaths in the Islamic Republic; Shamsuddin Kayani]*, Balatarin (Feb. 27, 2019), <https://www.balatarin.com/permlink/2019/2/27/5047141> See also *Qurbānīyān Qatl Hāy Zanjūrihiyy Az Āhli Sunat [Victims of the Chain Murders Among Sunnis]*, YouTube (May 2, 2015), [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3\\_o-HGGLa0g](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3_o-HGGLa0g) (discussing the details of the case).

<sup>185</sup> *Farzad Sultanzadeh Naderi, Tirūr Yik Rūhānī Āhli Sunat Dar Sulās Bābājānī Kirmānshāh [The Assassination of a Sunni Cleric in Salas-e Babajani in Kermanshah]*, Melli.org (Mar. 1, 2015), <https://bit.ly/3EoWLuI>

<sup>186</sup> *Qurbānīyān Shikanjih Va Marg Hāy Mashkūk Dar Jumhūrī Islāmī; Mulānā Muḥammad Ebrāhīm Dāmānī [Victims of Torture and Suspicious Deaths in the Islamic Republic; Molana Mohammad Ebrahim Damani]*, Balatarin (Feb. 16, 2019), <https://www.balatarin.com/permlink/2019/2/16/5039378>

<sup>187</sup> Amir Baloch, *I'dām Ābzārī Barāy Ir'āb [Execution a Way to Intimidate]*, Sahabb.org (Oct. 10, 2020), <https://bit.ly/3hwbkm9>



In April 2006, Molavi Nematollah Mir Baluch, Molavi Abdulhakim Hassanabadi, and Molavi Abdullah were killed during a car accident.<sup>188</sup> Molavi Nematollah Mir Baluch, also known as Tohidi, was a Sunni cleric from Sistan and Baluchistan Province. He publicly criticized the Islamic Republic's discriminatory policies against Sunnis in Iran.<sup>189</sup> Molavi Abdulhakim Hassanabadi, also known as Gumshadzehi, was teaching at the Zahedan seminary in Sistan and Baluchistan Province.<sup>190</sup> Some reports indicate that security forces had staged this accident.<sup>191</sup>

Similarly, Molana Abdullatif Heydari, a prominent Sunni Scholar in Khorasan Razavi Province, was killed in a car accident in February 2009.<sup>192</sup> Some reports mention his death among the state-orchestrated murder of Sunni clerics.<sup>193</sup>

## 5.8 Other Cases of Plausible Extrajudicial Murders of Sunni Clerics

Some reports indicate that the prominent scholar Molana Mohammad Omar Sarbazi died under suspicious circumstances and the Islamic Republic was in fact behind his death.<sup>194</sup> The government, however, vehemently denied this allegation.<sup>195</sup>

Molavi Abdulshukur Kurd, also known as Turshabi, was a Sunni cleric in Khash, Sistan and Baluchistan Province. On July 5, 2018, he was shot to death in front of a mosque in Khash. On the very same day, the Public and Revolutionary Prosecutor in Zahedan declared that Molavi Abdulshukur Kurd was killed because of a dispute between two local tribes.<sup>196</sup> There is no reporting on the outcome of this murder case. His father, Molana Abdulsatar Kurd, was also a Sunni cleric and the founder of a seminary in Khash. At least one report claims that Abdulsatar Kurd did not die a natural death and in fact was killed by MOI agents.<sup>197</sup>

---

<sup>188</sup> *Tashyī ' Pīkar 3 Rūḥānī Āhli Sunat Dar Zāhidān [Funeral of 3 Sunni Clerics in Zahedan]*, Kayhan (Apr. 16, 2006), <https://www.magiran.com/article/1029765>

<sup>189</sup> Baloch, *supra* note 187.

<sup>190</sup> *Mu'arifi Dāral 'ulūm Zāhidān [Introducing the Zahedan's Dar al-Ulum (Sunni Seminary)]*, SunniOnline, <http://sunnionline.us/farsi/daroruloom-zahedan> (Last visited Jan. 12, 2022).

<sup>191</sup> Kurdpa, *supra* note 121.

<sup>192</sup> *Vafāt Mūlānā 'abdullaṭīf Heydarī [Molana Abdullatif Heydari's Death]*, SunniOnline (Feb. 7, 2009), <http://sunnionline.us/farsi/2009/02/204>

<sup>193</sup> Kurdpa, *supra* note 121.

<sup>194</sup> Baloch, *supra* note 187.

<sup>195</sup> *Mūlavī Hā Dar Ra's Līst Tirūr [Molavies on the Top of the Assassination's List]*, Mashregh News Agency (Aug. 10, 2010), <https://bit.ly/3AfZLqo>

<sup>196</sup> *Qatl Mūlavī Kurd Bi Dunbāl Ekhtilāfāt Tāyīfīhiyy Budih Āst [Murder of Molavi Kurd Was Because of Tribal Disputes]*, Fars News Agency (Jul. 5, 2018), <https://bit.ly/3nG1mCB>

<sup>197</sup> *Qurbānīyān Qatl Hāy Zanjīrihiyy Dākhl Kishvar; Mu'arifi Qurbānīyān Qatl Hāy Zanjīrihiyy Jumhūrī Islāmī Dar Sāl Hāy 1367 Tā 1377: Mūlānā 'bdulsatār Kurd (Tarshābī) [Victims of the Chain Murders inside the Country; Introducing the Victims of the Chain Murders by the Islamic Republic between 1988 to 1998: Molana Abdulsatar Kurd (Turshabi)]*, Balatarin (May 11, 2019), <https://www.balatarin.com/permlink/2019/3/11/5055085>



Figure 4 - Molavi Abdulshukur Kurd (unknown date)

## 6 Assassinations of Sunni Clerics Living Abroad

In addition to the murder of Sunni clerics in Iran, a number of Sunni religious leaders have been assassinated in other countries. There is some speculation that the Islamic Republic may have been involved in these murders.<sup>198</sup>

### 6.1 Molana Abdulmalik Molazadeh

Molana Abdulmalik Molazadeh was a Sunni cleric in Sistan and Baluchistan Province. He had studied in Islamic schools in Pakistan and Saudi Arabia. His father, Abdulaziz Molazadeh, was a prominent religious scholar and the leader of Sunnis in Sistan and Baluchistan Province. During the constitutional negotiations in 1979, which led to the ratification of the Islamic Republic's Constitution in the same year, Abdulaziz Molazadeh publicly objected to Article 12 of the Constitution that designates Shi'a Islam as the official religion of the country. In protest, he resigned from the Assembly of Experts for the Constitution.<sup>199</sup>

Around the same time, Abdulmalik Molazadeh founded the Sunnis' Mohammadi Islamic Organization and was actively involved in *Shams* activities.<sup>200</sup> He played a major role in defending Sunnis' rights in Sistan and Baluchistan Province. Following the arrest of Ahmad Moftizadeh and other members of *Shams*, Molazadeh was also apprehended.<sup>201</sup> After about six

---

<sup>198</sup> *Tirūr Va Shahādat Mūlānā Ebrāhīm Şafīzādih Dabīr Kul Jibhi Āhli Sunat [Assassination and Martyrdom of Maulana Ebrahim Safizadeh, the Secretary General of the Sunni Front]*, Melliun Iran (May 26, 2019), <https://melliun.org/iran/206668>

<sup>199</sup> Ansari, *supra* note 117.

<sup>200</sup> *Qurbānīyān Qatl Hāay Zanjīrihiyy Az Āhli Sunat [Victims of the Chain Murders Among Sunnis]*, YouTube (May 2, 2015), [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3\\_o-HGGLa0g](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3_o-HGGLa0g)

<sup>201</sup> Ansari, *supra* note 117.

months in prison, he was released in 1982 but the government's intimidation continued. In 1989, Molazadeh went to Pakistan to avoid security forces' harassment.<sup>202</sup> He took the leadership of the Supreme Council of Sunnis of Iran in Karachi, Pakistan, which advocated for Sunnis' rights in Iran.<sup>203</sup> In February 1996, he was shot to death in his car in Karachi by unknown persons. No one claimed responsibility for his murder.<sup>204</sup>

## 6.2 Molavi Abdolnaser Jamshidzahi

Molavi Abdolnaser Jamshidzahi was an Iranian Sunni cleric and a graduate of Damascus University, in Syria. In February 1996, he, alongside Molana Molazadeh, was shot and killed in the streets of Karachi.<sup>205</sup> Some reports indicate that these two Sunni clerics were among the victims of the Chain Murders of Iranian intellectual and political opponents carried out by a group of MOI agents during the 1990s.<sup>206</sup>

## 6.3 Molavi Nooruddin Gharibi Kerdar

Molavi Nooruddin Gharibi Kerdar was one of the Sunni religious leaders in Khorasan Province. He had graduated from the Islamic University of Madinah in Saudi Arabia. Attending a religious school in Saudi Arabia has always been a red line for the Islamic Republic's security apparatus. Molavi Nooruddin Gharibi Kerdar, who had become subjected to the MOI's pressure and intimidation, left Iran for Pakistan. After a while he moved to Tajikistan, where he was shot to death by unknown persons in 1998.<sup>207</sup> His murder has remained unsolved until the present day.

## 6.4 Molavi Mosa Karampour

In May 2001, Molavi Mosa Karampour, a well-known Sunni cleric, was killed in a bomb attack in Herat, Afghanistan.<sup>208</sup> During the 1980s, Karampour had been arrested and tortured by Iranian security forces on different occasions. In 1989, he was appointed as the prayer Imam of Sheikh Mohammad Feiz Mosque in Mashhad, which soon was targeted by security forces. In January 1994, Sheikh Mohammad Feiz Mosque was demolished overnight. After that, Molavi Karampour went to Herat to escape future persecution by the Iranian government. He later revealed that he had been summoned and tortured by Iranian security forces many times between

---

<sup>202</sup> *Vīzhīh Barnāmiḥ 24 Sāl Ba'd Az Tirūr "Mūlānā 'abbulmalik Mulāzdhīh,"* YouTube (Jun. 3, 2020),

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KOSobYBBGlc>

<sup>203</sup> Ansari, *supra* note 117.

<sup>204</sup> Asqalani, *supra* note 118 at 21.

<sup>205</sup> *Id.*

<sup>206</sup> Jeyhun, *supra* note 159.

<sup>207</sup> *Qurbānīyān Tirūrīsm Jumhūrī Islāmī Dar Khārij Az Kishvar; Molavi Nooruddin Gharibi Kerdar [Victims of the Islamic Republic's Terrorism in Abroad; Molavi Nooruddin Gharibi Kerdar]*, Balatarin (May 2, 2019), <https://www.balatarin.com/permlink/2019/3/2/5048782>

<sup>208</sup> *Mūlānā Muḥammad Ebrāhīm Ṣafīzādīh Dar Hirāt Tirūr Shud [Molana Mohammad Ebrahim Safizadeh Was Assassinated in Herat]*, Fars News Agency (May 17, 2019), <https://bit.ly/3zOxjfg> See also *Qurbānīyān Tirūrīsm Jumhūrī Islāmī Dar Khārij Az Kishvar; Mūlavī Mūsā Karampūr [Victims of the Islamic Republic's Terrorism in Abroad; Molavi Mosa Karampour]*, Balatarin (Feb. 11, 2019), available at <https://www.balatarin.com/permlink/2019/2/11/5035595> (Discussing the date of the murder of Molavi Mosa Karampour).

1985 and 1994.<sup>209</sup> Karampour also published a book about the destruction of Sheikh Mohammad Feiz Mosque in which he described the Islamic Republic's policies against Sunni citizens.<sup>210</sup>

## 6.5 Molavi Abdulghani Shahouzahi

Molavi Abdulghani Shahouzahi, a well-known Sunni religious scholar from Sistan and Baluchistan Province, died under suspicious circumstances in Quetta, in Pakistan, in May 2017. He was a graduate of the Islamic University of Madinah in Saudi Arabia.<sup>211</sup> According to some reports, he had been forced to flee to Pakistan due to pressure from IRGC intelligence. After his death, Shahouzahi's family was under pressure from security forces to declare that he had lost his life in a car accident.<sup>212</sup> Molavi Shahouzahi had openly criticized the Islamic Republic.<sup>213</sup> There are some speculations among the Sunni community that the IRGC Quds Force was behind his murder.<sup>214</sup>

## 6.6 Molana Mohammad Ebrahim Safizadeh

In May 2019 Molana Mohammad Ebrahim Safizadeh, a prominent Sunni scholar, was shot by unknown persons in Herat, Afghanistan. A few days later he died of his wounds.<sup>215</sup> Sources close to Safizadeh stated that several months before his murder, IRGC intelligence agents had

---

<sup>209</sup> *Qurbānīyān Tirūrism Jumhūrī Islāmī Dar Khārij Az Kishvar; Mūsā Karampūr [Victims of the Islamic Republic's Terrorism in Abroad; Mosa Karampour]*, Balatarin (Feb. 11, 2019), <https://www.balatarin.com/permlink/2019/2/11/5035595>

<sup>210</sup> *Ākharīn Faryād Masjīd Shīykh Fīy Muḥammad Mashhad [The Last Cry of Sheikh Mohammad Feiz Mosque in Mashhad]*, IslamHouse.com, <http://islamhouse.com/fa/books/45615> (Last visited Jan. 12, 2022). See also *Mūlavī Mūsā Karampūr (Abū 'āmir) Emām Jamā' at Masjīd Shahīd Shudih Shīykh Fīy Muḥammad Mashhad [Molavi Mosa Karampour (Abu Amer) Friday Prayer Imam of the Martyred Sheikh Mohammad Feiz Mosque in Mashhad]*, AhleSonnat2020 Blog, <https://bit.ly/3nb8JBR> (Last visited Jan. 12, 2022) (discussing the details of Molavi Karampour's book about the destruction of Feiz Mosque in Mashhad).

<sup>211</sup> *Qurbānīyān Tirūrism Jumhūrī Islāmī Dar Khārij Az Kishvar; Mūlavī 'abdulghanī Shāhūzehī [Victims of the Islamic Republic's Terrorism in Abroad; Molavi Abdulghani Shahouzahi]*, Balatarin, <https://www.balatarin.com/permlink/2019/4/27/5083589> (Last visited Jan. 28, 2022). See also *Mūlavī 'abdulghanī Shāhūzehī Az Rūhānīyān Āhli Sunat Tavasūṭ Sipāh Dar Pākistān Tirūr Shud [Molavi Abdulghani Shahouzahi, a Sunni Cleric, Was Assassinated by IRGC in Pakistan]*, ArazNews (May 13, 2017), <https://www.araznews.org/fa/?p=35649> (discussing the time of Molavi Shahouzahi's murder).

<sup>212</sup> *Mūlavī 'abdulghanī Shāhūzehī Az Rūhānīyān Āhli Sunat Tavasūṭ Sipāh Dar Pākistān Tirūr Shud [Molavi Abdulghani Shahouzahi, a Sunni Cleric, Was Assassinated by IRGC in Pakistan]*, ArazNews (May 13, 2017), <https://www.araznews.org/fa/?p=35649>

<sup>213</sup> Balatarin, *supra* note 211.

<sup>214</sup> *Tirūr Rūhānī Āhli Sunat Sīstān And Balūchistān Tavasūṭ Nīrūy Quds Dar Pākistān [Assassination of Sunni Cleric from Sistan and Baluchistan Province by IRGC Quds Force in Pakistan]*, News.Gooya (May 14, 2017), <https://news.gooya.com/2017/05/post-3657.php>

<sup>215</sup> *Sū ' Qaṣd Bih Yīk Rūhānī Āhli Sunat Muntaqīd Irān Dar Āfqanīstān [Assassination of a Sunni Cleric Who Was Critical of Iran in Afghanistan]*, Radio Farda (May 18, 2019), <https://www.radiofarda.com/a/29949324.html> Some websites introduced Molana Safizadeh as the spokesman of the Sunni Front of Iran. See *Ākharīn Vaz 'īyat Jismī "Muḥammad Ebrāhīm Šafīzādih" Ba 'd Az Tirūr Nāfarjām Uo Dar Āfqanīstān [Latest Update of the Physical Conditions of "Mohammad Ebrahim Safizadeh" After His Unsuccessful Assassination in Afghanistan]*, Kalamemh.tv (May 18, 2019), available at <https://www.kalamemh.tv/1398/02/12117/>

contacted him and told him to stop his activities and return to Iran, which he refused.<sup>216</sup> Molana Safizadeh was a graduate of religious schools in Pakistan and Saudi Arabia.<sup>217</sup>

He had been arrested and accused of disseminating Wahhabism in September 1989. The Special Clerical Court sentenced him to five years' imprisonment and 75 lashes, which later was carried out in a public square in the city of Taybad, Khorasan Razavi Province.<sup>218</sup> In an interview in 2013, Safizadeh described the torture that he endured in prison.<sup>219</sup>

I've spent three months in the MOI's [detention center] in Mashhad. The first question [that they] asked in interrogations, trials, and the courts was the ideological and religious [question]. Torture was mostly different for different people. In the first days, [they] punched and kicked me, and when they saw that it didn't work, they tried to extract a confession using praise and flattery. I mostly received psychological torture; if someone showed weakness, [they] increased the physical torture.<sup>220</sup>

When Molana Safizadeh was behind bars in Vakilabad prison in Mashhad, his brother, Kheyrollah Safizadeh, was also arrested and then executed on fabricated charges.<sup>221</sup> Shortly after Safizadeh was released from prison in 1992, he was banned from teaching in Sunni seminaries and *imamate* [leading prayers] of a mosque.<sup>222</sup>

After the demolition of Sheikh Mohammad Feiz Mosque in Mashhad in January 1994, the government's pressure on Sunni clerics markedly increased. To avoid more persecution, Safizadeh left Iran to Herat, where he lived in exile until his murder. No group has claimed responsibility for his murder until the present day.<sup>223</sup>

---

<sup>216</sup> *Eṭilā'āt Sipāh Pīsh Az Ḥamlīh Bā Mūlavī Şafīzādih Tamās Giriftih Būd [IRGC Intelligence Unit Had Contacted Molavi Safizadeh Before the Attack]*, Iranintl.com (Jun. 9, 2019), <https://bit.ly/3yXpGC5>

<sup>217</sup> *Mūlānā Ebrāhīm Şafīzādih Bi Shahādat Rasīd [Molana Ebrahim Safizadeh Was Martyred]*, SunniOnline (May 22, 2019), <http://sunnionline.us/farsi/2019/05/16309>

<sup>218</sup> *Mūlavī Muḥammad Ebrāhīm Şafīzādih [Molavi Mohammad Ebrahim Safizadeh]*, Mashrooteh.com (May 28, 2020), <https://bit.ly/3h71YQa> See also Iranintl.com, *supra* note 216 (discussing that Safizadeh was sentenced to 75 lashes because of allegedly burning a picture of Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei).

<sup>219</sup> IranWire, *supra* note 119.

<sup>220</sup> *Id.*

<sup>221</sup> Mashrooteh.com, *supra* note 218. See also SunniOnline, *supra* note 217 (discussing the murder of Molana Safizadeh).

<sup>222</sup> Mashrooteh.com, *supra* note 218. See also IranWire, *supra* note 119 (discussing the year that Molana Safizadeh was released from prison).

<sup>223</sup> Iranintl.com, *supra* note 216.





Figure 5 - Molana Mohammad Ebrahim Safizadeh (unknown date)

## 7 Cases of Enforced Disappearance

Molavi Habibullah Hosseinbor was a Sunni cleric in Saravan, Sistan and Baluchistan Province. In 1991, he disappeared after he was released from prison.<sup>224</sup> No information has been found on his whereabouts or his condition until the present date. Some reports indicate that he has been killed by MOI agents.<sup>225</sup>

## 8 Cases of Forced Exile

Molana Mohiuddin Baluchestani, a Sunni religious scholar from Sistan and Baluchistan Province, passed away in May 2020 in Quetta in Pakistan. After the 1979 revolution, he became subject to the government's harassment because of his religious faith.<sup>226</sup> For a while, he was in exile in Najafabad, which is a conservative Shi'a city.<sup>227</sup> To avoid more persecution, he was forced to leave Iran to Pakistan, where he died in exile.<sup>228</sup>

## 9 Cases of Imprisonment of Sunni Clerics

Soon after the 1979 revolution, Sunni clerics became subjected to growing hostility from the Shi'a government. In addition to the historical conflict between the two Islamic sects, Shi'a clerics were particularly upset about Sunni clerics' influence over millions of Sunnis living in Iran. In reaction, some Sunni clerics dissociated themselves from the Islamic Republic altogether. Some of them, such as Mamousta Ezzedin Hosseini, former Friday prayer imam of Mahabad, joined the opposition groups that were fighting the government.<sup>229</sup> Since the 1979

---

<sup>224</sup> Ansari, *supra* note 117.

<sup>225</sup> *Id.*

<sup>226</sup> *Mūlānā Muḥiādīn Balūchistānī; Osvih Istiqamat [Molana Mohiuddin Baluchestani; a Role Model for Endurance]*, Kalameh.tv (June. 2, 2020), <https://www.kalameh.tv/1399/03/22684/>

<sup>227</sup> *Payām Tasliyat Kāk Hasan Āminī Va Sāyir Rūḥāniyān Āhli Sunat Bi Munāsibat Darguzasht Mūlānā Muḥiādīn Balūchistānī [Condolence Message from Kak Hassan Amini and Other Sunni Clerics After the Death of Molana Mohiuddin Baluchestani]*, Kalameh.TV (Jun. 2, 2020), <https://www.kalameh.tv/1399/03/22730/>

<sup>228</sup> Kalameh.tv, *supra* note 226.

<sup>229</sup> *A Short Biography of Sheikh Ezaddin Hosseini*, Rojhelat.info (Feb. 18, 2015), <http://rojhelat.info/en/?p=8223>

revolution, dozens of Sunni clerics and scholars have been assassinated in Iran and abroad or sentenced to execution or long imprisonment in unfair trials.<sup>230</sup>

## 9.1 Ahmad Moftizadeh

Ahmad Moftizadeh was a prominent Sunni scholar, holding the highest religious rank of *mufti*. He was also an influential political leader among the Kurdish community in Iran. He played a major role in advocating for the rights of Iranian Sunnis in Kurdistan and beyond during the constitutional negotiations in 1979.<sup>231</sup> Moftizadeh, however, soon became a critic of the newly established government when the Constitution designated Shi'a Islam as the country's official religion, which is supposed to "remain eternally immutable."<sup>232</sup>

In 1981, Moftizadeh and a group of Sunni scholars and activists organized the Central Council of Sunnis, also known as *Shams*, in order to defend the rights of Iranian Sunnis through dialogue with the Islamic Republic. In less than a year, however, the government severely repressed this group.<sup>233</sup> Many of Moftizadeh's students and members of *Shams* were arrested and prosecuted. Although more than 180 of them were later released in 1985, some of them were either executed or assassinated.<sup>234</sup>

In 1982, when Moftizadeh criticized the governments' new restrictions and discrimination against Sunnis, he was arrested by the direct order of Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, the founder and first Supreme Leader of the Islamic Republic.<sup>235</sup> Ayatollah Khomeini previously had praised Moftizadeh and called him "an honorable jurist and a brave cleric."<sup>236</sup>

In prison, Moftizadeh was tortured to make a televised confession. He was later sentenced to five years' imprisonment in a show trial. While in prison, he was sentenced to five more years of imprisonment. There is no reporting publicly available regarding his trials. Moftizadeh spent more than six years in solitary confinement. After the deterioration of his health because of cancer, he was conditionally released from prison in July 1992.<sup>237</sup> Moftizadeh passed away in less than six months in January 1993. Many blame the government for intentionally depriving him of proper and timely cancer treatment and leaving him to perish in prison.<sup>238</sup>

---

<sup>230</sup> Mehrabi, *supra* note 17.

<sup>231</sup> *Āḥmad Muftīzādih; Shakhshīyat Sīyāsī Irānī Āhli Sunat [Ahmad Moftizadeh; Sunni Iranian Political Figure]*, IranWire (Jul. 3, 2021), <https://iranwire.com/fa/special-features/50437>

<sup>232</sup> Qanuni Assasi Jumhuri Islami Iran [Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran], art.12. *See also* Mehrabi, *supra* note 17 (discussing the reaction of Ahmad Moftizadeh to the enactment of the Constitution).

<sup>233</sup> Kadivar, *supra* note 12.

<sup>234</sup> Mehrabi, *supra* note 17.

<sup>235</sup> Kadivar, *supra* note 12.

<sup>236</sup> Mehrabi, *supra* note 17.

<sup>237</sup> Kadivar, *supra* note 12.

<sup>238</sup> *Barkhī 'ulamā Va Andīshmandānī Ki Tavasūt Jumhūrī Eslāmī Tirūr Va Yā I'dām Shudand [Some Religious Scholars and Thinkers Who Were Assassinated or Executed by the Islamic Republic]*, Ahlesonnat.com (Jan. 23, 2016), <https://bit.ly/3nnyerU>



Figure 6 - Ahmad Moftizadeh (unknown date)

## 9.2 Molavi Fazlurahman Kohi

Molavi Fazlurahman Kohi, a Sunni Friday prayer imam in Sistan and Baluchistan Province, was sentenced to six years and four months' imprisonment after he criticized the government for the repression of the nationwide civil protests in November 2019. His trial was held *in camera*, and he was denied a proper legal defense.<sup>239</sup> After his arrest, several protests took place in different cities of Sistan and Baluchistan Province, which were violently repressed by security forces.<sup>240</sup>

## 10 Restrictions Imposed on Sunni Clerics

The Iranian government has also taken numerous measures against Sunni clerics to limit their activities. In recent years, senior Sunni clerics have been subjected to travel restrictions, and they cannot leave the country or even travel freely inside Iran.<sup>241</sup> In an interview in 2017, Molavi Abdolhamid, the Sunni Friday prayer Imam of Zahedan, revealed that he cannot travel to other countries or even go to cities other than Qom and Tehran.<sup>242</sup> Similarly, Hassan Amini, a Sunni cleric from Kurdistan, has been barred from leaving Iran. The authorities told him that they had

---

<sup>239</sup> *Yġk Emām Jum 'ih Āhli Sunat Bi Bīsh Az Shīsh Sāl Zindān Maḥkūm Shud [A Sunni Friday Prayer Imam Was Sentenced to More Than Six Years' Imprisonment]*, IranWire (Oct. 2, 2020), <https://iranwire.com/fa/news/sistan-and-baluchestan/41674>

<sup>240</sup> Mehrabi, *supra* note 17.

<sup>241</sup> IranWire, *supra* note 119.

<sup>242</sup> *Mūlānā 'abduḥamīd: Faqaṭ Ijāzih Safar Bi Qum Va Tīhrān Rā Dāram [Molana Abdulhamid: I Am Only Allowed to Travel to Qom and Tehran]*, ISNA (Dec. 2, 2017), <https://bit.ly/3A5SABi>



taken this action against him because he had spoken with media outlets based outside Iran, including Nour TV, a channel that reflects Sunni views.<sup>243</sup>

In addition, the Islamic Republic's intelligence and judiciary apparatus have prosecuted those Sunni clerics who have criticized the government's discriminatory policies against the Sunni community. In February 2009, the Special Court of the Clergy in Mashhad sentenced Molavi Abdollah Kheirshahi to four years and six months' imprisonment and five years of exile and a permanent ban on public speaking.<sup>244</sup> After being released from prison, Kheirshahi was also defrocked and banned from teaching in Sunni religious schools.<sup>245</sup> In 2017, security forces stopped him in the middle of the road and prevented him from going to the city of Khaf, in Khorasan Razavi Province.<sup>246</sup>

According to Ahmad Esmaeili, the former Friday prayer imam in the city of Javanroud in Kermanshah Province, the Special Court of the Clergy imprisoned Sunni clerics so that they would sign a pledge to terminate their careers as religious ministers after being released from prison.<sup>247</sup> "I was also told that I have no right to go to the pulpit and wear the clothes of a clergyman. The Special Clerical Court gets this signature," Esmaeili added.<sup>248</sup> The Special Clerical Court, which was established in 1979 by the order of Ayatollah Khomeini, acts under the sole control of the Supreme Leader.<sup>249</sup> Islamic Republic's constitution has not mentioned the Special Clerical Court, nor the parliament has ever passed laws governing its procedures.<sup>250</sup> The Islamic Republic's constitution recognizes Sunni jurisprudence with regard to religious teachings for Sunnis.<sup>251</sup> Despite this, the Special Court of the Clergy has broad jurisdiction over all Muslim clerics, with no distinction between Shi'as and Sunnis.<sup>252</sup>

---

<sup>243</sup> *Kāk Ḥasan Āmīnī: Hamchinān Mamnū' ulkhurujam Va Tahdīd Mīshavam* [*Kak Hassan Amini: I Am Still Banned from Leaving the Country and Threatened*], HumanRightsinIran.com (Mar. 4, 2016), <https://humanrightsiniran.com/1394/10671/>

<sup>244</sup> *Šudūr Ḥukm Dādghāh Dar Mūrīd Mūlavī Khīrshāhī* [*Issuing the Court Ruling on the Case of Molavi Kheirshahi*], SunniOnline (Feb. 11, 2009), <http://sunnionline.us/farsi/2009/02/206>

<sup>245</sup> Tahir Shirmohammadi, *I'd ām, Zindān Va Tashdīd Fishār Hā; Važ'īyat Āhli Sunat Dar Irān* [*Execution, Prison, and Intensification of Pressures; The Situation of Sunnis in Iran*], Deutsche Welle Persian (Jul. 1, 2013), <https://bit.ly/3lvHYW2>

<sup>246</sup> *Mūlavī Khīrshāhī 'ālim Sarshinās Āhli Sunat Az Safar Bi Shahr Khāf Man' Shud* [*Molavi Kheirshahi, the Well-known Sunni Scholar, Was Banned from Traveling to the City of Khaf*], Rojikurd.net (Feb. 15, 2017), <https://www.rojikurd.net/balochi/11308/>

<sup>247</sup> Shirmohammadi, *supra* note 245. See also Maryam Dadgar, *Vetting the Claims of Ayatollah Makarem Shirazi About the Situation of Religious Minorities in Iran*, Iran Press Watch (Nov. 26, 2016), available at <http://iranpresswatch.org/post/16242/16242/> (discussing the former position of Ahmad Esmaeili as a Friday prayer imam and his criticism about the situation of Sunnis in Iran).

<sup>248</sup> Shirmohammadi, *supra* note 245.

<sup>249</sup> Tahir Shirmohammadi, "*Dādghāh Vīzhīh Rūhāniyat, Dādghāhī Sīyāsī-Mazhabī Āst*" [*The Special Court of the Clergy is a Political and Religious Court*], Deutsche Welle Persian (Jul. 23, 2010), <https://bit.ly/3EVRt9y> See also Āyīn Nāmīh Dādsarā Hā Va Dādghāh Hāy Vīzhīh Rūhāniyat [The Rules of the Special Prosecutor Office and the Court of the Clergy] 1369 [1990], art. 1, available at <https://qavanin.ir/Law/PrintText/84853> (discussing that the Court is under the direct control of the Supreme Leader).

<sup>250</sup> Mohsen Kadivar, *'adam Vijāhat Qānūnī Dādghāh Vīzhīh Rūhāniyat* [*Lack of Legal Basis for the Special Court of the Clergy*], kadivar.com (Nov. 5, 2000), <https://kadivar.com/788/>

<sup>251</sup> Qanuni Assasi Jumhuri Islami Iran [Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran], art.12.

<sup>252</sup> Āyīn Nāmīh Dādsarā Hā Va Dādghāh Hāy Vīzhīh Rūhāniyat [The Rules of the Special Prosecutor Office and the Court of the Clergy], art. 13,15, 16.

## 11 Destruction and Closure of Sunni Mosques and Schools

In addition to other restrictions, the Sunni community faces discrimination with respect to their places of worship. The Iranian government bars Sunni citizens from building new mosques in major cities.<sup>253</sup> It is to be noted that more than one million Sunnis live in Tehran.<sup>254</sup> According to Ebrahim Ahrari Khalaf, a Sunni rights activist, the Islamic Republic has restricted the building of new Sunni mosques even in the areas with large number of Sunni residents.<sup>255</sup>

In the city of Mashhad, about fifty houses have been changed, unofficially and secretly, to prayer centers. [The government] does not permit any development and restoration of the few old mosques that have remained, such as Esmaeilabad Mosque ... [Moreover] we have to hold the Eid al-Fitr Prayer on the day that the government mandates.<sup>256</sup>

In addition, Iranian authorities have demolished and confiscated a number of Sunni mosques and religious seminaries over the past years.<sup>257</sup> On midnight of January 31, 1994, a large number of police and security forces attacked the Sheikh Mohammad Feiz Mosque in Mashhad and bulldozed it.<sup>258</sup> Sheikh Mohammad Feiz was a 100-year-old monument and an important place of worship for Sunnis in eastern Iran.<sup>259</sup> Despite its historical and religious values, the mosque was demolished, and its land converted to a public park.<sup>260</sup> Mosa Karampour, who was the prayer imam of Sheikh Mohammad Feiz Mosque, had to flee to Herat, Afghanistan, to avoid persecution by the Iranian government. Several years later, he was killed during a terrorist attack in Herat.<sup>261</sup>

A day after the destruction of Sheikh Mohammad Feiz Mosque, a group of people and Sunni clerics gathered in the Makki Grand Mosque in Zahedan. They were worried and wanted to know the reason for the overnight demolition of a Sunni mosque.<sup>262</sup> But security forces surrounded the mosque and used machine guns to fire at its façade.<sup>263</sup> Ebrahim Ahrari Khalaf witnessed the entire incident on that day.<sup>264</sup>

The schools were closed and some of the students came to the mosque ... We were praying when the people and the mosque were shot at ... [They] set up some DShKs [a heavy machine gun] in tall buildings around the mosque and fired ... I saw that

---

<sup>253</sup> Fereshteh Ghazi, *Sunī Hāay Irān Va Mushkil Ehdās Masjid [Iranian Sunnis and the Problem of Building a Mosque]*, BBC Persian (Oct. 30, 2016), <https://www.bbc.com/persian/iran-features-37817273>

<sup>254</sup> *Bīsh Az Yik Mīlūn Āhli Sunat Dar Tīhrān Zindīgī Mīkunand [More Than One Million Sunnis Live in Tehran]*, SunniOnline (Jul. 31, 2013), <http://sunnionline.us/farsi/2013/07/894>

<sup>255</sup> Ahrari Khalaf, *supra* note 41.

<sup>256</sup> *Id.*

<sup>257</sup> IranWire, *supra* note 119.

<sup>258</sup> Balatarin, *supra* note 208. *See also* Ahrari Khalaf, *supra* note 41 (discussing the details of the destruction of the mosque).

<sup>259</sup> Ahrari Khalaf, *supra* note 41.

<sup>260</sup> *Id.*

<sup>261</sup> Balatarin, *supra* note 208.

<sup>262</sup> Ahrari Khalaf, *supra* note 41.

<sup>263</sup> DUDOIGNON, *supra* note 15 at 223.

<sup>264</sup> Ahrari Khalaf, *supra* note 41.

a helicopter was shooting at the mosque ... I was leaning against a corner of the mosque, and I was very scared. I saw how a group of plainclothes agents, who had covered their faces, attacked the people, and used very ugly obscenities and insults against Sunni beliefs. I hadn't put on the ethnic dress [that day], maybe that's why they didn't attack me... I saw with my own eyes some people were killed there ... [and] many were also wounded ... [Moreover] a group of plainclothes agents went to the seminary and arrested some of the clerics there... The wave of arrests continued for several years afterward.<sup>265</sup>

After that, a series of clashes broke out in the city of Khash, Sistan and Baluchistan Province.<sup>266</sup> In 2008, the Imam Hanifah School in Zabol, in Sistan and Baluchistan Province, was destroyed. The reason given by the authorities was reportedly the school's failure to obtain the required permits, despite the fact that the school had operated for 17 years prior to its demolition.<sup>267</sup> In July 2014, a prayer center of Sunnis in Punak neighborhood of Tehran was destroyed. After that, a number of Sunni prayer Imams asked for permission to build a mosque for Sunni citizens in Tehran, which was ignored by the government.<sup>268</sup> More recently, on January 23, 2021, the foundation of the Eidgah, a Sunni place of worship, was destroyed in Iranshahr in Sistan and Baluchistan Province. This is the third time that the construction of a religious place for Sunnis in the region has been stopped due to allegedly failing to obtain proper permission.<sup>269</sup> In addition to closing Sunni seminaries, the Islamic Republic has also imposed restrictive measures on Sunni religious publishing, such as banning them from book fairs.<sup>270</sup>

---

<sup>265</sup> *Id.*

<sup>266</sup> DUDOIGNON, *supra* note 15 at 223.

<sup>267</sup> Alireza Kermani, *Juz' iyāt Takhrīb Madrisih Āhli Sunat Sīstān Tavasut Nīrū Hāy Āmnīyatī* [Details of the Destruction of the Sunni School in Sistan by Security Forces], Radio Farda (Sept. 4, 2008), [https://www.radiofarda.com/a/f4\\_Sistan\\_prayer\\_imam\\_sunni/463587.html](https://www.radiofarda.com/a/f4_Sistan_prayer_imam_sunni/463587.html)

<sup>268</sup> *Khabarguzārī Mihr: Āhli Sunat Dar Irān 10 Hizār Masjid Dārānd* [Mehr News Agency: Sunnis Have 10 Thousand Mosques in Iran], Radio Farda (Aug. 20, 2016), <https://www.radiofarda.com/a/f12-iran-sunnite-mosques-question/27935150.html>

<sup>269</sup> *Fishār Bar Fa 'ālān Balūch Irān: Takhrīb Zīr Banāy Yīk Makān Mazhabī Va Bāzdāshat Yīk Rūḥānī Āhli Sunat* [Pressure on Baluch Activists in Iran; Destroying the Foundation of a Religious Place and Arresting a Sunni Cleric], BBC Persian (Jan. 24, 2021), <https://www.bbc.com/persian/iran-55786817>

<sup>270</sup> DUDOIGNON, *supra* note 15 at 254.



Figure 7- Sunnis' destroyed place of worship in Iranshahr, Sistan and Baluchestan Province (Jan. 2021)

## 12 Violation of International Laws

Considering its treaty commitments, Iran is obligated to provide a full panoply of rights to its citizens with no discrimination on the basis of race, ethnicity, language, and religion. These also include the right to equality before the law and the right to equal access to education, and professional opportunities, among many others.

### 12.1 Right to Life

The right to life and the corollary right to be free from the arbitrary deprivation of life represent the defining human right and has attained *jus cogens* status as a non-derogable norm that binds all states.<sup>271</sup> According to Article 3 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), everyone has “the right to life, liberty, and security of person.”<sup>272</sup> Article 15 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) limits criminal liability and punishment to clear and precise provisions in the law that were in place and applicable at the time the act or omission took place.<sup>273</sup> Under Article 6(2) of the ICCPR, in countries that have not abolished the death penalty, “a sentence of death may be imposed only for the most serious crimes in accordance with the law,” and must be carried out pursuant to a “final judgment rendered by a competent court.”<sup>274</sup>

The Iranian government has a pattern of arbitrarily charging Sunni defendants to religious offenses or acting against national security. Dozens of such defendants have been sentenced to death in trials that lack the basic due process safeguards. The Iranian government practices

---

<sup>271</sup> William J. Aceves, *When Death Becomes Murder: A Primer on Extrajudicial Killing*, 50.1 COLUM HUM RTS L. REV. 116-184 (2018).

<sup>272</sup> G.A. Res. 217A (III), U.N. Doc. A/810 at 71 (1948).

<sup>273</sup> 999 U.N.T.S. 171; S. Exec. Doc. E, 95-2 (1978); S. Treaty Doc. 95-20; 6 I.L.M. 368 (1967).

<sup>274</sup> *Id.*

violate the right to life and the requirement for legal certainty under international human rights law.

## 12.2 Due Process Rights Including Right to a Fair Trial and Access to Justice

Article 9 of the ICCPR provides everyone's right to a speedy trial.<sup>275</sup> Also, Article 26 and Article 14 guarantee equal treatment and protection before the law without any discrimination and the right to "a fair and public hearing by a competent, independent and impartial tribunal established by law."<sup>276</sup> Sunni prisoners often have not been indicted within a reasonable time, have not had access to an attorney, or their appointed attorneys have not been allowed to read their cases before the trial, and their defenses and exonerating conditions have been ignored by judges because of security forces' pressure. Such incidents constitute a pattern of violations of the ICCPR provisions by the Islamic Republic.

In addition, depriving individuals of their liberty because of exercising fundamental rights, such as freedom of religion, is considered arbitrary detention.<sup>277</sup> A violation of the international norms relating to the right to a fair trial is of such gravity as to give the deprivation of liberty an arbitrary character.<sup>278</sup>

Moreover, the families of victims of extrajudicial murders of Sunni clerics have been denied access to justice. The Islamic Republic not only showed no interest in investigating their murders but also discouraged their families from seeking justice. At least in one case, judiciary officials openly stated that they could not investigate the murder case and asked the family to cease their attempts in this regard.<sup>279</sup>

## 12.3 Torture, Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment

Under Article 7 of the ICCPR, "No one shall be subjected to torture or to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment."<sup>280</sup> The witnesses interviewed by IHRDC, and numerous accounts discussed in this report, indicate that Sunni prisoners have been subjected to mistreatment, ranging from psychological torture to physical abuse. They reported being insulted and interrogated for long hours, detained in unsanitary conditions in crowded prison wards, and deprived of access to proper medical care and other necessities.

---

<sup>275</sup> *Id.*

<sup>276</sup> *Id.*

<sup>277</sup> According to Article 9 of the ICCPR, "Anyone who is arrested shall be informed, at the time of arrest, of the reasons for his arrest and shall be promptly informed of any charges against him." *See* 999 U.N.T.S. 171; S. Exec. Doc. E, 95-2 (1978); S. Treaty Doc. 95-20; 6 I.L.M. 368 (1967).

<sup>278</sup> *Individual Complaints and Urgent Appeals, Deliberations, Arbitrary Detention WG.*, <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/Issues/Detention/Pages/Complaints.aspx> (Last visited Jan. 12, 2022).

<sup>279</sup> Ghazi, *supra* note 174.

<sup>280</sup> 999 U.N.T.S. 171; S. Exec. Doc. E, 95-2 (1978); S. Treaty Doc. 95-20; 6 I.L.M. 368 (1967).



## 12.4 Right to Freedom of Thought, Conscience, and Religion

Article 18 of the UDHR and Article 18 of the ICCPR guarantee every person's right to religious freedom by an almost identical language. Accordingly, "[E]veryone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; this right includes freedom to change his religion or belief, and freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship, and observance."<sup>281</sup> In addition, Article 27 of the ICCPR declares that adherents of a religion "shall not be denied the right, in community with the other members of their group [ . . . ] to profess and practice their own religion."<sup>282</sup>

The Islamic Republic, however, has systematically violated its obligations under the ICCPR with respect to Sunni citizens residing in Iran. In many cities across the country, including Tehran, Sunnis are not allowed to build or operate their own mosque. Sunni citizens often have to gather in private prayer centers, some of which have been shut down by security forces. In addition, several Sunni mosques and religious schools have been demolished and confiscated in the past several years. The repressive policies against Sunnis' places of worship are against the Islamic Republic's commitment under Articles 21 and 22 of the ICCPR that provides for the right of peaceful assembly and freedom of association.<sup>283</sup>

Moreover, the Islamic Republic has arrested and prosecuted many Sunni citizens because of practicing their religion and advocating for their religious freedom. Some of them have been accused of propagating radical ideas, and many have been charged with acting against national security. Due to a lack of transparency in such cases, it is impossible to evaluate the government's claims. Without reliable evidence to support its claims, it can be concluded that the Iranian government has exacted harsh punishments on numerous Sunni citizens on account of their religious beliefs.

During the years after the 1979 revolution, several Sunni religious schools have been shut down and other schools' activities were subjected to strict government control. In addition, Sunni students have been given very restricted access to Sunni religious teachings in public schools.<sup>284</sup> According to Danial Babayani Khajenafas, a Sunni rights activist, the Ministry of Education used to provide a small pamphlet containing religious teachings for Sunni students that were taught by Sunni clerics in schools. Starting in 2011, however, this pamphlet was no longer offered.<sup>285</sup>

---

<sup>281</sup> G.A. Res. 217A (III), U.N. Doc. A/810 at 71 (1948). *See also* 999 U.N.T.S. 171; S. Exec. Doc. E, 95-2 (1978); S. Treaty Doc. 95-20; 6 I.L.M. 368 (1967).

<sup>282</sup> 993 U.N.T.S. 3; S. Exec. Doc. D, 95-2 (1978); S. Treaty Doc. No. 95-19; 6 I.L.M. 360 (1967).

<sup>283</sup> *Id.*

<sup>284</sup> ISNA, *supra* note 242.

<sup>285</sup> Babayani Khajenafas, *supra* note 29.

When the government restricts access to religious education for Sunni students, it effectively intervenes with their right, provided by Article 19 of the ICCPR, to seek and receive ideas and information of their choice.<sup>286</sup>

## 12.5 Right to Education and Work

Article 13 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) recognizes the right of everyone to education.<sup>287</sup> Despite the Iranian government's commitment to upholding this right, Sunni citizens face discrimination in the field of education. At least in one case, a Sunni rights activist was dismissed from the university he was attending because of security forces' pressure. Furthermore, after the 1979 revolution Sunnis were barred from competitive examinations required for some universities and civil service employment.<sup>288</sup>

Article 6 of the ICESCR protects the right to work. Accordingly, member states must prevent discrimination in the workplace and in the hiring and firing process.<sup>289</sup> In addition, Article 2 of the ILO Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Right at Work mandates all member states to eliminate discrimination in respect of employment and occupation.<sup>290</sup> Except for a few recent cases, Sunni citizens rarely have been appointed to high-ranking government jobs. Some Sunni citizens have been subjected to reprimand and even dismissal at their place of employment because of their religious activities.

From the very first year that Ebrahim Ahrari Khalaf started working as a school teacher, he faced difficulties in his job, including forced transfer to remote areas, a ban on teaching, and dismissal, merely because of his activities regarding the rights of Sunnis in Iran. In the years after his release from prison, Ahrari Khalaf not only got fired from every single school that he joined, but also his bookstore was shut down due to pressure from security forces.<sup>291</sup> In another incident, 17 Sunni teachers were banned from teaching. In September 2012, the Education Department in Kurdistan demoted these teachers to administrative posts, claiming their affiliation with Maktab-e Qur'an, a religious movement in Iranian Kurdistan.<sup>292</sup> Many adherents of Maktab-e Qur'an have been imprisoned and similarly expelled from their jobs in the past years.<sup>293</sup>

## Conclusion

As part of its display of "Islamic unity week" in Iran, the Islamic Republic puts on a yearly week-long show of celebrating the birthday of Prophet Mohammed, yet there is little similarity in the way Sunni and Shi'a citizens are treated in the country. The Iranian Sunni community is

---

<sup>286</sup> 993 U.N.T.S. 3; S. Exec. Doc. D, 95-2 (1978); S. Treaty Doc. No. 95-19; 6 I.L.M. 360 (1967).

<sup>287</sup> *Id.*

<sup>288</sup> DUDOIGNON, *supra* note 15 at 162.

<sup>289</sup> 993 U.N.T.S. 3; S. Exec. Doc. D, 95-2 (1978); S. Treaty Doc. No. 95-19; 6 I.L.M. 360 (1967).

<sup>290</sup> ILO Decl. on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work and its Follow-up, on its Eighty-sixth Session (1998), annex (Jun. 15, 2010).

<sup>291</sup> Ahrari Khalaf, *supra* note 41.

<sup>292</sup> *17 Mu'alim Suni Mazhab Az Tadrīs Maḥrūm Shudand [17 Sunni teachers Were Banned from Teaching]*, Balatarin (Jul. 28, 2012), <https://www.balatarin.com/permlink/2012/9/26/3156208>

<sup>293</sup> DUDOIGNON, *supra* note 15 at 191-2.



systemically repressed, and its members routinely endure discrimination in many aspects of life, including education and employment opportunities. That is in addition to many Sunni citizens who have been charged with national security offenses and sentenced to death or life in prison in grossly unfair trials.

Despite comprising a significant portion of the Iranian population, Sunnis have been barred from high-level government jobs. Moreover, Sunni citizens cannot freely practice their religious faith, they are not allowed to build mosques in major cities, and their religious teachings are prohibited and censored. Furthermore, Sunni religious leaders have been harassed throughout the past four decades. Many Sunni clerics have been killed, in Iran and abroad, in circumstances that suggest the involvement of the authorities in their deaths.

## **Methodology**

IHRDC gathered and analyzed information for this report from the following sources:

*Testimony of victims and witnesses.* IHRDC interviewed five witnesses for this report. One of the witnesses lives in Iran, but the rest of them are in exile in Malaysia, Germany, United Arab Emirates, and Turkey.

*Documents issued by non-governmental organizations.* Reports and press releases from different human rights organizations have been used in drafting this report.

*Academic articles and books.* Books and articles written by or about Sunni Muslims in Iran have been consulted and cited in this report.

*Religious Resources.* The Ayatollahs' fatwas regarding insults to the beliefs of Sunni Muslims were reviewed and cited in the report. Their responses to religious inquiries are accessible online in different websites affiliated with the Qom seminary.

*Government Documents.* The Iranian Constitution, the latest version of the Islamic Penal Code, and other legislations and documents issued by the Iranian government have been used as appropriate.

*Media reporting.* Various Iranian media sources, as well as non-Iranian media sources, have been used to provide details and context for this report.

Where the report cites or relies on information provided by government actors or other involved parties, it specifies the source of such information and evaluates the information considering the relative reliability of each source. The IHRDC has meticulously cross-checked all the sources of information used to compile this report to ensure their credibility and accuracy.

All names of places, people, organizations, etc. in the footnotes originally written in Persian have been transliterated using the system of the International Journal of Middle Eastern Studies (IJMES), available at <https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/international-journal-of-middle-east-studies/information/author-resources/ijmes-translation-and-transliteration-guide>

