

AFTER A BLOODY MAY

The World Must Challenge
Iran's Escalating War on Dissent



Abdorrahman Boroumand Center | For Human Rights In Iran



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Executive Summary



Nine months ago, Iranians rose in protest against institutionalized discrimination, state violence, deceit, and impunity epitomized in the death in detention of Jina (Mahsa) Amini. In response, the authorities resorted to their usual, long-standing methods of silencing dissent, killing, injuring, and mass arresting protesters. This time, however, in the face of Iranians' determination and a consistent and robust expression of outrage and solidarity from the international community, Iranian officials retreated somewhat, releasing and apparently pardoning thousands of protesters. Now these officials, counting on a return to the pre-protest status quo, are escalating violence in stark violation of their international obligations.

The bloody month of May, marked by 135 executions (at least six of which were politically motivated) and the broader crackdown, signals more violence in the coming months. Iranians continue to use every avenue at their disposal to say no to the Islamic Republic. Yet, to get their voices heard, they need the international community to remain steadfast in their expression of support and show Iranian rulers that their place and credibility in the community of nations requires more than empty speeches and promises.

At the forefront of this war on dissent has been a tactic long employed by Iranian officials: execution. Based on research by the Abdorrahman Boroumand Center for Human Rights in Iran (ABC), the raw figures are alarming. From January 1 through May 31, 2023, Iran carried out at least 293 executions, a nearly three-quarter increase over the same period in 2022. This comes amid a steady rise in total annual executions over recent years (317 in 2021, 576 in 2022.)

May's executions include those of three convicted in connection with protests in Esfahan, convictions that occurred despite the hazy, contradictory, and reportedly coerced nature of their confessions. Iran also executed two men convicted of blasphemy charges for social media posts critical of Islam in a shocking demonstration of the regime's intolerance of any religious disagreement. An Arab political activist abducted from Turkey was put to death accused of involvement in a shooting attack on a military parade – even though ISIS had claimed responsibility and the Revolutionary Guards news outlet had reported a retaliatory attack against ISIS in Syria.

Iran's leadership has pursued its war on dissent in other, less deadly ways to silence calls for justice and accountability. In cases where protest victims have raised their voices and organized in solidarity, whether Kurdish families traveling to visit the graves of victims in other towns or blinded protesters meeting and expressing themselves on social media, the state's response has been even more threats, arrests, and deadly violence to silence them and prevent their organizing.

In other cases, protesters apparently pardoned by the Leader in March have been summoned again to serve sentences or prosecuted on new charges. Meanwhile, lawyers, scores of whom had been detained and prosecuted during the protests, are being summoned preventively to deter them from representing protesters. Stopping perceived improper veiling - the reason for Mahsa Amini's death - is also a renewed priority in universities and schools, hotbeds of anti-government protests. University students have faced summonses, suspensions, and other forms of punishment. At the same time, a mysterious spate of mass school poisonings at some 230 secondary, primarily girls, schools across Iran since November 2022 raises serious questions about state negligence and possible complicity.

Halting this trend requires international resolve and consistency. However, as ordinary Iranians mourn at the graves of loved ones slain in protest crackdowns and face dire repercussions for pursuing accountability, representatives of the Islamic Republic enjoy leadership positions at United Nations organs, including the Human Rights Council, while politicians with a record in institutions key to state repression are welcomed in international fora. Clearly, more needs to be done, including raising the political and diplomatic cost of human rights violations for the Islamic Republic, to induce meaningful and sustainable change in Iran's laws and behavior.

Nine months after a nationwide uprising against clerical rule began, sparked by Mahsa Amini's death while in police custody, officials of the Islamic Republic of Iran are prosecuting a multi-front war on dissent, in brazen violation of their international legal commitments, and at a staggering cost in lives and livelihoods.

The shocking spate of at least 135 executions in May, including those of dissidents, raised the number of executed protesters to seven and the total for January-May 2023 to at least 293.¹ As Iranians engage in a war of attrition with the state for their universal rights and face myriad forms of persecution, and even deadly responses, from the state, the Islamic Republic easy accesses with ease prestigious positions in the United Nations human rights body, among others; and the Mayor of Tehran is welcomed in Brussels where he sanctions state terror. It is no wonder then that Iran's notorious Chief Justice feels comfortable calling the protest-related summary executions fair and warns of more to come.² The international community must send a strong message of solidarity with citizens fighting for fundamental human rights rather than one that indicates indifference at best.

In the fall of 2022, the international community stood by the Iranian people by creating the Independent International Fact-Finding Mission³ to investigate the death of Mahsa Amini and human rights violations during the ensuing protests, and expelling Iran from the Commission on the Status of Women. The long list of issues published by the UN Human Rights Committee (the Committee) in November 2022, which sheds light on a multitude of severe violations of the most basic human rights that Iran has committed to respect, testifies to the continued need for international vigilance.⁴



Yet developments in 2023, though not unusual, sent a confusing message to many rights defenders and victims of state violence in Iran.

On April 5, the Commission on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice renewed⁵ the membership of Iran, a country with a punitive and failed justice system that sends hundreds of individuals to the gallows annually for non-violent crimes.⁶ The Commission is mandated

¹ According to reports collected by Abdorrahman Boroumand Center for Human Rights in Iran. See the cases of Mohammad Mehdi Karami (<https://www.iranrights.org/memorial/story/-8588/mohammad-mehdi-karami>) and Seyed Mohammad Hosseini (<https://www.iranrights.org/memorial/story/-8592/seyed-mohammad-hosseini>), protesters executed on January 7, 2023.

² Mizan, May 30, 2023 (<https://www.mizanonline.ir/fa/news/4715481/>)

³ <https://www.ohchr.org/en/hr-bodies/hrc/ffm-iran/index>

⁴ <https://www.iranrights.org/library/document/3975>

⁵ <https://press.un.org/en/2023/ecosoc7117.doc.htm>

⁶ One hundred seventy-seven of the executions carried out from January through May - a majority - were for drug-related crimes. From the beginning of 2018 (following a reform of Iran's Law to Combat Narcotics, which reduced the scope of capital drug crimes chiefly by raising the volume of drugs possessed triggering the death penalty) <https://www.iranrights.org/library/document/3262> through May 31, 2023, at least 633 people were put to death on drug-related charges, of a total of 1,954 for that period. Before the reform of the drug law, annual drug-related executions ranged as high as 678 (in 2015, <https://www.iranrights.org/library/document/3832>).

to guide the ECOSOC's work in crime prevention and in evaluating the efficiency and fairness of criminal justice systems. On May 10, Iran was allowed to become the Chair of the Human Rights Council's Social Forum Assembly, and on June 1, it became one of the vice presidents of the 78th session of the General Assembly.⁷ On June 13, Tehran Mayor Alireza Zakani was welcomed along with other mayors at the Brussels' Urban Summit and given the opportunity to speak on TV. Zakani, a member of the Revolutionary Guards and former head of the Basij Student Organization, used the opportunity to cheer the release of Asadollah Asadi, an Iranian diplomat convicted for his role in a 2018 failed bombing attempt targeting dissidents in Paris.⁸



Picture of Mayor Zakani and other conference goers

“Allowing a world leader in executions to access leadership positions in UN bodies while Iranians are still mourning hundreds of unlawfully killed protesters has sent a disheartening message of indifference to those who fight for their rights. The international community should do more than business as usual to stop the escalation of violence and persecution against Iranians, including for exercising their right to peaceful assembly and free expression” said Roya Boroumand, Executive Director of Abdorrahman Boroumand Center for Human Rights in Iran (ABC).

May's alarming executions include those of three protesters, two people convicted of insulting religious figures on social media, and a minority political activist. Meanwhile, Iran responds to families of those killed in protests, lawyers, and students who organize for basic rights and accountability with arrests, summonses, prosecution, and other persecutory measures, even despite judicial officials' assurances of wide pardons for those involved in recent protests. This escalation of violence can only be the reaction of a regime confronted by a serious challenge to its legitimacy, using a judicial system lacking in independence to strangle those who would cross its red lines.

⁷ Deutsche Welle, May 17, 2023 (<https://www.dw.com/en/controversy-as-irans-un-ambassador-to-chair-social-forum/a-65660386>), Tasnim News, June 2, 2023 (<https://www.tasnimnews.com/en/news/2023/06/02/2905266/iran-elected-vice-president-of-un-general-assembly>)

⁸ Brussels Times, June 13, 2023 (<https://www.brusselstimes.com/551505/smet-under-fire-for-ultra-conservative-tehran-mayor-visit-to-brussels-city-hall>)

An Assault on the Right to Life

“Those who, because of their actions and crimes under the law [during the protests], ought to have been executed or should be, have had or will have their sentences implemented without pleasantries and of course at the same time with total respect for legal standards, justice, and fairness.” - Iran Chief Justice Gholamhossein Mohseni Ejei, May 30, 2023⁹

Chief Justice Mohseni Ejei's justification for protest-related executions should not be taken lightly. He built his career in the Intelligence Ministry, including as a representative of the chief justice, during the Islamic Republic's most repressive years. His tenure as Prosecutor General (2009-2014) saw executions more than double (from at least 451 to at least 953). Given an alarming increase in the use of capital punishment by Iran this year - a main front of the broader war on dissent - his words should be interpreted as a serious warning and responded to with outrage.

According to reports collected by ABC, from January 1 through May 31, 2023, Iran carried out at least 293 executions, an increase of 73% from 169 executions over the same period in 2022. Execution statistics had already increased dramatically, from 317 in 2021 to 576 in 2022.

Three protesters were put to death on May 19 in Esfahan's Dastgerd Prison, in what is known as the “Khane-ye Esfahan” case, raising the number of known protest-related executions to seven and causing the UN's Independent Fact-Finding Mission to express alarm.¹⁰



Chief Justice Mohseni Ejei

Several others are at imminent risk, including Mohammad Ghobadlu, a protester whose death sentence for the killing of a member of the security forces has been upheld by the Supreme Court after a flawed judicial process and in spite of exculpatory evidence. As of this writing, scores of protesters face capital punishment and at least 12 are under capital verdicts, according to reports collected by ABC. They include Abbas Kurkur(i), known as Mojahed Kurkur, convicted of the murder of Kian Pirlalak, a nine-year old boy fatally shot in a car during the November protests in Izeh. According to an informed source present at the scene shortly before the shooting of Pirlalak's family car, the bullets that hit the car could not have come from the location of the protesters, who had just started to gather in the area around 6:00 PM and were not armed. These protesters were on the righthand side of the car and could not have shot at the car from the front or the driver's side where the bullets impacted.¹¹ Pirlalak's own family members stress that Kurkur was framed and that they have no complaint

⁹ Mizan, May 30, 2023 (<https://www.mizanonline.ir/fa/news/4715481/>)

¹⁰ <https://www.iranrights.org/library/document/4050>

¹¹ ABC interview with an informed source, June 18, 2023

against him. They insist vehemently that they were present and saw that state agents were responsible and have filed an official complaint to that effect.¹²

Citizens who protest in the streets are not the only ones whose right to life is blatantly violated. On May 8, two individuals were executed on blasphemy charges for exercising their right to freedom of expression on social media accounts. Additionally, an Arab political activist (who was also a Swedish citizen) abducted from Turkey in 2020 was also put to death on May 6, following a flawed and opaque judicial process. He had been abducted after Iran failed to obtain his extradition from Poland, a country to which he had traveled for a conference. This is yet another stark reminder of the impunity with which the Islamic Republic enforces its justice beyond Iran's borders.¹³

Despite the Iranian Chief Justice's assertion that recent executions were carried out with "total respect for legal standards, justice, and fairness," Iran's use of the death penalty violates blatantly its international obligations including under the Convention on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), which Iran's Parliament has ratified. Year after year, case studies by the ABC and other human rights organizations have shed light on Iran's arbitrary use of the death penalty following a judicial process that violates the basic rights of defendants in a myriad of ways.

In criminal cases, including the many politically motivated ones, defendants are routinely denied access to lawyers during interrogations, which allows police and intelligence interrogators to coerce confessions under torture that are then used in courts as evidence.¹⁴ Case files or documents may not be made available to defendants and their lawyers to allow them to prepare a proper and timely defense.¹⁵ Courts often deny defendants access to vital evidence, including video footage recorded by close-circuit cameras,¹⁶ ignore their requests to call witnesses on their behalf, ban defendants' chosen lawyers from court, and fail to admit or consider key evidence that could save defendants' lives.¹⁷ With Iran's punitive and discriminatory criminal law, which is characterized by hazily defined crimes and a too-often opaque and politicized judicial process, the validity of the charges and the evidence against any of those facing the death penalty is in serious question. The recent executions are no exception.

¹² IranWire, June 5, 2023 (<https://iranwire.com/en/news/117219-parents-of-nine-year-old-kian-pirfalak-sue-government-agents/>)

¹³ The abduction was reportedly carried out by drug cartel operatives collaborating with Iranian security agents. Hamshahri, October 31, 2020 (hamshahrionline.ir/x6MNK); IranWire, December 18, 2020 (<https://iranwire.com/fa/features/44233/>) and May 25, 2023 (<https://iranwire.com/fa/features/116890-حبيب-اسودر-وايتي-بكمتر-شنيده-شده-ان-يك-سرو-نده-چند-لايه-116890>)

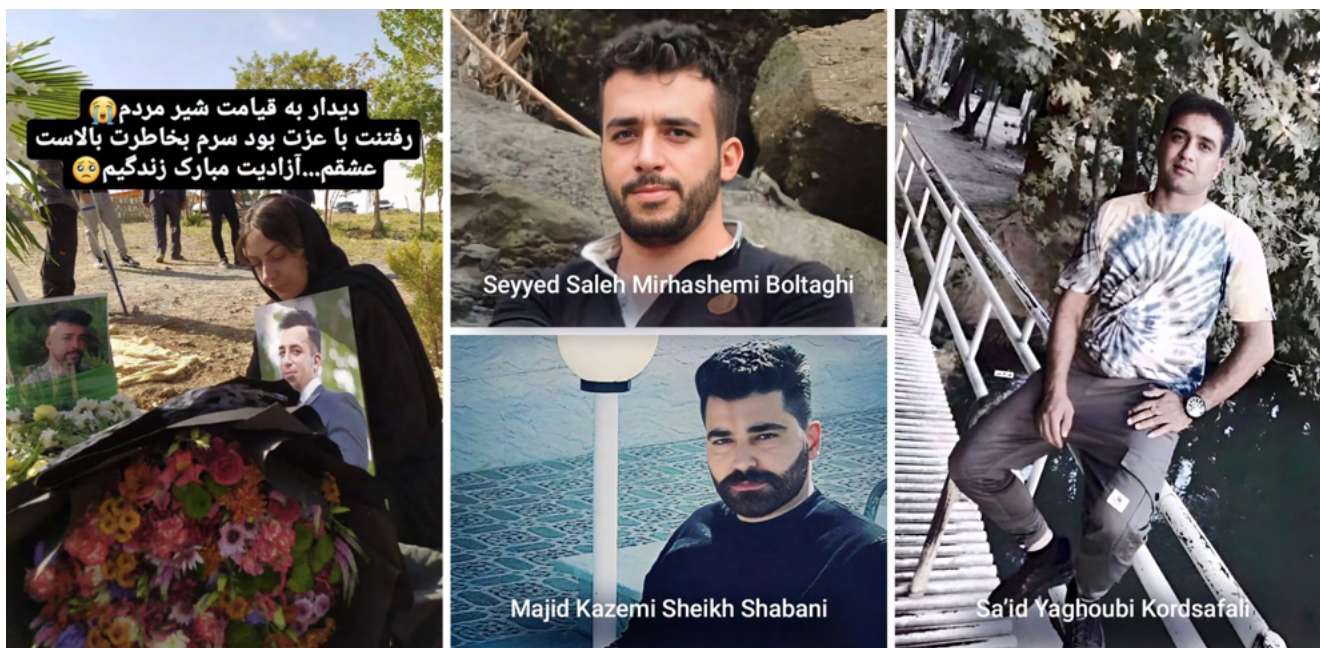
¹⁴ Seyed Mohammad Hosseini, executed January 7, 2023, was tortured to extract a confession during interrogations, during which he was denied access to a lawyer (<https://www.iranrights.org/memorial/story/-8592/seyed-mohammad-hosseini>). Mohammad Reza Salas Babajani was a member of the persecuted Gonabadi dervishes put to death on June 18, 2018. In mid-February 2018, Dervishes who had gathered in Tehran to prevent security forces from arresting their spiritual leader were subjected to a violent crackdown, during which a bus struck security force agents, killing three. Despite conflicting reports regarding the timing of the attack, arrests, and identity of arresting authorities, Salas - one of many arrested at the scene - was alleged to have driven the bus in a deliberate attack. Wounded, Salas was interrogated without access to a lawyer, and a self-incriminating interview of Salas lying in a hospital bed was broadcast on state television. He was tried across three sessions the next month. Evidence entered against him included his initial confessions, which he retracted in later trial sessions, saying he made them under coercion, and furthermore, that he had already been arrested at the time of the collision. The court did not summon witnesses prepared to corroborate these claims. Nonetheless, Branch 9 of Criminal Court One of Tehran Province issued a death sentence for Salas on March 19, 2018, which was upheld by Supreme Court. (<https://www.iranrights.org/memorial/story/-8267/mohammadreza-salas-babajani>). Navid Afkari, a popular champion wrestler who had participated in the nationwide protests during the winter of 2017-2018, was executed on September 12, 2020 for a homicide conviction issued on the basis of a forced confession made, according to an audio recording he had smuggled out of prison, under torture during an interrogation without a lawyer present, and other contested evidence (<https://www.iranrights.org/library/document/3792>, <https://www.iranrights.org/memorial/story/-8506/navid-farshid-afkari-sangari>).

¹⁵ Babak Paknia, the lawyer for three November 2019 protesters sentenced to death on property destruction charges, was not allowed to read his clients' case files at the original trial or appellate stage (<https://www.iranrights.org/library/document/3740>). Mohammad Yavar Rahimi, executed in August 2016 on charges including "war against God," was compelled to use a court-appointed attorney with whom he was not allowed to meet or speak before trial; the lawyer was given access to the case file only a few minutes before the trial (<https://www.iranrights.org/memorial/story/-8028/mohammad-yavar-rahimi>).

¹⁶ In the aforementioned case of Navid Afkari, the judge refused Afkari's request to review closed-circuit camera footage which the prosecution claimed showed Afkari and co-defendants at the scene of the alleged crime (<https://www.iranrights.org/memorial/story/-8506/navid-farshid-afkari-sangari>).

¹⁷ At trial, Navd Afkari repeatedly asked to introduce witnesses prepared to give exculpatory testimony. The judge either ignored these requests, or said these witnesses would be allowed to testify at a later time; however, they were never summoned (<https://www.iranrights.org/memorial/story/-8506/navid-farshid-afkari-sangari>).

From Protests to Gallows



Left: Instagram story posted by Mirhashemi's wife from the grave of her executed husband:

"I'll see you on judgment day, my brave man. You left with honor, and I hold my head high because of you, my love... Congratulations on your freedom, my life."

The fate of the Khane-ye Esfahan defendants is a case in point. Seyyed Saleh Mirhashemi Boltaghi, Majid Kazemi Sheikh Shabani, and Sa'id Yaghoubi Kordsafali were executed despite public outcry, and without minimum standards of due process. The three had been convicted of the deaths of a law enforcement officer and two Basij members who had been fatally shot during demonstrations at a roundabout in Esfahan County's Khane-ye Esfahan neighborhood on November 16, 2022.¹⁸

The three men, as well as seven other suspects, were arrested after the incident and interrogated by the Intelligence Division of the Revolutionary Guards. Six of the arrestees were named in the indictment. The case was referred to Branch One of the Revolutionary Court of Esfahan County, which tried it over four sessions. In a January 7, 2023, ruling, the court sentenced the three men to death by hanging; Mirhashemi and Kordsafali on the charge of "war against God by way of wielding a side pistol," and Kazemi on the charge of "war against God by way of wielding a Kalashnikov."¹⁹ Other charges against the three mentioned membership in illegal groups intending to disrupt internal security.

Evidence cited in the verdict included the defendants' confessions during initial investigations, the report of the Forensic Medical Authority, the testimony of witnesses and informed persons, a report from a weapons expert,

¹⁸ HRANA, May 19, 2023 (<https://www.hra-news.org/2023/hranews/a-41201/>) and court documents on file with ABC

¹⁹ All three were also sentenced to prison time for other security crimes. One of the six was acquitted, and the remaining two only received prison sentences.

the report of the crime scene reconstruction, digital evidence and documentation, and the discovery of two firearms. The lawyer for the three men sentenced to death appealed this decision, and it was referred to Branch Nine of Iran's Supreme Court. On May 14, 2023, this court upheld the death sentences.²⁰

Aside from the alarming haste in the issuance of the first verdict (just 53 days after the incident) for a capital crime and the complex evidentiary nature of a case involving a chaotic protest scene with hundreds of protesters, multiple state agents, and shootings, a number of issues mar this case:

- Court documents indicate that the primary evidence entered against the defendants was their confessions against themselves and their codefendants. Lack of access to the defendants by independent observers, and the risks faced by those who share case information, make it difficult to assess the conditions of the defendants' detention and confessions. Kazemi spoke of being tortured into confessing in a December 13, 2022, phone call from prison.²¹

Iranian law stipulates that confessions only constitute valid evidence where they are made before a judge in court (Article 218 of the Islamic Penal Code) and are "clear and without ambiguity." (Article 166 of the Islamic Penal Code) These defendants are said to have confessed during interrogation, including against each other, but they retracted those confessions before the Investigating Judge. The defendants' statements conflict markedly with one another and even with themselves.

Under interrogation, Mirhashemi said that he had seen Kazemi fire a Kalashnikov at agents. He retracted this before the Investigating Judge, saying Kazemi had only fired into the air with a pistol. At trial, Mirhashemi ultimately affirmed that he hadn't seen Kazemi fire a weapon. To the Investigating Judge, Mirhashemi said that he had gone to the scene and fired a Kalashnikov into the air; elsewhere, though, he claimed to have been carrying two cartridges, one of which he emptied totally and the other halfway by firing.

Kazemi said at trial that he had fired a Kalashnikov into the air, not at officers. He also said Yaghoubi had fired all the bullets. Yaghoubi, for his part, had first confessed to firing at agents during interrogations. Afterwards, he said before the Investigative Judge that he hadn't taken a weapon to the scene. He alleged that Kazemi and four other individuals, who had covered their faces, had done the shooting, and attributed a different firearm to Kazemi. At trial, Yaghoubi changed his story yet again, saying he had seen Kazemi and one other person firing weapons, and that neither he nor Mirhashemi were armed.

Yet another defendant (Soheil Jahangiri, who did not face capital charges) testified that Mirhashemi had no firearm, but had wielded a Molotov cocktail; despite the fact that none of the other defendants mentioned such an object. He also testified that all involved had covered their faces, and four individuals had pistols.

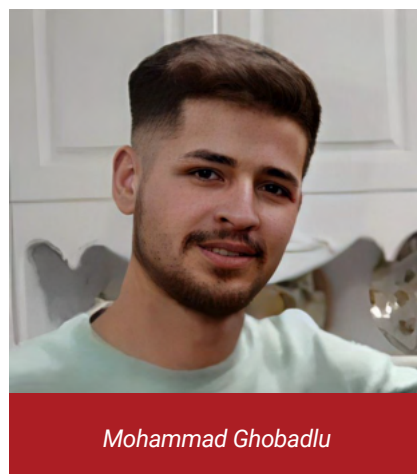
²⁰ Court documents on file with ABC. In its ruling, the Supreme Court modified certain other, non-capital, parts of the verdict

²¹ BBC Persian, April 16, 2023 (<https://www.bbc.com/persian/iran-65607225>). By May 14, an audio message from Kazemi had been made available to the media, in which he describes interrogators threatening to execute his family members and rape him, as well as abusing him with an electric shocker, beating him, and dislocating his shoulder (<https://twitter.com/bbcpersian/status/1657890914918965257>),

- Doubts surround the identity and ownership of the weapons alleged to have been used, which is of particular significance given the capital charge of “war against God ” by wielding specific firearms. Given that a forensic weapons expert found that the three state agents had been killed by shots fired from a Kalashnikov, it is unclear why two defendants were sentenced to death for wielding side pistols, in light of the fact that court documents cited murder in the justification of the “war against God” charge. The side pistol Mirhashemi allegedly used to shoot at state agents was never found, and no investigation was undertaken to secure it. Meanwhile, the two weapons that were recovered were not subjected to fingerprinting.
- The three men sentenced to death were only able to access a lawyer of their choosing in their final court session, being denied one for the entirety of the preliminary investigations and the majority of their trial sessions.
- Although the incident occurred in a crowded urban area with many places of business, the verdict makes no mention of any security camera evidence, or any effort to obtain such evidence from local business owners. Instead, the ruling refers to a video obtained from a defendant’s phone.
- Prosecutors alleged that Mirhashemi was in repeated contact with the Mujahedin-e Khalq organization, citing his membership in three Telegram channels Mirhashemi himself had named. No investigation was conducted into whether these channels actually existed, or who controlled them.
- Witnesses reported a large number of bullets were fired at the scene of the incident. There is no indication that these shells were recovered or included as evidence.

Following the execution of the “Khane-ye Esfahan” defendants, others charged in connection with the protests remain in danger of capital punishment, underscoring the urgent need for the international community to raise the political and diplomatic stakes over these cases.

One such case is that of Mohammad Ghobadlu. On May 23, Branch One of Iran’s Supreme Court, in denying a request for a de novo trial, upheld Tehran Criminal Court one’s death sentence on a charge of murder for Mohammad Ghobadlu, a young man accused of striking a group of motorcycle-mounted police officers, one fatally, with his car on September 22, 2022.²²



²² HRANA, May 23, 2023 (<https://www.hra-news.org/2023/hranews/a-41294/>)

On October 30, 2022, Ghojbadlu's chosen lawyer posted his defense on Twitter, pointing to serious inconsistencies in the prosecution's evidence, the day after Judge Abolqassem Salavati at Branch 15 of the Revolutionary Court in Tehran denied him entry to the first trial session in Ghojbadlu's other, security charge-based, case.²³ Issues the lawyer raised in his Twitter thread include:

- The hospital report specified that the deceased officer died from a strike to the brain and a skull fracture and had no bodily injuries. The police report, however, described bodily injuries to six officers.
- The officer was hospitalized at midnight on September 26, days after Ghojbadlu's arrest, and died the next day.²⁴
- The court also overlooked doubts regarding Ghojbadlu's mental fitness. The Forensic Medical authority in the case affirmed Ghojbadlu's mental fitness only on the basis of his own statements, despite the fact that the psychologist and a prison supervisor at Greater Tehran, where Ghojbadlu was held, had determined Ghojbadlu's mental health condition to be "very serious," and had twice warned the Investigating Judge of this fact in writing.²⁵ According to documentation obtained by the BBC, for the past six years, Ghojbadlu had been under treatment at Milad Shahryar Hospital for bipolar disorder, a condition whose symptoms include aggressive and dangerous behavior, as emphasized in that hospital's medical documentation.²⁶
- In a video of the officer's funeral posted by the Revolutionary Guards-affiliated website Tasnim, a speaker states that the slain officer had been found isolated and beaten by protesters.²⁷

Blasphemy: Death for Social Media Posts

On May 8, 2023, Iran executed Yusef Mehrdad, a farmer from Ardebil and father of three, and Sadrollah Fazeli Zareh, a Yasouj native who worked as a cabinet maker and cared for his elderly mother, for blasphemy. The men had been arrested because their social media activities were deemed blasphemous, a reminder of Iranian leaders' intolerance of dissent or attempts to challenge their religious beliefs.²⁸



Yusef Mehrdad



Sadrollah Fazeli Zareh

²³ Vokala Press, November 3, 2022 (<https://vokalapress.ir/میزان-وکلا-محمد-قیادل>). Ghojbadlu also faces capital security charges for the same alleged act, having been tried and initially convicted of "corruption on earth by way of crimes against individual's bodily integrity" by Branch 15 of the Revolutionary Court in Tehran. A de novo trial request in this case is still pending

²⁴ Twitter account of lawyer Amir Raisian, October 30, 2022 (<https://twitter.com/amirrejis/status/1586776707020750849>)

²⁵ HRANA, May 23, 2023 (<https://www.hra-news.org/2023/hranews/a-41294/>)

²⁶ BBC, December 24, 2022 (<https://www.bbc.com/persian/articles/ck732484pz9o>)

²⁷ Tasnim, September 28, 2022 (<https://www.tasnimnews.com/fa/news/1401/07/06/2780827/>)

²⁸ Another example of an individual arrested and executed for a religious offense was Amir Aslani Zanjani, who had also been charged with sexual assault, in 2014 (<https://www.iranrights.org/memorial/story/-7323/mohsen-amir-aslani-zanjani>). (<https://www.iranrights.org/memorial/story/-7323/mohsen-amir-aslani-zanjani>). Biographical information obtained from a source with knowledge of the case.

The case centered on Mehrdad and Fazeli Zareh's alleged role in managing social media channels active in criticizing and satirizing religion. Official reports do not elaborate on the nature of the content deemed offensive. The Supreme Court announced that this content would not be printed in the verdict in order to "preserve the taboo" against it. The names of the channels attributed to the defendants include "Naghd-e Khorafat and Mazhab" ("Criticizing Superstition and Religion") and "Solte-ye Aghl bar Owham" ("Reason's Triumph over Delusion.")

One social media account which shared content from Mehrdad and Fazeli Zareh's accounts remains available on Telegram: "Rosvaei-ye Islamgerayan" ("The Scandal of Islamists.")²⁹ The user "Qahve-ye Talkh: Roshangar va Khorafesetiz" ("Bitter Coffee: Enlightener and Fighter of Superstition") would engage in exchanges with pro-regime users and challenge their beliefs over the course of heated debates and in online conferences.³⁰ They also documented (and occasionally responded in kind to) their insults and vulgarity. In addition to satirizing and criticizing the Islamic Republic's official dogmas, Bitter Coffee also argued against voting in the 2020 election:

The elections of the clerical regime are a total formality. Elections which - how should I put this - are really appointments, and have been determined beforehand. All the candidates have passed through the filter of the Guardian Council, and if they're in line with the views and standards of that Council, their qualifications are confirmed (at the demand of the regime and its servants.) The Guardian Council is chosen by the self-styled Leader of all Muslims. Participating in the election means aligning with the demand of the leaders of the regime and signing off to the crimes, betrayals, and evildoing of the leaders, including Ali Khamenei, and that you yourself have announced you've consented to the present miserable situation, put your seal on it, and given permission for further killing, crimes, and evildoing.



Available posts indicate that at least some of the Telegram channels in the network were compromised by state authorities, with some now bearing the message "Restricted by order of the Judiciary."³¹ Indeed, in the last available posts, dating from July 2022, an administrator details how "Bitter Coffee" himself had been

²⁹ <https://t.me/rosvayieslamgaryan>

³⁰ January 31, 2019 (<https://t.me/rosvayieslamgaryan/5970>)

³¹ <https://t.me/rosvayieslamgaryan/10087>

arrested a few months prior and coerced, through threat of execution, into collaborating with state agents and trying to get personal information from other anonymous account admins.³²

Mehrdad and Fazeli Zareh were arrested in the spring of 2020 (Mehrdad on May 24) and interrogated at the Prosecutor's Offices in their hometowns before being transferred to Arak, where an Investigating Judge was pursuing the case of the social media channels. Initial investigations took place at the Branch One of the Investigating Judge's Office, in the Arak Prosecutor's Office, at the end of which Mehrdad and Fazeli Zareh were supplied with a court-appointed attorney. Charged with crimes such as insulting major religious figures³³ and "insulting religious sanctities," Mehrdad and Fazeli Zareh were held in solitary confinement for two months.³⁴ An informed source reported that Mehrdad specifically was denied access to a lawyer, and any contact with his family, for eight months after his arrest.³⁵

Mehrdad and Fazeli Zareh were tried at Branch One of Markazi Province Criminal Court One (Judge Mehrandish presiding) on the capital charge of "insulting the prophet of Islam." The court issued a guilty verdict on April 18, 2021, and the verdict was then upheld by Iran's Supreme Court.³⁶

According to information received by ABC from a source with knowledge of the case, the trial was marked by grave due process failures, at odds with both Iranian and international law:

- Mehrdad and Fazeli Zareh were deprived of access to lawyers during interrogation and proceedings at the Prosecutor's Office, except for at their final defenses (at which their court-appointed lawyers were nonetheless unable to effectively defend their clients). This was despite the fact that Article 190 of Iran's Code of Criminal Procedure stipulates that in capital cases, defendants are to be afforded a court-appointed attorney from the very beginning of preliminary investigations.
- The verdict cited confessions made by both defendants. Mehrdad specifically did not make a confession meeting the requirements for such cases under Iranian law: confessions must be "clear and without ambiguity" (Article 166 of the Islamic Penal Code) and made before the judge in court (Article 218 of the Islamic Penal Code). Mehrdad's reported statement of wrongdoing was made during preliminary investigations, however.

³² <https://t.me/rosvayieslamgaryan/10172>

³³ Arabic "sab ol-nabi," a term which encompasses insult to Mohammad, Imams, and other prophetic figures

³⁴ Fazeli Zareh was additionally charged with "apostasy," "falsely accusing the mother of the Prophet," "denigrating the Qor'an by way of burning," and "publishing images of others without their permission." Five other individuals were charged in the case.

³⁵ IranWire, May 11, 2023 (<https://iranwire.com/fa/features/116418>); HRANA, September 7, 2022 (<https://www.hra-news.org/2022/hranews/a-36941/>)

³⁶ In a separate case, the two were also tried for "forming and being members of a group and assemblies with the intent of disrupting national security" at Branch One of the Revolutionary Court of Arak. Here they were sentenced to 8 years in prison, 6 of which were to be served. HRANA, September 7, 2022 (<https://www.hra-news.org/2022/hranews/a-36941/>)

- A video depicting the burning of a Qor'an by an individual with an indistinct face, published on the channels in question, was imputed to Mehrdad by the judge on the basis that the individual's manner of speaking and accent corresponded to Mehrdad, though Mehrdad consistently denied that he appeared in the video. In this regard, the judges appealed to the hazy, problematic criterion of "judge's knowledge;" per Article 211 of the Islamic Penal Code, judges are obligated to consult expert opinion when invoking this knowledge, and the judge failed to do so.
- Mehrdad consistently rejected the capital charge of "insulting the Prophet of Islam" throughout adjudication, while expressing remorse for any mistakes he may have made. Article 114 of the Islamic Penal Code stipulates that for "hodud" crimes including "insulting the Prophet of Islam," the charge is nullified when a defendant repents before guilt is proven, and his or her penitence and reform are verified to the judge. Given Mehrdad's contrition, the case should not have been prosecuted under this capital charge.

Citing these defects, Mehrdad and Fazeli Zareh's lawyers had begun the process of seeking a de novo trial for their clients at the time of the executions.³⁷ Mehrdad and Fazeli Zareh were reportedly taken to solitary confinement on the night of May 4 to prepare for execution.³⁸ Following media attention on the case, the execution was halted. Just days later, however, the authorities executed the two men without giving them or their families prior notice.³⁹

The case of Mostafa Nili is only one example of how Iran's judiciary harasses lawyers in ways that impede and discourage active defense and advocacy for their clients. IRGC intelligence arrested Nili on November 7, 2022, while on his way to Zahedan with Sina Yusefi to represent families whose loved ones were killed during the protests. Nili said that a charge of "assembly and collusion with the intent of committing a crime against national security" was imputed to his "intent to travel to Zahedan" and "gathering in front of the Bar Association building." On April 11, 2023, he was released from Rajaishahr Prison (to which he had been transferred on December 6, 2022) following an amnesty from the Supreme Leader, which had the result of halting the new prosecution against him.⁴⁰

³⁷ Information provided by a source with knowledge of the case to Abdorrahman Boroumand Center, May 2023

³⁸ Telegram Channel of Dadban, May 4, 2023 (<https://t.me/Daadbaan2021/5400>, <https://t.me/Daadbaan2021/5406>)

³⁹ Telegram Channel of Dadban, May 8, 2023 (<https://t.me/Daadbaan2021/5442>)

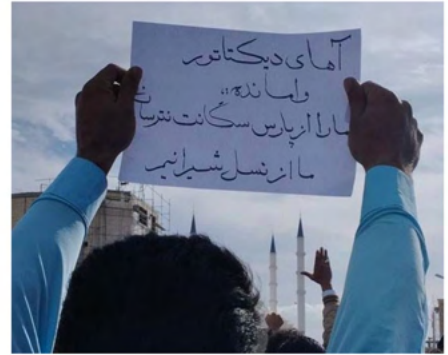
⁴⁰ Vokala Press, April 19, 2023 (<https://vokalapress.ir/> (وکال-مصطفی-نیللی-جایس-از-آزادی-از-زندان))



Mother of Abolfazl Adinehzadeh, 17-year-old killed in protest crackdowns in Mashad on October 6, 2022, at her son's grave.



Family members of Abolfazl Adinehzadeh, 17-year-old killed in protest crackdowns in Mashad on October 6, 2022, gather at their slain loved one's grave.



A protester in Zahedan, Baluchestan signals resolve: "Mr. Helpless Dictator: Don't scare us with your dog barks, we are lions" (published January 3, 2023.) Since Zahedan's Bloody Friday on September 30, 2022, protesters in that city held recurring demonstrations every Friday.



Protesters gather in Zahedan. One holds a sign reading: "What you've washed in blood is the life of my dear one." Published June 14, 2023.



The father and mother of Mohammad Mehdi Karami (protester executed on January 7, 2023) join parents of young people killed in protests crackdowns in Tehran, Siavash Mahmudi (17, killed September 21, 2022) and Yalda Aghafazli (19, killed October 26, 2022,) at the grave of Hamidreza Ruhi (killed November 18, 2022).



Family members of Kian Pirfalak, fatally shot in a car during protests in Izeh, Khuzestan Province in November 2022, gather to celebrate what would have been his 10th birthday at his grave.



Protest graphic in support of art students from at least 17 universities who had, as of June 19, joined a campaign to boycott their course tests: "We have nothing to say to you except one word: NO!" (published June 19, 2023)



Mahmonir Molairad, mother of Kian Pirfalak, fatally shot in a car during protests in Izeh, Khuzestan Province in November 2022 (published June 18, 2023).



Grieving mothers of those killed in protest crackdowns in September 2022 (published June 11, 2023).



Journalist Nazila Marufian was detained after conducting an interview with Mahsa Amini's father in September 2022 and ultimately fired from her job by June 15, 2023.



Amir Velayati, who lost an eye to security force fire during crackdowns on protests in Tehran on September 24, 2022, published an Instagram story: "My roots are in this soil. I'm not going anywhere."



Gathering of young people who lost eyes during protest crackdowns. A friend of Hamidreza Ruhi (killed November 18, 2022) displays his photo on his phone screen in tribute (published February 3, 2023).



Fathers of Mahsa Amini and Mohammad Mehdi Karami (protester executed on January 7, 2023) at Mahsa's grave.



Protesters who lost loved ones in protest crackdowns gather to demand accountability in Saqqez on June 9, 2023.



Artin, who lost his eye during crackdowns on gatherings to mourn slain protesters in Sanandaj in November 2022.



University art students gather to voice their opposition to Iran's rulers (published June 19, 2023).



Authorities close a place of business in Iran owing to women's failure to abide by the mandatory hijab law there (published June 21, 2023).

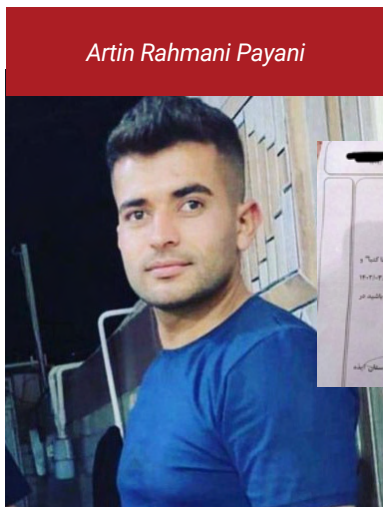


Zeynab Zaman, a women's rights activist, was arrested and forced twice to strip completely naked during her detention, according to a Twitter post of hers (published May 23, 2023).

A Push for Accountability Repressed

Eight months after Mahsa Amini's death, though mass protests have quieted against a backdrop of hundreds of executions (448 from October 1, 2022 through the end of May 2023, according to reports collected by ABC), sporadic gatherings have continued, including on June 1st in Abadan,⁴⁸ and victims' families continue to organize for justice and accountability.⁴⁹ In response, Iran's judiciary and intelligence forces are not only persecuting these families, but have launched another campaign of intimidation targeting protesters, students, journalists, and lawyers, among others. Iran's rulers, aware of the prospects of renewed widespread dissent, may be acting preventively in an attempt to quash another potential wave of protests. Their efforts have not deterred everyone.

Several protesters who have been shot in the eye report having been harassed, denied medical care, detained, and threatened to prevent them from meeting each other, organizing gatherings, or posting on social media – all on top of a mutilation and blinding that will affect them for life. Mercedeh Shahinkar, who was shot in Tehran in October 2022, reported that her house was raided and though she left home for a month, agents continuously watched her house. Under such pressure, she left Iran.⁵⁰ In the case of another eye shooting victim interviewed by ABC, authorities had threatened to arrest a family member and had also targeted a benefactor who was helping the victim with medical expenses.⁵¹ Speaking up, meeting, and expressing solidarity with each other has helped these victims live with the trauma of their life-altering injury.⁵²



On May 8, Hengameh Chubin, mother of Artin Rahmani Payani, who was killed at the age of 17 while protesting, posted a tweet mentioning the arrest of her brother Foad 28 days earlier in Izeh, expressing concern over the fact that he had been denied medical care. On April 26, she had tweeted that Foad had finally called her after 12 days to tell her that “they broke his nose and teeth and coerced him to confess under torture and sign papers prepared in advance.” She also stressed that threats and torture would not deter her from her fight for freedom: “We have nothing to lose...We will never go back... You are wrong to think that you will silence us with arrests and torture. You are only fueling our wrath and we will scream louder for our right to be free.”⁵³ A month later, she tweeted that Foad had been beaten

⁴⁸ On June 1, demonstrators in the city of Abadan, Ilam Province set up a street blockade and chanted “death to Khamenei” to protests the suspicious death of a 21 years old student, Bamshad Soleimankhani, in the hospital after he had been detained, presumably for social media posts supporting protests. (<https://twitter.com/FSeifikaran/status/1664371270073348098>); <https://kurdistanhumanrights.org/fa/?p=21129>

⁴⁹ <https://twitter.com/iranazadi1395/status/1666861432393039896?s=20>, <https://twitter.com/mfnvvy/status/1666955150030774272?s=20>, <https://twitter.com/Kamran43453852/status/1667250837826031627?s=20>

⁵⁰ Iran Wire, April 19th, 2023 (<https://iranwire.com/en/blinding-as-a-weapon/115712-blinding-as-a-weapon-34-a-young-mothers-badge-of-honor/>); and May 31, 2023 (<https://iranwire.com/en/blinding-as-a-weapon/117074-blinding-as-a-weapon-41-tormented-victim-wants-retribution-and-only-retribution/>)

⁵¹ ABC interview with a young woman who was shot in the eye during protests in a provincial town, June 15, 2023

⁵² BBC, April 5, 2023 (<https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-64503873>)

⁵³ <https://twitter.com/hengamehchoobin/status/1651237512713519107?s=20>

and taken to solitary confinement.⁵⁴ On June 15, 2023, Chubin tweeted a photo of her summons to the Branch Five of the Prosecutor's Office in Izeh.⁵⁵

A person close to the family told ABC that Foad Chubin, who is being held in Ahvaz Sheiban Prison, was active and showed solidarity with the families of other victims of the protests. He remains in detention in Sheiban Prison without bail, his legal fate uncertain.

Hossein and Mehdi Kazemi were both beaten and arrested the day following the secret execution of their brother Majid in Esfahan on May 19th. A cousin of the brothers told Voice of America that authorities arrested the pair after forcing Majid's body into an improperly small grave, in the presence of his shocked brother. Their sister Samieh was also arrested after she tried to find out more information about her brothers. She was released and, according to a social media post by her cousin, fired from her job. Majid Kazemi's father's retirement benefits were also cut off. The family has yet to hear from the two young men.⁵⁶

On June 9, 2023, family members of ten killed protesters from Sanandaj, Divandareh, and Dehgolan gathered in Saqqez and Bukan cemeteries to show their solidarity and demand justice. They were all arrested, along with the bus drivers, by Bukan police and taken to the police station where the men were separated and sent to Bukan Police's Intelligence.⁵⁷ A few of the detainees were released on June 13 and 15.⁵⁸ According to an informed source, by June 19, most of them (who could post bail) had been released after having been asked to commit to not gather, meet or speak to the media. The relative of one protest victim reportedly had broken ribs and a shoulder injury as a result of beating during his detention.⁵⁹

Another Dehgolan resident, Kamal Lotfi, who was arrested in late April and is held with an uncertain legal fate in Kamyaran Prison. Lotfi, who is in his fourth week of hunger strike, is the father of 20-year old Reza Lotfi, a protester shot and killed in Dehgolan on September 19, 2022.⁶⁰

On the morning of June 11, Mahmonir Molairad, mother of Kian Pirfalak, a nine-year-old shot dead by state agents on November 16, 2022, and a group which included children visited Kian's grave in Izeh on the occasion of his birthday.⁶¹ An informed source told the local activist account "Bong Radio" that, despite the fact the family had issued no call for protests⁶² and there had been no incidents, a large number of security force agents were present in Izeh and the surrounding area and had established checkpoints on the roads. In unclear

⁵⁴ <https://twitter.com/hengamehchoobin/status/1666828913014718465?s=20>

⁵⁵ <https://twitter.com/hengamehchoobin/status/1669291599791095808>

⁵⁶ Voice of America Persian, May 31, 2023 (<https://twitter.com/VOAfarsi/status/1663969494111248384?s=20>)

⁵⁷ Twitter accounts of Atena Daemi (<https://twitter.com/AtenaDaemi/status/1667267978692272129?s=20>), <https://twitter.com/AtenaDaemi/status/1667267978692272129?s=20>) and Amjad Hossein Panahi (https://twitter.com/amjad_panahi/status/1667290038005125121)

⁵⁸ HRANA, June 13 and 15, 2023 (<https://www.hra-news.org/2023/hranews/a-41642/>) (<https://www.hra-news.org/2023/hranews/a-41677/>)

⁵⁹ ABC interview with an informed source, June 19th, 2023.

⁶⁰ HRANA, June 11, 2023 (https://www.hra-news.org/2023/hranews/a-41608/?tg_rhash=22a41dd9689763)

⁶¹ Video of the birthday celebration livestreamed by Mahmonir Molairad and circulated by other accounts shows a peaceful gathering, including young children (<https://twitter.com/IranIntl/status/166781728177283077>)

⁶² Mehrdad Pirfalak, Kian's, emphasized in a story on his personal Instagram account on June 16 that family members had not issued a call for gatherings on Kian's birthday. Archived by Vahid Online, June 16, 2023 (<https://t.me/VahidOnline/55014>)

circumstances, Puya Molairad, a cousin of Kian's mother who had been seen often with her since Kian's death,⁶³ is reported to have fatally struck a state agent at a roadblock while driving toward his farm on a narrow road. The local source reports that Molairad stopped and exited the car with his hands up, in order to turn himself in to law enforcement, only for agents to fire multiple rounds at him. Puya Molairad died after being transferred to the hospital.⁶⁴

From June 11 through at least June 14, Mahmonir Molairad was subject to house arrest, with agents surrounding her home. Following the death of Puya, Sajjad Pirfalak, Kian's uncle, was arrested on June 17th. Based on available information, Pirfalak's mother, who has not lived in her home for some time, was also summoned by the Intelligence.⁶⁵



Instagram story of birthday gathering for Kian Pirfalak, posted by his mother Mahmonir Molairad

"We have nothing to lose... We will never go back... You are wrong to think that you will silence us with arrests and torture. You are only fueling our wrath and we will scream louder for our right to be free." - Hengameh Chubin, mother of Artin Rahmani Payani, teenager killed in protests

An Empty Pardon, Renewed Summons

Less than three months after mass pardons and the release of 22,000 protesters, according to the Chief Justice,⁶⁶ various forms of harassment and intimidation are being reported across the country. Many, including lawyers and those released following the pardon, have been summoned or summoned again for criminal prosecution. According to lawyer Ali Mojtahedzadeh, as of April 8, some defendants who were supposedly granted amnesty by the Supreme Leader earlier this year are, in fact, still at risk of trial and punishment. Given

⁶³ Based on available information provided to ABC by a contact with knowledge of the area, Puya Molairad was from the same clan as Hadi Bahmani, a 17-year-old killed during the protest crackdowns in Izeh, and was also related to Bahman Bahmani, currently held in Sheiban Prison on charge of "war against God."

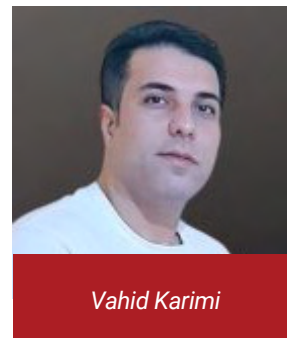
⁶⁴ "Bong Radio," Instagram post of June 11, 2023 (<https://www.instagram.com/p/CtXUDQTvs0Z/>) and June 12, 2023 (<https://www.instagram.com/p/CtY8crENkxY/>)

⁶⁵ ABC interview with an informed source, June 17, 2023; HRANA, June 18, 2023 (https://twitter.com/hra_news/status/1670380691672924160?s=20); IranWire, June 15, 2023 (<https://iranwire.com/fa/news-1/117542-اختصاصی-حبس-خانگی-ماهنیر-مولایر-ادمانر-کیان-بیر-فک-117542>); Iran International, June 14, 2023 (<https://www.iranintl.com/202306183142>)

⁶⁶ Etemad, March 13, 2023, (<https://www.etemadonline.com/بخش-اجتماعی-602089/23-عفو-رہی-اعتراضات-ایران-قوه-قضاییہ>).

that the pardon was based on the nature of the charges rather than the identity of the defendant, provincial authorities have leeway to pursue charges other than those for which amnesty was granted.⁶⁷

Vahid Karimi, arrested at his family home in Qazvin by Revolutionary Guards Intelligence on November 29, 2022, was charged with acts including “assembly and collusion to commit crimes against national security” and “propaganda against the regime.” Released in late February 2023 following the Leader’s pardon, he received a summons on June 9 from the Branch 36 of the Appeals Court of Tehran.⁶⁸



Vahid Karimi



Alyieh Motallebzadeh

Women’s rights activist and photographer Alyieh Motallebzadeh had been free for 25 days after the Leader’s pardon when she was summoned back to the Evin Prosecutor’s Office.⁶⁹ According to her daughter, on May 11th, after two summonses, agents entered the family house by breaking down the door, searched the house, then confiscated her mother’s phone and all electronic devices.⁷⁰

Nasim Soltan Beigi, a journalist and former student activist, was summoned on June 9th, for the third time, to Branch Four of the



Nasim Soltan Beigi

Prosecutor’s Office in Evin on charges of “propaganda against the regime” and “assembly and collusion.” She had been arrested at the airport in late December 2022 in connection with the protests and released on bail. Judiciary officials had told her that her case was among those that had been closed as a result of the Leader’s pardon.⁷¹

Lawyers at the Front Lines

Lawyers who have worked on protestors’ cases have also been summoned, prosecuted, and otherwise persecuted.⁷² In early May, around twenty lawyers were told to report to the Branch Seven of the Prosecutor’s Office in Evin, which focuses on security cases.⁷³

⁶⁷ Radio Farda, April 8, 2022 (<https://www.radiofarda.com/a/iran-s-judiciary-continues-protesters-trial-despite-previous-pardon/32355188.html>); Etemad, April 8, 2023 (<https://www.etemadnewspaper.ir/fa/main/detail/199208/«عفو-گسترده-بازي-خطرناك-با»>)

⁶⁸ HRANA, May 26, 2023 (<https://www.hra-news.org/2023/hranews/a-41339/>)

⁶⁹ RFI, March 6, 2023 (<https://www.rfi.fr/fa/iran-20230306-احضار-مجدد-عفو-شدگان-قوه-قضائيه-توسط-نهادهاي-امنيتي-خانواده-ابو-الفضل-آدينمزا-اده-احضار-شدند>)

⁷⁰ HRANA, May 10, 2023 (<https://www.hra-news.org/2023/hranews/a-41049/>)

⁷¹ HRANA, May 20, 2023 (<https://www.hra-news.org/2023/hranews/a-41224/>)

⁷² See ABC’s February 27, 2023 newsletter, “Iran Must be Held to Account for Lawyers’ Fundamental Rights” (<https://www.iranrights.org/newsletter/issue/130>).

⁷³ Vokala Press, May 13, 2023 (<https://vokalapress.ir/موج-احضار-وکلاي-دادگستر-ي-به-شعبه-۷-دادس>)



Ali Sharifzadeh Ardakani, who represented Mohammad Hosseini, a protester put to death on January 7, 2023, was charged with “propaganda against the regime” and interrogated at the Branch Seven of the Public and Revolutionary Prosecutor’s Office of Karaj after Tweeting about Hosseini’s account of being tortured during interrogations and criticizing the hastiness of his execution. Released temporarily on bail, a judge also ordered that he cease activity on Twitter and Instagram for a year.⁷⁴ On May 10, he was ordered to appear at the Evin Prosecutor’s Office.⁷⁵



On May 10, 2023, Samin Cheraghi, who represents several protesters, announced via Twitter that she had received a summons from Branch Seven of the Prosecutor’s Office in Evin, with no mention of the charge against her.⁷⁶



The day before, Hassan Yunesi, who had been arrested on November 7, 2022, while on his way to Zahedan to represent families of killed protesters, had tweeted a picture of his summons to Evin’s Branch Seven of the Prosecutor’s Office in Evin. Again, no charge was mentioned.⁷⁷ Yunesi wrote on his personal Twitter account that after reporting to Evin on May 23, officials told him the relevant authorities either did not work at the location or were in meetings; the point of the summons was only to “belittle and frighten lawyers” according to Yunesi.⁷⁸



Sarah Hamzezadeh, a member of Semnan’s Bar Association who had been arrested at her office in Shahroud in late December and prosecuted for “propaganda against the regime,” was summoned in early June 2023 to Branch Seven of the Prosecutor’s Office in Evin. The summons did not mention a charge.⁷⁹

⁷⁴ Radio Farda, January 14, 2023, (<https://www.radiofarda.com/a/32223440.html>); Voice of America Persian, February 3, 2023 (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LQ7h7W0UdSA>)

⁷⁵ HRANA, May 11, 2023 (<https://www.hra-news.org/2023/hranews/a-41079/>)

⁷⁶ <https://twitter.com/samincheraghi/status/1656327422646648832>

⁷⁷ IranWire, May 12, 2023 (<https://iranwire.com/fa/news-1/116455>)

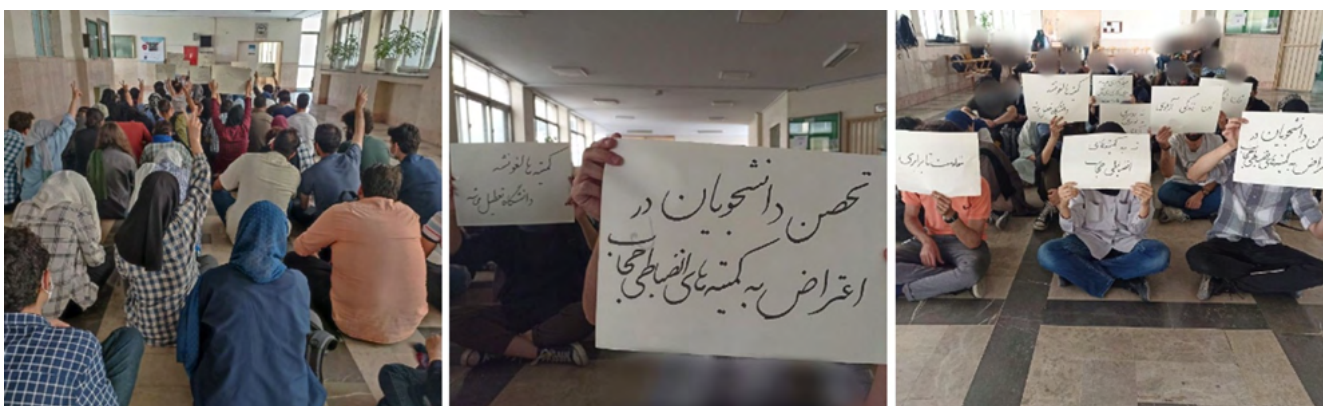
⁷⁸ <https://twitter.com/hassan26695572/status/1660913972537597953>

⁷⁹ HRANA, May 12, 2023 (<https://www.hra-news.org/2023/hranews/a-41083/>)



Sina Yusefi, the vice chairman of the Lawyers' Human Rights Commission in East Azerbaijan Province, was sentenced to six months in prison and banned from leaving the country for two years, after being arrested on October 15, 2022, the day after he announced the formation of a commission to follow up on local protester cases. His electronic devices were also confiscated.⁸⁰ On his Twitter page, he described the reason for his prosecution as “performing my essential duty and defending the people’s legal rights.”⁸¹ As a part of the same case, in a court decision dated April 9, 2023, Branch 112 of Criminal Court Two of Tabriz (Judge Mohammad Ali Piri presiding) sentenced Yusefi to 91 days in prison and a fine of 15 million tomans on a charge of “publishing falsehoods on social media.” The judge specified that the charge stemmed from Yusefi’s publication, in the form of a Tweet, of “unrealistic” numbers of detained protesters.⁸²

Schools and Universities: The Hotbed of Dissent



Scenes from a sit-in at the Tehran University School of Social Sciences, posted to Telegram by the National Student Guild Councils on May 9

Despite the crackdown on protesters and clear signals and warnings, including from the Supreme Leader, that the state will not concede on the mandatory veil issue, many women and girls seem to have engaged in a war of attrition against the state and its discriminatory law.⁸³ In the face of the ongoing challenge of “improperly veiled” and unveiled women, the authorities are taking deterrence measures such as fines, installation of cameras, and threats of prosecution for those who encourage unveiling.⁸⁴ They also seem to have turned their attention to students. In universities, close to 150 of which played an active role in the nationwide 2022 protests, students are

⁸⁰ Vokala Press, December 13, 2022 (<https://vokalapress.ir/>); HRANA, December 13, 2022 (<https://www.hranews.org/2022/hranews/a-38323/>)

⁸¹ <https://twitter.com/SinaYousefilaw/status/1602296641528143873?s=20>

⁸² HRANA, April 20, 2023 (<https://www.hra-news.org/2023/hranews/a-40690/>)

⁸³ <https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/iran-vows-crack-down-people-who-promote-removing-veil-2023-04-15/>; Yasaman Aryani and Monireh Arabshahi antiveil activists released from prison on <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cADWkOcmMI4>; Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei stressed his commitment to implement the mandatory hijab law on April 4, 2023. <https://www.iranintl.com/en/202304040490>; <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-64503873> <https://epaimages.com/search.pp?pictureid=11407741>

⁸⁴ <https://www.dw.com/en/womens-day-iranian-women-vow-to-press-on-despite-clampdown/a-64910608>; <https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/iran-resorts-security-cameras-ostracism-deter-unveiled-women-2023-05-02/>

harassed and punished for improper veiling. They are asked to commit to not participating in future protests, deprived of student cards (and thus access to many university services) and suspended.

Summonses have been reported at several universities including Tehran University's School of Social Sciences,⁸⁵ Babol Nushirvani University, where students' cards have been confiscated,⁸⁶ and Alzahra University, where on May 24, art student Molud Safari and several others were banned from entering campus and suspended for two terms.⁸⁷ On May 22, a number of Tehran University students protested the daily persecution of students and called for all disciplinary committee rulings for bad veiling to be rescinded, and for the campus patrol to cease harassing students.⁸⁸ Kerman's Shahid Bahonar University students report an increase in the budget of the university's ideological bureau ("Herasat"), and the recruitment of new forces to harass students for improper veiling, as well as plainclothes individuals photographing students on campus.⁸⁹ Farshid Azizpur, a Tehran University art student, was suspended for six months for protesting the university ideological bureau's treatment of students deemed to be badly veiled.⁹⁰



Unveiled schoolgirls protest against mandatory hijab in Iran's Isfahan Province on April 10

Universities are not the only educational establishments that have been targeted. High schools and middle schools, also vocal during the protests, and a subject of concern for the authorities because of their protest-related activities⁹¹, and improper veiling generally,⁹² have been affected by a wave of poisonings since November 30th, 2022. By March, 25 (out of 31) provinces and approximately 230 schools had been affected, and more than 5,000 (mostly) schoolgirls had been poisoned, as reported by a member of the parliamentary fact-finding committee in early March.⁹³ These poisonings, which have raised serious national and international concerns,⁹⁴ were usually

followed by a heavy security presence in schools and hospitals while parents remained in the dark regarding the nature of the poison. After months of inaction and disinformation, arrests were reportedly made, but again, authorities have refused to provide information to the public and those affected.

⁸⁵ National Student Guild Councils, May 9, 2023 (https://t.me/senfi_uni_iran/9410)

⁸⁶ National Student Guild Councils, May 27, 2023 (https://t.me/senfi_uni_iran/9516)

⁸⁷ National Student Guild Councils, May 24, 2023 (https://t.me/senfi_uni_iran/9509)

⁸⁸ National Student Guild Councils, May 22, 2023 (https://t.me/senfi_uni_iran/9480)

⁸⁹ National Student Guild Councils, May 31, 2023 (https://t.me/senfi_uni_iran/9545)

⁹⁰ National Student Guild Councils May 21, 2023 (https://t.me/senfi_uni_iran/9541)

⁹¹ The Kerman IRGC Commander noted on November 1, 2022, that schoolchildren were among the leaders of the riots (Ebteda News, November 1, 2022, <https://ebtedanews.ir/?p=81282>);

In February, a member of the Parliament's Commission on Culture had complained about the fact that in some schools, budgets for libraries are cut and used for installing cameras, and that some school officials searched students' bags (Bartarinha, February 14, 2023, <https://www.bartarinha.ir/-بخش-اخبار-1286828/20-روز-حسین-حجلی-در-مدار-یاد-دختر-ان-محل-شد>)

⁹² See, for example, the January 13, 2021, Ministry of Education announcement of plans to fight improper veiling: <https://www.isna.ir/news/99102418169>

⁹³ ISNA, March 6, 2023 (<https://www.isna.ir/news/1401121511246/جز-نیات-جدیدی-از-طل-مسمومیت-دانش-آموزان>)

⁹⁴ <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2023/03/iran-deliberate-poisoning-schoolgirls-further-evidence-continuous-violence>

A Long-Standing Pattern Continues

The post-protest persecutions and the increase in the number of executions in May, and in 2023 more generally, should not come as a surprise; a similar spike occurred following the protests over the contested 2009 election results. The number of reported executions rose from 445 in 2009 to 819, 89% of which were drug related, in 2010.⁹⁵ The United Nations' human rights mechanisms and civil society have long documented the grave and systemic human rights violations by the Islamic Republic of Iran and sought accountability for them. Decade after decade however, the same issues are raised and recommendations remain largely unaddressed.

In November 2011, the UN Human Rights Committee raised multiple issues where Iran has performed poorly in regard to its obligations under the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, including the elimination of discriminatory laws and practices, freedom of expression, association and assembly. The Committee raised concerns regarding the use of the death penalty, such as for vague offences, the due process of law, the use of torture and coerced confessions, and the use of deadly force against peaceful protesters. It drew attention to the lack of transparency and independent monitoring, impunity for human rights violations, and the persecution of those calling for accountability.⁹⁶ They include:

- “[The] extremely high and increasing number of death sentences pronounced and carried out in the State party, the wide range and often vague definition of offences for which the death penalty is applied, and the large number of capital crimes”
- “[The] widespread use of torture and cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment in detention facilities, particularly of those accused of national security-related crimes or tried in Revolutionary Courts, which in some cases have resulted in the death of the detainee,” as well as the fact that “confessions have been used as the primary evidence to obtain convictions in court.”
- The lack of “a full, impartial and independent investigation into allegations of killings, torture and other ill-treatment during and following the 12 June 2009 presidential elections, and that the high-level officials responsible have not been held accountable.”
- “The independence of the judiciary is not fully guaranteed and is compromised by undue pressure from the Executive power, including the Office for Supervision and Evaluation of Judges, as well as senior clerics and high-ranking Government officials ahead of trials.”

More than a decade later, these issues still remain mostly unresolved. In the list of issues mentioned in the UN Human Rights Committee's fourth periodic report on the Islamic Republic of Iran (updated November 2022, in advance of a scheduled October 2023 review), the Committee reiterated many of the same points, asking for details regarding investigations of post-protest “alleged killings, torture and other ill-treatment” and “reports that victims of past human rights violations and their relatives, lawyers or human rights defenders who have called for accountability have been subjected to reprisals.” This recent List of Issues also highlighted Iran's use

⁹⁵ ABC research; The election of President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad in 2005 was followed by protests in Kurdistan and in Khuzestan. The number of reported executions also rose significantly from at least 107 to 234 in 2006 and 479 in 2007.

⁹⁶ <https://www.iranrights.org/library/document/4049>

of the death penalty for offenses other than the “most serious crimes” and the “lack of fair trial guarantees for defendants in death penalty cases, including the use of closed proceedings before the revolutionary courts, the low standard of evidence and the restricted access of defendants to counsel.”⁹⁷

Iran's cooperation with the UN human rights system and special procedures in particular, remains selective and insufficient. In a statement on June 19th, at the occasion of the opening of the UN Human Rights Council, High Commissioner for Human Rights Volker Türk mentioned Iran among the state with a poor record of cooperation with the UN:

"Iran continues to engage formally with my Office, including on issues pertaining to discrimination against women and girls; accountability for severe human rights violations; and imminent executions. Yet substantive implementation of the State's obligations under international human rights law remains very limited, and I am concerned by the massive recent increase in executions, as well as continuing discrimination against women and girls. Iran does not cooperate with the Special Procedures country mandate, and has received only one Special Procedures mandate holder in the past 17 years."⁹⁸

The Islamic Republic of Iran's violations of its international human rights commitments with regard to freedom of expression, right to due process, and the right to life are starkly clear. Just as apparent is the fact that the political cost Iranian officials have been made to pay so far has not been consistent and significant enough to motivate meaningful change.

Despite the state's escalation of preventive and punitive responses to those who defy it, Iranians are engaged in a war of attrition with their rulers, seeking the recognition of their fundamental rights, including the choice of dress. If they are to succeed, they need strong and persistent international support. The world must let Tehran know that violent responses to dissent are intolerable.

“Iranians have not given up and continue to be persecuted for defending their basic human rights. Rather than undermining their trust in international human rights mechanisms by allowing Iran to access leadership positions in UN bodies for example, the international community must continue to stand with the Iranian people, whose uprising held ‘Life’ as a central demand” said Boroumand.

⁹⁷ <https://www.iranrights.org/library/document/3975>

⁹⁸ <https://www.ohchr.org/en/statements/2023/06/urging-greater-cooperation-high-commissioner-turk-opens-human-rights-council>

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