

EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT

POLITICAL AFFAIRS COMMITTEE

Notice to Members

Members will find attached a paper on the human rights situation in Iran prepared for the Political Affairs Committee's public hearing on 'Respect for human rights in Iran' by Amnesty International.

For technical reasons, this is only available in the original language.

DIRECTORATE GENERAL FOR COMMITTEES
AND INTERPARLIAMENTARY DELEGATIONS

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AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL'S WRITTEN STATEMENT
TO THE POLITICAL AFFAIRS COMMITTEE OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT
(28 NOVEMBER 1985)

Throughout 1985 Amnesty International's worldwide membership has continued its campaign against the continuing violations of human rights in Iran. In the past 5 years, as it did before the 1979 revolution, Amnesty International has repeatedly requested Iran to comply with the international human rights instruments to which it is committed, calling for the implementation of adequate safeguards against torture and ill-treatment of prisoners in Iran, for the release of prisoners of conscience, for fair trials for all political prisoners and for an end to executions. Meanwhile the organization continues to receive numerous and persistent reports that human rights abuses are still occurring today.

Prisoners of Conscience and Political Prisoners

There are thousands of political prisoners in Iran, and political arrests are continuing. Amnesty International knows of imprisoned members of many political opposition groups such as the People's Fedayan Organization, the Tudeh Party, the People's Mojahedine Organization, Rah-e Kargar, and the Kurdish Democratic Party, as well as members of the Baha'i faith.

Prisoners in Iran include many who are held solely for the non-violent expression of their beliefs, but it is impossible to estimate the number of such prisoners of conscience currently held, because of the difficulty in obtaining and verifying information on individual cases.

In some cases entire families are imprisoned, while in others relatives are known to be held as hostages for indefinite periods or until the suspected political opponent can be found and arrested. One woman interviewed by Amnesty International described how Revolutionary Guards had come to her home in Tehran in November 1983 in order to arrest her husband. When, after they had waited for four days, he failed to return home, the guards told her that they would take her away for two hours' questioning. She was taken immediately to Evin Prison and released after spending 14 months in detention.

Judicial Proceedings

The unpredictable and often arbitrary nature of judicial proceedings continues to be of concern. Some political detainees are released after

several weeks or months without charge or trial, others held incommunicado without charge or trial for longer periods with no opportunity to challenge their detention in a court of law. Some are sentenced to long terms of imprisonment after summary trials, but are released before the expiry of their sentence; others, sentenced to relatively short prison terms, are executed or kept in prison after their sentence expires. Former prisoners have consistently testified that they were not informed of the precise charges against them, or that the charges were vaguely worded; that they were denied access to a defence lawyer; and that their trial, conducted by a religious judge in the presence of guards, lasted only a matter of minutes. Some former prisoners interviewed by Amnesty International were not officially informed of the outcome of their trial for some time, while others were told subsequently by their families. The majority of political trials are held in secret, with no opportunity for the defendants' relatives to attend. Judgments are not made public and, contrary to international human rights standards, there is no recourse for the defendant to appeal against conviction and sentence.

The Death Penalty

In 1984, Amnesty International recorded 661 executions in Iran. The total number for this year up to the end of October was 399. However, Amnesty International does not claim that these figures reflect the actual number of people executed during this period. Many executions are carried out in secret, and are not officially acknowledged; therefore the actual total is likely to be considerably higher than the figures cited above.

Those executed include members or suspected members of various political movements, and members of the Baha'i faith. There are also many reported executions of persons sentenced for drug-related offences.

Amnesty International has interviewed many former prisoners who in the course of their imprisonment were forced to watch the execution of relatives, friends and cell-mates. One man, a member of the People's Mojahedine Organization who was held in Tabriz prison between February 1981 and September 1983, told Amnesty International:

"When you're in a cell with other political prisoners you share an intimate, special relationship with them. With time I got to know my fellow prisoners and love them... Each time they would take prisoners away to be executed, and then new prisoners came to my cell, and I got to know them in the same way, and the same thing happened so many times.

"In the end it was so emotionally painful, that I found myself hoping I'd be the next to be executed... apart from the physical torture, the emotional and psychological torture was terrible... when there were executions, we had to load the bodies onto a lorry, with maybe a hand or limb missing from them. I had to do it three times, putting the corpses into bags and loading them onto a lorry.

"Sometimes there were relatives executed together, or else one only would be executed, and beforehand they would be allowed a final brief meeting. My cell was close to the execution yard, and I could overhear these meetings and the cries that followed the executions..."

A female student imprisoned in Evin Prison and Ghezel Hesar Prison between September 1981 and March 1982 described to Amnesty International her experiences of living in a cell holding 120 women, ranging from schoolgirls to the very old, some of whom were awaiting execution:

"One night a young girl called Tahereh was brought straight from the courtroom to our cell. She had just been sentenced to death, and was confused and agitated. She didn't seem to know why she was there. She settled down to sleep next to me, but at intervals she woke up with a start, terrified, and grasped me, asking if it were true that she really would be executed. I put my arms around her and tried to comfort her, and reassure her that it wouldn't happen, but at about 4 am they came for her and she was taken away to be executed. She was 16 years old."

Families of prisoners awaiting execution are rarely informed or allowed visits, most of them being told by telephone to collect the belongings of their executed relative or being given the number of the plot in the cemetery where s/he is buried. Relatives are rarely allowed access to the body of the person executed.

Amnesty International opposes totally and unconditionally the imposition and infliction of the death penalty. In Iran the organization's concern in this regard is particularly grave in view of the continuing large numbers of executions and the lack of provisions for fair trial and appeal.

Torture and Ill-treatment of Prisoners

Amnesty International continues to receive numerous and consistent allegations of torture and ill-treatment of detainees. Torture often begins immediately after arrest, usually in buildings operated by local komitehs or Pasdaran (Revolutionary Guards). Many such buildings were previously used by SAVAK, the National Intelligence and Security Organization operating during the time of the Shah. There is no limit to the amount of time a political detainee may be held incommunicado, without charge or trial. Torture is often inflicted in order to extract confessions about political activities, names and addresses of other political activists and the whereabouts of "safe houses", and to induce the prisoner to appear on television to repent his or her political or religious beliefs or activities. Such practice is in clear contravention not only of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, which Iran ratified in 1975, but of Iran's own Constitution, Article 38 of which states:

"Any form of torture for the purpose of extracting confessions or gaining information is forbidden. It is not permissible to compel individuals to give testimony, make confessions or swear oaths, and any testimony, confession or oath obtained in this fashion is worthless and invalid. Punishments for the infringement of these principles will be determined by law".

The absence of any prescribed limitation on incommunicado detention leads to a sense of isolation frequently increased by the detainees' knowledge that their families may not have been told where they are and may indeed have been warned not to make inquiries about them for a number of months. Relatives may in fact be threatened with arrest themselves if they ignore this.

Detainees are further disoriented by treatment such as "football", where the blindfolded detainee, hands bound behind the back, is pushed from one guard to another while being beaten, punched and kicked. According to one former detainee: "This "football game" is often used on people who have just been arrested. It breaks down the resistance, and can make one feel lonely and unstable."

The method of torture most commonly reported by former prisoners is beating with whips and cables of varying thickness, ranging from telephone cable to heavy plaited steel rods whose strands open into a claw at one end, which rips the flesh. Interrogators may concentrate on particular parts of the body, especially the soles of the feet or the back, for prolonged periods. Prisoners are always blindfolded during such beatings and usually have their hands and sometimes their feet bound together; they may also be tied to a bed.

A former teacher, not a member of any political organization, although he had criticized the country's educational policies, told Amnesty International that following his arrest in September 1983:

"They [Revolutionary Guards] put a sack over my head and over that a piece of cloth around my mouth...first of all they punched me hard and repeatedly in the face. Then they removed my shirt and told me to lie face down on a bench. I heard the crack of a whip and I felt as though my back was being cut by a huge knife..."

Other forms of physical torture reported to Amnesty International since 1980 by former victims include being hung up for hours at a time, sometimes with the body contorted by having one arm stretched over the shoulder and tied behind the back to the opposite arm; burning with electricity and cigarettes and various forms of sexual abuse, including rape of both men and women prisoners. Amnesty International has interviewed scores of former prisoners who have left Iran and their testimonies have testified to the systematic use of torture and ill-treatment in prisons and detention centres in Iran. A number of such individuals have been examined by Amnesty International medical doctors in Europe who have concluded that physical scarring evident on the bodies of torture victims is consistent with both the kind of torture to which they claim they were subjected and the date it was alleged to have occurred.

Physical torture is frequently accompanied by psychological torture. This may take the form of mock execution, sharing a cell with prisoners who are mentally disturbed, and threats to arrest, ill-treat or execute relatives.

A woman in her twenties, a member of the Organization of the People's Fedayan, whose imprisonment was referred to above, was arrested in November 1983 when the Revolutionary Guards could not find her husband. She was imprisoned for 14 months in Evin Prison and at Gohar-Dasht Prison, where she spent four and a half months in solitary confinement. She told Amnesty International:

"...in Gohar-Dasht there wasn't a minute when you couldn't hear shouts of people being subjected to torture, you could feel it taking place, you could feel the person in the next cell being dragged out. The beating had nothing to do with interrogation - that's why Gohar-Dasht is so frightening, it's just a part of the prison life."

There were many cases of prisoners who had become mentally disturbed as a result of torture or ill-treatment. She described one day seeing a distant female relative tied to a radiator in a corridor in Evin Prison:

"She was incontinent and had soiled herself badly, the smell of excrement in the corridor was awful. She behaved just like a 2 or 3 year-old child, when taken to the lavatory she simply soiled herself and her clothes. She was very wet and dirty. She also ate like a small child or a retarded person and her food would spill down her when she ate with her hand..."

"You see, there is a general atmosphere of fear and uncertainty, everyone suffers from this, everyone has psychological problems, no-one can be normal in there. Out of 14 months in prison I was in solitary confinement for nine months, either in solitary confinement in the strictest sense of the word or in cells meant for one person and where I was held with two others. But for the nine months there was no contact whatsoever with the outside world, no reading material, nothing. In that period I tried to look after myself and take hold of myself as far as I could because I could feel myself being pressurized and becoming at times psychologically unbalanced. During the nine months no-one had questioned or interrogated me, I was still waiting for somebody to ask me a question and this brought with it a lot of anxiety too. All the time I saw things, strange things, like pictures in my mind and I felt that everybody was an informer, I felt that about everybody I came into contact with. I even imagined that I saw my husband and that he was an interrogator or a collaborator with the regime and even, can you imagine, I thought my tiny son was one, too."

Amnesty International knows of several prisoners who tried to commit suicide as a result of the psychological and physical torture to which they were subjected.

Amnesty International has proposed to send a delegation to Iran to discuss its concerns with the appropriate authorities. So far there has been no response. The organization has therefore repeated its appeal to the Government of the Islamic Republic of Iran to take urgent and concrete steps to put an end to the human rights abuses described above, and to honour those human rights which it has committed itself to uphold.

At the same time, recalling the statement made by Amnesty International's Secretary General before the European Parliament in Strasbourg in December 1984, and the Parliament's Resolution 'On Human Rights in the World 1984, and Community Policy on Human Rights' (Doc. A2-121/85), Amnesty International reiterates its appeal to the institutions of the European Community and the governments of its member states to uphold their international commitments by ensuring that under no circumstances are export licences granted for equipment that would be used for torture and cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment in Iran, and that no Iranian refugees are involuntarily returned to Iran if they may become prisoners of conscience, or be subjected to torture or execution there, or indeed to other countries which may subject them to refoulement to Iran. The organization also calls upon the institutions of the European Community and the governments of its member states to use actively all other appropriate opportunities to impress upon the Iranian authorities their obligation to adhere to international legal human rights standards.