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“DON’T LET THEM KILL US”

IRAN’S RELENTLESS EXECUTION CRISIS SINCE THE
2022 UPRISING

RESEARCH
BRIEFING

AMNESTY
INTERNATIONAL



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Cover picture portrays the faces of some of the men, women and child victims of executions in 2023 in Iran. © Private

The title of this research briefing quotes Majid Kazemi, Saeed Yaghoubi and Saleh Mirhashemi, who wrote “Don’t let them kill us” on a note that was smuggled out of prison two days before they were arbitrarily executed on 19 May 2023 in relation to the 2022 “Woman Life Freedom” uprising.

This research briefing documents the horrifying surge in executions in Iran in 2023, the highest in eight years. More than half of the executions were for drug-related offences amid a distressing return to a lethal anti-narcotics policy since Ebrahim Raisi’s rise to presidency in 2021. With systemic impunity in Iran, the briefing reiterates the need for states to initiate criminal investigations under the principle of universal jurisdiction into crimes under international law committed by Iranian officials, irrespective of the absence or presence of the accused in their territory.

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Since the “Woman Life Freedom” uprising of September-December 2022, the Iranian authorities have embarked on a brutal killing spree, using the death penalty as a tool of oppression to create a pervasive sense of fear across the country, exert control over the population, and tighten their grip on power at any cost.

In 2023, executions soared, with at least 853 people executed across the country, marking a 48% increase from 2022 and a 172% increase from 2021.

At least 545 people (64%) were executed for acts that should never result in the death penalty under international law, including for acts that are protected by the rights to privacy and freedom of expression, religion or belief; for overly broad and vaguely worded charges that do not meet the principle of legality; and for drug-related and other offences not involving “intentional killing”.

The spike in executions is largely attributed to a distressing return to a lethal anti-narcotics policy since Ebrahim Raisi’s rise to presidency and Gholamhossein Mohseni Ejei’s appointment as the Head of the Judiciary, both in 2021. Since then, the downward trend in drug-related executions from 2018 to 2020, during which the Iranian authorities executed between 20 and 30 people for such offences annually, was reversed. In 2023, the authorities carried out at least 481 drug-related executions, constituting 56% of the total number of executions. This marks an 89% increase from 2022 when 255 people were executed for drug-related offences and a 264% increase from 2021 when 132 people were executed for drug-related offences.

The use of the death penalty continued to disproportionately impact Iran’s oppressed Baluchi ethnic minority, which constitutes only about 5% of Iran’s population but accounted for 20% of all executions in 2023, with at least 172 Baluchi men and women executed. Of these 172 executions, 138 were for drug-related offences, accounting for 29% of all drug-related executions, further exposing the discriminatory effect of the authorities’ lethal anti-narcotics strategy on the most marginalized and impoverished communities.

The authorities also used the death penalty to punish individuals who had challenged or were perceived as having challenged the Islamic Republic establishment and its politico-religious ideologies. In 2023, the authorities executed at least seven people in connection with nationwide protests – six in connection with the “Woman Life Freedom” protests of September-December 2022 and one in connection with the nationwide protests of November 2019. Additionally, the authorities executed at least two social media users for “apostasy” and “insulting the Prophet of Islam” (*sabbo al-nabi*) and at least six individuals belonging to oppressed ethnic and/or religious minorities for their real or perceived affiliation with political groups deemed “hostile” by the authorities.

In a shocking escalation in their use of the death penalty against child offenders, authorities executed a 17-year-old boy – **Hamidreza Azari** – and misrepresented his age as 18 in state media to evade accountability. Four other individuals who were under 18 at the time of the crime were also executed.

At least 520 people (61%) were arbitrarily executed after conviction and sentencing by Revolutionary Courts, which lack independence and operate under the influence of security and intelligence bodies. Revolutionary Courts exercise jurisdiction over drug-related and national security offences. Proceedings by such courts are inherently unfair with defendants being systematically denied fair trial rights, including to adequate defence, to meaningfully challenge the legality of their detention, to presumption of innocence, not to self-incriminate and to meaningful review. Revolutionary Courts also repeatedly rely on torture-tainted “confessions” to convict and sentence people to death.

The execution crisis in Iran both stems from and exacerbates a wider crisis of systemic impunity for the arbitrary deprivation of life. Security forces, prosecutors and judges collaborate in a relentless assault on the right to life.

Amid domestic calls for the abolition of the death penalty, including from death row prisoners, the Iranian authorities have doubled down and persisted with their state-sanctioned killing spree which has turned prisons into killing fields, celebrating the swift application of the death penalty against

protesters and presenting their inhumane, lethal anti-narcotics strategy as “an effort to keep humanity alive” that is worthy of global praise.

Without a robust global response, Amnesty International fears that the Iranian authorities will continue using the death penalty as a tool of oppression to execute thousands more people in the coming years.

To record the number of executions carried out in 2023, Amnesty International worked closely with Abdorrahman Boroumand Centre, drawing from open sources, and reviewed the execution logs of Iran Human Rights and Kurdistan Human Rights Network. Amnesty International also reviewed legal documents, official letters and statements, and interviewed informed sources with direct knowledge about individuals executed in 2023 or at risk of execution.

Amnesty International calls on the Iranian authorities to:

- Quash all convictions and death sentences issued following unfair trials, and release all individuals whose detentions are rendered arbitrary on account of severe non-observance of fair trial rights, in particular those involving reliance on “confessions” extracted under torture and other ill-treatment. If charged with internationally recognizable offences, individuals must be retried in proceedings that meet the most rigorous international fair trial standards, excluding “confessions” obtained under torture and other ill-treatment, and without recourse to the death penalty. Immediately and unconditionally release all those convicted and sentenced to death, indicted, or undergoing investigations solely for the exercise of their rights to freedom of expression, association and peaceful assembly.
- Immediately establish an official moratorium on executions, with a view to fully abolishing the death penalty. Pending the full abolition, bring provisions in national legislation in line with international law and standards, including by: removing the death penalty for drug-related and any other offences not involving intentional killing; repealing vaguely worded provisions of the Islamic Penal Code that criminalize the exercise of the rights to freedom of belief and religion, expression, association and peaceful assembly; ensuring that proceedings meet the highest standards for a fair trial from the time of arrest; and repealing legal presumptions of guilt and mandatory death sentences.
- Amend Article 91 of the Islamic Penal Code to expressly prohibit the use of the death penalty for crimes committed by persons below 18 years of age, in all circumstances and without any discretion for judges.

Amnesty International calls on all UN member and observer states to:

- Initiate criminal investigations under the principle of universal jurisdiction into crimes under international law committed by Iranian authorities, irrespective of the absence or presence of the accused in their territory. This includes initiating adequately resourced criminal investigations aimed at disclosing the truth about the crimes, identifying those suspected of responsibility, including superiors, and issuing, when there is sufficient admissible evidence, international arrest warrants.

2. METHODOLOGY

This briefing is predominantly based on research Amnesty International conducted from January 2023 to March 2024 as part of its ongoing monitoring and documentation of the use of the death penalty in Iran.

To record the number of executions carried out in 2023, Amnesty International worked closely with Abdorrahman Boroumand Centre, a human rights organization which documents judicial punishments in Iran, drawing from open sources, including state media reports and reports from independent media outlets and human rights organizations based outside Iran with access to informed contacts inside the country, including prisoners and the families of executed victims. These human rights organizations include Baloch Activists Campaign;¹ Haalvsh, a Baluchi human rights organization;² Hengaw Organization for Human Rights;³ Human Rights Activists News Agency;⁴ Iran Human Rights;⁵ Kurdistan Human Rights Network;⁶ and Kurdpa Human Rights Organization.⁷ Amnesty International also reviewed the logs of recorded executions compiled by Iran Human Rights and Kurdistan Human Rights Network, comparing them against its records to reach a final figure.

This research briefing also draws from campaigning and research outputs issued by Amnesty International throughout 2023 about individuals who were at risk of execution or who were executed, based on information obtained from sources with direct knowledge, located inside and outside Iran.⁸ The organization also reviewed legal documents such as criminal court, Revolutionary Court, and Supreme Court verdicts; official letters, including opinions issued by Iran's Legal Medicine Organization, which is a state forensic institute; and letters from high level security officials to prosecutors requesting the expedition of death penalty cases.

Amnesty International also regularly monitored and reviewed official statements by the authorities published in state and state-affiliated media outlets in Iran and searched for and analysed videos that were broadcast on state television, including footage of court hearings in Revolutionary Courts and propaganda videos providing the authorities' version of events and showing the forced "confessions" of victims.

Other documentary and audiovisual evidence reviewed included birth certificates and medical records of individuals executed or at risk of execution, CCTV footage used as evidence during criminal proceedings, and pictures showing injuries to the necks of individuals executed through hanging.

Amnesty International reviewed other publicly available material, including audio recordings and letters from death row prisoners smuggled out of prison, and information shared by relatives and lawyers of individuals impacted by the death penalty through social media accounts or media interviews.

On 20 December 2023, Amnesty International wrote to the Head of the Judiciary, Gholamhossein Mohseni Ejei, requesting information on the use of the death penalty in Iran during 2023. No response had been received by the time of publication. Amnesty International renews its call on the Iranian authorities to publish information on the use of the death penalty in Iran.

Amnesty International opposes the death penalty in all cases without exception. The death penalty is a violation of the right to life as proclaimed in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights; and the ultimate cruel, inhuman and degrading punishment. Amnesty International has consistently called on all states that retain the death penalty, including Iran, to establish an official moratorium on executions, with a view to completely abolishing the death penalty.

¹ <https://www.balochcampaign.us/>

² <https://www.haalvsh.org/>

³ <https://www.hengaw.net/>

⁴ <https://www.hra-news.org/>

⁵ <https://www.iranhr.net/>

⁶ <https://www.kurdistanhumanrights.org/>

⁷ <https://kurdpa.net/>

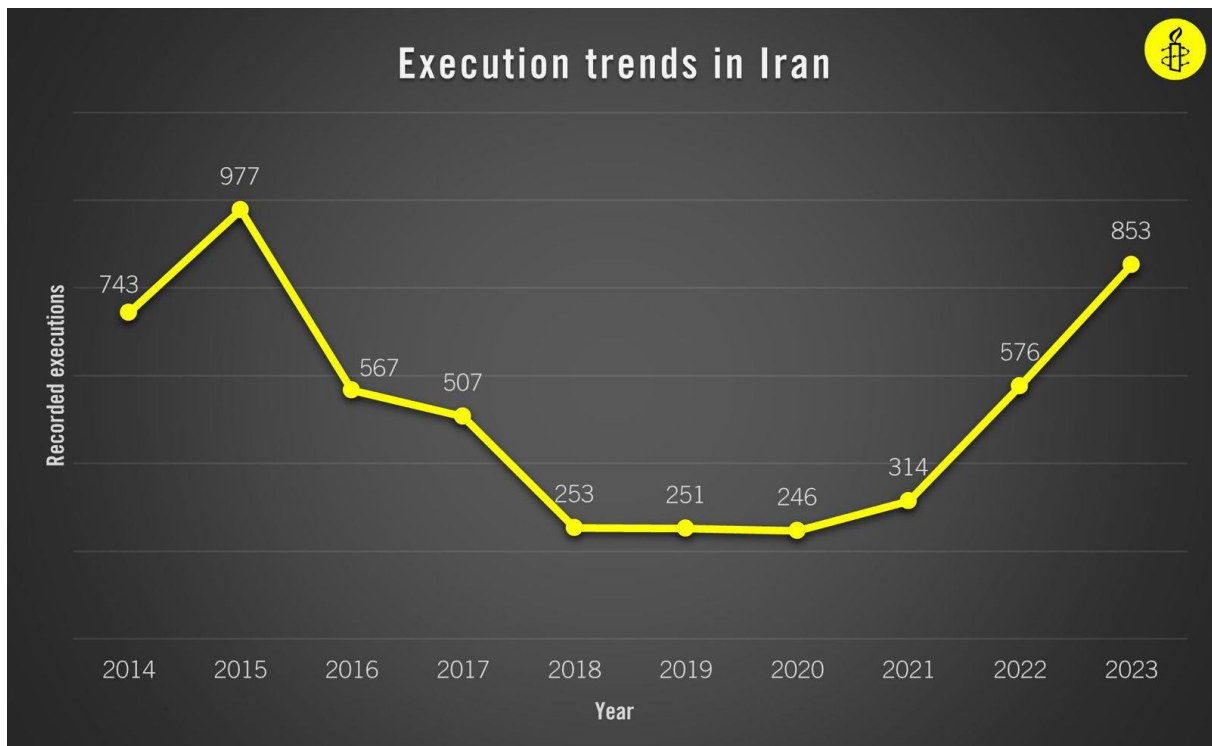
⁸ The organization's publications on the use of the death penalty in Iran issued throughout 2023 are available at: <https://www.amnesty.org/en/location/middle-east-and-north-africa/iran/>.

3. DEATH PENALTY WEAPONIZED AS A TOOL OF REPRESSION

Since the “Woman Life Freedom” uprising of September-December 2022, the Iranian authorities have weaponized the death penalty to create a pervasive climate of fear across the country, exert control over the population, and suppress dissent and any challenge to their iron grip on power.

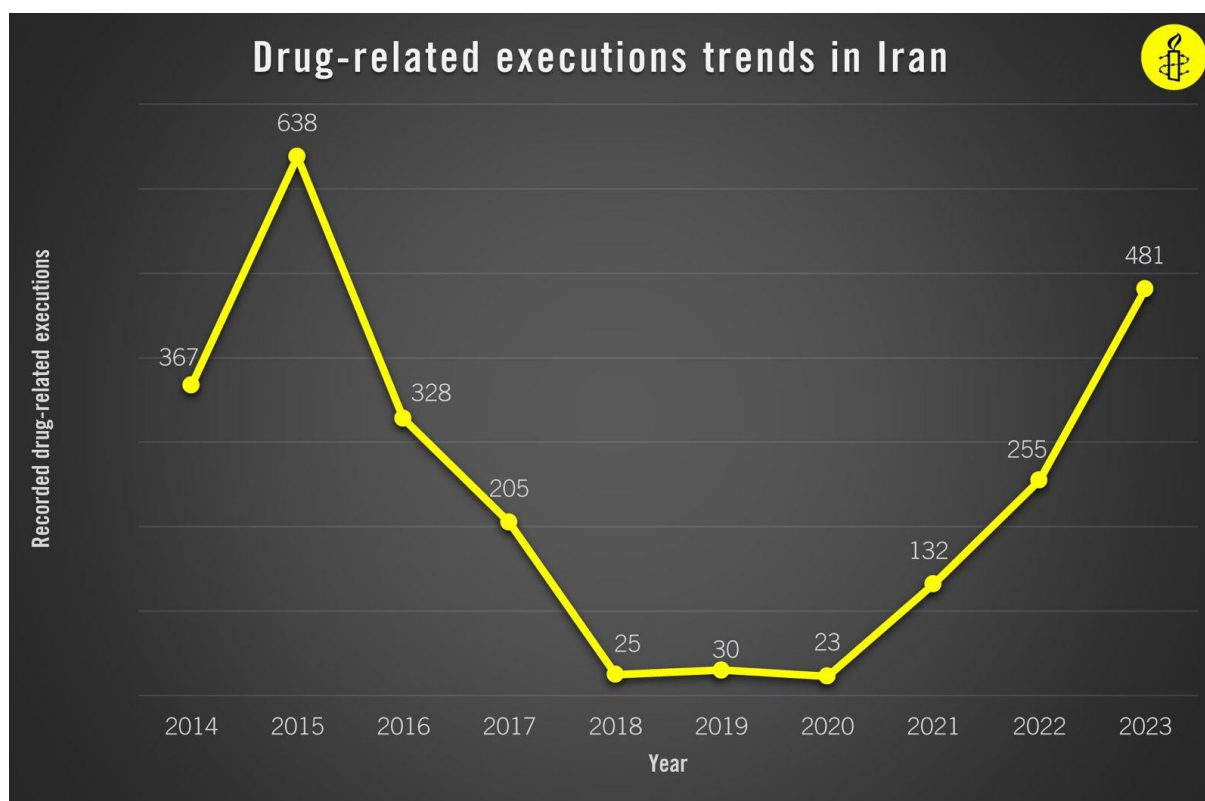
As a result, 2023 saw an exponential increase in the number of recorded executions. The authorities executed at least 853 people in 2023, a 48% increase from 2022 when 576 people were executed and a 172% increase from 2021 when 314 people were executed.

Amnesty International believes that the real number of executions is higher, but the Iranian authorities are not transparent about the number of people executed each year and do not make data on executions publicly available.



The exponential rise in executions since January 2023 stems largely from a distressing return to a lethal anti-narcotics strategy, with at least 481 people executed for drug-related offences in 2023.

This policy shift comes after significant declines in drug-related executions between 2018 and 2020, when between 20 and 30 such executions were recorded annually.



Individuals from Iran's oppressed Baluchi ethnic minority accounted for 20% of all executions in Iran, with 172 Baluchis executed, despite making up around 5% of Iran's population, which underscores the disproportionate and discriminatory effect of the death penalty on marginalized and impoverished communities.⁹

Concurrently, 2023 witnessed a wave of executions targeting individuals who had challenged or were perceived as having challenged the theocratic establishment and its politico-religious ideologies. These included the execution of at least seven protesters – six in connection with the “Woman Life Freedom” protests of September-December 2022 and one in connection with the nationwide protests of November 2019. Additionally, the authorities executed at least two social media users for “apostasy” and “insulting the Prophet of Islam” (*sabbo al-nabi*) in connection with their social media posts. At least six individuals belonging to oppressed ethnic and/or religious minorities were also executed for their real or perceived affiliation with political groups deemed “hostile” by the authorities.

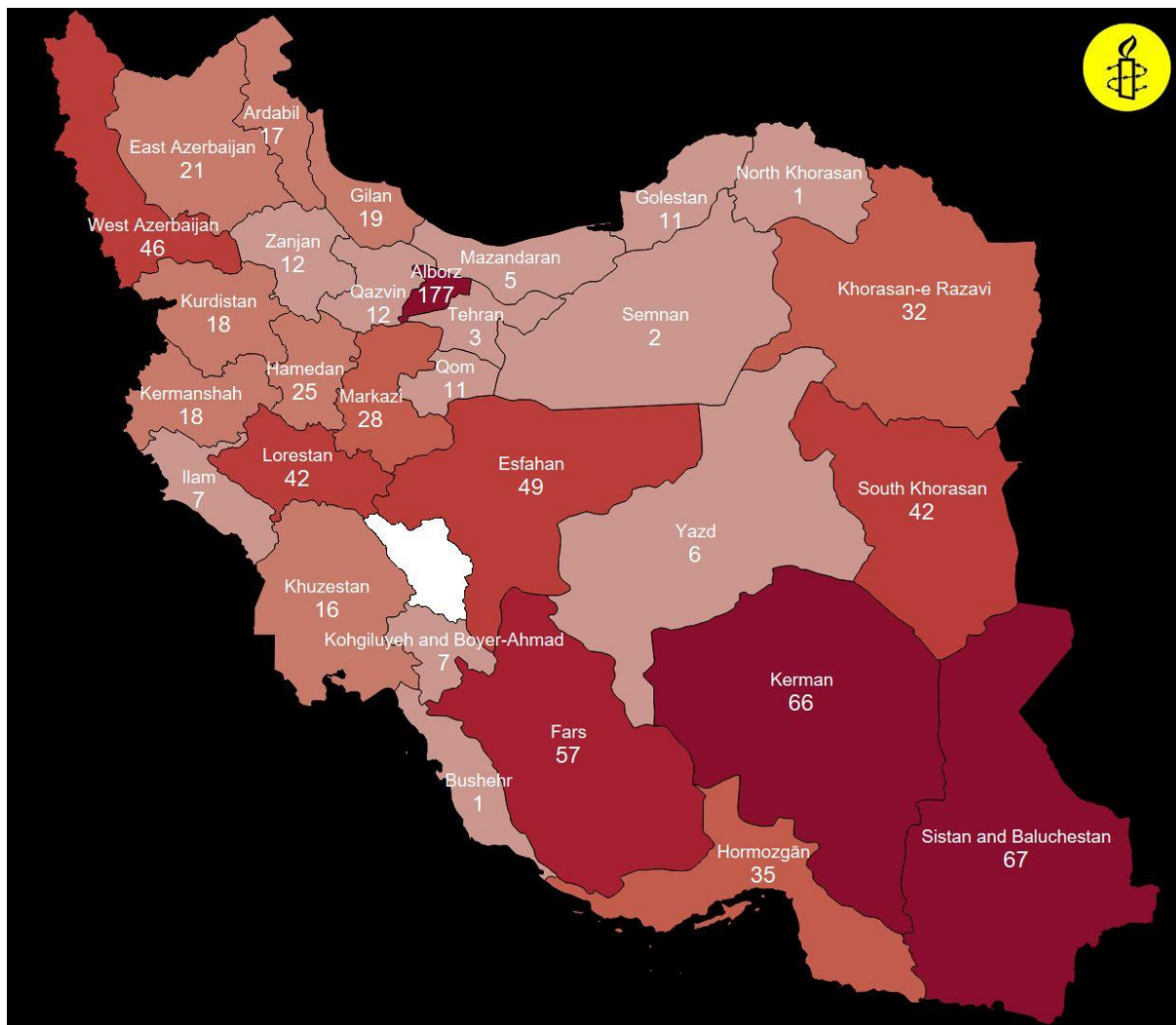
The escalation of drug-related executions, alongside executions targeting protesters, social media users and dissidents, reveals the Iranian authorities' use of the death penalty on all fronts as a weapon to instil fear in the aftermath of the “Woman Life Freedom” uprising. This is consistent with previously recorded patterns in Iran of execution sprees following periods of unrest and political dissent, such as observed in 2010 following the widespread protests that took place in the aftermath of the disputed presidential election of 2009.¹⁰

⁹ The vast majority of the executions targeting Baluchi people were for drug-related offences. See section 5.1 “Baluchi minority disproportionately impacted”.

¹⁰ Amnesty International, “Iran executions send a chilling message”, 30 March 2010, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2010/03/iran-executions-send-chilling-message/>; Amnesty International, “Shocking execution of Iran protesters condemned”, 28 January 2010, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2010/01/039shocking039-execution-iran-protesters-condemned-20100128/>; Amnesty International, “Chilling execution spree with escalating use of death penalty against persecuted ethnic minorities”, 2 March 2023, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2023/03/iran-chilling-execution-sprees-with-escalating-use-of-death-penalty-against-persecuted-ethnic-minorities/>; Amnesty International, “Chilling use of the death penalty to further brutally quell popular uprising”, 16 November 2022, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2022/11/iran-chilling-use-of-the-death-penalty-to-further-brutally-quell-popular-uprising/>; Amnesty International, “Two Kurds executed amid increasing use of death penalty as weapon of repression”, 15 July 2020, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2020/07/iran-two-kurds-executed-amid-increasing-use-of-death-penalty-as-weapon-of-repression/>

The executions of 853 individuals took place across 30 of Iran's 31 provinces, namely:

Alborz (177), Sistan and Baluchestan (67), Kerman (66), Fars (57), Esfahan (49), West Azerbaijan (46), Lorestan (42), South Khorasan (42), Hormozgān (35), Khorasan-e Razavi (32), Markazi (28), Hamedan (25), East Azerbaijan (21), Gilan (19), Kurdistan (18), Kermanshah (18), Ardabil (17), Khuzestan (16), Qazvin (12), Zanjan (12), Golestan (11), Qom (11), Kohgiluyeh and Boyer-Ahmad (7), Ilam (7), Yazd (6), Mazandaran (5), Tehran (3), Semnan (2), North Khorasan (1), and Bushehr (1).¹¹



Map showing the breakdown of executions across Iran's provinces ©Private

Among the 853 individuals executed were 821 men, 24 women, and eight whose gender is unknown.

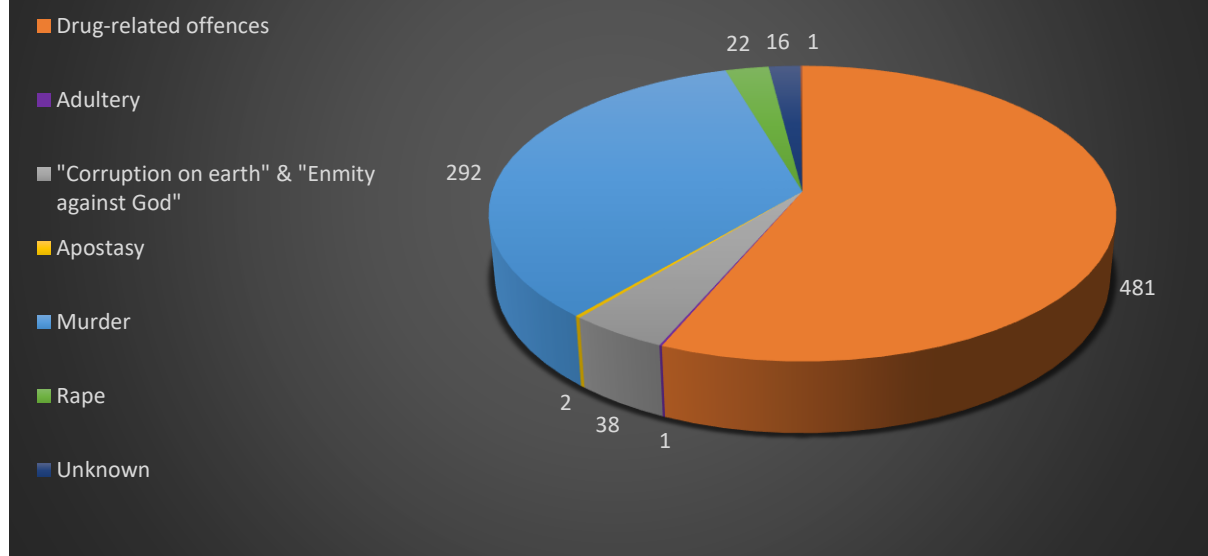
Of the executions recorded by Amnesty International, 481 were for drug-related offences; 292 were for murder;¹² 38 executions were for the overly broad and vaguely worded charges of “enmity against God” (*moharebeh*) and/or “corruption on earth” (*efsad-e fel-arz*) and one for “armed rebellion against the state” (*baghi*);¹³ 22 were for rape; two were for “apostasy” and “insulting the Prophet of Islam” (*sabbo al-nabi*); one was for “adultery”; and 16 were for offences unknown to the organization.

¹¹ The only province from which no executions were recorded was Chahar Mahal and Bakhtiari.

¹² One individual was convicted and sentenced to death for murder and rape, but to avoid double counting, Amnesty International included his execution under the category of murder including in the pie chart on p.9.

¹³ See section 3.1 “Executions for acts that should never result in the death penalty”.

Breakdown of executions by offence in Iran in 2023



The authorities executed seven individuals – all men – in public, including two Afghan nationals who had been sentenced to death for “enmity against God” (*moharebeh*) and “corruption on earth” (*efsad-e fel arz*).¹⁴

Children were present during a public execution that took place for rape in May 2023, according to videos broadcast on state media.¹⁵

In December, the authorities also executed a young woman – **Samira Sabzian Fard** – who was sentenced to death by a court in Tehran under the principle of *qesas* (“retribution-in-kind”) in relation to the murder of the man she was forced to marry as a 15-year-old child.¹⁶

The surge in executions is persisting into 2024 with at least 95 people executed in the first 80 days of the year, up until 20 March 2024.

3.1 EXECUTIONS FOR ACTS THAT SHOULD NEVER RESULT IN THE DEATH PENALTY

Of the 853 recorded executions in 2023, at least 545 were unlawfully carried out for acts that should never result in the death penalty under international law, which prohibits the use of the death penalty for offences that do not meet the threshold of the “most serious crimes” involving intentional killing.¹⁷

The 545 executions can be divided into three categories.

The first category encompasses at least three executions for acts that are protected by the rights to privacy and freedom of expression, religion or belief, and should not be criminalized, let alone punished by the death penalty. These include “apostasy”, “insulting the Prophet of Islam” (*sabbo al-nabi*), and adultery.

The second category encompasses 39 executions for the overly broad and vaguely worded charges of “enmity against God” (*moharebeh*), “corruption on earth” (*efsad-e fel-arz*), and/or “armed rebellion against the state” (*baghi*), which are not internationally recognizable offences and do not meet the

¹⁴ Mizan Online News Agency, “Two perpetrators of the terrorist attack against Shahcheragh holy shrine were executed in public”, 8 July 2023, <https://www.mizanonline.ir/fa/news/4722173> (in Persian).

¹⁵ Voice of America, “The execution of a man in Meragheh in front of children; Prosecutor: he was evil and a rapist”, 25 May 2023, <https://ir.voanews.com/a/maraghe-execution-iran-rape/7108897.html> (in Persian).

¹⁶ Iran Human Rights, “Samira Sabzian Executed in Ghezelhesar Prison”, 20 December 2023, <https://iranhr.net/en/articles/6415/>

¹⁷ See Chapter 7 “International standards.”

principle of legality, which requires all criminal conduct to be clearly defined and its definitions to be accessible and foreseeable.

The last category encompasses 503 executions for internationally recognizable offences that do not involve “intentional killing”. These include 481 executions for drug-related offences¹⁸ and 22 for rape.

3.1.1 EXECUTED FOR ACTS PROTECTED BY INTERNATIONAL HUMAN RIGHTS LAW

In 2023, at least two people were executed for charges stemming solely from the peaceful exercise of their rights to freedom of expression, religion and belief.

SADROLLAH FAZELI ZAR’E AND YOUSEF MEHRDAD EXECUTED FOR APOSTASY



Sadrollah Fazeli Zar’e (left) and Yousef Mehrdad (right) ©Private

On 8 May 2023, authorities executed two social media users – **Sadrollah Fazeli Zar’e** and **Yousef Mehrdad** – in Arak prison, Markazi province. Yousef Mehrdad, who was a father of three young children, was convicted of “insulting Islamic sanctities” and “insulting the Prophet of Islam” (sabbo al-nabi).

Sadrallah Fazli Zar’e, who was a cabinet maker and took care of his older mother, was convicted of multiple charges including “apostasy”, “insulting the Prophet of Islam” (sabbo al-nabi), “insulting Islamic sanctities”, “blasphemy against the mother of the Holy Prophet”, and “desecrating the Quran through burning”.

The men’s convictions and death sentences were issued by Criminal Court One in Arak, Markazi province, in April 2021 following gross fair trial violations. The Supreme Court upheld their convictions and death sentences in August 2021.

On the day of their executions, Mizan News Agency, the media branch of Iran’s judiciary, published a lengthy report announcing that “the death sentences of two Quran-burning blasphemers of religion and Islamic sanctities have been implemented.”¹⁹

According to the report, authorities arrested Yousef Mehrdad on 23 May 2020 and accused him of being the “manager and creator of a very famous online group engaged in anti-Islamic activities” and of being the main operator of “15 anti-religious groups and channels”. The report stated that “documents obtained on devices seized from him and explicit confessions that he made to judicial officials, made it clear that he had engaged in extensive activities promoting atheism and insulting religious and Islamic sanctities”.

The judiciary report further stated that Sadrollah Fazeli Zar’e was arrested around June 2020 after investigations into Yousef Mehrdad made it “clear that he had extensive and close cooperation with another person named Sadrollah Fazeli Zar’e in managing these anti-Islam and blasphemers of religion groups and channels”. The authorities accused Sadrollah Fazeli Zar’e of “managing 20 anti-religious groups and channels” and stated that “the accused, after being confronted with the obvious facts on his mobile phone, admitted that the account [insulting religious sanctities and promoting atheism] belonged to him”.

According to the judiciary’s report, the Supreme Court’s verdict also stated that messages found in the two men’s devices “explicitly insulted the sanctity of the beloved messenger of Islam

¹⁸ For further details, see chapter 5 “Drug related executions”.

¹⁹ Mizan Online News Agency, حکم اعدام ۲ قرآن‌سوز، هتاک به دین و مقدسات اسلامی اجرا شد, [“The death sentence of two Quran burners who insulted Islam and Islamic sanctities was carried out”], 8 May 2023, <https://www.mizanonline.ir/fa/news/4711483/> (in Persian).

[Prophet Mohammad], Hazrat Fatima [the daughter of Mohammad], Imam Ali, Imam Hassan, Imam Hossein, and the all the infallible Imams”.

Their executions took place without prior warning to their lawyers or families, depriving them of a final visit with their loved ones.²⁰ Following their executions, the authorities published a propaganda video²¹ detailing their “crimes” and showing a blurred picture²² of their hangings. According to a report from an Iranian lawyers’ organization, Dadban, based outside Iran, judicial authorities had promised Yousef Mehrdad’s family on 7 May 2023 that his execution had been halted and that a pardon from the Supreme Leader was going to be applied to his case.²³ The next day, his family found out about his execution from media reports.²⁴

In 2023, Iranian authorities executed at least one more individual for acts protected under international law. **Ahmad Nikoui** was executed for “adultery” on 29 April 2023 in Karaj central prison (Nedamatgah-e Karaj), Alborz province, for having consensual sexual relations with a married woman. The fate of the woman is unknown.

Under Iran’s Islamic Penal Code, the punishment for engaging in consensual extra-marital sexual relations is punishable by sanctions ranging from a flogging sentence of between 31 and 100 lashes up to the death penalty, applicable to adults and children including boys over 15 lunar years and girls over 9 lunar years.

It is unclear how many people are under sentence of death and at risk of execution for extra-marital relations in Iran, as authorities refuse to reveal such information.

3.1.2 EXECUTED FOR VAGUELY WORDED AND OVERLY BROAD CHARGES

In 2023, 38 individuals were recorded as having been executed for “enmity against God” (*moharebeh*) and/or “corruption on earth” (*efsad-e fel arz*). Of these, over half were in connection with alleged acts that should never result in the death penalty, including robbery, espionage, possession of arms, drawing weapons, and membership in Kurdish opposition groups. In nine other cases, these vague and broadly worded charges were brought in connection with incidents involving the death of an official, including during nationwide protests.

Of these 38 individuals, five were executed in relation to the 2022 “Woman Life Freedom” uprising.²⁵

On 20 February 2023, the Iranian authorities executed **Hassan Abyat**, from Iran’s oppressed Ahwazi Arab minority, for “corruption on earth” (*efsad-e fel arz*).²⁶ He was sentenced to death in relation to the death of an agent from the paramilitary Basij force in 2011 and alleged membership of an “opposition group”, following a grossly unfair and torture-tainted trial before a Revolutionary Court. Hassan Abyat had denied any involvement in the agent’s death. The authorities executed him in secret in Sepidar prison, Khuzestan province, without prior notice to or final visit with his family.

On 6 May 2023, authorities also executed Swedish-Iranian national and Ahwazi Arab dissident, **Habib Chaab (Asyoud)** for “corruption on earth” (*efsad-e fel arz*).²⁷ He had been abducted from Turkey in

²⁰ BBC Persian, “ایران قضائیه اعلام کرد که دو نفر را به اتهام «سب‌النبی» و «توهین به مقدسات» اعدام کرده است, Iran’s judiciary has declared that it has executed two people under the charges of “insulting the Prophet of Islam” and “insulting Islamic sanctities”, 8 May 2023, <https://www.bbc.com/persian/articles/cv2d0p9x1o> (in Persian).

²¹ Aparat, “Insults which could only be remedied with executions”, 2023, <https://www.aparat.com/v/Hoawq> (in Persian).

²² Figar, [ببینید: کلیپ لحظه اعدام یوسف مهرداد +فیلم و عکسی تار از لحظه اعدام شدن], 9 May 2023, <https://figar.ir/cinema-and-tv/all-news/general-news/151136-yusuf-mehrads-execution-19ord/> (in Persian).

²³ Dadban, X (formerly Twitter) post: “صبح امروز #یوسف_مهرداد در حالی اعدام شد که یک منبع آگاه و معتبر به دادبان گفت: خانواده از اجرای حکم او هیچ اطلاعی نداشتند و یوسف تا دیروز عصر در بند عمومی بوده است. Dadban that his family had no idea about the implementation of his sentence and he was in the general ward till yesterday afternoon”, 8 May 2023, <https://twitter.com/dadban4/status/1655498612661448705> (in Persian).

²⁴ Dadban, X (formerly Twitter) post: “صبح امروز #یوسف_مهرداد در حالی اعدام شد که یک منبع آگاه و معتبر به دادبان گفت: خانواده از اجرای حکم او هیچ اطلاعی نداشتند و یوسف تا دیروز عصر در بند عمومی بوده است (previously cited).

²⁵ See Chapter 4 “Protest-related executions”.

²⁶ Amnesty International, “Iran: Chilling execution spree with escalating use of death penalty against persecuted ethnic minorities”, 2 March 2023, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2023/03/iran-chilling-execution-sprees-with-escalating-use-of-death-penalty-against-persecuted-ethnic-minorities/>

²⁷ Amnesty International, “Iran: Six Ahwazi Arabs at grave risk of execution” (Index: MDE 13/6783/2023), 12 May 2023, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/mde13/6783/2023/en/>

October 2020 and removed to Iran where he was subsequently sentenced to death after a grossly unfair trial before a Revolutionary Court marred by torture allegations. The authorities had accused him of being the leader of a “terrorist” group responsible for “armed operations” in Khuzestan province between 2017 and 2019. The authorities have not revealed his place of execution.

3.2 OPPRESSED ETHNIC MINORITIES DISPROPORTIONATELY IMPACTED BY DEATH PENALTY

Previously documented patterns of executions having a disproportionate impact on the oppressed Baluchi minority intensified in 2023. The authorities executed at least 172 individuals – 166 men and six women – from the Baluchi minority. Baluchi individuals were executed across the country with 59 executions in Sistan and Baluchestan province, 24 in South Khorasan province, 31 in Kerman province, 15 in Hormozgān province, 16 in Khorasan-e Razavi province, eight in Esfahan province, five in Fars province, three in Yazd province, two in Alborz province, two in Golestan province, two in Hamedan province, two in Semnan province, one in Ardabil, one in Mazandaran province, and one in Qom province.

Of these, 138 Baluchi individuals were executed for drug-related offences, 26 for murder, seven for “corruption on earth” (*efsad fel arz*) and/or “enmity against God” (*moharebeh*),²⁸ and one for rape.

The authorities executed at least 82 men from Kurdish-populated provinces²⁹ in 2023 – 18 in Kermanshah province, 18 in Kurdistan province and 46 in West Azerbaijan province. Of these 82 individuals, 47 were executed for murder, 26 for drug-related offences, seven for “corruption on earth” (*efsad fel arz*) and/or “enmity against God” (*moharebeh*),³⁰ one for “armed rebellion against the state” (*baghi*), and one for rape.

Additionally, at least 14 individuals from the Kurdish ethnic minority were executed in other parts of the country in the provinces of Alborz, Fars, Gilan, Ilam, Hormozgān, Markazi, Sistan and Baluchestan, and South Khorasan. Of these, 10 were executed for drug-related offences, two for “corruption on earth” (*efsad fel arz*),³¹ and two for murder.

The authorities executed Kurdish man **Mohayyedin Ebrahimi**, 43, on 16 March 2023 in Urumieh prison, West Azerbaijan province, after a grossly unfair trial.³² According to Kurdish human rights activists, he had been denied access to a lawyer from the time of his arrest and throughout his trial, and convicted and sentenced to death based on torture-tainted “confessions”.

According to Kurdish human rights activists, security forces shot and injured Mohayyedin Ebrahimi at the time of his arrest on 3 November 2017 in Oshnavieh, West Azerbaijan province, while he was working as a cross-border courier (*kulbar*) between the borders of Iran and the Kurdistan region of Iraq. After spending several days in hospital, security forces transferred him to a detention centre belonging to the Intelligence Organization of the Revolutionary Guards in Urumieh, where he was held for months in solitary confinement and interrogated under torture and other ill-treatment, according to Kurdish human rights activists. The authorities accused him of carrying weapons and membership of

²⁸ Islamic Republic News Agency, “حمیدرضا الداغی” صادر شد, [“The indictment of the accused in the case of martyr ‘Hamidreza Aldaghi’ was issued”], <https://www.irna.ir/news/85108456> (in Persian); Haalvash, “میت چندان (دهفانی)» زندانی سیاسی بلوچ پس از تحمل بیش از ۱۲ سال حبس اجرا حکم اعدام شد», [“The implementation of the death sentence of Meysam Chendani (Dehghani), a Baluchi political prisoner, after enduring more than 12 years in prison”], 11 November 2023, <https://tinyurl.com/2jnfkths> (in Persian).

²⁹ The Iranian authorities do not publish disaggregated figures for ethnic minorities in Iran. However, according to unofficial statistics, the population of the Kurdish ethnic minority in Iran is estimated to be between 8 and 12 million, making up a median average of around 10% of the population. Amnesty International was unable to ascertain whether all 82 individuals were Kurdish.

³⁰ Mizan Online News Agency, “عضو تیم خرابکاری مرتبط با رژیم صهیونیستی در استان آذربایجان غربی اعدام شدند», [“Four members of a sabotage team associated with Mossad were executed in West Azarbaijan”], 29 December 2023, <https://www.mizanonline.ir/fa/news/4751817> (in Persian); Kurdpa, “حکم اعدام «میت چندان (دهفانی)» زندانی سیاسی بلوچ پس از تحمل بیش از ۱۲ سال حبس اجرا شد», [“The death sentences of two prisoners were implemented in Urumieh Prison”], 14 February 2023, <https://kurdpa.net/fa/news/2023/02/47> (in Persian); Human Rights Activists News Agency, “محی الدین ابراهیمی، زندانی سیاسی اعدام شد», [“Mohayyedin Ebrahimi, political prisoner, was executed”], 17 March 2023, <https://www.hra-news.org/2023/hranews/a-40300/> (in Persian).

³¹ Kurdistan Human Rights Network, “قاسم آبهسته، زندانی عقیدتی گرد اعدام شد», [“Ghasem Abesteh, Kurdish Sunni prisoner, was executed”], 5 November 2023, <https://kurdistanhumanrights.org/fa/news-fa/executions-fa/2023/11/05/p30418/> (in Persian); Kurdistan Human Rights Network, “ایوب کریمی، زندانی عقیدتی گرد اعدام شد», [“Ayoub Karimi, Kurdish Sunni prisoner, was executed”], 29 November 2023, <https://kurdistanhumanrights.org/fa/news-fa/executions-fa/2023/11/29/p30954/> (in Persian).

³² Kurdistan Human Rights Network, “گزارشی درباره بازداشت، اتهامات، روند دادرسی و اجرای حکم اعدام محی الدین ابراهیمی، زندانی سیاسی گرد، زندانی عقیدتی گرد اعدام شد», [“A report on the arrest, charges, prosecution and execution of Kurdish political prisoner, Mohayyedin Ebrahimi”], 17 March 2023, <https://kurdistanhumanrights.org/fa/news-fa/executions-fa/2023/03/17/p20593/> (in Persian).

Kurdish opposition groups, which he repeatedly denied. In August 2018, Branch Two of the Revolutionary Court in Urumieh sentenced him to death for “armed rebellion against the state” (*baghi*). Iran’s Supreme Court subsequently overturned the verdict, citing “flawed investigations” and sent his case back to Branch Two of the Revolutionary Court for retrial. The court sentenced him to death for a second time and, this time, the Supreme Court upheld his death sentence and rejected his request for a judicial review.

Ahwazi Arab,³³ Baluchi³⁴ and Kurdish³⁵ minorities were disproportionately impacted by the authorities’ cruel practice of executing individuals in secret and without prior notice to their families. Authorities also sometimes buried victims in secret and refused to return their bodies to their families.

In 2024, the authorities have continued to execute Kurdish prisoners in secret. On 29 January 2024, they arbitrarily executed Kurdish dissidents³⁶ **Pejman Fatehi**, **Vafa Azarbar**, **Mohammad (Hazhir) Faramarzi** and **Mohsen Mazloum** after a grossly unfair trial. The authorities had subjected the four men to enforced disappearance since their arrests on 20 July 2022, and harassed and intimidated their families.



Picture of four Kurdish dissidents executed on 29 January 2024 ©Private

In a public statement on 2 February 2024,³⁷ Pejman Fatehi’s wife, Bayan Azimi, said the authorities had denied the men access to lawyers and refused to return their bodies to their families, denying them the right to bury their loved ones in accordance with their traditions. Bayan Azimi highlighted the injustices suffered by the four men:

“The Islamic Republic ... extracted forced ‘confessions’ from these four beloved ones, denied them the right to a lawyer, they denied their families access to their casefiles. The Islamic Republic executed them and refused to give their bodies to their families. The authorities did not give them a trial. A judge called them for one minute, asked them to give their names, and then told them ‘Go away. We have issued your death sentence. Now, you have to wait for your deaths’... How should I tell my son that his father has been executed? What the Islamic

³³ See the case of Habib Chaab (Asyoud) in section 3.1 “Executions for acts that should never result in the death penalty”.

³⁴ For examples of such cases involving Baluchi prisoners, see section 5.1 “Baluchi minority disproportionately impacted”.

³⁵ For examples of such cases involving Kurdish prisoners, see page 13.

³⁶ Amnesty International, “Forcibly disappeared Kurdish men risk secret execution” (Index: MDE 13/7600/2024), 18 January 2024, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/mde13/7600/2024/en>

³⁷ Hengaw Organization for Human Rights, X (formerly Twitter) post: بیان عظیمی همسر پژمان فاتحی از سازمان‌های حقوق بشری و دولت آلمان می‌خواهد به جمهوری اسلامی فشار بیاورند تا که پیکرهای بی‌جان پژمان فاتحی، محمد هژیر فرامرزی، محسن مظلوم، وفا آذر بار را تحویل بدهند تا آنها در کردستان دفن شوند [“Bayan Azimi, Pejman Fatehi’s wife, demands that human rights organization and the German government pressure the Islamic Republic so that their bodies are returned and they can be buried in Kurdistan”], <https://twitter.com/HengawO/status/1753366265161203956> (in Persian).

Republic is doing is a crime. It is a violation of human rights. Now that my husband and these three other beloved ones have been executed, we must become the voices of other people to stop the Islamic Republic from executing them.”³⁸

In refusing to disclose the whereabouts of the remains of Pejman Fatehi, Vafa Azarbar, Mohammad (Hazhir) Faramarzi and Mohsen Mazloun, the Iranian authorities are committing enforced disappearance, a crime under international law.

At least three other Sunni Kurdish men – **Anwar Khezri, Kamran Sheikheh and Khosrow Basharat** – are at grave risk of execution in Ghezel Hesar prison, Alborz province, with their decade-long pleas for a fair retrial, excluding torture-tainted “confessions”, repeatedly ignored.³⁹ They were sentenced to death around June 2018 by a Revolutionary Court in Tehran for “corruption on earth” (*efsad-e fel arz*) after a grossly unfair trial that lasted just five minutes. In open letters written from inside prison, the men have detailed how they were repeatedly tortured to “confess”.

Between November 2023 and January 2024, four other men who were sentenced to death in the same case – **Ghasem Abesteh, Ayoub Karimi, Davoud Abdollahi and Farhad Salimi** – were executed, raising fears that the executions of the remaining three men are imminent.



Picture of seven Sunni Kurdish men from the same case. The four men whose pictures appear in the top row were executed, while the three men in the bottom row are at risk of execution. ©Private

3.3. SYSTEMIC FAIR TRIAL RIGHTS VIOLATIONS

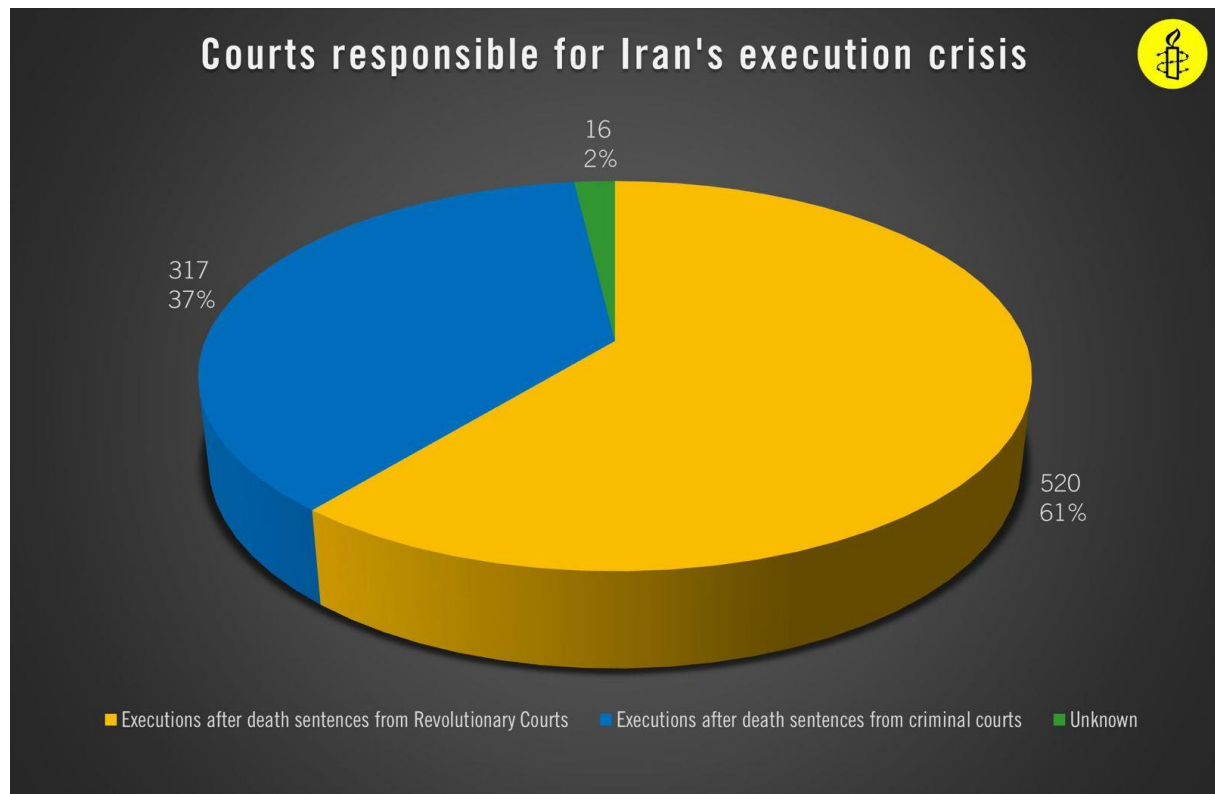
Amnesty International has repeatedly documented how Iran’s judiciary, closely aligned with intelligence and security forces, has consistently played a key role in suppressing dissent and condemning protesters, human rights defenders and other dissidents to harsh prison sentences or the death penalty on spurious charges.⁴⁰ The judiciary systematically violates the rights of those caught up in the criminal justice system and has been instrumental in violating the right to life of tens of thousands of individuals over the lifespan of the Islamic Republic.

³⁸ Deutsche Welle, “همسر پژمان فاتحی: حتی نگذاشتند پژمان عکس فرزندش را ببیند”, 2 February 2024, <https://www.dw.com/fa-ir/video-68160537>

³⁹ Amnesty International, “Iran: Executions of protester with mental disability and Kurdish man mark plunge into new realms of cruelty”, 24 January 2024, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2024/01/iran-executions-of-protester-with-mental-disability-and-kurdish-man-mark-plunge-into-new-realms-of-cruelty/>

⁴⁰ See: Amnesty International, Trampling Humanity: mass arrests, disappearances and torture since Iran’s 2019 November protests (Index: MDE 13/2891/2020), 2 September 2020, www.amnesty.org/en/documents/mde13/2891/2020/en/; Amnesty International, Caught in a web of repression: Iran’s human rights defenders under attack (Index: MDE 13/6446/2017), 2 August 2017, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/mde13/6446/2017/en/>

Of the 853 executions recorded in 2023, at least 520 (61%) followed verdicts by Revolutionary Courts, and at least 317 (37%) followed verdicts by criminal courts. In 16 cases, the specific courts issuing the death sentences were unknown.



Revolutionary Courts exercise jurisdiction over a range of acts considered by the authorities as “anti-Revolutionary offences” that threaten national security or undermine Islamic values. These include all drug-related offences, “enmity against God” (*moharebeh*), “corruption on earth” (*efsad-e fel-arz*) and “armed rebellion against the state” (*baghi*).

Amnesty International’s research has consistently shown that Revolutionary Courts lack independence and operate under the influence of security and intelligence forces. Judges presiding over Revolutionary Courts are hostile and biased against defendants, and have shown a lack of impartiality by openly supporting the accusations of the intelligence and security officials. Vetting processes for the appointment of judges to Revolutionary Court lead to the exclusion of any individuals whose political and religious beliefs are not aligned with the State ideology.

Amnesty International’s documentation of hundreds of cases in Revolutionary Courts since the establishment of the Islamic Republic in 1979⁴¹ has found systematic violations of fair trial rights, including to a fair and public hearing by an independent and impartial tribunal, to adequate time and facilities for the preparation of defence and to communicate with counsel of own choosing, to presumption of innocence, to not self-incriminate, to equality of arms, and to a meaningful review by a higher tribunal.

Individuals are systematically denied access to legal representation throughout the investigation stage, with some even denied access to a lawyer during trial.

⁴¹ Amnesty International, Law and human rights in the Islamic Republic of Iran (Index: MDE 13/003/1980), 1 February 1980, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/mde13/003/1980/en/>; Amnesty International, “Iran: Briefing paper” (Index: MDE 13/008/1987), 30 April 1987, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/mde13/008/1987/en/>; Amnesty International, *Iran: From protest to prison: Iran one year after the election* (Index: MDE 13/062/2010), 9 June 2010, <https://www.amnesty.org/fr/documents/mde13/062/2010/en/>; Amnesty International, *Iran: Addicted to death: Executions for drugs offences in Iran* (Index: MDE 13/090/2011), 15 December 2011 <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/mde13/090/2011/en/>; Amnesty International, *Iran: Broadcasting injustice, boasting of mass killing: A case study of August 2016 execution of 25 Sunni men in Iran* (Index: MDE 13/5079/2016), 17 November 2016, <https://www.amnesty.org/ar/documents/mde13/5079/2016/en/>.

Prolonged incommunicado detention is prevalent, sometimes in informal and secret detention centres run by intelligence and security forces which lack judicial oversight.

Forced “confessions” obtained under torture and other ill-treatment, when detainees had no access to legal representation, are unlawfully used as admissible evidence to issue convictions even when retracted in court, while judges systematically ignore allegations of coercion, torture and other ill-treatment and refuse to order investigations. Sometimes, forced “confessions” are broadcast in propaganda videos on state television before trials have even begun to demonize individuals in the public eye and justify harsh prison and death sentences.

In some cases, trials are expedited and verdicts are issued within weeks of arrest; in other cases, detainees are held in pre-trial detention for months or years while they are denied access to legal representation. Trials are generally summary and extremely brief, sometimes lasting only a few minutes, and take place behind closed doors.

Courts often deny lawyers access to case information prior to trials or only provide access within a few days or hours of the start of the trial, effectively removing the ability of lawyers to provide an adequate defence.

During trials, Revolutionary Court judges routinely refuse to call defence witnesses or allow defence lawyers to cross examine prosecution ones, prohibit defendants from speaking, and ignore exculpatory evidence.

Defendants and their lawyers are not provided with copies of court verdicts, and lawyers are only permitted to read and make notes of judgements in judicial offices.

The Supreme Court routinely rubberstamps Revolutionary Court verdicts without carrying out meaningful reviews.

Amnesty International’s concerns about unfair trials in Iran, including in relation to the role of Revolutionary Courts in the arbitrary deprivation of life and liberty, have been repeatedly echoed by the UN Special Rapporteur on the human rights situation in Iran. In 2017, the former Special Rapporteur on Iran, Asma Jahangir, stated:

“The lack of independence of the judicial system, in particular the revolutionary courts, is alarming... Revolutionary courts are viewed not as a forum for granting justice, but as an extension of the coercive executive branch of the Government that operates to control all criticism or independent actions for securing rights.⁴² Revolutionary courts continue to issue the vast majority of death sentences. Violations of the rights to fair trial and due process are systematic before these courts. Legal representation is denied during the investigation phase, lawyers are often refused access to information, many trials reportedly last only a few minutes, and no evidence other than confessions extracted through torture is considered for the imposition of a death sentence.⁴³

The current Special Rapporteur on Iran Javād Rehmān and other Special Procedures of the UN Human Rights Council, have repeatedly expressed concerns about executions after unfair trials in Iran.

Most recently, in a May 2023 statement, multiple Special Procedures condemned the arbitrary executions of several dissidents after unfair trials by Revolutionary Courts and warned:

“[E]xecutions following flawed trials were tantamount to arbitrary deprivation of life under international law... Trials of some of these persons were marred by violations of due process guarantees in proceedings that fell short of international fair trial standards... Any death sentence undertaken in contravention of a government’s international obligations is unlawful and tantamount to an arbitrary execution.”⁴⁴

⁴² The UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Islamic Republic of Iran, *Report*, 14 August 2017, UN Doc. A/72/322, para.110.

⁴³ The UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Islamic Republic of Iran, *Report*, 14 August 2017, (previously cited), para.60.

⁴⁴ The UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Islamic Republic of Iran, the UN Special Rapporteur on the independence of judges and lawyers, and the UN Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions, “UN experts urge Iran to stop ‘horrific wave’ of executions”, 19 May 2023, <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2023/05/un-experts-urge-iran-stop-horrific-wave-executions>; The UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Islamic Republic of Iran, the Working Group on Arbitrary Detention, the Working Group on Enforced

4. PROTEST-RELATED EXECUTIONS

Since the nationwide protests of December 2017-January 2018, the Iranian authorities have increasingly used the death penalty to sow fear among the public, stifle dissent and deter further protests. This pattern intensified following the nationwide protests of November 2019 and surged in the aftermath of the “Woman Life Freedom” uprising of September-December 2022.

Since January 2018, the authorities have executed at least 13 people in relation to protests:

- One in 2018. **Mohammad Salas**⁴⁵ was executed in Alborz province in relation to the February 2018 Gonabadi Dervish protests;
- Two in 2020. **Mostafa Salehi**⁴⁶ was executed in Esfahan province in relation to the December 2017-January 2018 protests, while **Navid Afkari**⁴⁷ was executed in Fars province in relation to the July-August 2018 protests;
- Two in 2022 who were both executed in relation to the 2022 uprising. **Majidreza Rahnavard**⁴⁸ was executed in public in Khorasan Razavi province. State media published a photograph of his execution.⁴⁹ **Mohsen Shekari**⁵⁰ was executed in Tehran province;
- Seven in 2023. **Mohammad Mehdi Karami** and **Seyed Mohammad Hosseini** were executed in Tehran province, **Majid Kazemi**, **Saleh Mirhashemi** and **Saeed Yaghoubi**⁵¹ were executed in Esfahan province, and **Milad Zohrevand**⁵² was executed in Hamedan province, all in relation to the 2022 uprising. **Kamran Rezaei**⁵³ was executed in Fars province in relation to the November 2019 protests; and
- One in 2024. **Mohammad Ghobadlou**⁵⁴ was executed in Tehran province in relation to the 2022 uprising.

Seven were executed for the vague and broadly worded charges of “enmity against God” (*moharebeh*) or “corruption on earth” (*efsad-e fel arz*) and six for “murder” in relation to the deaths of members of the security forces during protests.

All victims were convicted and sentenced to death after grossly unfair trials marred by serious torture allegations that were not investigated.

and Involuntary Disappearances, and other UN Special Procedures, / “Iran: UN experts condemn recent executions, urge moratorium on death penalty”, 9 May 2023, <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2023/05/iran-un-experts-condemn-recent-executions-urge-moratorium-death-penalty>

⁴⁵ Amnesty International, “Iran: Sufi bus driver executed at dawn after grossly unfair trial”, 18 June 2018,

<https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2018/06/iran-sufi-bus-driver-executed/>

⁴⁶ Tasnim News Agency, “حکم قصاص قاتل پاسدار شهید سجاد شامسنایی اجرا شد” [“The Qesas sentence of the murderer of martyr Sajjad Shah, IRGC soldier, was implemented”], 5 August 2020, <https://www.tasnimnews.com/fa/news/1399/05/15/2321425> (in Persian).

⁴⁷ Amnesty International, “Iran: Secret execution of wrestler Navid Afkari a travesty of justice”, 12 September 2020,

<https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/press-release/2020/09/iran-secret-execution-of-wrestler-navid-afkari-a-travesty-of-justice/>;

Amnesty International, “Iran: Wrestling champion Navid Afkari feared at risk of execution”, 11 September 2020, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/press-release/2020/09/iran-wrestling-champion-navid-afkari-feared-at-risk-of-imminent-secret-execution/>

⁴⁸ Amnesty International, “Iran: Public execution of Majidreza Rahnavard exposes authorities’ revenge killings”, 12 December 2022,

<https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2022/12/iran-public-execution-of-majidreza-rahnavard-exposes-authorities-revenge-killings/>

⁴⁹ See (*graphic content warning*): Mashregh News, “اولین تصویر از اعدام مجید رضا رهنورد” [“The first photo of the execution of Majidreza Rahnavard”], 12 December 2023, <https://www.mashreghnews.ir/photo/1445135/> (in Persian).

⁵⁰ Amnesty International, “Iran: Horrifying execution of young protester exposes authorities’ cruelty and risk of further bloodshed”, 8 December 2022,

<https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2022/12/iran-horrifying-execution-of-young-protester-exposes-authorities-cruelty-and-risk-of-further-bloodshed>

⁵¹ Amnesty International, Iran: “They violently raped me”: Sexual violence weaponized to crush Iran’s ‘Woman life freedom’ uprising (Index: MDE

13/7480/2023), 6 December 2023, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/mde13/7480/2023/en/>

⁵² Amnesty International, “Iran: Young man at grave risk of execution in connection with protests amid ‘killing spree’”, 11 January 2023,

<https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2023/01/iran-young-man-at-grave-risk-of-execution-in-connection-with-protests-amid-killing-sprees/>; AmnestyIran,

X post: “Amnesty International is horrified by reports of the chilling execution of Milad Zohrevand on 23 November in Hamedan Central prison and calls

on the international community to urge Iranian authorities to immediately establish an official moratorium on executions,” 24 November 2023,

<https://x.com/AmnestyIran/status/1728096676261277927?s=20>

⁵³ Iran Human Rights, “ایران: هشدار سازمان حقوق بشر ایران؛ در شیراز؛ ۹۸ اعدام کامران رضایی، از معترضان آبان ۹۸” [“Iran Human Rights’ warning: Kamran Rezaei, a 2019 protester, was executed”], 30 November 2023, <https://iranhr.net/fa/articles/6371/> (in Persian).

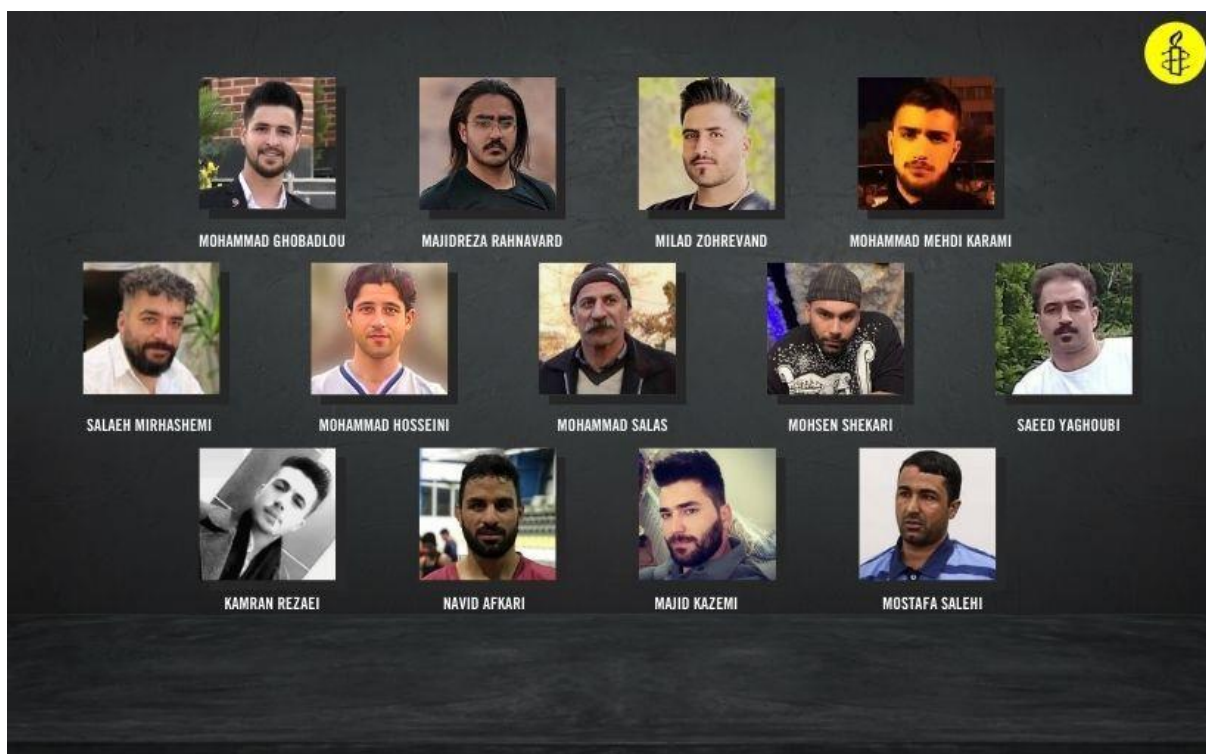
Pictures of 13 individuals executed in relation to protests since January 2018. ©Private

[realms-of-cruelty/](#)

“DON’T LET THEM KILL US”

IRAN’S RELENTLESS EXECUTION CRISIS SINCE THE 2022 UPRISING

Amnesty International



4.1 EXECUTIONS IN CONNECTION WITH THE “WOMAN LIFE FREEDOM” UPRISING

Since the “Woman Life Freedom” uprising of September-December 2022, the authorities have executed nine people in connection with the protests. The authorities executed two people in December 2022 while protests were still ongoing, and six other protesters in 2023.

Of the six executions that took place in 2023, five protesters were executed for the vague and broadly worded charges of “enmity against God” (*moharebeh*) or “corruption on earth” (*efsad-e fel arz*).

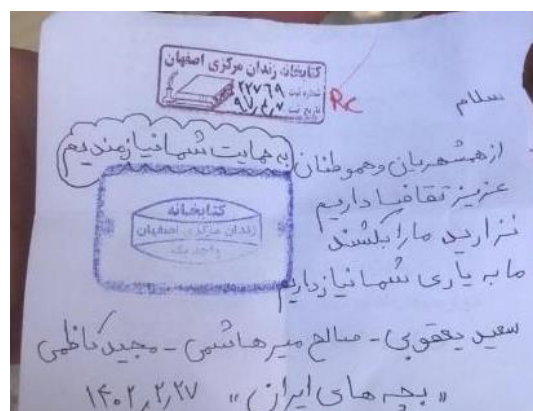
Mohammad Mehdi Karami and **Seyed Mohammad Hosseini** were executed in January 2023 in connection with the death of one Basiji agent, while **Majid Kazemi**, **Saeed Yaghoubi** and **Saleh Mirhashemi**, were executed in May 2023 in connection to the deaths of three members of the security forces, although they were never charged with “murder”.

On 17 May 2023, just two days before Majid Kazemi, Saeed Yaghoubi and Saleh Mirhashemi were executed on 19 May 2023, they smuggled a note out of prison, pleading for help, which said:

“We have a request for our dear fellow country [men and women], don’t let them kill us. We need your support.”⁵⁵

The executions of these five protesters took place amid concerns that the use of vague charges instead of “murder” charges reflected a lack of evidence for the authorities’ allegations and an intent to secure convictions through the Revolutionary Courts.⁵⁶

Revolutionary Courts have jurisdiction over the charges of enmity against God” (*moharebeh*) and “corruption on earth” (*efsad-e fel arz*), while criminal courts have jurisdiction over “murder” charges. The referral of protesters to Revolutionary Courts rather than Criminal Courts has facilitated further



Picture of the note that Majid Kazemi, Saeed Yaghoubi and Saleh Mirhashemi smuggled out of prison ©Private

⁵⁵ Mohammad Hashemi, X post: جان بچه‌های ایران در خطر است. [“The lives of the children of Iran are in danger”], 17 May 2023, <https://x.com/FreeMajidKazemi/status/1658784900458364931?s=20>

⁵⁶ See Chapter 3.3, “Systemic Fair Trial Rights Violations”.

erosion of defendants' fair trial rights. Amnesty International has repeatedly documented concerns over the lack of impartiality and independence of Revolutionary Courts, as well as systematic flagrant fair trial violations throughout proceedings by such courts.⁵⁷

The sixth protest-related execution in 2023 was for "murder" in relation to the death of a security official.⁵⁸ Authorities executed **Milad Zohrevand** in November 2023 without any prior notice to his family.⁵⁹

In 2024, the Iranian authorities have continued to execute individuals in relation to the uprising. **Mohammad Ghobadlou**, a youth with a mental disability, was executed in January 2024 while his lawyer and relatives were awaiting a retrial and were unaware that top judicial authorities bypassed legal processes and issued his final death sentence in secret.⁶⁰

4.2 INDIVIDUALS AT RISK OF PROTEST-RELATED EXECUTIONS

At least six individuals are under sentence of death and at risk of execution in relation to the "Woman Life Freedom" uprising. They include **Manouchehr Mehman Navaz**,⁶¹ **Reza (Gholamreza) Rasaei**,⁶² **Mojahed (Abbas) Kourkouri**,⁶³ **Mehran Bahramian**, and **Fazel Bahramian**, and **Mamousta Khazrnejad**. All were convicted and sentenced to death following grossly unfair torture-tainted trials.

Mehran Bahramian and **Fazel Bahramian** were sentenced to death in January 2024 by a Revolutionary Court in Semirom, Esfahan province, after a grossly unfair trial. The men were arrested in December 2022 after taking part in the 40th day memorial ceremony for Fazel Bahramian's brother who was killed by security forces during the "Woman Life Freedom" uprising in Semirom on 16 November 2022. According to human rights activists, security forces arrested the men in a violent manner from their homes, transferred them to a detention centre belonging to the Revolutionary Guards, and subjected them to enforced disappearance for three months by denying their family any knowledge of their fate and whereabouts.⁶⁴ According to media reports, they were subjected to torture and other ill-treatment to compel them to give forced "confessions", leading to broken limbs and eardrum rupture in the case of Mehran Bahramian, and head injuries in the case of Fazel Bahramian.⁶⁵ The Revolutionary Court convicted them of "enmity against God" (*moharebeh*) in connection with the death of a member of the security forces during protests in Semirom in December 2022 that were violently quashed by security forces during the "Woman Life Freedom" uprising.⁶⁶

Kurdish Sunni cleric, **Mamousta Khazrnejad**, was convicted of "corruption on earth" (*efsad-e fel arz*) and sentenced to death by a Revolutionary Court in Urumieh, West Azerbaijan province, following a grossly unfair trial that ended in December 2023, according to Kurdish human rights activists.⁶⁷ He was arrested by security forces at his home in Bukan, West Azerbaijan province, on 19 November 2022, after giving a speech at a memorial service for a bystander who was killed during the "Woman Life Freedom" uprising three days earlier, and after he had published statements in support of the nationwide protests on his Telegram channel. According to Kurdish human rights activists, in

⁵⁷ See Chapter 3.3, "Systemic Fair Trial Rights Violations". See also: Amnesty International, *Trampling Humanity: mass arrests, disappearances and torture since Iran's 2019 November protests* (Index: MDE 13/2891/2020), 2 September 2020, www.amnesty.org/en/documents/mde13/2891/2020/en; Amnesty International, *Caught in a web of repression: Iran's human rights defenders under attack* (Index: MDE 13/6446/2017), 2 August 2017, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/mde13/6446/2017/en/>

⁵⁸ Mashregh News, فیلم + ماجرای شایعه بتن‌ریزی روی قبر قاتل شهید نظری + فیلم, 27 November 2023, <https://www.mashreghnews.ir/news/1550609> (in Persian).

⁵⁹ Amnesty International, X post: "Amnesty International is horrified by reports of the chilling execution of Milad Zohrevand on 23 November in Hamedan Central prison", 24 November 2023, <https://twitter.com/AmnestyIran/status/1728096676261277927>

⁶⁰ Amnesty International, "Iran: Execution of protester with mental disability and Kurdish man mark plunge into new realms of cruelty" (previously cited) December 2022, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/mde13/6308/2022/en/>

⁶¹ Amnesty International, "Tortured Iranian Kurdish man sentenced to death: Reza Rasaei" (Index Number: MDE 13/7381/20), 6 November 2023, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/mde13/7381/2023/en/>

⁶² Amnesty International, "Man facing imminent protest-related execution: Mojahed Kourkouri" (Index Number: MDE 13/7565/2024), 5 January 2024, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/mde13/7565/2024/en/>

⁶³ Dadban, X (formerly Twitter) post: "مهران و فاضل بهرامیان، از بازداشت‌شدگان خیزش سراسری، در شهر سمیرم به اعدام محکوم شدند", 26 January 2024, <https://twitter.com/dadban4/status/1750927611214118963> (in Persian); Iran International X (formerly Twitter), 27 January 2024, <https://x.com/IranIntl/status/1751196831789330538?s=20>

⁶⁴ Dadban, X (formerly Twitter) post: "مهران و فاضل بهرامیان، از بازداشت‌شدگان خیزش سراسری، در شهر سمیرم به اعدام محکوم شدند" (previously cited).

⁶⁵ Dadban, X (formerly Twitter) post: "مهران و فاضل بهرامیان، از بازداشت‌شدگان خیزش سراسری، در شهر سمیرم به اعدام محکوم شدند" (previously cited).

⁶⁷ Kurdistan Human Rights Network, "ارومیه: ماموستا محمد خضرنژاد، روحانی گرد اهل سنت به اتهام «افساد فی الارض» به اعدام محکوم شد", 10 February 2024, <https://kurdistanhumanrights.org/fa/news-fa/prison-sentences-fa/2024/02/10/p32506/> (in Persian).

sentencing him to death, the court relied on his forced “confessions” that he made under torture and other ill-treatment when he was held in a Ministry of Intelligence detention centre. He was denied access to a lawyer.

At least two others – **Saeed Shirazi** and **Abolfazl Mehri Hossein Hajilou** – have undergone trial on charges that carry the death penalty.

At least a dozen others are also being investigated for capital crimes in relation to the “Woman Life Freedom” uprising.

At least one protester - **Abbas Deris** – is at risk of execution for “enmity against God” (*moharebeh*) in connection with the November 2019 protests.⁶⁸

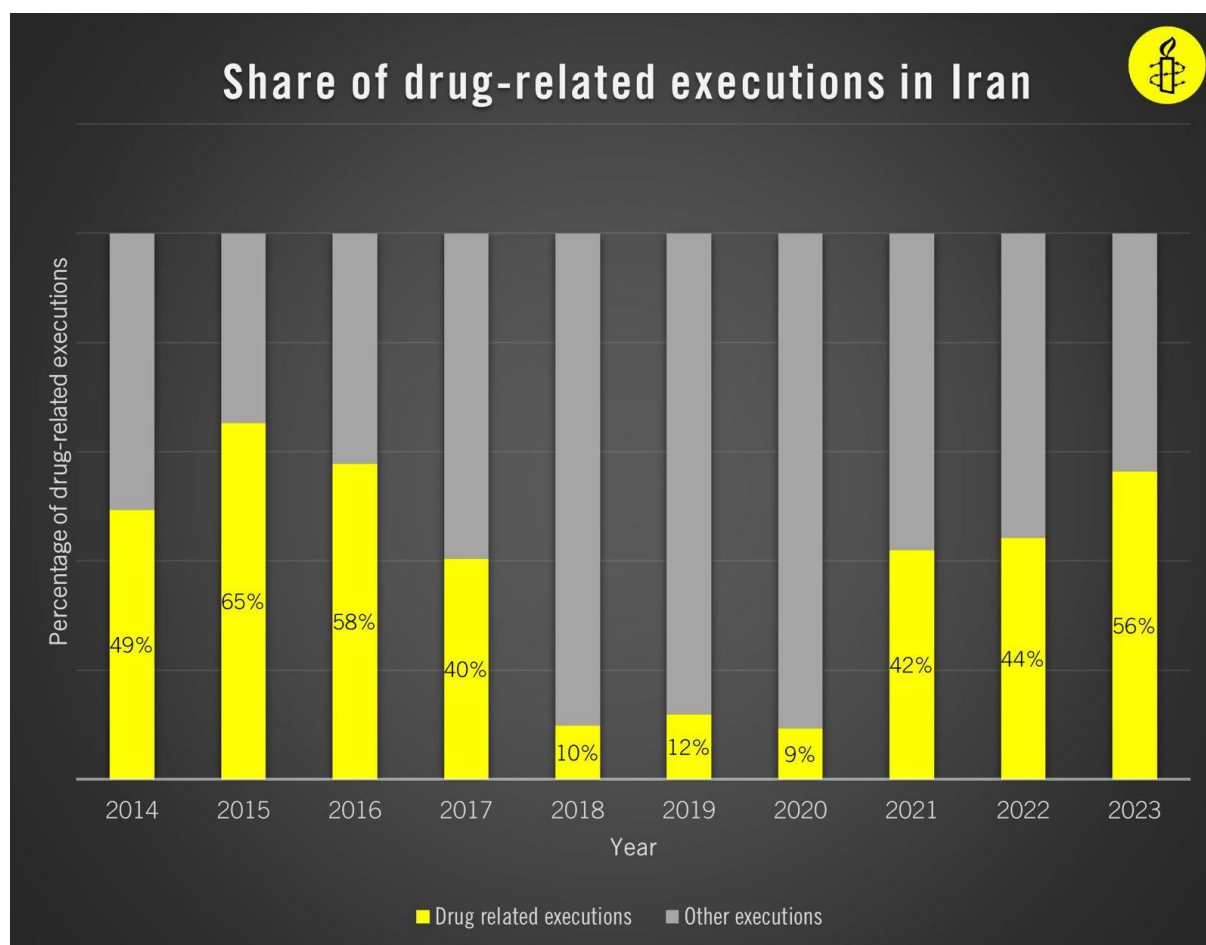
⁶⁸ Amnesty International, “Iran: Tortured protester at grave risk of execution: Abbas Deris” (Index: MDE 13/7665/2024), 2 February 2024, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/mde13/7665/2024/en>

5. DRUG-RELATED EXECUTIONS

In 2023, at least 481 drug-related executions took place in 25 provinces across Iran.

Several prisons across the country became sites of mass killings in 2023, including in the provinces of Alborz with 86 drug-related executions, Kerman with 52, South Khorasan with 39, Sistan and Baluchestan with 36, Fars with 35, Hormozgan with 28, Lorestan with 30, Esfahan with 30, Markazi with 26, West Azerbaijan with 23, Khorasan-e Razavi with 20, Hamedan with 18, and Ardabil with 11. Drug-related executions were also carried out in Qom (7), Zanjan (6), Qazvin (6), Gilan (5), Khuzestan (4), Yazd (4), East Azerbaijan (4), Golestan (3), Kermanshah (3), Semnan (2), Kohgiluyeh and Boyer-Ahmad (1), Mazandaran (1), and North Khorasan (1).

The 481 drug-related executions constitute 56% of the total executions (853) recorded in 2023. This marks an 89% increase from 2022 (255) and 264% from 2021 (132).



Of the 481 individuals executed in relation to drug-related offences, 467 were men and six women, while the gender of the remaining eight is unknown.

The ages of those executed in relation to drug-related offences known to Amnesty International ranged from 22 years old to 72 years old. The youngest individuals executed were all Baluchi men, arrested when aged 19 or 20 including **Hadi Shahuzehi**⁶⁹; **Mansour Yosefzahi**⁷⁰; **Naser Azbagzahi**

⁶⁹ Haalvash, "اجرای حکم اعدام دستکم یک زندانی بلوچ در زندان کرمان" ["The implementation of a death sentence for a Baluchi prisoner in Kerman Prison"], 10 July 2023, <https://haalvsh.org/2023/07/10/13749/> (in Persian).

⁷⁰ Human Rights Activists News Agency, "گزارشی از اعدام چهار زندانی در زندانهای کشور" ["Reports of four executions in the country's prisons"], 1 February 2023, <https://www.hra-news.org/2023/hranews/a-39481/> (in Persian); Haalvash, "صدور حکم اعدام برای یک زندانی بلوچ در زندان بندر عباس" ["A death sentence was issued for a Baluchi prisoner in Bandar Abbas"], 16 June 2022, <http://tinyurl.com/32ejxthf> (in Persian).

(Rakhshani)⁷¹; Saeed Sanjarani⁷²; and Abdolbasir Pajam (Tutazei)⁷³. They were aged between 22 and 29 when executed. The oldest person executed was a 72-year-old Baluchi man.⁷⁴



Five prisoners from the oppressed Baluchi ethnic minority executed ©Private

The Islamic Republic's use of the death penalty for drug-related offences contributes to a cycle of poverty and systemic injustice, disproportionately impacts the human rights of poor and marginalized communities, deepens existing structural inequalities, and further entrenches discrimination. Those arrested and prosecuted for drug-related offences are often unaware of their rights and cannot afford independent legal representation. Their families frequently struggle with the dire economic consequences of losing breadwinners.

5.1 BALUCHI MINORITY DISPROPORTIONATELY IMPACTED

In 2023 as in previous years, Iran's lethal anti-narcotics policies disproportionately impacted the most marginalised and impoverished communities, especially men and women from the oppressed Baluchi ethnic minority.

Despite making up about 5% of Iran's population, the Baluchi minority accounted for 29% of drug-related executions, with 138 Baluchi people – 135 men and three women – executed in 2023. This continues the discriminatory trends documented in 2022 when 107 Baluchis were executed for drug-related offences, constituting 42% of all drug-related executions that year (255) and in 2021 when 45 Baluchis were executed for drug-related offences, constituting 34% of all drug-related executions that year (132).

The Baluchi minority, residing predominantly in Sistan and Baluchestan, one of Iran's poorest provinces, face significant underdevelopment due to the central government's persistent underinvestment. The authorities have consistently neglected the root causes of involvement in drug offences, such as economic deprivation and systemic marginalization.

⁷¹ Haalvash, "اجرا حکم اعدام دستکم دو زندانی بلوچ در زندان مرکزی زاهدان" ["The implementation of two death sentences for two Baluchi prisoners in Zahedan Prison"], 30 November 2023, <http://tinyurl.com/mrmxh74b> (in Persian).

⁷² Haalvash, "اجرای حکم اعدام دستکم یک زندانی بلوچ در زندان بیرجند" ["The implementation of a death sentence for a Baluchi prisoner in Birjand Prison"], 10 September 2023, <http://tinyurl.com/mwm5z3d8> (in Persian).

⁷³ Haalvash, "انتقال یک زندانی بلوچ دیگر به سلول انفرادی زندان یزد جهت اجرای حکم اعدام" ["Another Baluchi prisoner was moved to solitary confinement for the implementation of his death sentence"], 3 May 2023, <https://haalvsh.org/2023/05/03/12895/> (in Persian).

⁷⁴ See Chapter 5.1, "Baluchi Minority Disproportionately Impacted".

Throughout 2023, the Iranian authorities cruelly executed members of the Baluchi minority for drug-related offences in secret without prior notice to families and lawyers, showing disregard for life and denying relatives final visits. Families usually learn of the executions when called by prison authorities to collect the bodies of their loved ones.

According to Baluchi human rights activists, in the course of three days on 30 July, 31 July and 1 August 2023, the authorities secretly executed at least 11 Baluchi men for drug-related offences, including **Bidollah Gorgij**, and **Hossein Gamshadzei**, without prior notification to their families or final visits.⁷⁵ During his trial before a Revolutionary Court in Zabol, Sistan and Baluchestan province, Hossein Gamshadzei had denied the charges and stated that the drugs found on his farm did not belong to him. Additionally, on 10 August 2023, the authorities secretly executed **Ahmad Narouie**, a father of two, and **Hamid Barahouie (Barichi)**, a father of five, in Vakil Abad prison, Razavi Khorasan province⁷⁶, and on 8 October 2023, **Emambakhsh Gorgij** in Torbat Heidarieh prison, Razavi Khorasan province.⁷⁷ All were sentenced to death by Revolutionary Courts and denied their last rights.

HOSSEIN ALI DIL BALUCH



Hossein Ali Dil Baluch ©Private

On 19 October 2023, Hossein Ali Dil Baluch, 27, was secretly executed in the central prison of Birjand city, South Khorasan province. According to Baluchi human rights activists, a Revolutionary Court in Birjand had issued a mandatory death sentence against him but advised for his case to be referred to the Commission on Pardons and Commutations to be commuted to life imprisonment.⁷⁸

Under Iran's criminal laws and procedures, courts are mandated to impose the death penalty for certain drug-related offences without the possibility of considering mitigating circumstances. The decision to commute death sentences rests with the Commission on Pardons and Commutations, which can act only after mandatory death sentences are issued. In cases where courts signal their support for potential commutation, the follow-up procedures remain unclear, leaving prisoners unsure if they must apply for commutation or if their case is automatically referred to the Commission on Pardons and Commutations based on the court's advice.

According to informed sources, at 3:30am on 19 October 2023, the prison authorities attempted to remove Hossein Ali Dil Baluch from the public section of the prison and take him away for execution without prior notice to him, his family or his lawyer. When he realized that the authorities were taking him away for execution, he refused to leave the public section of the prison, pleading with the guard that the Revolutionary Court had supported the commutation of his death sentence. Nevertheless, several prison officials forcibly transferred Hossein Ali Dil Baluch to the gallows where he was executed at dawn.

The case of Hossein Ali Dil Baluch is a painful example of how prisoners, hopeful for a commutation of their death sentence, lack any insight into the status of their cases, including whether their cases have been formally referred to the Commission on Pardons and Commutations or if a final decision has been made.

Hossein Ali Dil Baluch's family only discovered that he had been executed when they were contacted by the prison authorities later the same day to collect his body from the morgue. Since

⁷⁵ Haalvash, "12 other prisoners were executed in the past 48 hours: 11 Baluchi citizens and one Afghan were executed in Iran's prisons despite legal ambiguities", 1 August 2023, <http://tinyurl.com/4bezWSC4> (in Persian).

⁷⁶ Haalvash, "A video of Ahmad Narouie who was executed this morning in Vakil Abad Prison", 10 August 2023, <http://tinyurl.com/4h77a9mc> (in Persian).

⁷⁷ Haalvash, "A picture of a prisoner who was executed in Torbat Heidarieh prison", 10 August 2023, <http://tinyurl.com/4xkpb4xt> (in Persian).

⁷⁸ Haalvash, "The execution of a Baluchi prisoner was carried out in Birjand prison without notice to the family and despite a degree of clemency", 27 October 2023, <https://tinyurl.com/bhnzbmap>

his execution, his family have in vain sought answers from the authorities on the reasons for his execution when he was hopeful for a commutation of his death sentence.

5.2 REGRESSIVE OFFICIAL STATEMENTS AGAINST 2017 REFORMS

Before 2017, the Iranian authorities executed hundreds annually for drug-related offences. Global outcries condemning drug-related executions of 638 people in 2015 and 328 people in 2016 led to legislative reforms to the Anti-Narcotics Law in October 2017 that required higher quantities of seized drugs for imposing mandatory death sentences.⁷⁹ In January 2018, the then head of the judiciary, Sadegh Amoli Larijani, paused drug-related executions and mandated reviews for potential commutation under the 2017 reforms.⁸⁰

IRAN'S ANTI-NARCOTICS LAWS

The 2017 reforms to Iran's Anti-Narcotics Law introduced a new article, Article 45, into the law, which changed the minimum quantity of seized drugs needed to impose the death penalty from over 5kg to over 50kg for bhang, cannabis or opium, and from 30g to 2kg for heroin, morphine, cocaine or their chemical derivatives. The punishment for offences which previously attracted the death penalty but now fell before the newly set thresholds was reduced to a maximum of 30 years' imprisonment and a fine.⁸¹

In June 2017, prior to the adoption of the reforms in October 2017, Amnesty International warned that while the proposed amendments might contribute to a drop in the number of executions, they would still fuel Iran's execution machine.⁸²

Those affected by the surge in drug-related executions since 2021 include both individuals sentenced to death prior to 2017 who did not qualify for commutation based on the quantities of drugs seized from them, as well as individuals arrested more recently with drug quantities exceeding the thresholds for mandatory death sentences.

Following these legal developments, drug-related executions dramatically fell to 25 in 2018, 30 in 2019, and 23 in 2020. These improvements proved short-lived. Following Ebrahim Raisi's presidency in August 2021, and the appointment of Gholamhossein Eje'i as the Head of the Judiciary⁸³, top judicial authorities and officials at the Anti-Narcotics Headquarters, which operates under the presidency, have publicly criticized the 2017 reforms. For instance, on 27 November 2021, the Judicial Deputy of Iran's Prosecutor General, Saeed Omrani, stated:

"Article 45, added to the Anti-Narcotics Law, broke the back of the fight against narcotics ... This law benefits drug-traffickers. Article 45 has also weakened the deterrent incentive... Larger amounts of drugs are being seized, indicating that the fear among drug-traffickers has decreased."⁸⁴

In a similar vein, on 6 July 2022, the Head of Branch 41 of the Supreme Court for Security and Drug Offences, Hossein Zebhi, stated: **"Five years after the implementation of this law, we are witnessing that ... drug-related crimes, trafficking of cargoes, and the volume of trafficking have increased by 25 to 35 percent."**

⁷⁹ Amnesty International and Abdorrahman Boroumand Centre for Human Rights in Iran, "Iran must not squander opportunity to end executions for drug-related offences", 28 July 2017, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2017/07/iran-must-not-squander-opportunity-to-end-executions-for-drug-related-offences/>

⁸⁰ Tasnim News Agency, توقف اعدام محکومان مواد مخدر با دستور رئیس قوه قضاییه ["The Head of Judiciary has halted drug-related executions"], 9 January 2018, <https://www.tasnimnews.com/fa/news/1396/10/19/1623390/> (in Persian).

⁸¹ Shenassname, (۱۲/۱/۱۳۹۶) قانون مجازات با مواد مخدر (با آخرین اصلاحات تا ۱۲/۷/۱۳۹۶) ["Anti-Narcotics Law (with the last amendments until 12/7/1396)"], 7 October 2021, <https://tinyurl.com/3j3aykcu>

⁸² Amnesty International and Abdorrahman Boroumand Foundation, "Iran must not squander the opportunity to end executions for drug-related offences", 28 July 2017, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2017/07/iran-must-not-squander-opportunity-to-end-executions-for-drug-related-offences/>

⁸³ Mizan Online News Agency, اعدام مخالفان اعدام قاچاقچیان مواد مخدر بگویند با حذف اعدام، چه اتفاقی می افتد؟ ["The Head of Judiciary has halted drug-related executions"], 23 October 2016, <https://www.mizanonline.ir/fa/news/235800/> (in Persian).

⁸⁴ Tabnak, گلایه های تند از تدوین و اجرای ماده ۴۵ الحاقی قانون مجازات با مواد مخدر ["Harsh criticisms of the drafting and implementation of Article 45 which was added to the Anti-Narcotics law"], 27 November 2021, <https://www.tabnak.ir/fa/news/1090084/> (in Persian).

The cost of committing these crimes has decreased. Article 45 has ... broadened the field for drug traffickers by reducing penalties”.⁸⁵

Hossein Zebhi proceeded to defend the effectiveness of the death penalty for combating drug-trafficking, saying:

“Experience from past years has showed that the severe punishment of execution in the fight against drug trafficking is very effective and deterrent ... With the reduction of death sentences based on Article 45, we witnessed a significant increase in crimes.”⁸⁶

On 12 January 2023, the Director of Legal Affairs at Anti-Narcotics Headquarters, Mohammad Tarahomi, told lawmakers, that the 2017 legal reforms “dealt a severe blow” to anti-narcotics penal policies.⁸⁷

Such statements by officials blaming reforms that had led to a short-lived reduction in drug-related executions for the alleged rise in drug trafficking reveal the authorities’ insistence in intensifying their unlawful use of the death penalty for drug-related offences.⁸⁸

5.3 LETHAL LEGAL INITIATIVES

The rise in drug-related executions and criticism of current legislation have been accompanied by efforts of the executive, judicial and legislative branches to enact a new lethal anti-narcotics law. This legislation, if adopted, would expand the range of seized drugs that would incur the death penalty.

On 9 April 2022, the Director of Legal Affairs at the Anti-Narcotics Headquarters, Mohammad Tarahomi, announced that a decree from Iran’s Supreme Leader, Ali Khamenei, for “anti-narcotics laws to be updated and reformed in Parliament”⁸⁹ had prompted the judiciary and headquarters to collaborate in drafting a new anti-narcotics bill containing 115 articles.⁹⁰

In December 2022, a five-article bill was submitted by the government to the parliament, based on President Ebrahim Raisi’s instructions to prioritize some sections of the lengthier bill and following his public calls to intensify efforts in the “relentless battle against drugs”.⁹¹

On 8 January 2024, the Parliamentary Legal and Judicial Commission approved the general principles of the five-article bill.⁹²

Article 1 of the bill authorizes the Anti-Narcotics Headquarters to develop, in cooperation with the Ministry of Health and Medical Education, a list of drugs whose production, distribution, sale or attempted sale shall incur the death penalty in the same manner as for drugs currently specified in the Anti-Narcotics Law when their quantities exceed an amount specified by the law. The article enables the expansion of drug types incurring the death penalty without the need for legislative amendments, but merely through approval by the cabinet.

Article 4 of the bill reaffirms that in cases of capital drug offences, no mitigating circumstances may be considered to replace the death penalty with an alternative punishment, leaving those sentenced to death with the sole option of seeking commutations from the Commission on Pardons and Commutations.

⁸⁵ Mehr News, *صفر تا صد مبارزه با مواد مخدر در کشور* [“Hundred to zero in the fight against drugs in the country”], 6 July 2022, <https://www.mehrnews.com/news/5531840/> (in Persian).

⁸⁶ Mehr News, *صفر تا صد مبارزه با مواد مخدر در کشور* [“Hundred to zero in the fight against drugs in the country”], 6 July 2022 (previously cited).

⁸⁷ Islamic Republic News Agency, *کوک ناسازگار قوانین در برابر مبارزه با مواد مخدر* [“Out of tune laws in the fight against drugs”], 12 January 2023, <https://www.irna.ir/news/84996522> (in Persian).

⁸⁸ Tasnim News Agency, *ارزان بودن مواد مخدر با وجود گرانی‌های موجود، ناشی از حمایت خارجی‌هاست* [“The low price of drugs despite current inflation levels indicates foreign influence”], 27 November 2021, <https://www.tasnimnews.com/fa/news/1400/09/06/2615406/> (in Persian).

⁸⁹ The announcement states that the decree was issued in the Persian calendar year of 1399, which corresponds to the 12-month period between 20 March 2020 and 21 March 2021, but does not specify the month.

⁹⁰ Iranian Student News Agency, *ارسال لایحه «پیشگیری و مبارزه با مواد مخدر» به دولت؛ پیشنهادات جدید این لایحه چیست؟* [“Prevention and Fight against Narcotics’ bill was sent to the executive: what are the new proposals in this bill?”], 9 April 2022, <https://www.isna.ir/news/1401012010279/> (in Persian).

⁹¹ Khabar Online, *یک لایحه، هر چه سریع‌تر* [“Raisi urges the prompt submission of an anti-narcotics bill”], 3 November 2022, <https://www.khabaronline.ir/news/1690813/> (in Persian); and Islamic Republic News Agency, *لایحه اصلاح قانون مبارزه با مواد مخدر به مجلس تقدیم می‌شود* [“The bill to reform anti-narcotics law will be presented to parliament”], 12 January 2023, <https://www.irna.ir/news/84986486> (in Persian).

⁹² Mizan Online News Agency, *تصویب کلیات لایحه اصلاح قانون مبارزه با مواد مخدر* [“The general principles of the bill to reform anti-narcotics laws were passed”], 8 January 2024, <https://www.mizanonline.ir/fa/news/4753492/> (in Persian).

6. EXECUTIONS OF THOSE ARRESTED AS CHILDREN

Iran is one of the last countries in the world that continues to use the death penalty against individuals aged under 18 at the time of the crime in a violation of international law. The authorities persist in their refusal to amend Article 91 of the Islamic Penal Code to abolish the death penalty for crimes committed by children in all circumstances.

In 2023, Amnesty International recorded the execution of five individuals who were children at the time of the crime: namely, **Adel Damani**, **Ali Najafi**, **Abdolsamad Shahuzehi**, **Hamidreza Azari**, and **Mahmoud Rigi**. Hamidreza Azari was still a child (17 years old) at the time of his execution.

The organization has identified more than 80 other individuals on death row who were under 18 at the time of the crime, with some languishing on death row for over a decade.

The Convention on the Rights of the Child, which Iran ratified in 1994, provides that neither capital punishment nor life imprisonment without possibility of release shall be imposed for offences committed by persons below 18.

Despite this, the Iranian authorities have executed at least 109 individuals who were under the age of 18 at the time of the crime since Iran ratified the Convention in 1994. The vast majority were executed for murder.

6.1 EXECUTION OF A 17-YEAR-OLD CHILD

In a shocking escalation in their use of the death penalty against child offenders, the Iranian authorities executed a 17-year-old boy in November 2023.

HAMIDREZA AZARI



Hamidreza Azari ©Private

On 24 November 2023, the authorities executed 17-year-old **Hamidreza Azari** who was arrested on 28 April 2023, less than seven months earlier when he was just 16 years old. Amnesty International reviewed a copy of Hamidreza Azari's birth certificate to verify his age.

Hamidreza Azari was executed in Sabzevar prison, Khorasan-e Razavi province, after a grossly unfair trial before Branch Five of Criminal Court One in Khorasan-e Razavi province, which sentenced him to public execution for murder in relation to the fatal stabbing of a man during a group fight on 28 April 2023.

Just three days after Hamidreza Azari's arrest, on 1 May 2023, state media published several propaganda videos of him making forced "confessions" and being taken before a judicial official.

In one propaganda video,⁹³ published on 1 May 2023, Hamidreza Azari is shown being taken, with his hands cuffed and feet in chains, before a judicial official for questioning. It is unclear whether the judicial official was a prosecution official or a judge. In the video, Hamidreza Azari is shown from behind, sitting before the official and "confessing" to stabbing someone in the chest with a knife. It does not appear from the video that Hamidreza Azari had a lawyer present during the questioning.

In another propaganda video,⁹⁴ published on 2 May 2023, a state media journalist is shown interrogating Hamidreza Azari and another individual, both of whom are filmed with their backs to

⁹³ Aparat, محاکمه قاتلین شهید مدافع غیرت حمید رضا الداغی, ["Trial of the murderers of the martyr, a defender of honour, Hamidreza Aldaghi"], 1 May 2023, <https://www.aparat.com/v/YKEgU> (In Persian); Arsheh Online, فیلم + اعدام شد + قاتل حمیدرضا الداغی در سبزوار اعدام شد + فیلم, ["The murderer of Hamidreza Aldaghi was executed in Sabzevar + Video"], 24 November 2023, <http://tinyurl.com/4uwtkbp9> (in Persian).

⁹⁴ Aparat, اولین فیلم از اعترافات قاتل شهید حمیدرضا الداغی در سبزوار, ["The first video of the confessions of the murderer of martyr Hamidreza Aldaghi in Sabzevar"], 2 May 2023, <https://www.aparat.com/v/wu3HC> (in Persian)

the camera. In the video, the journalist asks Hamidreza Azari his age, to which he replies that he is 16 years old.

The authorities also clearly acknowledged in public that he was under the age of 18 at the time of the crime. In a video published on 9 May 2023, a spokesperson for Iran's judiciary who was providing the latest information about the case during a press conference stated, without naming Hamidreza Azari, that "[He] is under 18 years old" and held in a juvenile correction centre.⁹⁵ The spokesperson also predetermines the outcome of the proceedings, even before the investigation stage has completed, stating, "God willing, a final order in the investigation stage and a religious and legal verdict in the trial stage will be promptly issued".

On 11 May 2023, state media reported that, as per "public demand", the prosecutor of Sabzevar, Jafar Tayyar Saberi, issued "special instructions" to expedite the case,⁹⁶ leading to Hamidreza Azari's indictment just 13 days after his arrest.

Prior to this, on 8 May 2023, during a public statement made at the meeting of the Supreme Council of the Judiciary, the Head of the Judiciary, Gholamhossein Mohseni Eje'i stated that he called on judicial officials in Sabzevar to expedite the case. He stated, "I have called the Sabzevar judiciary three times. The last time was today, I asked what has happened with this case? I contacted the head again this morning and told them to expedite these files, and that if you must, sacrifice your weekend or your evenings to complete as soon as possible the things that can be done sooner."⁹⁷

Amnesty International's research has repeatedly shown how the Iranian authorities deny individuals access to a lawyer at the investigation phase, enabling interrogators to use torture and other ill-treatment to extract forced "confessions" that are later used by courts to issue convictions and lengthy prison or death sentences.

Following his arrest, Hamidreza Azari clearly stated on state media that he was 16 years old, and the judicial authorities stated publicly that he was under the age of 18 at the time of the crime. However, following his execution, the authorities misrepresented his age as 18 in state media and refused to publicly acknowledge that he was 16 at the time of arrest and 17 at the time of execution in an apparent attempt at evading accountability for violating international human rights law.⁹⁸

6.2 NEW DIRECTIVE, SAME OLD PROPAGANDA

In recent months, Iranian authorities have misleadingly promoted a directive from the Head of the Judiciary on 24 October 2023 as a step towards "a further reduction" in death sentences against child offenders. This move comes amid domestic and international condemnation of Iran's rising execution rate and its continuing practice of sentencing child offenders to death.⁹⁹

Amnesty International's analysis of the directive reveals that it fails to introduce any changes to address long-standing concerns about inherently flawed juvenile laws and their arbitrary application.

⁹⁵ Mehr News Agency, "تشریح آخرین وضعیت پرونده شهید حمیدرضا الداغی" ["Description of the latest status of the case of martyr Hamidreza Aldaghi"], 9 May 2023, <https://www.mehrnews.com/news/5775413>

⁹⁶ Tabnak, "حکم قصاص در ملأعام برای قاتل شهید حمیدرضا الداغی" ["Public execution verdict for the murderer of martyr Hamidreza Akdaghi"], 14 October 2023, <https://www.tabnak.ir/fa/news/1198490>; Iranian Students' News Agency, "پرونده شهادت حمیدرضا الداغی به صورت ویژه در حال پیگیری است" ["The case of the martyrdom of Hamidreza Al-Daghi is being pursued in a special manner"], 3 May 2023, <https://www.isna.ir/news/1402021307576>; Islamic Republic News Agency, "حمیدرضا الداغی" صادر شد. "کیفرخواست متهمان پرونده شهید حمیدرضا الداغی" ["The indictment for the accused in the case of martyr "Hamidreza Aldaghi" was issued"], 11 May 2023, <https://www.irna.ir/news/85108456> (in Persian)

⁹⁷ Mashregh News, "فیلم/ پیگیری پرونده شهید الداغی توسط رئیس قوه قضاییه" ["Video/ The pursuing of the case of martyr Aldaghi by the Head of the Judiciary"], 8 May 2023, <https://www.mashreghnews.ir/news/1487574>

⁹⁸ Khabar Online News Agency, "حکم قصاص در ملأعام برای قاتل شهید حمیدرضا الداغی" ["The issuance of the sentence of *qesas* ["retribution in kind"] in public for the murderer of martyr Hamidreza Aldaghi"], 14 October 2023, <https://www.khabaronline.ir/news/1824603/> (in Persian).

⁹⁹ The UN Special Rapporteur on the human rights situation in Iran, the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child and the UN Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions, "Iran: UN experts say executions of child offenders must stop", 25 November 2021, <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2021/12/iran-un-experts-say-executions-child-offenders-must-stop>

6.2.1 ARTICLE 91 OF THE ISLAMIC PENAL CODE

Under Iran's 2013 Islamic Penal Code, the age of criminal responsibility for boys is 15 lunar years and for girls nine lunar years, meaning that, in cases of murder and certain other capital crimes, boys and girls above these ages are treated as adults and can be sentenced to death.

In 2013, the authorities introduced Article 91 to the Islamic Penal Code, which allows judges to issue a punishment other than death for murder and some other capital crimes if they determine that the child's "mental growth and maturity" at the time of the crime are in doubt. Judges may seek an expert opinion from the Legal Medicine Organization of Iran (LMOI), a state forensic institute under the judiciary, or rely on their own assessment.

Amnesty International has repeatedly urged the Iranian authorities to amend Article 91 to abolish the death penalty for crimes committed by children in all circumstances and without any discretion for judges.

Under international law, child offenders must never be sentenced to death, irrespective of claims about their real or supposed maturity. In addition, such claims rest on a presumption of adult maturity for girls above nine and boys above 15 lunar years, which violates international law.

6.2.2 ARBITRARY IMPLEMENTATION OF ARTICLE 91

Despite Article 91's inherent flaws, it allows judges to shield child offenders from the death penalty. Yet, in numerous cases documented by Amnesty International since 2013, judges have failed to apply Article 91 in favour of child offenders.

Sometimes, judges deemed child offenders mature, without even consulting the LMOI, after questioning defendants.

According to numerous verdicts reviewed by Amnesty International since 2015, judges' questions frequently focused on whether the youth recognized the religious prohibition of killing, whether they felt upset upon injuring the deceased, their study of religious texts, and their efforts to conceal the murder.

Cases referred to the LMOI were also marked by arbitrariness. Sometimes, LMOI doctors deemed child offenders mature based on arbitrary questions about understanding right from wrong. Other times, judges found defendants to be "mature" even when LMOI doctors cited inability to assess maturity years after the alleged crime. Occasionally, courts disregarded LMOI's opinion on immaturity and sentenced defendants to death.

Amnesty International has repeatedly urged the Iranian authorities, including judges and LMOI doctors, to halt these "maturity assessment" processes that inherently violate children's human rights and risk subjecting them to the death penalty, and instead adopt a position that treats all individuals under 18 as less mature and culpable than adults, in accordance with international juvenile justice principles.

Amnesty International recalls that medical professionals have a clear duty to avoid any involvement in torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading punishment including the death penalty. By providing "maturity" assessments that are then used by courts to issue death sentences, LMOI psychiatrists are effectively facilitating the execution of those who were children at the time of the crime.

6.2.3 NEW DIRECTIVE FAILS TO CORRECT LONG-STANDING INHERENT FLAWS

On 24 October 2023, the Head of the Judiciary, Gholamhossein Mohseni Eje'i, issued a directive¹⁰⁰ titled the "Directive for determining the growth and full mental development of mature¹⁰¹ individuals under 18 solar years" for the purpose of applying Article 91.¹⁰² The directive outlines its objective as "creating a unified procedure for establishing the growth and full mental developments of mature individuals under 18 falling within the scope of Article 91...in order to prevent the prolongation of legal proceedings due to flawed investigations or annulment of verdicts based on this article and to ensure speed and attentiveness in decision-making and verdict issuance by first-instance and appellate courts and the Supreme Court".

Article 2 of the directive reaffirms the discretion granted to judges under the existing note to Article 91 of the Islamic Penal Code to determine whether to refer a child offender to the LMOI for a maturity assessment.¹⁰³ Article 1 specifies that the referrals should be made to the Psychiatric Commission of the LMOI.

Note 1 to Article 2 specifies that "if the judge uses a method other than obtaining a [LMOI] commission opinion for resolving doubts, they must clearly reflect the method in the case". The Directive provides no further guidance on the methods judges may use, increasing the risk that child offenders will continue to be subjected to inappropriate questioning and assessments by judges with no expertise in child psychology to deem child offenders mature enough to merit the death penalty. Notes 2 and 3 of Article 2 state that judges "must conduct the necessary investigations into the perpetrator's understanding of the nature of the crime and its nature at the time of the crime" and ensure that before the last session for the final defence, they have reached their own conclusion on whether the child offender had attained maturity and understood the nature and consequences of their actions. Again, the directive provides no further information on the scope and modalities of these investigations and reinforces the flawed foundation of the country's juvenile system, which assumes that children under 18 are as mature and equally culpable as adults, unless proven otherwise through unspecified investigations.

Article 3 of the directive mandates for LMOI opinions to be clearly written, reasoned and to summarize the investigation results, without specifying the modalities of such investigations.

Article 4 states, "if necessary, judicial authorities may request the clinical files of child offenders from treatment centres or the LMOI". The provision reinforces the wide discretionary power granted to judges and fails to specify any criteria for determining necessity. The mention of treatment centres and clinical files points to problematic patterns, previously documented by Amnesty International, where judges conflate the lesser culpability of children, due to their age, with the diminished responsibility of individuals with mental illnesses.

¹⁰⁰ The directives of the Head of the Judiciary hold significant weight within Iran's political and legal structure as he is appointed by the Supreme Leader and in turn oversees the appointment of judges and prosecutors across the country. Traditionally, these directives focus on detailing the implementation of existing laws rather than overriding them.

¹⁰¹ Before the 2013 Islamic Penal Code, Iranian legislation made no distinction between the minimum age of criminal responsibility and the age at which individuals are considered to have full criminal responsibility in the same way as adults. Both were conflated into the concept of "maturity" (*bolugh*), which is linked to the onset of puberty, and set at 15 for boys and nine for girls. Once children reached this age, they were deemed to have full criminal responsibility and generally sentenced to the same punishments as adults including the death penalty. Those under the age of "maturity", referred to as "immature" (*na-balegh*) or a "child" (*teff*), are not deemed to have any criminal responsibility.

¹⁰² Ekhtebare, دستورالعمل چگونگی تشخیص رشد و کمال عقل افراد بالغ کمتر از هجده سال تمام شمسی, ["The Directive for determining the growth and full mental development of mature individuals under 18 solar years"], 29 October 2023, <http://tinyurl.com/bde7cmbd> (in Persian).

¹⁰³ Mizan Online News Agency, دستورالعمل چگونگی تشخیص رشد و کمال عقل افراد بالغ کمتر از هجده سال تمام شمسی, ["The Directive for determining the growth and full mental development of mature individuals under 18 solar years"], 4 February 2024, <https://www.mizanonline.ir/fa/news/4758225/> (in Persian).

7. INTERNATIONAL STANDARDS

Iran is a party to a number of international treaties which protect fair trial rights and prohibit the arbitrary deprivation of life and liberty, the use of the death penalty against individuals who were under the age of 18 at the time of the crime, and acts of torture and other ill-treatment.

These treaties include: the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), and the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (CERD).

However, Iran has failed to become a party to other key international human rights treaties that guarantee core human rights principles, such as the right to life, the right to liberty, and prohibition of torture and other ill-treatment, and enforced disappearance.

These include the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CAT), the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, and the Second Optional Protocol to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, aiming at the abolition of the death penalty. Likewise, Iran is not yet a state party to the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court.

7.1 DEATH PENALTY

Amnesty International opposes the death penalty in all cases without exception, regardless of the nature or circumstances of the crime; guilt, innocence or other characteristics of the individual; or the method used by the state to carry out the execution. The death penalty is a violation of the right to life as proclaimed in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. It is the ultimate cruel, inhuman and degrading punishment.

The arbitrary deprivation of life is absolutely prohibited at all times and in all circumstances. States are prohibited from derogating from their treaty obligations to respect this right.¹⁰⁴ This prohibition is a norm of customary international law and may never be restricted.¹⁰⁵

Article 6(2) of the ICCPR, and Safeguard No.1 of the UN Safeguards¹⁰⁶ guaranteeing protection of the rights of those facing the death penalty, adopted through UN Economic and Social Council resolution 1984/50, provide that the imposition of the death penalty must be restricted to the “most serious crimes”.

The UN Human Rights Committee has stated that “The term ‘the most serious crimes’ must be read restrictively and appertain only to crimes of extreme gravity, involving intentional killing. Crimes not resulting directly and intentionally in death, such as [...] drug [...] offences, although serious in nature, can never serve as the basis, within the framework of article 6 [of the ICCPR], for the imposition of the death penalty.”¹⁰⁷

The UN Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions has similarly stated that “The death penalty may not be imposed for drug-related offences unless they meet this requirement.”¹⁰⁸

The mandatory imposition of the death penalty, even for the most serious crimes, is prohibited.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁴ ICCPR Article 6; UDHR, Article 3; Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), Article 6; and UN Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions, *Report*, 9 August 2012 UN Doc. A/67/275, para. 14.

¹⁰⁵ UN Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions, *Report*, 9 August 2012, (previously cited), para. 11; CAT General Comment 2, §1.

¹⁰⁶ Adopted by Economic and Social Council resolution 1984/50 of 25 May 1984.

¹⁰⁷ Human Rights Committee, General Comment No. 36: The right to life (Article 6 of the ICCPR), UN Doc. CCPR/C/GC/36, 30 October 2018, para.35.

¹⁰⁸ UN Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions, *Report*, 9 August 2012 (previously cited), para.122.

¹⁰⁹ UN Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary and arbitrary executions, *Report*, 22 December 2004, UN Doc. E/CN.4/2005/7 para. 63-64; and UN Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary and arbitrary executions, *Report* 29 January 2007, UN Doc. A/HRC/4/20, para. 55-66.

Discriminatory imposition of the death penalty, including its disproportionate imposition on particular ethnic or racial groups, constitutes an arbitrary deprivation of the right to life.¹¹⁰

International standards restrict the imposition of the death penalty on people in certain categories, including individuals who were under the age of 18 at the time of the crime¹¹¹ and those with mental or intellectual disabilities or disorders.¹¹²

7.2 FAIR TRIAL RIGHTS

Under international law, the imposition of the death penalty following an unfair trial violates the right to life and the prohibition of cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment. In view of the irreversible nature of the death penalty, the proceedings in capital cases must scrupulously observe all relevant international standards protecting the right to a fair trial, no matter how heinous the crime.¹¹³

Proceedings must conform to the highest standards of independence, competence, objectivity and impartiality of judges and juries.

All individuals who risk facing the death penalty must benefit from the services of competent defence counsel at every stage of the proceedings.

They must be presumed innocent until their guilt has been proved based upon clear and convincing evidence leaving no room for an alternative explanation of the facts, in strict application of the highest standards for gathering and assessing evidence, excluding statements elicited as a result of torture, ill-treatment or other forms of coercion.

The proceedings must guarantee the right to review of both the factual and the legal aspects of the case by a higher tribunal, composed of judges who did not hear the case at first instance.

The individual's right to seek pardon, commutation of sentence (substitution of a lighter penalty) or clemency from state authorities must be ensured, since it is an obligation under international law.¹¹⁴

These safeguards are a means of protecting the human rights of people facing the death penalty. Where that has not been the case the individual must be given a re-trial in proceedings which comply with these standards, and without recourse to the death penalty.

Under international law, the imposition of the death penalty following an unfair trial constitutes an arbitrary deprivation of life.

¹¹⁰ William Andrews v United States (11.139), Inter-American Commission, Report 57/96 (1996), para.177; Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions, *Report*, 9 August 2012 (previously cited), para.14. Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD), *Concluding Observations: USA*, 8 May 2008, UN Doc. CERD/C/USA/CO/6, para.23; Special Rapporteur on torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment, *Report*, 15 January 2008, UN Doc. A/HRC/7/3 para. 40; UN Secretary-General, *Moratoriums on the use of the death penalty*, 11 August 2010, UN Doc. A/65/280, para.72.

¹¹¹ ICCPR, Article 6(5) of the and CRC, Article 37(a).

¹¹² Safeguards guaranteeing protection of the rights of those facing the death penalty (1984), para. 3; UN Commission on Human Rights, Resolution 2005/59, adopted on 20 April 2005, UN Doc. E/CN.4/2005/L.10/Add.17; UN Human Rights Committee (HRC), *Concluding Observations: USA*, 16 December 2006, UN Doc. CCPR/C/USA/CO/3/Rev., para. 7, HRC, *Concluding Observations: Japan*, 18 December 2008, UN Doc. CCPR/C/JPN/CO/5, para.16, HRC, *Views: Sahadath v Trinidad and Tobago*, adopted on 2 April 2002, UN Doc. CCPR/C/78/D/684/1996, para. 7.2; Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions, *Report*, 7 October 1996, UN Doc. A/51/4571, para.115-116.

¹¹³ Amnesty International, *Fair Trial Manual – Second edition* (Index: POL 30/002/2014), 9 April 2014, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/pol30/002/2014/en/>

¹¹⁴ ICCPR, Article 6(4); Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, arbitrary and summary executions, *Report*, 7 October 1996 (Previously cited), para.111; HRC, *Views Pinto v Trinidad and Tobago*, adopted on 20 July 1990, UN Doc. CCPR/C/39/D/232/1987, para. 12.5; HRC, *Views Kelly v Jamaica*, adopted on 8 April 1991, UN Doc. CCPR/C/41/D/253/1987, para. 5.10; Amnesty International, *Fair Trial Manual – Second edition* (previously cited)

8. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The execution crisis in Iran both stems from and exacerbates a wider crisis of systemic impunity in Iran for the arbitrary deprivation of life as security forces, prosecutors and judges collaborate in a relentless assault on the right to life.

In 2023 alone, the authorities executed at least 853 people, including protesters, social media users and dissidents as well as individuals from the most impoverished communities convicted of drug-offences.

The increase in the number of executions from previous years is largely due to the authorities' draconian "war on drugs", resulting in the execution of at least 481 people in 2023 in relation to drug-related offences, 29% of them from the oppressed Baluchi minority.¹¹⁵

The execution spree also comes amid the Iranian authorities' attempts to stop further nationwide protests in the aftermath of the "Woman Life Freedom" uprising in 2022.

Amid the international community's reticence about addressing soaring execution rates in Iran, particularly for drug-related offences, prisoners on death row in Iran have gone on hunger strike and publicly plead for interventions to halt executions. In a letter published online on 28 January 2024, a group of prisoners on death row in Ghezel Hesar prison, Alborz province, wrote¹¹⁶:

"We, a group of prisoners sentenced to death, are asking for your help... All of us were deprived of a fair trial and denied access to a lawyer...

Every week, the authorities hang some of us in Ghezel Hesar prison... Thousands of prisoners [here] are under sentence of death... and hundreds of our cases have been sent for implementation of our executions, which could take place in the coming days and weeks.

Among us are individuals who have been sentenced to death for all sorts of charges, including drug-related offences, under the principle of 'retribution-in-kind' (Qesas), as well as political prisoners and prisoners of conscience, all awaiting execution.

To make sure that people hear our voices, we are compelled to go on hunger strike... Perhaps with your help, these executions can be stopped. In whatever way you can, please be our voice and that of our families".¹¹⁷

The letter was followed by calls from Iranian civil society, including the families of death row prisoners and those executed, for the abolition of the death penalty in Iran. It also sparked solidarity hunger strikes by human rights defenders, including human rights defender and Nobel Peace Prize laureate Narges Mohammadi and 60 other women imprisoned for political reasons in Tehran's Evin prison, as well as labour rights activists and relatives of victims of Iran's mass prisoner killings of the 1980s.¹¹⁸

¹¹⁵ Islamic Republic News Agency, "لايه اصلاح قانون مبارزه با مواد مخدر به مجلس تقديم می‌شود" ["The bill to reform anti-narcotics law will be presented to parliament"], 12 January 2023, <https://www.irna.ir/news/84986486> (in Persian).

¹¹⁶ Radio Zamaneh, "نامۀ زندانیان زیر حکم اعدام در زندان قزل‌حصار: ما مستحق مرگ نیستیم" ["Prisoners on death row in Qezel Hesar Prison: 'We don't deserve to die'"], 28 January 2024, <https://www.radiozamaneh.com/801249> (in Persian).

¹¹⁷ Radio Zamaneh, "نامۀ زندانیان زیر حکم اعدام در زندان قزل‌حصار: ما مستحق مرگ نیستیم" ["Prisoners on death row in Qezel Hesar Prison: 'We don't deserve to die'"], 28 January 2024, <https://www.radiozamaneh.com/801249> (in Persian).

¹¹⁸ Iranwire, "بیانیه خانواده‌های خواران علیه اعدام معترضان" ["The statement of Khavaran families against the executions"], 29 January 2024, <https://iranwire.com/fa/news-1/124798> (in Persian); Radio Zamaneh, "112 تن از معلمان و فعالان کارگری و منی در حمایت از کارزار نه به اعدام دست به اعتصاب غذا" ["112 teachers and labour rights activists have started a hunger strike in support of the 'No to executions' campaign"], 26 January 2024, <https://www.radiozamaneh.com/800953/> (in Persian); Iranwire, "پوستند «توقف ماشین اعدام» به کمپین اعتصاب غذای زندانیان سیاسی" ["Ten political prisoners have joined the 'stop the execution machine' campaign"], 29 January 2024, <https://iranwire.com/fa/news-1/124773> (in Persian); Radio Zamaneh, "اعتصاب غذای زندانیان سیاسی: این بار جان فشانای برای نجات جان ستمشده‌ها علیه اعدام: ۱۰ تشکل کارگری و اجتماعی با اعتراض هفتگی زندانیان همراه شدند" ["Hunger strike of political prisoners: sacrificing life to save life"], 9 February 2024, <https://www.radiozamaneh.com/802767/> (in Persian). Radio Zamaneh, "تظاهرات دوشنبه‌ها علیه اعدام: ۱۰ تشکل کارگری و اجتماعی با اعتراض هفتگی زندانیان همراه شدند" ["Tuesdays against executions: 10 labour and social rights activists have started a weekly protest in solidarity with prisoners"], 13 February 2024, <https://www.radiozamaneh.com/803545/> (in Persian); Narges Mohammadi, Instagram post, "The women's ward of Evin's prison has joined the hunger strike of Ghezel Hesar prisoners", 30 January 2024, <https://www.instagram.com/p/C2uDT03KMLM/> (in Persian); Radio Zamaneh, "نامۀ زندانیان زیر حکم اعدام در زندان قزل‌حصار: ما مستحق مرگ نیستیم" ["Prisoners on death row in Ghezel Hesar Prison: 'We don't deserve to die'"], 28 January 2024, <https://www.radiozamaneh.com/801249> (in Persian).

The Iranian authorities have ignored these calls and have continued their killing spree in 2024. Indeed, they have celebrated the swift application of the death penalty against protesters,¹¹⁹ and presented their inhumane, lethal anti-narcotics strategy as worthy of global praise¹²⁰ and “an effort to keep humanity alive”.¹²¹

Given widespread and systematic human rights violations in Iran amid systemic impunity, Amnesty International has long advocated for an international independent investigative and accountability mechanism on Iran and had called for the extension of the mandate the UN Fact-Finding Mission on Iran during the 55th session of the UN Human Rights Council, which has taken place between 26 February and 4 April 2024. Such a mechanism is vital to collect, consolidate, preserve, and analyze evidence of crimes under international law and other serious violations of human rights committed by the Iranian authorities, including in view of cooperating with future legal proceedings. States must also exercise universal jurisdiction to criminally investigate and prosecute Iranian officials reasonably suspected of criminal responsibility for crimes under international law.

The international community must stand with victims of Iran’s execution machine and prisoners at risk of execution. Without a robust global response to the execution crisis, the Iranian authorities will be emboldened to continue to weaponize the death penalty as a tool of oppression and use prisons across the country as killing fields.

8.1 RECOMMENDATIONS TO IRANIAN AUTHORITIES

- Immediately establish an official moratorium on executions, with a view to fully abolish the death penalty;
- Immediately and unconditionally release all those convicted and sentenced to death, indicted, or undergoing investigations solely for the exercise of their rights to freedom of expression, association and peaceful assembly;
- Quash all convictions and death sentences issued following unfair trials. Release all individuals, including protesters, whose detention is rendered arbitrary due to severe non-observance of fair trial rights, in particular those involving reliance on “confessions” extracted under torture and other ill-treatment. If charged with internationally recognizable offences, individuals must be retried in proceedings that meet the most rigorous international fair trial standards, excluding “confessions” obtained under torture and other ill-treatment, and without recourse to the death penalty;
- Pending the full abolition of the death penalty, bring provisions in national legislation that allow for the use of the death penalty in line with international law and standards, including by: removing the death penalty for drug-related and any other offences not involving intentional killing; repealing vaguely worded provisions of the Islamic Penal Code that criminalize the exercise of the rights to freedom of belief and religion, expression, association and peaceful assembly; ensuring that proceedings meet the highest standards for a fair trial from the time of arrest; and repealing legal presumptions of guilt and mandatory death sentences;
- Amend Article 91 of the Islamic Penal Code to explicitly prohibit the use of the death penalty for crimes committed by persons below 18 years of age, in all circumstances and without any discretion for judges;

¹¹⁹ Javan Online, “How many hours did it take to arrest the culprits in crimes during last year riots?”, 7 October 2023, <https://www.javanonline.ir/fa/news/1189709> (in Persian); Mashregh News, “محاکمه و مجازات ضاربین و قاتلین حوادث اخیر با نهایت سرعت انجام شود” [“The trials and punishments of criminals and murderers of recent events should be expedited”, 1 May 2023, <https://www.mashreghnews.ir/news/1485217> (in Persian)

¹²⁰ Fars News, “Iran is on the global front line in the fight against narcotics drugs”, 2 January 2023, <https://farsnews.ir/news/14011012000048/>

¹²¹ Islamic Republic News Agency, “لايه اصلاح قانون مبارزه با مواد مخدر به مجلس تقديم می‌شود” [“The bill to reform anti-narcotics law will be presented to parliament”, 12 January 2023, <https://www.irna.ir/news/84986486> (in Persian)].

- Pending legislative amendments, urgently issue a circular requiring all judges to apply Article 91 in favour of all persons aged below 18 at the time of the crime, recognizing that individuals under the age of 18 are always to be treated as less mature and culpable than adults;
- Conduct prompt, thorough, impartial and effective investigations into allegations of torture and other ill-treatment and, if there is sufficient admissible evidence, bring those suspected of responsibility, including superiors, to justice in fair proceedings and without resort to the death penalty;
- Uphold international standards of fairness in all trials, including by ensuring that statements obtained through torture and other ill-treatment or without a lawyer present are excluded as evidence and that detainees are granted access to a lawyer of their choosing from the time of arrest and throughout all stages, promptly informed of their rights, given adequate time and facilities to prepare a defence, and provided with public, reasoned judgements;
- Regularly publish comprehensive and detailed information, disaggregated at least by gender, age, nationality and ethnic background, about the use of the death penalty which can contribute to public debates on the issue. The data should include: the number of persons sentenced to death and for what offences; the number of prisoners appealing the sentences and at what level; location of detention; information on past and scheduled executions; the total number of persons under sentence of death; the number of death sentences reversed or commuted on appeal; and the number of instances in which pardons have been granted; and
- Extend invitations to and accept requests for visits from the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Iran and other Special Procedures of the UN Human Rights Council, as well as the UN Fact-Finding Mission on Iran.

8.3 RECOMMENDATIONS TO ALL UN MEMBER AND OBSERVER STATES

- Initiate criminal investigations under the principle of universal jurisdiction into crimes under international law committed by Iranian authorities, irrespective of the absence or presence of the accused in their territory. This includes initiating adequately resourced criminal investigations aimed at disclosing the truth about the crimes, identifying those suspected of responsibility, including superiors, and issuing, when there is sufficient admissible evidence, international arrest warrants;
- Publicly condemn the Iranian authorities' use of the death penalty as a tool of political repression, and the alarming rise in executions in the aftermath of the "Woman Life Freedom" uprising, and press on the Iranian authorities to immediately establish a moratorium on executions, with a view to abolish the death penalty;
- Ensure cooperation with and funding of anti-drug trafficking initiatives do not contribute, directly or indirectly, to the arbitrary deprivation of life and other human rights violations in Iran;
- Request high level observers to all ongoing capital proceedings.

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