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Security Forces Shoot Protesters in Minority-Dominant City of Zahedan

(Beirut) – [Iranian](#) security forces using unlawful lethal force, killed and wounded several dozen protesters in Zahedan on September 30, 2022, killing the most people during the protests on a day being called “Bloody Friday,” Human Rights Watch said today. The newly established United Nations fact-finding mission on Iran should pay special attention to security force atrocities in minority-dominant areas like Zahedan, the predominantly Baluchi capital of Sistan and Baluchistan province.

Human Rights Watch documented the shooting of protesters and bystanders by verifying 52 videos and photographs shared by Haalvsh, an Iranian human rights group, carrying out open-source research, and interviewing 13 witnesses and families of those killed on September 30 and in October. Through analyzing photos and videos, Human Rights Watch found that at least 12 people, including a boy, were killed and 30 were wounded in Zahedan on September 30, though the actual numbers may be much higher. Since September 30, security forces have killed at least eight people, knowledgeable sources identified victims in their interviews with Human Rights Watch. Among these were at least three children shot dead in protests on September 30 and October 28.

“The number of protesters and bystanders shot by Iran’s security forces on ‘Bloody Friday’ was the largest killed in a single day during the protests, but no one responsible has been arrested,” said [Tara Sepehri Far](#), senior Iran researcher at Human Rights Watch. “The government’s immense brutality has brought the struggles of long-neglected communities like Zahedan to the center of protests.”

The available information shows that on September 30, police and intelligence agents opened fire on protesters from the rooftops around the Grand Mosalla prayer hall and the Maki Mosque, the main Sunni mosque in Zahedan. Security forces shot at a car transporting those injured to the hospital. For the most part the protesters did not pose a serious threat to the well-armed security forces.

“As I came out [of the prayer hall] to look for my brother, I saw bodies on the ground, mostly young people,” a witness told Human Rights Watch. “At first, I didn’t even realize the police were shooting but then I noticed that they were firing from the buildings.”

Baluchi human rights groups have collected the [names](#) of 85 to [97](#) people, including nine children, who were killed between September 30 and October 5 in Zahedan. Rather than conducting a transparent and impartial investigation and holding those responsible for these killings accountable, Iranian authorities responded to subsequent protests with further unlawful force.

On September 30, people were leaving the prayer area in the Grand Mosalla prayer hall in Zahedan around noon, when security forces shot teargas and bullets toward a group of dozens of young protesters marching toward Police Station Number 16, less than 100 meters northeast. According to witnesses and video evidence, security force personnel positioned on the surrounding tall buildings fired at protesters who began throwing stones and shouting protest slogans, killing and wounding several protesters and bystanders.

As the day progressed, residents, some of whom threw rocks and Molotov cocktails (gasoline bombs), clashed with police and other security forces. Witnesses said that the security forces shot dozens more people, including children, in areas close to the nearby Maki Mosque, where many

local residents took the dead and injured throughout the afternoon and evening. Protests continued for several days.

Ismael Shahbakhsh, the uncle of Farzad Shahbakhsh, 27, looked for him at the Khatam Hospital on September 30, he said in a [prerecorded interview](#) shared with Human Rights Watch.

“When I entered the emergency room, I saw a distressing scene that is impossible to describe,” he said. “The white ceramic tiles of the floor had turned red. ... I looked through three pages of 10 to 15 names of those injured and Farzad’s name was not there. ... Afterward a nurse came to me with five or six pages, each with 18 to 20 names on it, and told me Farzad was among those who died.”

Immediately after the September 30 incidents, [Tasnim News](#), a media outlet close to Iran’s intelligence agencies, stated that an armed opposition group, Jaysh al-Adl, claimed responsibility for “terror attacks” in Zahedan. The news outlet claimed that armed rebels attacked three police stations and fired at Police Station Number 16, a claim that the armed group rejected.

Mowlana Abdol Hamid Ismaealzahi, the most prominent Friday prayer imam in Zahedan, [issued a video statement](#) rejecting pro-government websites’ claims about the incident.

“It’s the police station that first starts shooting, shooting indiscriminately and shooting military ammunition, not only toward the place where those youngsters were chanting and expressing their feelings, but also even toward inside the Grand Mosalla, where people were praying,” he said. “They shoot there and throw teargas inside, even the women’s section gets gassed and is shot at, and one of the women is killed, is martyred, as well.”

The Human Rights Watch analysis of September 30 videos and photographs found that protesters frequently threw rocks at police stations and in two instances threw Molotov cocktails. Protesters were not visibly carrying firearms or shooting at security forces. In one incident at about 5 p.m. near the Maki Mosque, a protester reportedly fired upon two cars whose passengers were shooting at protesters and killed four Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) members.

Since September 30, protests against the government have continued in Zahedan and other cities in the province, particularly on Fridays after prayer.

On October 28, the Security Council of Sistan and Baluchistan province, headed by the governor, [issued](#) a statement saying the clashes had resulted in the deaths of six security force members and 35 other people. The council said that “negligence” had resulted in the death of people praying and dismissed the head of Police Station Number 16 and the head of police in Zahedan, but made no mention of any further investigation into the unlawful use of force against protesters.

On the same day, during the protests that took place after Friday prayer, two sources familiar with the victims said that security forces shot and killed [at least two children](#), Adel Barichi Koochakzayi, 13, and Omid Narouyi, 16. Sources said that both were shot in the neck and face.

Since the beginning of widespread protests in Iran on September 16, Human Rights Watch [has documented](#) security forces’ use of excessive and lethal force in violation of international human rights law. They have fired handguns, shotguns, and military assault rifles against protesters during largely peaceful and often crowded demonstrations in at least 13 cities across the country. As of December 9, Human Rights Activist News Agency (HRANA) [had confirmed](#) the death of 255 people during the protests and was investigating 226 more. More than 200 reports of deaths are from minority-dominant Kurdish and Baluchi provinces.

The Iranian government should abide by the United Nations [Basic Principles on the Use of Force and Firearms by Law Enforcement Officials](#), which state that security forces shall apply non-violent means before resorting to the use of force. Whenever the lawful use of force is unavoidable, law enforcement officials should exercise restraint and act in proportion to the seriousness of the offense and the legitimate objective to be achieved. They should minimize injury, and respect human life. Furthermore, intentional lethal use of firearms may only be made when strictly

unavoidable to protect life. The Basic Principles further provide that, “[i]n cases of death and serious injury or other grave consequences, a detailed report shall be sent promptly to the competent authorities.”

Authorities have [arrested thousands](#) of protesters and hundreds of human rights defenders. Courts have imposed often harsh sentences in trials that fall short of international standards. On November 2, Ali Mostafavinia, the head of the Sistan and Baluchistan judiciary [told the media](#) that 620 people were arrested during the protests in Zahedan and 45 indictments have been issued in connection with the protests.

“The Iranian government’s atrocious record of violations of detainee rights underscores the urgency of pressing for the immediate release of protesters wrongfully detained and halting grossly unfair trials,” Sepehri Far said.

Security Forces’ Use of Lethal Force

September 30 Shootings, Early Afternoon

Several people said that on September 30, while inside Zahedan’s Grand Mosalla prayer hall, they heard gunshots outside toward the end of Friday prayers, between 12:30 p.m. and 1 p.m. They were not aware of any protests that day but given the events across the country, the protests were not unexpected, they said. During the prayer, Mowlana Abdol Hamid Ismaeelzahi, the Friday prayer imam, [spoke](#) about the country’s ongoing protests and the allegation that a security official had raped a 15-year-old Baluchi girl in the city of Chahabar, asking for prompt and impartial investigation and justice.

One said:

I was standing ready to start the Sunnat prayer [in the prayer hall] when I heard gunshots. ... As I came out [of the prayer hall] to look for my brother, I saw bodies on the ground, mostly young people. At first, I didn’t even realize the police were shooting but then I noticed that they were firing from the buildings. I saw officers above tall buildings surrounding the prayer area. It wasn’t just shooting from the police station, but also from these buildings.

Two of the people attending Friday prayers said that a small group of young protesters started chanting as they were leaving the prayer area and moving toward Police Station Number 16, less than 100 meters away, when the security forces started shooting in their direction. They said the shooting came from the station and building surrounding the prayer area. Another person in the area when shooting started said that local residents were not armed and were chanting while moving toward the police station. Some protesters were throwing stones at the police station. “I could see four people on the rooftop of the police station shooting toward people,” the person said. “From the police station they started shooting bullets and teargas toward the protesters and inside the Mosalla building where people were praying. The situation got really tense then. Then people started throwing stones at the police.”

Informed sources said that Abdollah Narouyi, 30, a fruit vendor, and Abdolrahman Balouchkhah, 28, a worker, were both shot dead close to the Mosalla building after they left the facility to see what was happening.

Human Rights Watch verified a video shared on Telegram on September 30 at 3:04 p.m. that corroborates the time the shooting started. The video, recorded under the tarps of the Grand Mosalla, shows people rising from their knees and beginning to leave the prayer site while gunfire is audible in the distance. The angle of rays of sunlight shining through the slits in the tarps onto the supportive beams above the people’s heads indicates the video was recorded between noon and 12:40 p.m.

Human Rights Watch has not been able to determine the circumstances under which security forces opened fire. However, police and plainclothes agents repeatedly used lethal force near Police

Station Number 16, while Human Rights Watch has seen no evidence that protesters used firearms at that time. Eight videos recorded between 12:30 p.m. and 1:45 p.m., shared on Telegram and verified by Human Rights Watch, show people throwing stones toward the police station while gunfire is audible. A video recorded around 12:30 p.m. shows what appears to be an early stage of the protest. Fewer people are gathered at the southwest corner of the police station and far fewer rocks are being thrown than in videos recorded later.

A person wearing white and crouching on the station's roof is visible holding what appears to be a weapon 50 seconds into the video. Around the same time, gunfire heard coming from the station becomes more frequent, the crowd of protesters grows, and people begin throwing more rocks. An informed source identified a man carrying a prayer rug in this video as Abdollah Narouyi, whom security forces reportedly fatally shot soon after the video was recorded.

Human Rights Watch verified another video shared on Telegram that shows a person in white clothing aiming and firing what appears to be a shotgun in the direction of the Grand Mosalla. Three other men, including two in uniform, are visible on the roof. Human Rights Watch also analyzed a video it received that appears to show the barrel of a rifle jutting from the roof of a building about 50 meters from the police station after 1 p.m.

Two videos uploaded to Twitter and Telegram and verified by Human Rights Watch appear to show a youth being shot and killed near Police Station 16. The first, recorded at about 1 p.m., shows protesters walking about 60 meters south of the police station gate. Six seconds into the video a single gunshot is heard, and four seconds later an identified boy is shown lying on the ground with a small trail of blood coming from the back of his head. More gunshots ring out, forcing the protesters to flee south.

The second video shows the person in the same location, now motionless on his back and surrounded by a pool of blood. Several other videos corroborated that the boy had been shot. Community members also sent a photo to Human Rights Watch that shows dried blood on the boy's upper right temple.

Human Rights Watch verified 11 videos and one photograph taken inside or near the Grand Mosalla showing at least 26 people who were wounded or killed after 12:30 p.m. on September 30. Nine appear dead; four of them with apparent head wounds and three others with blood on their chest or stomach. Eight of the 26 were bleeding from their legs, five from their chest or stomach, five from their head or neck, and one from their arm. Human Rights Watch could not confirm where seven had been wounded, because they were wrapped in blankets or had bloodied clothes with no clearly visible injury.

Three other Telegram videos verified by Human Rights Watch and recorded around 2 p.m. show at least 14 more people being treated for wounds at the Khatam hospital in Zahedan. Human Rights Watch could not confirm that people who appear dead in these videos were dead.

Late Afternoon on September 30

Witnesses said that following the initial shootings close to the police station, from about 1:30 p.m. to 2 p.m., protesters started marching and moving those killed and injured toward the health center in the Maki Mosque, half a kilometer away. Two witnesses who saw bodies on the ground said that they appeared to have been shot in the neck or chest.

A video circulated on Twitter on October 2 shows at least seven bodies on the ground inside what a local source confirmed to be the Maki Mosque health center. Most of these bodies are covered entirely with blankets or cloth. Among these bodies, Human Rights Watch identified three people who died on September 30 near the police station.

[In a publicly available interview](#), Habiborahman Rigi, an engineer who later went to Zahedan's Maki Mosque to help those injured, described "terrible" moments of several people being killed by shots to the head and neck, while local residents tried to help them. He said that as he arrived at the

mosque, he first helped carry a motorcycle rider who was shot in the leg into the mosque's health center. Given the lack of medical equipment, he decided to drive three injured people to the hospital. He said that security forces in uniforms and civilian clothes were standing across Khayam Avenue near the mosque. One of the security forces allowed him to pass through and go to the hospital after he waved a white flag.

During the afternoon, protests appeared to spread to various areas close to the Maki Mosque, particularly alongside Khayam Street. Several people said that security forces were wearing local Baluchi clothes rather than police uniforms.

A 28-year-old man who had attended the prayers said that at about 3 p.m. he saw Farzad Shahbakh, who had been walking behind him, moments after he was shot from behind on Khayam Street: "I heard gunshots and then saw him on the ground. They had shot him from behind. I saw him when he was already shot. The people speaking around him said that he was shot from behind."

[In a publicly available interview](#), Esmail Shahbakh, Farzad's uncle, said that his family was informed that Farzad was wounded and taken to Khatam Hospital. They went and found his body in the morgue. "He was shot from behind and his heart [area] was bleeding," Esmail Shahbakh said. "He was killed by one bullet."

A video recorded at about 4:10 p.m. that Human Rights Watch verified shows local residents taking shelter from gunfire behind cars, walls, and other objects on Khayam Street, just southwest of the Maki Mosque. The gunfire seems to be coming from the west. One second into the video, a man appears to throw a Molotov cocktail toward the source of the gunfire. As shots ring out, one person lies motionless less than 10 meters from the Nobovat Surgery Center, next to Maki Mosque, surrounded by other protesters.

Rigi, the volunteer, said that he continued transferring people from the mosque to the hospital throughout the afternoon. He also said that two critically injured people refused to go to the hospital for fear of reprisals.

At about 6 p.m., when dozens of people had gathered inside Maki Mosque before evening prayer, two cars without identification attempted to drive down Khayam Street toward the mosque while passengers shot at people on the street. Two residents said a person opened fire at the cars and killed four passengers who were later identified as security officials. They included Seyed Ali Mousavi, head of IRGC intelligence in the province. They said security forces subsequently killed the shooter. One resident said:

I went to the Maki Mosque for the Maghreb [evening] prayer around 5 p.m. or 5:15 p.m. There is a second floor in the mosque, and I was able to see that two cars were entering the street with forces walking and shooting at everyone. People were falling on the street and were being taken to the small health center that is inside the mosque. I was hearing voices through a window we had cracked open. I heard the forces saying they shot Mousavi. Later through [a government announcement] I found out that he was the commander of the forces who was shot. And they were IRGC. We didn't know who they were because they were wearing Baluchi clothes. We thought we were being shot by the police.

A source with close knowledge of the situation said that at least 15 people were injured in the incident.

[In a publicly available interview](#), Ebrahim Parnian, the father of 19-year-old Amirhossein Parnian, said that his son was standing on the east corner of the Maki Mosque between 6:40 p.m. and 6:50 p.m. Rigi said in his video that he was getting ready to leave the mosque after prayers had ended and the sun had set when people brought a body of a young man wrapped in a blanket who was later identified as Amirhossein Parnian. Those accompanying Parnian told Rigi he was shot in the eye near the mosque. Rigi asked someone to hold up Parnian's head so that he does not choke to

death from his blood as he drove the body to the hospital while holding a white flag and shouting that he was carrying an injured person. However, this time security forces shot at his car from both sides of the street, wounding Rigi in the leg.

Two sources who were near the mosque said that gunfire was heard in the area until later that night.

A video shared with Human Rights Watch by a resident and recorded after 5:30 p.m. on September 30 shows a group of people walking near the northeast section of the mosque as gunfire is audible in the distance.

Some people also described vandalism and property destruction during that day. Human Rights Watch verified a video on Facebook on October 1 that shows the Nobovat Surgery Center on fire after the protests near the Maki Mosque dispersed.

Shootings Elsewhere in Zahedan on September 30

Witness accounts and videos verified by Human Rights Watch demonstrate that protests expanded to other areas of Zahedan on September 30 and that the security forces used unlawful lethal force in the city's Shirabad neighborhood.

Four videos uploaded to Telegram and verified by Human Rights Watch show protesters 3.6 kilometers north, 2.5 kilometers northwest, and 2 kilometers east of Police Station Number 16 throwing rocks at a burning police vehicle, hurling a Molotov cocktail at an alleged base for Basij paramilitaries, and demonstrating next to a burning marketplace. Four people said that they saw helicopters flying across the city in various areas. One described someone shooting from a camouflaged helicopter in an area close to the mosque.

Human Rights Watch was not able to identify any protesters shot in these areas.

One informed source, however, said that he saw the bodies of Omid Sarani, 13, and a man, 21, on the ground on one corner of Kargar Square, about 2.5 kilometers northeast of Police Station Number 16 in Shirabad neighborhood, around 2 p.m. The square is 200 meters south of Police Station Number 13.

Human Rights Watch verified two videos shared on Telegram on October 1 and recorded in Shirabad between 4:20 p.m. to 5:20 p.m. on September 30 that show the killing of a boy near Kargar Square. The first, recorded 80 meters north of Police Station Number 13, shows a group of protesters standing next to a fire in the road throwing objects in the direction of the police station while gunshots ring out. At least three children are visible among these protesters; the two of them closest to the police station standing next to each other, one wearing all white and the other all light-blue clothing.

The second video, recorded moments after the first in the same location, shows protesters running to pick up the child in the light-blue clothing as the boy in white runs away with blood spattered on his right pants leg. The crowd carries the boy in blue away from the police station and lays his body down on the street, exposing a gaping wound to his right cheek. The boy is bleeding profusely and is not seen moving in this video.

A video provided to Human Rights Watch by a local source shows the boy lying limp with his eyes open while a voice says the date September 30 and that the dead boy was 11 years old.

Shootings on October 1 and October 2

Protests in Zahedan continued during subsequent days. A witness said that on October 1, armed men who appeared to be security forces coming from a mosque in Shirabad neighborhood opened fire on six young men who were passing near the mosque, wounding Khadonour Lajeyi. The security forces then departed in a car that was coming out of the mosque parking area. Lajeyi died at about 10 p.m. the next day at a hospital in Zahedan.

An informed source said that on October 2 at about 8 p.m., a bullet fatally struck Soleiman Arab, a passenger riding on the back of a motorcycle, in the neck on Keshavarz 10 Street. Residents in the vicinity believe the weapon used was a Kalashnikov-type assault rifle fired by members of the security forces from the roof of a three-story building on that street. After the shooting, the residents brought Arab to the local hospital.

Shootings on October 28

Video footage shows that after Friday prayer on October 28, groups of protesters gathered on streets close to the Maki Mosque and other neighborhoods in the city. *Haalvash* [reported](#) that authorities used lethal force to disperse crowds of people who were throwing stones. Local groups provided the names of 35 people injured during the protests that day, as well as two children, Adel Barichi Koochakzayi, 13, and Omid Narouyi, 16, who were shot and killed around Kosar Square.

A knowledgeable source said that Koochakzayi was walking toward his grandparents' house when he was shot in the neck in a park and football field close to Kosar Square after 2 p.m. "People initially carried Adel Barichi's body for about 10 meters before they had to flee because of the shooting," the source said. "It took 15 minutes before the shooting by security forces calmed down and people could carry Adel Barichi's body from the square to Makran Street where they put him in a private car and took him to the Maki Mosque health center."

Doctors at the mosque found Koochakzayi lifeless but transferred him and 12 other injured people to Khatam Hospital. Police and prosecutors have told family members that they need video footage of his shooting to investigate his death and claim that the proper procedure of referral to the police for investigation was not followed.

Omid Narouyi, 16, left his house to buy bread and was shot three times between 1:15 p.m. and 1:30 p.m., close to the community market at Kosar Square, a knowledgeable source said. Bullets struck his face near his eyes and ears. The source said his family was informed about his death at around 5 p.m. or 6 p.m.

Human Rights Watch verified five videos shared on Telegram and Twitter that were recorded on October 28 between noon and 1:30 p.m. and show police officers firing weapons and teargas toward protesters on Khayam Street, east of the Maki Mosque. Two of the videos recorded closer to noon, one from a nearby rooftop and the other from the ground, show protesters moving east from Khayam Square while gunshots ring out. The other three videos show the protesters moving toward a line of about 35 security officers, at least seven of whom were sitting on or standing next to motorcycles, and four security vehicles positioned 350 meters east of the square. In these later videos the protesters are gathered near a fire burning at the intersection of Khayam Street and Modarres Street, chanting and throwing rocks while gunfire rings out and a canister emitting white smoke is deployed nearby.