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# Iran: Security Forces Kill, Torture, Abuse Children

Young Protesters Unlawfully Detained



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*A memorial to children killed in Iran outside of UNICEF's office in Washington, DC, November 30, 2022. © 2022 Bryan Olin Dozier/NurPhoto via AP*

(Beirut) – [Iran](#)'s security forces repressing widespread protests have unlawfully killed, tortured, sexually assaulted, and disappeared children as part of a pattern of serious violations, Human Rights Watch said today.

Iranian authorities have also arrested, interrogated, and prosecuted children in violation of legal safeguards, and judges have barred children's families from hiring lawyers of their choice to defend them, convicted children on vague charges, and tried them outside of the youth courts that have sole jurisdiction over children's cases. Security forces have arrested and detained children without notifying their families, sometimes for weeks. Students released from detention have been barred from returning to school, or authorities have cut off their families' social welfare, resulting in the children having to go to work.

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"Iranian leaders have unleashed their brutal security forces to sexually assault and torture children, and have not spared children from ludicrously unfair trials," said [Tara Sepehri Far](#), senior Iran researcher at Human Rights Watch. "Over the past seven months, the authorities have not hesitated to extend the coercive power of the state to silence even children."

Human Rights Watch investigated abuses against 11 children between September 2022 and February 2023, and documented new details about two previously reported cases.

Iranian authorities have [brutally repressed](#) widespread protests and dissent by people demanding fundamental change. Human Rights Watch, Amnesty International, and other rights groups have documented the prevalent use of lethal force against protesters, including children. The United Nations Fact-Finding Mission on Iran should investigate these grave abuses against children as part of its broader reporting on the Iranian government's serial human rights violations, Human Rights Watch said.

Human Rights Watch documented government security forces restraining, blindfolding, and torturing children in detention. Authorities beat and sexually assaulted a 17-year-old boy, bruising him all over and causing bleeding from his anus, a family member said. A high school student said that security forces pushed her onto a lit gas range during arrest, setting her clothing on fire, and beat and whipped her during interrogation. Interrogators tortured another boy by shoving needles under his nails. Two children were tortured to provide the whereabouts of family members. A 16-year-old has tried twice to take his own life after being beaten, electroshocked, and sexually assaulted.

The authorities have failed to provide medical treatment to children the forces injured, including a 13-year-old boy whose rib was broken during a beating. Authorities threatened family members to keep quiet about the abuses. These abuses are consistent with dozens of other accounts reported by activists and rights groups.

Under [Iranian law](#), children may be questioned only by specialized children's prosecutors and tried only before youth courts. In one case involving 16 defendants, including three children, the head of Iran's judiciary [co-appointed](#) a [revolutionary court](#) judge, a cleric, as a youth justice judge. But none of the defendants were granted youth-court protections or allowed to hire their own defense [lawyers](#), and the children were sentenced to 25 years in prison. Iran's Supreme Court overturned the convictions of the three boys, citing a lack of evidence, but [ordered their retrials](#) by the same judge, who then sentenced them to 3, 5 and 10 years in prison.

An Iranian lawyer said that he was aware of 28 children who had been charged with "enmity against God" and "corruption on earth," vague crimes that can be punished by death or amputation of the right hand and left foot.

By early April 2023, Iranian rights groups had [recorded](#) the killings of 537 people by security forces in the context of protests that began in late August 2022 following the death of Mahsa Jina Amini in police custody, including [at least](#) 68 children. Human Rights Watch previously [reported](#) the deaths of children including 16-year-old Nika Shakarami, whose family found her body 10 days after she disappeared during protests in Tehran on September 20, and 16-year-old Sarina Esmailzadeh, who died after being beaten by security forces on September 23, in Gohardasht, Alborz province. Iranian authorities claimed that both girls died by jumping or falling from buildings and have harassed and detained family members.

"Children who have experienced horrific abuses in detention and at trial risk long-lasting harm," said [Bill Van Esveld](#), associate children's rights director at Human Rights Watch. "The United Nations Fact-Finding Mission should prioritize investigating these abuses and recommend a path to accountability."

**For detailed information about the children's cases, please see below.**

Human Rights Watch contacted two children and the relatives of six others, and four unrelated witnesses to shootings and beatings of children, as well as activists, journalists, and legal experts with firsthand knowledge of abuses against children in custody, unfair trials, and fatal shootings from September 2022 through February 2023. Human Rights Watch is withholding the names of the children, their relatives, and other sources, and details that could be used to identify them, to protect their security, at their request.

## **Torture, Sexual Assault**

An informed source confirmed the arrest in January of a 17-year-old boy and his 19-year-old brother in Zahedan. They and others were detained for 21 days in the Pastor detention center, where they were tortured. Interrogators pressured the boy to denounce his father and provide information about him.

The boy later said that he was unable to walk because he had been beaten on the soles of his feet. Officials also “touched [his] and the other [detainees’] genitals and gave them electric shocks, and threatened them with rape with a plastic pipe, and with death.” Another boy, 17, was also tortured, local news reports said, and a media outlet close to Iran’s intelligence agencies published the boys’ coerced false confessions that they had shot at police cars.

Detention center officials regularly gave the detainees painkillers, and the first youth collected the pills and took them all at once to try to end his life. “He woke up in a hospital, then tried a second time by eating soap and shampoo,” the source said. In November, a child [reportedly](#) took his [life](#) after being tortured in Tabriz.

In late January, the boy and others in the group were transferred to the youth correctional center in Zahedan Central Prison. Officials told the first boy and his brother that they are “hostages so that we can get your father,” the source said.

Shir Ahmad Shirani, the chief editor of the Haal Vash news website, which has reported extensively on children’s cases in Zahedan, told Human Rights Watch in April that in virtually all cases he was aware of, children or adults taken to the Pastor detention center for days after their arrest were beaten, blindfolded, and kept in solitary confinement and not allowed phone calls or visitors. The police run the detention center, but it has been used by other agencies, including Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps intelligence, he said.

## **Torture, Sexual Assault**

In early December, a 17-year-old boy, as well as his cousin and two friends, were arrested after Friday prayers in Zahedan by men in an unmarked car, a relative said. The family learned from the police that the youths were held by the Revolutionary Guard, who detained them for four days and accused them of throwing stones and shouting slogans. There had been a protest in Zahedan that day, but the four friends had not participated and were not in a protest area when arrested.

They were taken to the Revolutionary Guard building, where they were separated. The boy was blindfolded and told to sign a paper, his relative said. His hands were tied behind his back, and he was regularly interrogated and beaten. Once, an interrogator punched him in the chest so hard that he was unable to draw breath, his relative said. On another occasion, he lost consciousness during a whipping.

Revolutionary Guard officers sexually assaulted him, but he did not want to share details, his relative said. He was denied food and given insufficient water for four days, and then transferred to prison, where his family was then allowed to bail him out pending trial.

“When he was released, he was bleeding from the anus,” his relative said. “His entire body had bruises, including his shoulders, arms, chest, waist, and thighs, and he was not in a good mental state. He just stared at one spot, in a daze, and to every question we asked, he only responded that we had to get his friends out of jail.”

They were charged with rioting and collusion against national security. At their second hearing, the judge acquitted the 17-year-old but threatened that he would be given the death penalty if he was arrested again, the relative said. As of mid-February, “He still wakes up at night, shaking.”

Other recent allegations of torture of child detainees in Zahedan, including sexual assault, were published in Persian language media and on social media accounts. Haal Vash news agency

reported that on December 30 security forces in street clothes arrested Bismillah Barahoui, 17, and twins Ismail and Ibrahim Sargolzaei, 16. Revolutionary Guard forces reportedly tortured them in a detention center, including with electroshocks. As a result, Ibrahim was unable to speak to family members after he was transferred to the Zahedan Prison Correctional Center. The boys are accused of “carrying protest placards.”

### **Torture, Detention with Unrelated Adults**

A secondary-school student said she was arrested in November during a raid on a relative’s home in western Iran. Several other children were also arrested apparently in response to an alleged arson attempt, which the security officials “knew had nothing to do with us, but still, they beat us so much to make us confess it was us that [started the] fire,” she said. Armed security forces “poured out” of multiple cars, entered the house, and violently arrested and injured her, she said. Officers took her to the local intelligence office, where she was tied to a chair, blindfolded, and a sack was placed over her head.

Three officers interrogated her from 11 a.m. to 3 p.m., she said, and beat her with a baton “on my sides, neck, and from the waist down, and they used a whip on my ankles.” Two different officers came and questioned her from 3 p.m. until 11 p.m., beating her if she did not answer or hesitated. She could hear other children in the next room, including a 16-year-old boy she knew, who, she later learned, was severely beaten and electroshocked.

That night, she was transferred to a women’s prison, where she was questioned daily for seven days, from 9 a.m. to 9 p.m., she said. “Only during lunch time, they would send you to the cell to eat something and then go again for interrogation. They would hit you, but most of their harassment was using insults, or asking each question 30 times.” She remained in the women’s prison for a month, where her family was allowed to call her twice a day. She was held with adults, in violation of Iranian and international children’s rights law.

She was released on bail and is awaiting trial on accusations of “destruction, collusion, insulting the leadership, Molotov cocktail, writing slogans, uncovering the hijab, being a leader, acting against the security of the country and the system, and inciting people to kill,” she said. “I am under observation.” The Public Prosecutor’s Office reportedly refused to allow the family to hire a defense lawyer and said she faces charges of *moharebeh* (enmity against God).

Fateme Fanaeian, an Iranian journalist, described two cases in which boys were detained with unrelated adults, including a 17-year-old from Karaj, who was badly beaten during arrest in November, threatened with rape by other prisoners, and later released on bail. Another 17-year-old, from Shiraz, was forced to sign papers without knowing what they were and detained with three adults, Fanaeian said.

### **Torture, Incommunicado Detention, Denial of Medical Care**

In late October, security forces in a city in Western Iran arrested a boy during a raid when they sought to arrest a relative. The relative said he had been shot during a demonstration in September and held at a police station, where he was beaten and “forced to sign a series of white [blank] papers.” He couldn’t walk for two days after he was released, and still has birdshot pellets in his body. He fled to another city when the authorities threatened to rearrest him before the raid that led to his younger relative’s arrest.

Security forces “dragged [the boy] on the asphalt,” cursed and beat him during arrest, and detained him incommunicado for six days in an intelligence facility where he was tortured to provide information about the relative who had fled, he said. There are [numerous reports](#) that Iranian [security forces detain children incommunicado](#), including girls, sometimes for weeks.

The relative said that at the intelligence facility,

*They put needles under [the boy's] nails and beat him a lot, with punches, kicks, and batons. Then they took him to a room where there were two chairs and a table. They tied him to the chair and he said they brought a syringe and put it in his arm. They didn't say what it was but told him, "If we inject you with this, you will either die or become paralyzed." Three or four people would beat him, then they would leave. After five minutes, new people would come and beat him.*

They also threatened to execute him. "They would come at 2 and 3 in the morning and wake him up and say, 'Let's go, we want to execute you.'" After the boy's release, the relative said, the boy "had nightmares, and when he woke up he just looked at the wall, he was depressed."

Officials had told the boy to stop going to school – "they told him, even if you get a master's degree we'll make sure you don't get a job," the relative said – and the government has since cut off the social-welfare allowance of the boy's family, citing his arrest. As a result, the boy dropped out of school and is working 10-hour shifts at a job, a relative said.

### **Sexual Harassment, Beatings**

In October, a girl and her friend, both under 18, planned to spray-paint slogans on the walls near Azadi Square in Sanandaj, but did not, when nearby shopkeepers told them not to, a relative said. The girls were arrested while sitting in the square at around 2 p.m. by plainclothes agents who put them in a private car, blindfolded them, and took them to a location where they were interrogated until 7 p.m. The officers alleged the girls were part of a larger group responsible for spray-painting slogans and threatened them with five years in prison. The male officers told the friend to "stand up so we can get a look at you," the relative recalled her saying. Officers checked all the pictures on her phone and told her to identify each person. When her family called, officers told her to say she was at a friend's house.

The girls were released later that day without charge, but they are under surveillance and regularly receive calls from security forces who warn them not to participate in protest-related activities, the relative said.

A woman who was detained for a day in a police station in Sanandaj in late September described seeing two boys, about age 15, being beaten with batons during interrogation. The woman said that peering beneath her blindfold she had seen that the boys "were beaten a lot, I could even see the baton [marks] on their faces, they were all crying and pleading." She said that a mother and daughter, who was under 18, were also beaten.

### **Torture, Lack of Medical Care, Threats with a Knife**

Late one afternoon in October, men in civilian clothes in a white car stopped a 13-year-old boy who was on his way to the supermarket. The men checked his mobile phone. Without provocation, one of the men hit the boy in the head with an object, knocking him out, a relative said.

When he regained consciousness, he found himself at a facility known as "Bashgahe Afsaran," which people interviewed said was used by the Revolutionary Guard. Officers interrogated the boy and realized that he was from a politically active family. "They wanted to know where the family was," a relative said:

*He didn't know anything, his mother strictly keeps him out of that.... But they tortured and interrogated him all the time. They tied him with anklets and handcuffs and threatened him with a knife. One of his ribs was broken and his whole body was bruised, but they threatened the family so bad that they didn't dare to take him to the hospital after his release and brought a doctor to see him at home.*

His family paid for his release on bail.

## Abusive Prosecutions, Unfair Trials

On November 3, protesters [killed](#) a member of the Basij paramilitary forces who was attacking protesters in Karaj. Sixteen people, including [three 17-year-old boys](#), were [tried](#) and convicted by a revolutionary court, which arbitrarily refused to allow independent lawyers to represent the people on trial, according to news reports and a lawyer following the case. Five were sentenced to death, and the others, including the boys – Arian Farzamnia, Amin Mehdi Shokrollahi, and Amir Mehdi Jafari – were convicted of [enmity against God and corruption on Earth](#) and sentenced to 25 years in prison and “banishment” or detention in a distant location. Jafari, like other defendants, was [reportedly tortured](#) during interrogation.

The Supreme Court accepted an appeal from five defendants, including the three boys, and ordered a retrial due to lack of sufficient evidence, but returned the case to the same judge, the lawyer said. In April, the judge sentenced Farzamnia to 10 years in prison in Kerman, Shokrollahi to 5 years in Mashhad, and Jafari to 3 years in Qom.

Under [Iranian law](#), arrested children may be questioned only by specialized children’s prosecutors. In this case, according to [reports](#) on the trial in pro-government media, the General Intelligence Department interrogated them. The law also only permits trying children before provincial-level courts for children, which provide increased access to family members and lawyers and guarantee the child’s privacy by closing trials to the public.

This trial was open to the public, yet the authorities [claimed](#) that “all the legal procedures have been followed” because the head of the judiciary had certified the revolutionary court judge to act as a criminal court and a youth court judge. But under the law only a youth court may try children, even in cases with both adult and child defendants.

The trial of the children for “corruption on earth,” a vague charge, also appears to be abusively excessive, because the [Iranian criminal code](#) limits liability to “a person who *extensively* commits felonies against the bodily entity of people or internal or international security.”

## Lethal Force Against Children

A youth said he participated in protests in Sanandaj on November 17 and that in the early afternoon, at the entrance of Mulavi township, uniformed Revolutionary Guard officers armed with Kalashnikovs fired into the air as the protesters approached. When the group threw rocks from a distance of around 50 meters, the officers fired and continued as the protesters ran away, wounding three men and a boy whose appearance suggested he was roughly 14 or 15, the youth said. The boy “fell right next to me. He had been shot on the left side of his chest, below his heart, and heavy blood gushed out and flowed on the asphalt.” A group of protesters tried to carry him away but were cut off by security officials on motorcycles, the youth said:

*The boy saw them, and told us, ‘They will arrest you because of me. If I am going to die, let me die. If they are going to arrest me, let them arrest me.’ The boy thanked us and told us to go. When we left, we saw the motorbikes were on his heels.*

The use of assault weapons against protesters running away after throwing rocks from a distance is unlawful use of lethal force. Human Rights Watch has [documented numerous incidents](#) of security forces unlawfully firing shotguns, assault rifles, and handguns against protesters across Iran since the beginning of widespread protests on September 16. Another resident of Sanandaj witnessed two incidents of security forces severely beating children in their custody.

Security forces fatally shot Omid Sarani, 13, in Zahedan, in Sistan and Baluchestan province, on September 30, an informed source said. Omid’s body was found on Karegar square next to the body of a 20-year-old man from the same neighborhood, where security forces had shot at protesters. The city that day “was like a war zone, there was shooting, helicopters,” the source said. Omid was “shot in the heart,” and the man was shot in the head, the source said. Amnesty International previously [confirmed](#) these killings.

Abolfazl Adinezhadeh, 17, was fatally shot at close range with a shotgun on October 8 during protests in Mashhad. The death certificate [stated](#) he died as the result of liver and kidney damage due to birdshot, the BBC [reported](#). A lawyer who is in contact with the boy's family said that the authorities subsequently issued a warrant against two relatives and warned them that they would face criminal charges if they complained. The lawyer also reported that their landlord refused to renew their lease under pressure from the Revolutionary Guard.

The Iranian authorities have reportedly sought to silence the families of other children killed or wounded by security forces, including [Asra Panahi](#), 15, who was fatally [beaten](#) at her [high school](#) on October 12; Hasti Hossein Panahi, 16, who has been in a [coma](#) since being [taken](#) from her school and reportedly [beaten](#) on November 9; [Kian Pirfalak](#), 9, who was fatally [shot](#) on November 16; and Behrad Moradi, 16, who was shot and suffered internal injuries on November 23 and discharged from a hospital on December 3 with pellets still in his head, according to reports and photographs uploaded to social media.

### **Children Injured and Denied Medical Care**

In several reported cases, Iranian security forces injured and detained children without giving them access to medical care. In a [video](#) uploaded to social media, a boy in a hospital bed identified as Ilya Rezaei, 14, from Mahalat in Markazi Province, says that Revolutionary Guard forces shot him on November 20 while he was returning home from his work in a bicycle factory, then pushed him into a vehicle and drove him to a Revolutionary Guard facility, torturing him with an electroshock weapon, without providing medical treatment. An X-ray reportedly [shows](#) birdshot in Ilya's chest.

Amir Hossein Rahimi, 15, was shot during protests near Karaj and detained in Kechoui Prison correctional center for two months without medical care for birdshot in his head, neck, chest, and stomach, his mother [told](#) a journalist. His family [reportedly](#) could not afford his 500 million tomans (almost US\$119,000) bail. He faces [trial](#) before the Karaj Revolutionary Court for throwing a Molotov cocktail.

### **Children Denied Education**

Iran's supreme leader, Ali Khamenei, has pardoned about 300 high school students detained across the country, who were released, but many have been denied re-enrollment in school, apparently under pressure from the Revolutionary Guard, said Hossein Raeisi, an Iranian law expert who is following nine such cases: "For these children, it means the end of their schooling, even if not officially, and the end of their future."

On October 23, Education Minister Yousef Nouri [said](#) student protesters were being [taken](#) to psychiatric centers for "reform and retraining," under the [supervision](#) of a [cleric](#) and a psychologist. School officials have also reportedly assaulted children who participated in protests.

### **Children Assaulted, Arrested at Schools**

Fateme Fanaeian, an Iranian journalist, described three cases in which school principals called police in response to schoolgirls' protests. In October, after a 16-year-old sang a protest song with her classmates at a school in Rasht, the police detained three girls for 15 days and threatened them with rape and death.

Plainclothes officers arrested a 17-year-old girl at the door of her school in Tehran after the schoolchildren had "kicked out a mullah" who had come to speak, Fanaeian said. The principal closed the school doors to prevent the children from leaving and called the police, who beat dozens of girls with batons, and dragged one girl on the ground, and detained a dozen children overnight.

In Bandar Abbas, a schoolgirl from Afghanistan filmed the Shariati High School principal threatening students, and the video was widely seen on social networks, causing parents to take their children out of the school. The girl was arrested.

