

IRN38962.E 10 May 2002

Subject: »Iran«: Information on a demonstration or riot taking place in Sanandaj on 22 February 1998; repercussions thereof

Regional Office: 2

From: Research Directorate, Immigration and Refugee Board, Ottawa

The Research Directorate was unable to find reports of a riot or demonstration in Sanandaj on 22 February 1998. However, on the same date in 1999 in Sanandaj, a protest against "the killing of protesters in previous days in Urumiyeh and other western Iranian cities and against Turkey's arrest of Kurdish rebel leader Abdullah »Ocalan«" took place (AFP 23 Feb. 1999). Although initially protesting these issues, it was reported that the demonstration became one against Iran's Islamic regime (ibid.; Voice of Israel 22 Feb. 1999). Among the chants reported were "down with Khamenei" and "down with Khatami" (AFP 23 Feb. 1999; KCWPI 22 Feb. 1999; NCR 25 Feb. 1999; *Green Left Weekly* 24 Mar. 1999).

Reports of the size of the demonstration included estimates of "tens of thousands" (AFP 23 Feb. 1999; KCWPI 22 Feb. 1999), 50,000 (NCR 25 Feb. 1999) and more than 70,000 protesters (*Green Left Weekly* 24 Mar. 1999; CPI 1 Mar. 1999). Reportedly, protesters "turned violent" (Voice of Israel 22 Feb. 1999) and "confronted State Security Forces with molotov cocktails" (NCR 25 Feb. 1999). The Kurdistan Committee of the Worker-Communist Party of »Iran« (KCWPI) reported that "people set fire to the regime's intelligence office, several of its vehicles, as well as several banks" and noted that demonstrators were armed (22 Feb. 1999). However, at least one report, a written statement signed by numerous human rights groups and other NGOs, submitted to the Commission on Human Rights of the United Nations Economic and Social Council, claimed that the demonstration was "peaceful" but "brutally suppressed" (UN 12 Apr. 1999).

Reportedly, State Security Forces and the Revolutionary Guard Corps confronted the demonstrators (AFP 24 Feb. 1999; Voice of Israel 23 Feb. 1999; NCR 11 Mar. 1999). The Washington-based opposition party National Council of Resistance of »Iran« (NCR) noted in a statement dated 11 March 1999 that the role of the State Security Forces and the Revolutionary Guard was admitted to the "state-run ... Arya and Neshat dailies." Further, according to the NCR, the Iranian Kurdistan Governor "admitted on Sanandaj television, Tuesday evening, February 22, that he had given the orders to open fire on the crowd" (11 Mar. 1999).

A number of reports cite differing statistics of those killed and wounded in the demonstration. In an Associated Press report, a "provincial official" claimed there were two deaths and five injuries (23 Feb. 1999). The Washington Kurdish Institute (WKI) claimed that "Revolutionary Guards, opened fire indiscriminately [on demonstrators]" and, citing a Turkish newspaper, "reported six deaths and hundreds wounded" (WKI 3 Mar. 1999). The Iraq-based opposition group People's Mujahedeen, in a statement quoted by Agence France Presse, said that "18 people [were] killed and ... dozens wounded ... in an attack by members of the Revolutionary Guards Corps and state security force" (AFP 23 Feb. 1999).

Reportedly, the number of arrests during and after the demonstrations totalled 2,000 people (AFP 24 Feb. 1999; UN 12 Apr. 1999; NCR 11 Mar. 1999). In October 1999, AFP reported that

[the] police were justified in intervening in the rallies, which led to clashes with demonstrators, [Interior Minister Abdolvahed] Mussavi-Lari said, adding that the protests had been manipulated

by the opposition.

... [T]he "people arrested were members of the (banned) Democratic Party of Iranian Kurdistan, or of the Kumeleh" the outlawed Iranian Kurdish communist party....

It was the first time the government has mentioned the presence of the two opposition groups among the demonstrators (9 Oct. 1999).

According to the People's Mujahedeen, following the demonstrations Sanandaj "the Revolutionary Guards and Intelligence Ministry forces launched a major wave of arrests in [the] city ... [and] 'a de facto state of emergency' had been declared ... [with] security forces stationed ... throughout the city" (AFP 24 Feb. 1999). The Research Directorate was unable to find reports detailing the fate of those arrested or other repercussions among sources consulted for this Response.

This Response was prepared after researching publicly accessible information currently available to the Research Directorate within time constraints. This Response is not, and does not purport to be, conclusive as to the merit of any particular claim to refugee status or asylum. Please find below the list of additional sources consulted in researching this Information Request.

References

Agence France Presse (AFP). 9 October 1999. "Iran MP Defends Iranian Kurds Against Government Crackdown." (NEXIS)

_____. 24 February 1999. "2,000 Arrests in Iranian Kurdistan: People's Mujahedeen." (NEXIS)

_____. 23 February 1999. "18 Slain in Kurdish Protests in Iran: Rebels." (NEXIS)

Associated Press (AP). 23 February 1999. "Two Kurds Killed, Five Injured in Clashes." (NEXIS)

Communist Party of Iran (CPI). 1 March 1999. "Mass Demonstrations in Iran's Kurdistan." <<http://www.marxist.com/appeals/kurdistan1.html>> [Accessed 9 May 2002]

Green Left Weekly [Broadway NSW, Australia]. 24 March 1999. No. 354. Norm Dixon. "Upsurge of Iranian Kurdistan." <<http://www.greenleft.org.au/back/354/354p15.html>> [Accessed 9 May 2002]

Kurdistan Committee of the Worker-Communist Party of Iran (KCWPI). 22 February 1999. Press Release No. 3. "Tens of Thousands Demonstrate Against the Islamic Republic of Iran in Sanandaj." <<http://www.marxist.com/appeals/kurdistan2.html>> [Accessed 9 May 2002]

National Council of Resistance of Iran (NCR). *Brief on Iran*. No. 1393. 15 May 2000. "Mojahedin Units Inside Iran Pound Headquarters of Special Anti-Riot Police." <http://www.iran-e-azad.org/english/boi/13930515_00.html> [Accessed 9 May 2002]

_____. 18 April 1999. "National Council of Resistance of Iran" <<http://www.iran-e-azad.org/english/ncri.html>> [Accessed 9 May 2002]

_____. 11 March 1999. "State-run Dailies Admit to the Carnage in Kurdistan."

<<http://www.iran-e-azad.org/english/ncr/990311.html>> [Accessed 9 May 2002]

_____. 25 February 1999. Statement 02/25/99. "Chanting 'Down with Khatami,' Tens of Thousands Demonstrate in Various Cities in Iran." <<http://www.iran-e-azad.org/english/ncr/990225.html>> [Accessed 9 May 2002]

The NCR describes itself as:

The National Council of Resistance of Iran (NCR) was founded in July 1981 in Tehran to oppose the fundamentalist regime ruling Iran and establish a pluralist democracy. ... In late 1981 and early 1982, the NCR drafted, adopted and published its principal positions and the outline of the future government's programs after the overthrow of the mullahs' regime. The council quickly expanded to include all democratic forces opposed to the Khomeini regime and not responsible for any crimes during the Shah's reign. The NCR continues to keep its doors open to such forces and public figures (18 Apr. 1999).

United Nations (UN) Economic and Social Council. Commission on Human Rights. 12 April 1999 "Question of the Violation of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms in Any Part of the World." (E/CN.4/1999/NGO/124)
<<http://www.unhchr.ch/Huridocda/Huridoca.nsf/TestFrame/bbbc1b6eb6890c6ec1256b72004e55b8Opendocument>> [Accessed 9 May 2002]

Voice of Israel [Jerusalem, in Persian]. 22 Feb. 1999. "Iran: Eight Protesters Said Killed Pro-Ocalan Riots in Sanandaj." (BBC Monitoring 23 Feb. 1999/NEXIS)

Washington Kurdish Institute. 24 Sept. 2001. "About WKI...."
<<http://www.kurd.org/about/about.html>> [Accessed 9 May 2002]

_____. 3 March 1999. "WKI Protests Iranian Regime's Violent Repression of Kurdish Demonstrators Calls for International Inquiry into Disturbances Which Left Dozens Killed and Injured." Press Release. <<http://www.kurd.org/press/prIranViolence.html>> [Accessed 9 May 2002]

"The Washington Kurdish Institute (WKI) is a non-profit, research and educational organization ... WKI amplifies informed, independent perspectives of issues which affect Kurds and bear directly on regional stability and U.S. national interests.

... [T]he Institute ... maintain[s] a strict non-partisanship and uncompromised support for international human rights standards. The Advisory Committee includes prominent scholars, human rights practitioners, Middle East and foreign policy experts, and Kurds from around the world." (24 Sept. 2001).

Additional Sources Consulted

IRB Databases

NEXIS

Internet sites including

Amnesty International

Country Reports (1999-2000)

Human Rights Watch

»Iran« Human Rights Chronicle

The Iranian

Keesing's Record of World Events 1999

Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty

World News Connection

Search Engines

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