

# amnesty international

## IRAN

### WRITTEN STATEMENT TO THE 45TH SESSION OF THE UNITED NATIONS COMMISSION ON HUMAN RIGHTS

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Since the end of July 1988 Amnesty International has recorded over 1000 names of political prisoners who have reportedly been executed. The organization has spent months collecting information about large numbers of political executions, and further reports are still being received. It has sent appeals on behalf of hundreds of political prisoners reportedly at risk of execution, and submitted a list of reported execution victims to the Iranian authorities for their comments. No response to these inquiries has yet been received from the authorities in Tehran.

The majority of the execution victims were supporters of the Iranian opposition group the People's Mojahedine Organization of Iran (PMOI), but members and supporters of a number of left wing opposition groups including the Tudeh Party, the People's Fedaiyan Organization of Iran (Majority), Rah-e Kargar and the Iran Communist Party, as well as the Kurdish opposition groups Komala and the Kurdistan Democratic Party of Iran, are also reported to be among the execution victims.

Many of these groups are involved in armed opposition to the Iranian Government. The PMOI-backed National Liberation Army staged an armed incursion into western Iran from neighbouring Iraq between 25 and 28 July 1988, immediately after the ceasefire in the Gulf War. This incursion appears to have been one of the events which triggered the current wave of executions. However, many of the execution victims had been imprisoned for a number of years prior to their execution, and among them there were a large number of prisoners of conscience and others serving prison terms, imposed after unfair trials, for their non-violent political activity. Many of the PMOI prisoners who have been executed had been serving prison sentences dating from 1981 when there was a major clampdown on the PMOI's activities by the government. Thousands of PMOI supporters were executed at that time, including those involved in armed clashes with government forces. Thousands more were imprisoned for such offences as distributing leaflets and newspapers, collecting money for the families of political prisoners and taking part in marches and demonstrations. Some had been forced to remain in prison despite having completed their prison terms. Many of those recently executed were teenagers at the time of their arrest.

In some cases former political prisoners have been re-arrested and executed although they had not participated in banned political activity since their release from prison. Reports of executions have reached Amnesty

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International from all parts of Iran, from relatives and from many different political groups. Among the victims are a number of prisoners on whose behalf the organization had appealed.

The present wave of executions began in August and September when family visits to political prisoners were suspended. Rumours of executions and of mass burials began to circulate while distraught relatives were left with no information about their imprisoned family members. Even in October, when some family visits were again permitted, confusion persisted as some relatives arrived at prisons only to be denied access to prisoners without explanation.

Relatives of executed prisoners who recently left Iran have described to Amnesty International how they attempted to send money and clothing into the prisons in the hope of obtaining a signed receipt to indicate that their family member was still alive. Eye-witnesses have described to Amnesty International crowds of relatives which gathered outside Gohardasht Prison in Karaj on visiting days, only to be dispersed roughly by Revolutionary Guards outside the prison without any explanation.

Among those interviewed by Amnesty International is one woman who, desperate to obtain news of her husband, had dug up the corpse of an execution victim in Jadeh Khavaran Cemetery in Tehran, believing it to be that of her husband. Other witnesses have described to Amnesty International groups of people touring prisons, government offices and cemeteries trying to find traces of their missing relatives.

Relatives who have been informed of an execution by the authorities have often been given very little information. One man told Amnesty International that his father was telephoned in early November and told to report the next day to the Komiteh (Islamic Revolutionary Committee) in his neighbourhood of Tehran. There he was informed that his son had been executed and given a few personal belongings. He was not told when his son, who had been imprisoned since 1983, had been executed, nor where the body was buried. Other relatives have been told even less, and at the present time thousands of prisoners' relatives have no way of knowing if their family members are alive or dead.

It is not clear whether the execution victims are being re-tried prior to their execution. No evidence that any court proceedings have preceded these executions has yet come to light despite repeated inquiries about this question to the Iranian authorities from Amnesty International members around the world.

Although some Iranian officials have sought to deny that large numbers of political executions have taken place, a number of Iranian leaders, including the Chief Justice, Ayatollah Moussavi Ardebili, and President Khamenei have made statements which seem to support a policy of executing sympathisers of the armed political opposition.

While this massive wave of political executions has overshadowed other Amnesty International concerns in Iran in recent months, other human rights violations of concern to the organization have persisted there. Detention without charge or trial of individuals with an alleged connection to opposition groups is reported to have increased in the latter part of 1988. Young people in particular are reported to have been targeted by street patrols of Revolutionary Guards carrying out random searches, and detaining for further investigation individuals about whom they have suspicions.

These widespread detentions appear to be taking place without any judicial supervision. While it is anticipated that the tenth anniversary of the foundation of the Islamic Republic in February 1989 will be accompanied by an amnesty for prisoners, Amnesty International's welcome for the release of political prisoners imprisoned after unfair trials and of prisoners of conscience will be muted because hundreds, if not thousands, of prisoners will have been killed before the amnesty comes into effect.

The death penalty has continued to be very widely applied in criminal cases, and a new law due to come into force from 21 January 1989 appears to provide for a mandatory death sentence for anyone found in possession of more than five kilograms of hashish or opium, or more than 30 grams of heroin, codeine, methadone or morphine. The law forms part of a new campaign against drug abuse launched by Prime Minister Mir Hussein Musavi at a press conference in Tehran on 8 December. On 16 January 56 people convicted of drug trafficking were executed in various towns across the country. The new campaign promises to add to the hundreds of people executed in Iran for drug offences since the establishment of the Islamic Republic, some of whom were sentenced to death after unfair trials before Islamic Revolutionary Courts.

Beatings continue to be a widely used judicial punishment and in 1988 Amnesty International recorded 21 instances of amputation as a judicial punishment for repeated theft. For the first time in Amnesty International's records one of the amputation victims was a woman. This punishment normally involves the amputation of the four fingers of the right hand. Amnesty International agrees with the position reflected in Resolution 1984/22 of the Sub-Commission on Prevention of Discrimination and Protection of Minorities, according to which such punishments cannot be considered consonant with the prohibition of torture or cruel, inhuman or degrading punishment.

Amnesty International has continued to be denied access to Iran to discuss with government authorities the organization's serious concerns. The organization has not received any reply from government authorities in Tehran to its many inquiries and appeals, although some Iranian diplomats have met with representatives of Amnesty International overseas, which we welcome.

Amnesty International urges the international community to use whatever channels are available to persuade the Iranian Government to put an end to the present wave of political executions, and to implement and observe judicial and other procedures to safeguard the human rights of its citizens.

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