



9 September 2020

Joint call for states to mandate a UN-led inquiry into the serious human rights violations, including enforced disappearances, torture and unlawful killings during and in the aftermath of the November 2019 protests in Iran, on the occasion of the 45th session of the HRC

We, the undersigned human rights organizations, call on your government to address the continuing crisis of impunity for serious human rights violations committed by the Iranian authorities during the November 2019 protests and their aftermath, including through collective action at the 45th session of the UN Human Rights Council.

In November 2019, nationwide anti-establishment protests in Iran, triggered by a significant rise in the price of petrol, were met with a brutal campaign of mass repression by the Iranian authorities. Security forces used unlawful force, including live ammunition, birdshot, metal pellets, tear gas and water cannons against unarmed protesters and bystanders, killing hundreds and arresting thousands, according to the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR).¹ These gross violations of human rights took place under the cover of an unprecedented week-long Internet shutdown imposed by the Iranian authorities.

The intentional use of lethal force by security forces during the protests resulted in the unlawful killing of hundreds of protesters and bystanders, including children, who posed no imminent threat to life or serious injury. Amnesty International has found that the security forces killed more than 300 people, including 23 children – 22 boys, aged between 12 and 17, and a girl reportedly aged between eight and 12.² Most of the victims were shot in the head or torso, indicating that security forces were shooting to kill.³

The authorities also arrested more than 7,000 men, women and children as young as 10. Many detainees were subjected to incommunicado detention and enforced disappearance while held in undisclosed locations. According to Amnesty International, police, intelligence and security forces and some prison officials used widespread torture and other ill-treatment against detainees. These

¹ OHCHR Press briefing on Iran, 6 December 2019, accessible at:

<https://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=25394&LangID=E>

² Amnesty International, They shot our children: Killings of minors in Iran's November 2019 protests (Index: MDE 13/1894/2020).

³ Amnesty International, Iran: Details of 304 deaths in crackdown on November 2019 protests, 20 May 2020 (Index: MDE 13/2308/2020).

included the most frequently reported methods of physical torture such as beatings, floggings, suspension, and forcing detainees into stress positions for prolonged periods, as well as information on torture methods such as electric shocks, waterboarding, mock executions, and sexual violence and humiliation⁴. Detainees were systematically denied access to a lawyer at the investigation stage of their case and many were forced to make “confessions” under torture and other ill-treatment, which were unlawfully used as evidence by courts. Some continued to be denied access to legal representation at their trials. Hundreds have been prosecuted on overly broad and vague charges in trials that failed to meet international fair trial standards. Many have been sentenced to lengthy prison terms and flogging and at least three protesters have been sentenced to death. Two human rights defenders have had their flogging sentences carried out.

We are seriously concerned about the situation of individuals who are subjected to ongoing enforced disappearance, are arbitrarily detained or are facing unfair trials that could lead to lengthy prison terms, flogging and/or execution in connection with their participation in the protests.

Despite the UN High Commissioner’s call for “*prompt, independent and impartial investigations into all violations that have taken place*”⁵ and a similar call from ten UN Special Procedures⁶, the Iranian authorities have failed to open investigations into allegations of crimes under international law and other serious human rights violations committed by police, security and intelligence agents and prison officials, with the complicity of Iran’s judiciary, and to take any steps to hold those responsible to account. Instead, high level officials have made statements praising security and intelligence bodies and the authorities have embarked on a campaign of mass repression and harassment to intimidate and silence victims and families of victims seeking truth, justice and redress.

In a report released last week, the Special Rapporteur on human rights in Iran has expressed his deep concern that “*the Government’s denial of responsibility is exacerbated by a lack of transparent, independent and prompt investigations into the events*”⁷. He also stressed that “*the Government’s obstruction of a proper investigation [is further established by] concerning reports that the families of victims are being harassed and threatened for having publicly demanded justice for their relatives’ deaths*”⁸.

As attention has been shifting to other issues in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, we believe it is important that this issue does not slip away from the Council’s attention. The succession of atrocities in Iran is inextricably linked to the impunity that has led the authorities to believe that they can commit crimes under international law and other serious human rights violations without repercussions either domestically or from the international community. Therefore, promoting accountability is more essential than ever, not only to support victims and their families who are anguished at the lack of justice, truth and reparation, but also to provide a vital safeguard against the recurrence of such violations in the future.

⁴ Amnesty International, Iran: Trampling Humanity – Mass Arrests, Disappearances and Torture since Iran’s 2019 November Protests, 2 September 2020, accessible at: <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/mde13/2891/2020/en/>

⁵ UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, *Bachelet calls on Iran to address multiple human rights violations in context of recent protests*, 9 December 2019, accessible at: <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=25393&LangID=E>

⁶ SR on Iran, SR on freedom of assembly, SR on freedom of expression, SR on extrajudicial executions, SR on torture, SR on human rights defenders, SR on independence of judges and lawyers, WG on Arbitrary Detention, WG on Enforced and Involuntary Disappearances, *Iran: Experts alarmed at alleged mistreatment of detained protesters*, 20 December 2019, accessible at <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=25449&LangID=E>

⁷ UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Islamic Republic of Iran, Report to the UN General Assembly, A/75/213, 21 July 2020 (para. 9), accessible at: <https://undocs.org/A/75/213>

⁸ UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Islamic Republic of Iran, Report to the UN General Assembly, A/75/213, 21 July 2020 (para. 13), accessible at: <https://undocs.org/A/75/213>

We therefore **renew our call for the UN Human Rights Council to establish a UN-led inquiry** into the widespread and systematic crimes and serious human rights violations committed by the Iranian authorities during and in the aftermath of the November 2019 protests.⁹

We urge your government to take the opportunity of the 45th session of the Human Rights Council to support the establishment of such an inquiry and deliver a clear and resounding message for the need for accountability in this context and to avoid repetition of such crimes under international law and other serious human rights violations.

Abdorrahrman Boroumand Center for Human Rights in Iran

AHRAZ - Association for the Human Rights of the Azerbaijani people in Iran

All Human Rights for All in Iran

Amnesty International

Arseh Sevom

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Cairo Institute for Human Rights Studies

Center for Human Rights in Iran

Centre for Supporters of Human Rights

ECPM – Together against the Death Penalty

FIDH – International Federation for Human Rights

Human Rights Watch

HRAI – Human Rights Activists in Iran

Impact Iran

Iran Human Rights

Iran Human Rights Documentation Center

Justice for Iran

Kurdistan Human Rights - Geneva (KMMK-G)

OutRight Action International

Siamak Pourzand Foundation

Small Media

United for Iran

AI Index Number: MDE 13/3025/2020

⁹ *Joint call for the UN Human Rights Council to take urgent action on the situation of human rights in the Islamic Republic of Iran in relation to the repression of popular protests*, 16 December 2019, accessible at: <http://impactiran.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/Joint-Call-for-a-UNHRC-special-session-on-the-situation-of-human-rights-in-Iran-in-relation-to-the-repression-of-popular-protests.pdf>