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## Thirty Years Ago in Iran

February 11, 2009

"Don't listen to those who speak of democracy. They all are against Islam. They want to take the nation away from its mission. Break the poisonous pens of all those who speak of nationalism, democracy, and such things."

- Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini

Qom, 13 March, 1979

Three decades ago, while he was founding the new political regime of Iran, Ayatollah Khomeini clearly stated that criticism and dissent would not be tolerated. Under his command, the revolutionary government and the revolutionary tribunals (the government's judicial arm) fomented arbitrary violence, in order to spread fear in different social strata and to silence all voices of dissent. More importantly, the new revolutionary authorities used violence to monopolize the expression of religious legitimacy and moved to end the traditional independence of Iran's Shi'a clergy. In a matter of months, the voices of religious leaders who strongly disapproved of the involvement of the clergy in politics and who had denounced the Islamic Revolutionary Tribunals were silenced. From the very moment of its inception, when it was still enjoying the support of a vast majority of the people and faced no other challenge than that of reorganizing the country, the Islamic regime engaged in systematic abuse of human rights as a matter of ideological necessity.

On the occasion of the thirtieth anniversary of the establishment of the Islamic Republic of Iran, the Abdorrahman Boroumand Foundation is disseminating a key historic document of Amnesty International: [\*\*\*Law and Human Rights in the Islamic Republic of Iran\*\*\*](#), A report covering events within the seven month period following the Revolution of February 1979, published in February 1980.

Alarmed by the number of summary executions and the systematic denial of the rights of accused persons, Amnesty International sent a mission to Iran to protest the executions and to investigate the revolutionary trials that were taking place. The mission, Amnesty's last to visit Iran, worked in Tehran from April 12 to May 1, 1979 and met members of secular political organizations and the provisional government (February 11 to November 6, 1979) but was not permitted to attend trials or to meet with the clerics who retained the real power in Iran. Back in London, the researchers continued investigating the situation of human rights by monitoring

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press reports and receiving information from their contacts inside the country. Notably, the report explored Islamic Shi'a jurisprudence and critically assessed Iranian officials' claims of implementing Islamic justice in Iran.

The ground-breaking report covers a crucial moment in the history of the Islamic Republic of Iran, when all its security apparatus -- the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps, the Islamic Revolutionary Committees, and the Islamic Revolutionary Tribunals -- were being established. It also explores and analyzes the Press Law and provides a list of new religious and criminal offenses unknown to Iran's judicial system before the revolution. Amnesty's report is an indispensable reference document for journalists, policy makers, human rights advocates, and students of Iranian studies who deal with Iran's issues today.

The traumatic impact of state violence in early post-revolutionary Iran is only partly reflected in the report's numbers. For the first six months of the revolution, Amnesty International reports 438 officially announced executions. However, it stresses the fact that its reporters' access to information from provincial towns was limited and concludes: "On 9 July, [the newspaper] *Ayendegan* quoted Tehran prosecutor Abolfazl Shahshahani as saying that the revolutionary courts had processed approximately 10,000 cases since the revolution. If this figure is accurate, it means that Amnesty International's report, based on approximately 900 cases, covers only a small percentage of the Tribunal's case load. "

The report provides information on the trials of high-ranking officials of Iran's former regime, including the Major General of the Imperial Iranian Army Aviation, [General Khosrowdad](#), as well as General [Pakravan](#), the former head of Iran's security agency SAVAK. It also highlights the cases of ordinary people executed for "[prostitution](#)," "[homosexuality](#)," "capitalism" "feudalism", and "religious dissidence".

What happened during the first few months of the revolution was only a prelude to the great terror that was to unfold a year later. Between June and September 1981, Amnesty deplored [1600 executions](#) in Iran. As of June 30, 1982, the number of officially announced executions since the beginning of the revolution [reached 4,400](#). The death penalty was the ultimate means of spreading terror and intimidating the population, but a range of other punishments, such as [flogging](#), [amputation](#), [stoning](#), long jail sentences, lost jobs, purges from the administration, and property confiscation were meted out in violation of Iran's international obligations as a party to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

By now, most political parties and groups active in 1979 have been banned, and many have seen their leadership and many of their members executed. Participation in the [iranrights.org/english/newsletter-9.php](http://iranrights.org/english/newsletter-9.php)

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country's political life is a privilege granted to a limited number of the revolutionary faithful. The Islamic Republic's leaders, powerful and unaccountable, remain intolerant of any group -- or anyone -- who stands up to them, resorting to violence to punish or deter them. The net of repression is wide; authorities not only punish attempts to create independent political parties but target any citizen who calls for more democratic institutions or who organizes to promote [human rights](#), independent unions, [freedom of conscience](#), [gender equality](#), or cultural rights. Activists, [journalists, and bloggers](#) are detained, charged, and sentenced for "[endangering national security](#)," or creating "illegal groups," or for "publicity against the state."

The Abdorrahman Boroumand Foundation re-circulates Amnesty International's 1980 report in accordance with its [mandate](#) to keep the memory of the victims alive and to defend the right of citizens and future generations to know the truth about what happened thirty years ago. As the world watches the Iranian authorities celebrating the thirtieth anniversary of their rule, it should also remember that the machinery of terror, meticulously described by Amnesty International in 1980, is [still functioning](#).