

IRAN PROTESTS

POLITICS OF FEAR: DEATH SENTENCES FOR PROTESTERS

NO.10



May 2023

Eight months have passed since the start of widespread demonstrations over Mahsa Jina Amini's death in the custody of Iran's morality police. Tens of thousands of protesters have been detained and tried and sentenced to prison on a variety of charges. A number of protesters have faced more serious charges, including charges which could potentially carry the death penalty, while others have actually been sentenced to death.

To date, seven protesters, detained during the Women, Life, Freedom uprising, have been executed. According to human rights groups, at least twelve protesters have been sentenced to death. Verdicts for four of the 12, namely Mehdi Mohammadifard, Javad Rouhi, Mahan Sadrat Marni, and Saman Saidi (also known as Saman Yassin), have been overturned by the Iranian Supreme Court. Out of the remaining eight individuals, Mohammad Qobadlu's death sentence was once again upheld by the Supreme Court, and seven others are awaiting an appeals ruling for their cases by the Supreme Court.



Apart from the execution of those detained during the recent uprising, Iranian authorities have executed hundreds of citizens on various other charges.

According to a May 12 report by Human Rights Watch, Iranian authorities have executed at least 60 people since April 2023. Human Rights Activists News Agency (HRANA) has also reported that in 2022, Iranian authorities executed 565 people, five of whom were minors under the age of 18, at the time they committed a crime. According to HRANA, from January 1 to May 5, 2023, at least 192 people, including eight women, have been executed in Iran. Many of these executions were linked to drug trafficking and murder.

Protesters Executed



On May 19, 2023, Iran's judicial system announced that it had executed Saleh Mirhashemi, Majid Kazemi and Saeed Yaqoubi, as the main suspects of a case known as "the Isfahan House." The three protesters were arrested on November 21, 2022 and accused of killing three Basij security officers in the Isfahan House neighborhood, on November 15. The execution of the three protesters was carried out less than ten days following the confirmation of their verdict by the Supreme Court, and as human rights organizations and ordinary citizens were demanding a halt to the execution and a fair retrial of those accused.

The people of Isfahan showed up in front of the prison for two consecutive nights prior to the execution, requesting that the executions be halted. However, the judicial system executed them on the morning of Friday, May 19. The three protesters were accused of being involved in the killing of three security officers.

The state-run Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting and regime-aligned news outlets released videos of the three detainees, in which they confessed to the crimes.

However, after their interrogation period was over and they were moved from the security detention center to the public prison, where they could communicate with their families, the three protesters repeatedly claimed that they had been forced into false confessions by their interrogators, who had threatened to arrest family members and relatives of the detainees.

Mirhasehmi, Kazemi and Yaqoubi had been denied the right to defense lawyers and fair trial.

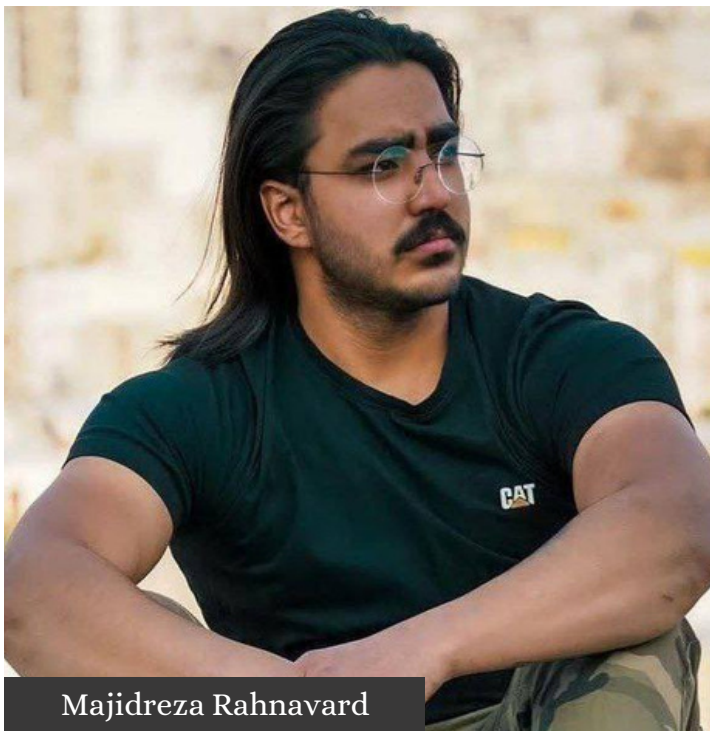


Mohsen Shekari

Mohsen Shekari was the first protester who was executed on December 8, 2022 in Tehran. The execution was carried out less than three months into the uprisings.

Shekari was 22 years old and was tried and sentenced to death on the charge of Moharebeh or enmity with God, for setting fire to a trash can, blocking a street in Tehran, and injuring a security officer. Unfortunately Mohsen Shekari's name had not been made public prior to his execution. Only 75 days passed between his arrest and his execution, and he was denied access to a lawyer of his choosing during the entire legal proceedings.

Majidreza Rahnavard, 23 years old, was executed on December 12, 2022 on charges of being involved in the killing of two Basij forces in Mashhad. He was arrested on 19th of November 2022 and the court proceedings were completed quickly and without legal formalities. He was charged with attacking six Basij forces on 17th of November, 2022 at Hor-Ameli street of Mashhad, during which, two of Basiji security forces were killed and four others were injured.

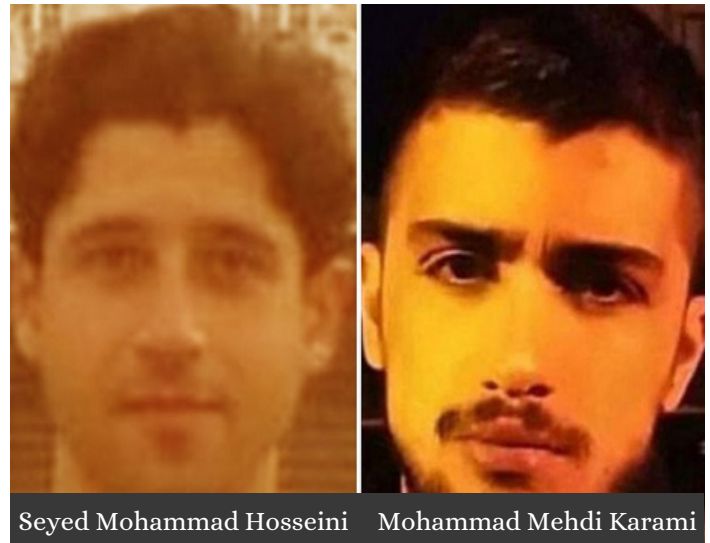


Majidreza Rahnavard

The judge found him guilty of Moharebeh (enmity against God), a capital offense and sentenced Rahnavard to death. Rahnavard's sentence was implemented less than two weeks after his trial and only 23 days after his arrest.

During his arrest and trial, Majidreza Rahnavard was denied access to a lawyer of his choosing. In videos broadcast by the Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting, Rahnavard appeared in front of the camera with a broken hand and a bruised and wounded face and head.

Two other defendants involved in demonstrations, **Mohammad Mehdi Karami**, 21, and **Seyed Mohammad Hosseini**, 40, were executed on January 7, 2023 after being convicted of killing a Basij agent. They had been detained along with 14 other individuals on suspicion of taking part in the murder of a Basij agent, named Ruhollah Ajamian.



Seyed Mohammad Hosseini

Mohammad Mehdi Karami

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Other Political Executions

Political executions in recent months have not been limited to those arrested during the Woman, Life, Freedom uprising. In the past month, the Islamic Republic has executed at least three political-ideological prisoners who had previously been detained.



On May 6, the Iranian regime executed **Habib Esiyod** (Habib Frajullah Kaab), an Iranian-Swedish citizen, on the charge of efsad-e fel arz (spreading corruption on earth). He was arrested in Turkey in October 2022 and was held in the Ministry of Intelligence's detention center under strict security conditions for the duration of his detention.

During his imprisonment, he was never permitted to speak with an attorney of his choice or explain his case. He was accused of being the leader of a group that plotted a terrorist attack on September 22, 2018, during a military parade along Quds Boulevard in Ahvaz, causing the death of 25 persons.

Also, on May 8, 2023, two people named **Yousef Mehrad** and **Sadrollah Fazeli Zare** were executed in Iran on the charge of blasphemy. They were arrested in 2020. Their execution demonstrated that individuals in Iran could easily be tried, sentenced and executed solely for having different religious beliefs or for criticizing religion.



Protesters Facing Possible Execution

As part of its ongoing series of reports on protesters detained during the uprising, and in light of the increasing number of executions and the growing concern for protesters facing the death penalty, Femena has been investigating and regularly reporting on these cases. In addition to the individuals mentioned above, at least 60 other protesters, detained during the demonstrations following Mahsa Amini's death, are currently facing charges which could carry the death penalty.

On Saturday, October 29, 2022, **Mohammad Qobadlu**, from the city of Parand, in Tehran province, was tried and sentenced to death in the 15th Branch of Tehran's Revolutionary Court, headed by Abolqasem Salavati. Given the application of Article 48 of the Code of Criminal Procedure, the defendant's attorney was not permitted to present his defense at the hearing.



According to the indictment, Mohammad Qobadlu is accused of ramming his car into officers on motorcycles, killing one officer and injuring five others. According to his family and doctors, Qobadlu has bipolar disorder, and at the time of the incident lacked self-control because he wasn't taking his medication. But a forensic psychiatrist rejected this claim in a court session. Therefore, the Supreme Court approved Mohammad Qobadlu's death sentence.

However, his retained lawyer, who took the case after the initial trial, was able to prevent the implementation of the execution sentence and has since requested the case be reviewed by the Supreme Court.

On May 23, 2023, Amir Raisian, Qobadlu's lawyer, announced that the Supreme Court had upheld the "Qisas" death sentence. It should be noted that Qobadlu was sentenced to death twice, once for Moharebeh and again for the murder of a police officer, which is subject to "Qisas" or retribution punishment, decided upon by the family of the victim. Concerns about his possible execution have grown, since the Supreme Court confirmed his Qisas sentence.

Protesters at Risk of Execution in Baluchistan

During the Women, Life, Freedom uprising, Sistan and Baluchistan province was a major center of resistance and protest. This region accounts for the most protest deaths, including both adults and children.

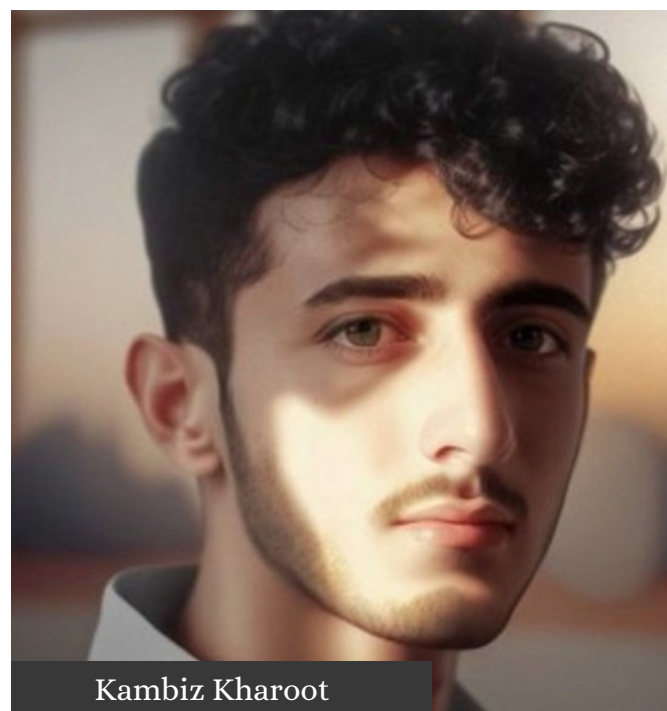


Protests following the Friday prayers in Zahedan have been consistent and even after 8 months they continue. According to available statistics, this region accounts for 30% of all executions in Iran, while only 5% of Iran's population lives in this province. Sistan and Baluchistan province is one of the poorest and least developed provinces of Iran, with the highest unemployment rate.

Poverty, discrimination, and systematic repression of the Baluchi people have contributed to underdevelopment and deprivation of even the most basic of needs, including lack of clean drinking water in many areas of the province. Due to economic impoverishment many Baluchis have taken to smuggling fuel or goods, including drugs across the border, as a means for survival. The state's response to these practices has been long prison sentences and execution of Baluchis.

Six of the eight protesters who have been detained and are currently facing death sentences are from Baluchistan.

Kambiz Kharoot a 22 year-old Baluchi citizen was sentenced to death by the 2nd Criminal Branch of Zahedan's Shahid Nouri Court on charges of "disturbance and chaos", through "enmity with God" and "spreading of corruption on earth". The verdict was delivered to him in Zahedan prison on January 3, 2023.



Kambiz Kharoot

He was arrested on October 1, 2022 and was released on bail in late October. He was then arrested again on November 12 and this time he faced serious charges. According to Baluch human rights reports, he was severely tortured in detention and was denied the right to counsel. Despite this, he denied all of the charges against him in court. He is currently being held in Section 9 of Zahedan's Central Prison, while the Supreme Court considers his appeal.



Shoaib MirbaluchZehi Rigi

Shoaib MirbaluchZehi Rigi, a 19-year-old Baluchi citizen was sentenced to death on charges of "spreading corruption on earth". According to reports, Shoaib was arrested on October 5, 2022, and his death sentence was issued on December 19, 2022, about two and a half months after his arrest. On the day of his arrest, Shoaib left his house to buy medicine and was arrested by intelligence agents in front of the pharmacy.

According to sources, MirbaluchZehi was detained in Zahedan's Intelligence Detention Center, for 14 days during which time he was tortured and forced to falsely confess against himself.

According to close sources, his physical torture was so severe that deep bruises on his body were still visible after a month. Shoaib MirbaluchZehi was tried in court without the right to an attorney. This Baluch citizen has been sentenced to death in Zahedan's prison. With his objection to the ruling, the primary verdict was sent to the appeals court.

Mansour Dehmardeh, a 23-year-old Baluch working as a bus driver's helper is one of the detainees of the recent protests in Zahedan. Mansour Dehmardeh, who suffers from a physical disability, was arrested by intelligence forces in Zahedan on October 3, 2022. He was sentenced to death on January 3, 2023 by the 2nd branch of the criminal court at Zahedan's Shahid Nouri Court on the charge of "spreading corruption on earth".



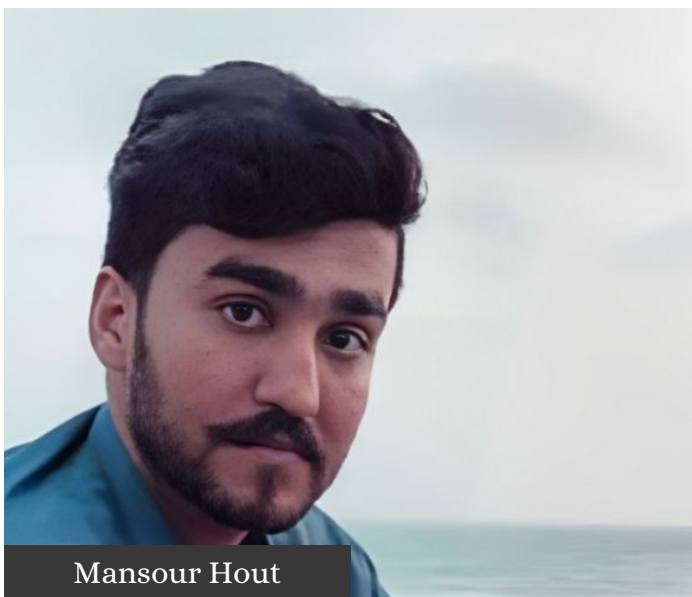
According to the report, he was tortured so severely at the intelligence detention center for ten days that his teeth and nose were broken. Mansour Dehmardeh is currently imprisoned in Section 9 of Zahedan's Central Prison, and despite his poor physical condition, he has been denied access to proper medical treatment. His case has now been referred to the Supreme Court for a final appeal.

Ebrahim Narouei, a 25-year-old Baluchi citizen and one of the detainees of the recent protests in Zahedan, has been sentenced to death by the 6th branch of the Zahedan Revolutionary Court on charges of moharebeh or enmity with God. He was arrested on October 3, 2022 near his house on Zahedan's old road.

According to reports, he was forced to falsely confess against himself after a week of torture Zahedan's Intelligence Detention Center. His death sentence was announced on December 30, 2022 in Zahedan's Central Prison. Ebrahim Narouei did not have the right to an attorney of his choosing in court.



He is currently in Section 9 of Zahedan's Central Prison and his case has been sent to the Supreme Court for appeal.



Mansour Hout

Mansour Hout, a 27-year-old Baluchi citizen and son of Kamal Khan Hout, a prominent Baluch poet and singer of Baluchi music and Tanbur musician, was arrested on October 2, 2022 and charged with "spreading corruption on earth" and enmity with God. He received a death sentence. He is the father of an eight-year-old boy. The campaign of Baluchi activists claimed that after his arrest, Mansour was tortured for 10 days while being kept in Chahbahar's Intelligence Detention Center. Then, he was transferred to section 2 of Zahedan's Central Prison.

Nizamuddin Hout, 21, was arrested on September 30, 2022, in Chahbahar and sentenced to death on January 8, 2023 the 2nd branch of Shahid Nouri Court on charges of "spreading corruption on earth" and "enmity with God."

Haalvsh human rights group reported, that according to an informed source close to Mansour and Nizamuddin Hout the two "were subjected to severe torture while being detained, and under duress and threats from the security interrogators, they were forced to confess to crimes against themselves and sign and finger prints documents to this effect."



Nizamuddin Hout

It should be noted that on Friday, September 30, 2022, a protest was held in the city of Chahbahar in Sistan and Baluchestan Province in response to news that the then-police chief of Chahbahar, Ibrahim Kochzai, had sexually assaulted a 15-year-old Baluchi girl. Following Friday prayers in Zahedan (Capital of Sistan and Baluchestan Province) on September 30, 2022, prayer goers marched to the sixteenth police station in Zahedan and demanded accountability and a trial for the police commander of Chahbahar.

Security forces opened fire on unarmed protesters, killing at least one hundred people. This day is known as “the Bloody Friday of Zahedan” or “the Black Friday of Zahedan” and protests have been held in Zahedan on a weekly basis since. Many protesters were arrested on September 30 or on subsequent days in relation to this protest.



The Bloody Friday of Zahedan

Protester at Risk of Execution in Khuzestan Province

The city of Izeh in Khuzestan province has also played a prominent role in recent Iranian protests. This small and impoverished city, which was once considered a place of exile for some political prisoners, saw a large number of people on the streets in protest against the government, both during the November 2019 protests and the Woman, Life, Freedom uprising. As a result, protesters have been brutally suppressed, killed, and detained in this city on numerous occasions. At least seven of those arrested are currently facing charges of “enmity with God” and “spreading corruption on earth,” which can lead to the death penalty, and one person named Mojahed Korkuri, from Izeh, has also been sentenced to death.

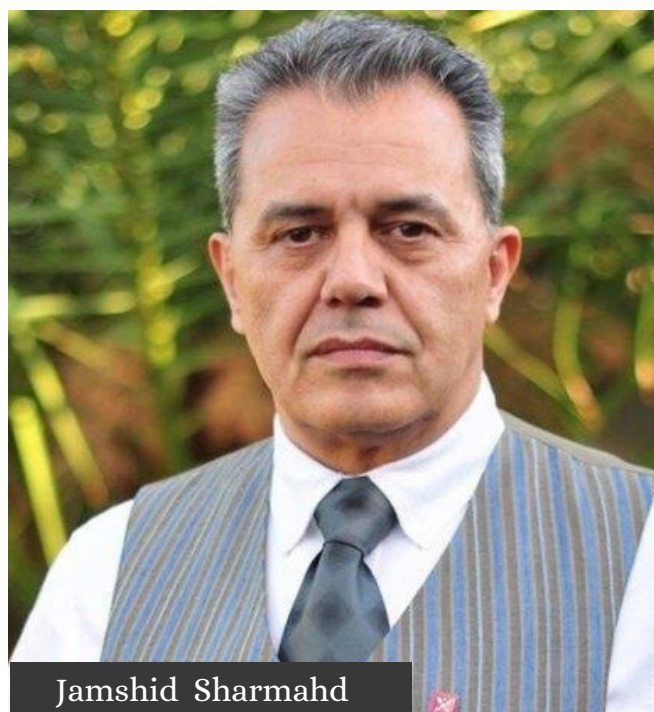
Abbas (Mojahed) Korkuri, 39, was sentenced to death by the Revolutionary Court of Izeh for the murder of 9 year old Kian Pirfalak on November 16, 2022.



Korkuri was seriously injured when he was arrested on December 20, 2022 in the village of Par Surakh, Izeh. Hossein Saeedi and Mahmoud Ahmadi, two of his companions, were killed as a result of shots and grenades fired by government forces, and their bodies were not returned to their families.

Mojahed Korkuri was sentenced to death, despite the fact that Kian’s mother, Zeinab Moulai, testified, as a witness to her son’s death, and explained that security forces were responsible for the shooting. Kian Pirfalak was killed on November 16, 2022 after security forces opened fire on his family’s car. His father was also seriously injured as a result of the shooting.

Other Political Activists Facing Possible Execution Sentence



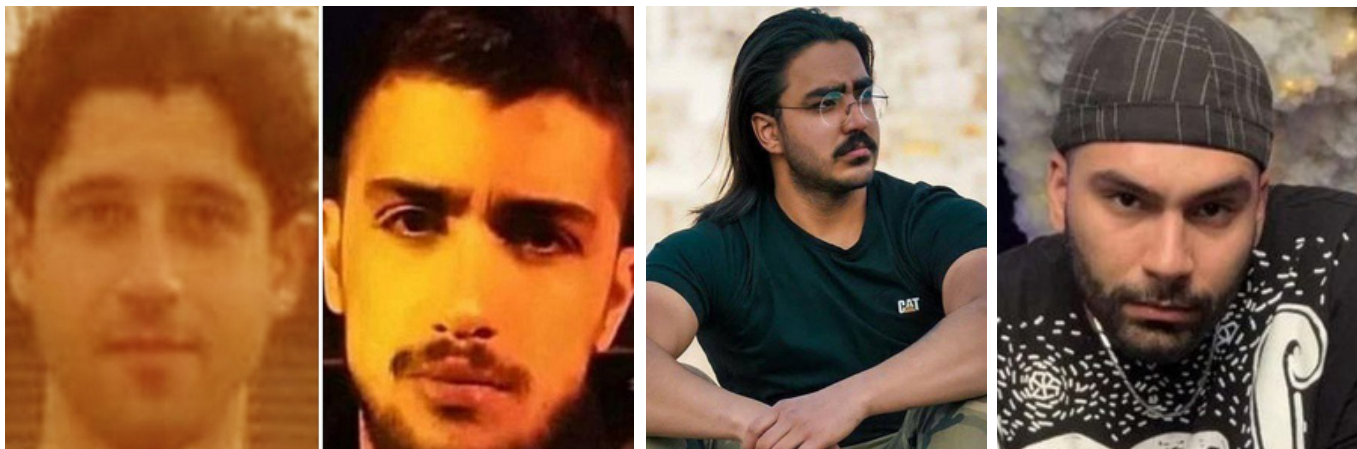
Jamshid Sharmahd, an Iranian-German Political activist, was sentenced to death according to an announcement by Iran's judiciary announced on April 26, 2023. He was the head of an association called Kingdom Assembly of Iran (Anjoman-e Padeshahi-ye Iran). Sharmahd also took charge of a dissident foreign based Radio program, called Tondar, after its former director, Forood Fouladvand, disappeared.

Sharmahd was kidnapped by the Iranian security forces in Dubai in the summer of 2020 and is now facing execution after the Supreme Court confirmed his death sentence.

Executions Target Poor and Economically Disenfranchised Groups

A look at the cases of executed protestors or those facing the death penalty, as well as others facing serious charges, reveals that the majority of them are from the socio-economically disadvantaged groups.

Mohsen Shekari, Majidreza Rahnavard, Seyed Mohammad Hosseini, and Mohammad Mehdi Karami were all young blue collar or service industry workers, one of whom made his living by working in a cafe, another worked as an apprentice in a fruit market, and the third as a poultry farm worker.



They were citizens who took to the streets to protest, hoping to improve the situation and change the country's fortunes. In addition to being denied political and social rights, Iran's unstable economy, unchecked inflation, and the rising costs of housing, food, and clothing had left them feeling hopeless about the future. Despite facing guns, jail, or even death, for these most marginalized and structurally excluded populations the street and public protest are often the only place and strategy for expression of discontent. Targeting structurally excluded populations for detention, torture and death, including working class, and poor populations as well as ethnic and religious minorities by security forces is in many ways the state's ultimatum to a population whose needs and demands have been ignored for decades.

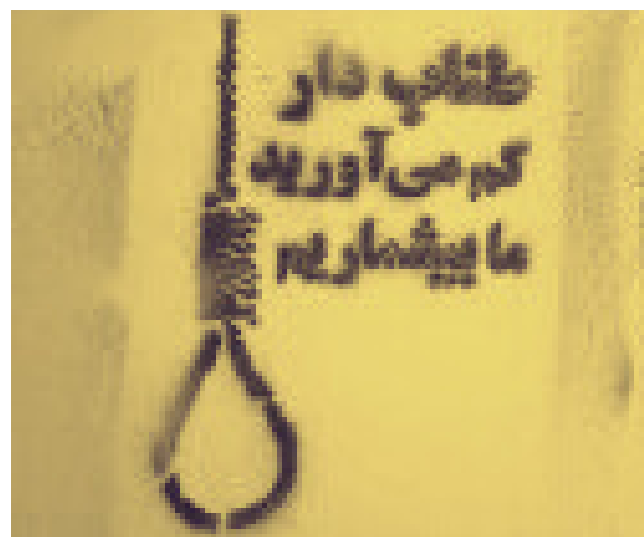


The Islamic Republic came to power with the slogan of bettering the lives of the working class, the poor and economically disenfranchised populations, and now, after forty-four years of rule, it not only lacks the ability to meet their basic needs, but also severely suppresses their protests.

This social group—with which the Iranian regime is familiar—has nothing left to lose and state officials understand that if the protests by structurally excluded groups continue, they will pose a serious threat to the regime's survival.

It should be noted that of all executed protesters who were charged with involvement in the murder of security agents, none had admitted guilt to the charge, and despite efforts by security agents, interrogators, the judicial system and the state-backed Iranian radio and television, the guilt of these individuals in this respect has never been established.

It is also worth noting that the majority of confessions were obtained through interrogation and torture, and all of the defendants denied their confessions once interrogations and torture ended and after they were transferred to a public prison. A review of their records reveals that the majority of them were law-abiding citizens working hard to make ends meet. After eight months of protests and execution of seven protesters for the supposed crime of killing several security or Basij forces, the Iranian authorities and in particular the judicial system have yet to comment on the security forces' killing of over 500 protesters.



None of the state perpetrators have faced legal action or been held accountable for their actions. Instead, the families of those who have been killed, executed, or imprisoned are frequently threatened and under pressure by the security forces in an effort to prevent them from speaking out and disseminating information about the whereabouts and situation of their loved ones. The lack of accountability and the killing with impunity by Iran's security forces has left Iranians angry. Every now and then, the enraged public returns to the streets, their numbers continuously growing, as they protest against harsh punishments and judicial injustices like the death penalty and call for its repeal from Iranian law.

Femena supports Women Human Rights Defenders, their organizations and feminist movements through analysis of trends and policy, documentation, fostering the development of regional communities of practice and advocacy.

Femena's work is primarily focused on contexts of shrinking or closed civic space and contexts complicated by growing extremism and conflict.



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