CAUGHT IN A WEB OF REPRESSION
IRAN’S HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS UNDER ATTACK
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1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The election of President Hassan Rouhani in 2013 gave rise to hopes both in Iran and internationally that the human rights situation in the country would improve. However, over the course of his first term in office, the country’s courageous human rights defenders, who were already struggling to recover from the 2009 post-presidential election crackdown, found themselves at the receiving end of suffocating levels of repression at the hands of the country’s judiciary and security apparatus.

Since 2013, scores of human rights defenders have been handed down harsh prison sentences in connection with their peaceful human rights activities. Many more have been subjected to surveillance, interrogations and drawn-out criminal proceedings coercing them into self-censorship. The wave of repression appears to be an attempt on the part of the state’s repressive arms to crush any aspirations for change created by the promises of increased freedoms made during the electoral campaign of President Hassan Rouhani in 2013.

President Rouhani and his administration have so far failed to take any meaningful steps to stop these abuses. On the contrary, they have brushed aside reports of abuses in their media interviews and statements to the UN, claiming that Iran’s judiciary is independent and no one in the country is imprisoned solely for peacefully exercising their rights to freedom of expression, association and assembly. There is still no indication that his administration intends to change course during his second term in office.

Some groups of human rights defenders, such as anti-death penalty campaigners, women’s rights activists and those seeking truth and justice for the gross human rights violations of the 1980s, have experienced particularly intensified repression. This has included shockingly long prison sentences, interrogations which activists have described as unprecedentedly harsh and official statements in state media which routinely label human rights defenders as “foreign agents” and “traitors” bent on harming national security and destroying traditional values. In many case, the authorities’ motive appears to have been a desire to curtail the defenders’ renewed activism and campaigns.

For others, like minority rights activists, trade unionists and human rights lawyers, the tempo of repression has remained more or less the same as before President Rouhani’s election. Since 2013, many trade unionists and human rights lawyers who were jailed during the crackdown following the 2009 presidential election protests have been released from prison after serving their sentences. However, the climate of fear amongst them persists as the authorities continue to resort to harassment, interrogations, fresh criminal cases, and employment bans to prevent them from carrying out their human rights activities.

This report refers to 45 individuals who have been subjected to abuses ranging from surveillance and harassment to criminal prosecutions and imprisonment for their peaceful human rights activities. The cases of 21 human rights defenders are documented in detail. The research is based on interviews that Amnesty International conducted with 22 individuals, including human rights defenders and their families and lawyers. It is also based on a close study of courts verdicts, official statements, and publicly available testimonies from human rights defenders and their families. According to the findings in the report, across the board, human rights defenders caught in the web of state repression have experienced noticeably worse treatment at the hands of Iran’s abusive criminal justice system.

On the one hand, Revolutionary Courts have issued increasingly lengthy prison sentences against human rights defenders, which in many cases have exceeded a decade. On the other, the prosecution and judicial authorities have lowered the threshold for invoking national security-related charges against human rights defenders. Amnesty International was able to obtain court verdicts in the cases of eight human rights defenders, all of which demonstrate how courts cite a wider range of peaceful human rights activities as “evidence” of criminal activity. These include visiting the gravesites of those killed during the 2009 post-
presidential election protests; having contact with families of victims of human rights violations, including former or current political prisoners; signing petitions in support of human rights; giving interviews to media outlets outside Iran about human rights abuses; and merely discussing human rights on social media such as Facebook or Twitter.

Charges routinely used against human rights defenders are drawn from the Islamic Penal Code and almost always include “gathering and colluding to commit crimes against national security” (Article 610), “forming a group composed of more than two people with the purpose of disrupting national security” (Article 498) and/or “membership of a group with the purpose of disrupting national security” (Article 499). The definitions of these crimes contravene the principle of legality as they are overly broad and vague, and allow the authorities to apply them arbitrarily. Moreover, many of these offences do not amount to internationally recognizable criminal offences.

Other charges based on the penal code which are commonly used to prosecute human rights defenders include “spreading propaganda against the system” (Article 500), “insulting the Supreme Leader” (Article 514), and “insulting Islamic sanctities” (Article 513). These offences effectively criminalize the free expression of ideas and opinions, in contravention of Iran’s international human rights obligations.

Years of repression, particularly since 2009, have left Iran without any legally authorized NGOs that work on human rights issues and are critical of the state. As a result, those caught up in the recent upsurge of repression are human rights defenders who pursue their activism independently or as part of informal groups of individuals who espouse similar causes. To communicate and organize, they rely heavily on social media. In response, the authorities have increasingly used posts related to human rights as “evidence” of criminal activity. In some court verdicts, they have also banned human rights defenders from engagement in the online space for a set period.

Other activities criminalized by the prosecution authorities and courts include communicating about human rights concerns with international non-governmental organizations (NGOs) such as Amnesty International, or with intergovernmental organizations such as the UN and the European Union (EU). This is well illustrated by the case of Narges Mohammadi, who was charged with several national security-related offences after meeting with the EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy on International Women’s Day on 8 March 2014. She was ultimately sentenced to 16 years’ imprisonment, a term which she is currently serving in Evin prison. Another emblematic case is that of Arash Sadeghi, who has been sentenced to a total of 19 years in prison on national security-related charges based entirely on his human rights work, including communicating with Amnesty International.

Human rights defenders who have faced reprisal for sending information regarding human rights violations to the UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Iran include Mohammad Maleki, who has been subjected to a travel ban since September 2011, and Saeed Shirzad, who is serving a five-year prison sentence for “gathering and colluding against national security”, related entirely to his peaceful human rights work.

The criminalization of human rights defenders in Iran takes place against the backdrop of ongoing smear campaigns against human rights defenders, particularly on the internet. The authorities routinely equate the defence of human rights to “espionage”, “collusion against national security”, “incitement to sedition”, and support of the “hypocrites” – a derogatory term used by the Iranian authorities to refer to people with real or perceived links to the People’s Mojahedin Organization of Iran (PMOI), a banned opposition group that advocates the overthrow of the Islamic Republic.

**Unfair trials**

Trials of human rights defenders on national security-related charges in Iran take place before Revolutionary Courts, which are characterized by unfair, summary and predominantly secret processes.

All the human rights defenders whose cases are documented in the report were denied access to a lawyer from the time of arrest and during investigations. Those arrested were frequently held in prolonged solitary confinement, which may amount to torture, and were given little or no access to their families and lawyers. Many were subjected to torture or other ill-treatment during interrogations conducted by Ministry of Intelligence or Revolutionary Guard officials and compelled to “confess”. Judges failed to order investigations into allegations of torture and other ill-treatment, in breach of Iran’s own Constitution and the Code of Criminal Procedure as well as the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, to which Iran is a state party.
Key battlegrounds for human rights in Iran

Human rights defenders targeted by the state include individuals active on a range of human rights issues in Iran.

The authorities have targeted people involved in Iran's growing movement against the death penalty, often accusing them of “threatening national security” or “defying Islam”. Narges Mohammadi, Executive Chairperson of the Centre for Human Rights Defenders, was sentenced to 16 years' imprisonment in May 2016, 10 years of which was for the charge of “forming a group... with the purpose of disrupting national security”, which related to her involvement with the Campaign for Step by Step Abolition of the Death Penalty (known by its Persian acronym, Legam). This campaign was launched by several prominent human rights defenders in 2013.

Other anti-death penalty activists targeted include Atena Daemi and Omid Allishenas, who were each sentenced to seven years' imprisonment on national security-related charges brought for their peaceful opposition to the death penalty. This involved criticizing the authorities' execution record online, distributing anti-death penalty pamphlets and participating in gatherings outside prison in solidarity with families of death row prisoners.

Artists who have merely addressed death penalty issues in their art have also been criminalized. An example is the case of writer Golrokh Ebrahimi Iraee, who received a six-year prison sentence on charges that include “insulting Islamic sanctities” for writing an unpublished story about the horrific practice of stoning.

Women’s rights activists have faced renewed repression in the context of the endemic discrimination and violence confronting women and girls every day in Iran. The crackdown intensified after a group of women launched in October 2015 a campaign promoting pro-women’s rights candidates for the February 2016 parliamentary elections. In the first half of 2016, more than a dozen activists were summoned, interrogated and threatened with imprisonment. The level of threats led to the campaign being shut down.

Iran's intelligence bodies have used surveillance to nip in the bud any serious attempt by women’s rights activists to organize themselves to challenge state-sanctioned discrimination. This has included the monitoring of activities undertaken during travel abroad, as seen in the case of Alieh Motalebzadeh, who is facing prosecution on national security-related charges for attending a workshop in Georgia on “Women’s empowerment and elections” in October 2016.

The renewed assault on women’s rights activists has been accompanied by an official discourse which flatly equates feminism with criminality and describes any initiative relating to women’s rights as a “conspiracy” against national security. This hostile attitude has been expressed not only toward women’s rights defenders but even toward lone voices within the government of President Rouhani who have made modest efforts to improve the situation of women’s rights in the country, such as the Vice-President on Women and Family Affairs, Shahindokht Molaverdi.

Women who oppose compulsory veiling (hijab) have also been subject to severe smear campaigns on state media. An illustrative example is the case of US-based Iranian journalist and women's rights activist Masih Alinejad, who has founded a popular online campaign called My Stealthy Freedom against compulsory hijab. She has been repeatedly subject to sexual insults on state-sanctioned media outlets and threatened with rape and death by social media users believed to be affiliated with Iran's intelligence and security forces.

Workers defying the ban on independent trade unions are paying a high price for their bravery. The number of jailed trade unionists is believed to have dropped since 2013. However, trade unionists have continued to face long prison terms on concocted national security-related charges. Some of those in detention have faced torture and other ill-treatment. Other trade unionists, including those recently released after completing their sentences, have continued to face harassment by intelligence and security officials, dismissals from employment at both public institutions and private companies, and police violence. Yet independent workers' organizations have rarely been more needed as soaring inflation, cuts to subsidies, unpaid wages and precarious jobs have left millions of poorly paid people in Iran struggling to survive.

Trade unionists currently jailed in Iran for their peaceful activism include Esmail Abdi, a mathematics teacher and a member of the board of directors at the Teachers' Trade Association of Tehran, who is serving a six-year prison sentence. The prospect of imprisonment looms over many other trade unionists who are undergoing trial or awaiting the outcome of their appeals against their convictions and sentences. They include three former or current members of the board of directors at the Teachers' Trade Association of Tehran, Mahmoud Beheshti Langroodi, Mohammad Reza Niknejad and Mehdi Bohlooli; three members of the Syndicate of Workers of Tehran and Suburbs Bus Company, Davoud Razavi, Ebrahim Madadi and Reza Shahabati; and a member of the Free Union of Workers of Iran, Jafar Azimzadeh.
Lawyers defending prisoners of conscience and other victims of human rights violations have fared no better in the crackdown. Prominent human rights lawyer Abdolfattah Soltani continues to languish in Iran, serving a 13-year prison sentence on spurious national security-related charges. Other human rights lawyers, including those recently released from prison, continue to face harassment and interrogations by intelligence and security officials which prevents them from carrying out their professional duties and responsibilities effectively. Some have also experienced disbarment. Lawyers who were forced flee into exile in 2009 are not able to safely return to the country as they have pending criminal investigations against them.

As a result of all this, human rights lawyers in Iran have become an endangered species, with only a handful of lawyers shouldering the enormous task of providing meaningful, independent legal representation to prisoners of conscience and other victims of human rights violations. These lawyers often face a range of repressive measures including: arbitrary intervention by the authorities to deny or restrict their visits to their clients; delayed access to court files; lack of appropriate facilities for private consultation and communication with clients; the presence of intelligence agents and prison officials during meetings with clients; and travel bans.

Other targeted human rights defenders include those defending the rights of Iran’s religious minorities, who have been repressed and discriminated against for decades. In particular, members of the Baha’i community, deemed a “heretical” sect by the authorities, have faced harassment, arbitrary arrest and detention and criminal proceedings for criticizing the ban on their enrolment in higher education institutes and for forming their own clandestine universities to provide Baha’i youth with higher education.

Education rights activist Navid Khangani, a founding member of the Committee for Pursuit of the Right to Education for Baha’i Students and the Association to Oppose Discrimination in Education, has been imprisoned since August 2012. He was sentenced to 12 years and five months’ imprisonment for his peaceful human rights activities. Another education rights activist, Rouhie Safajoo, a 20-year-old Baha’i student, was arrested and detained for nearly a month in March 2016, during which she spent eight days in solitary confinement. The authorities subsequently charged her with “dissemination of lies”, which they said stemmed from her critical posts on Facebook. She has been out on bail since 27 March 2016, pending trial.

Defenders who seek to advance ethnic minority rights have been similarly subjected to threats from intelligence and security officials, prosecution and imprisonment for their peaceful human rights activities. Frequently, they have also been labelled as “separatists” and accused of inciting tension to undermine Iran’s territorial integrity.

Alireza Farshi Yekendi, a member of Iran’s Azerbaijani Turk minority and the founder of an online campaign to commemorate International Mother Language Day, received a 15-year prison sentence in February 2017 on charges including “gathering and colluding to commit crimes against national security” and “founding groups with the purpose of disrupting national security”, which stemmed from his peaceful activism. Mohammad Ali Amouri, a minority rights activist from Iran’s Ahwazi Arab minority and a founding member of a now-disbanded cultural rights group called Al-Hiwar (meaning “Dialogue” in Arabic), has been on death row since 2012. Rahman Asakereh, another founding member of Al-Hiwar, has been serving a 20-year prison sentence since 2011. Both men have been convicted of “enmity against God” (moharebeh) for their peaceful activities at Al-Hiwar, which involved the promotion of Arabic language, identity and culture.

The authorities have also undertaken renewed efforts to supress human rights defenders seeking truth, justice and reparation on behalf of individuals who were summarily executed or forcibly disappeared during the 1980s and their families. Amongst the defenders are also relatives of victims who are still demanding to know what happened to their loved ones and bring those responsible to justice. Mansoureh Behkish and Raheleh Rahemipour are among those recently sentenced to prison terms on national security-related charges simply for trying to find out the truth, holding commemorative gatherings or visiting the sites of mass graves where their loved ones are believed to be buried. Maryam Akbari-Monfared, who is serving a 15-year prison sentence, is facing reprisals, including denial of medical care and threats of an additional three-year prison term and exile to a remote prison, for filing a complaint with the Office of the Prosecutor from inside prison in October 2016 in which she requested an official investigation into the mass extrajudicial executions of political prisoners, including her siblings, in 1988.

The renewed crackdown follows recently revived calls for an inquiry into the killings of several thousand political prisoners in a wave of extrajudicial executions across the country in the summer of 1988. This was triggered by the release of an audio recording in September 2016 of a meeting in 1988 in which senior officials are heard discussing and defending the details of their plans to carry out the mass executions. The release of the audio recording triggered a chain of unprecedented reactions from high-level officials, leading them to admit for the first time that the mass killings of 1988 were planned at the highest levels of government.
Human rights defenders targeted for seeking truth and justice include some born after the 1979 Revolution, who have taken to social media and other platforms to discuss the past atrocities and attended memorial gatherings held at Khavaran, a deserted gravesite in south Tehran where some of the thousands of political prisoners who were extrajudicially executed in the summer of 1988 are buried in unmarked mass graves. The prison sentences against Atena Daemi, 29, and Omid Alishenas, 33, are examples of court verdicts reviewed by Amnesty International in which engaging in online discussions about the 1988 massacres has been cited as evidence of “criminal” activity deemed threatening to national security and insulting to the founder of the Islamic Republic of Iran and used to convict the human rights defenders.

International law and standards

The patterns of repression of human rights defenders that Amnesty International has documented violate international legal instruments to which Iran is a state party, including the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. The UN Declaration on the Right and Responsibility of Individuals, Groups and Organs of Society to Promote and Protect Universally Recognized Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms, which articulates existing rights in a context applicable to the work of human rights defenders, recognizes the right of everyone, “individually and in association with others, to promote and strive for the protection and realization of human rights and fundamental freedoms at the national and international levels”.

Recommendations

Immediate and wide-ranging action is needed to ensure respect and protection for the vital work human rights defenders carry out, end the climate of fear they find themselves in and create a safe and enabling environment in which they can work without fear of reprisals. This is, moreover, an essential step towards improving the human rights of all those living in Iran.

Among other actions, Amnesty International is calling on the Iranian authorities to:

- Release immediately and unconditionally all human rights defenders imprisoned solely for peacefully exercising their rights to freedom of expression, association and assembly;
- Explicitly recognize the legitimate work of human rights defenders, end the criminalization of peaceful activities that promote and defend human rights, including communication and interaction with international and regional human rights mechanisms, and ensure a safe and enabling environment where it is possible to defend and promote human rights without fear of reprisal, punishment or intimidation;
- Promptly lift the undue restrictions on the right to association that are preventing individuals from forming and joining human rights NGOs and independent trade unions.

Amnesty International is also calling on other countries, in particular EU member states, as well as the EU itself, which has announced plans to relaunch a renewed bilateral human rights dialogue with Iran, to:

- Press the Iranian authorities, during their political dialogues and other bilateral interactions, to immediately and unconditionally release all human rights defenders imprisoned solely for their peaceful activities.
2. METHODOLOGY

This report analyses the situation that human rights defenders have been facing in Iran during the last four years. It covers the period since the election of President Hassan Rouhani in 2013 in order to test the perception often seen in Western media articles and heard from policy makers in Western European countries that Iran’s increased international engagement has been accompanied by a commitment to improve the human rights situation in the country.

The report refers to 45 individuals who have been subjected to abuses ranging from surveillance and harassment to criminal prosecutions and imprisonment for their peaceful human rights activities. The cases of 21 of these human rights defenders are documented in detail. Of them, 12 had been convicted and were serving prison sentences as of 12 July 2017; five had been sentenced but were at liberty pending the outcome of their appeals; two were at liberty and undergoing trial; one had received a final conviction and sentence but was out of prison on temporary leave; and one was at liberty but under a travel ban.

Fifteen of the 21 cases detailed in the report concern human rights defenders whose cases have begun since 2013. Five – Abdolfattah Soltani, Navid Khanjani, Maryam Akbari Monfared, Rahman Asakereh and Mohammad Ali Amouri – concern individuals who were imprisoned before 2013 but have remained in detention during the period under review. One concerns a person who is at liberty but has been subjected to a travel ban since 2011.

In each case, Amnesty International collected information from reliable sources, including independent human rights activists on the ground and lawyers, to conclude that the human rights defenders were targeted in relation to their peaceful human rights activities. For eight of these cases, Amnesty International was also able to obtain court verdicts. In other cases where such documents were not available or could not be obtained safely, Amnesty International relied on human rights defenders, families and lawyers sharing detailed information about their content. It also reviewed published testimonies from human rights defenders and their families.

Court documents are often not available in Iran because its criminal justice system has no clear legal provisions with regard to making court judgements publicly available, contrary to Iran’s obligations under international human rights law and standards. In some cases, individuals had obtained written copies of a court verdict, but were concerned, as is commonly the case in Iran, that they would face reprisal if they shared them.

In carrying out its research, Amnesty International conducted interviews with 22 people, including human rights defenders and their families and lawyers. All interviews were conducted remotely in Persian, over the phone or on social messaging applications. Unless otherwise indicated, Amnesty International has withheld the names of sources interviewed in order to protect their security. For this reason, this report does not specify the specific time, location or means of communication for the interviews conducted.

Amnesty International also reviewed statements by the Iranian authorities in both the Persian and English languages relating to cases involving human rights defenders and the government’s approach to human rights more generally. The statements include the Iran government’s statements in international forums, such as the UN Human Rights Council, and during dialogues with the EU, as well as their replies to the UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Iran. They also include government statements on human rights cited in state-owned and state-affiliated news agencies.
Access to detailed information, including documentary evidence, was an important consideration in the selection of cases for this report. Amnesty International was generally able to obtain greater access to information about human rights defenders based in Tehran. The organization undertook efforts to address this limitation by diversifying its sources and documented violations against several human rights defenders belonging to ethnic minorities outside of the capital. However, it acknowledges that the report still highlights a disproportionate number of cases from Tehran.

Undertaking human rights research on Iran is fraught with challenges. The Iranian authorities generally do not permit human rights groups or international experts to visit the country. Since 1979, Amnesty International has made repeated attempts to visit Iran for research purposes, but has not been permitted to do so. Furthermore, as this report shows, the Iranian authorities have criminalized the communication and interaction of Iranian human rights defenders with international organizations.

Amnesty International sent a letter to the Head of the Judiciary on 21 June 2017, seeking information about the situation of specific human rights defenders, including many of those highlighted in this report. In particular, it requested information by 12 July. As of this date, the authorities had not responded. Amnesty International will continue to seek opportunities to discuss its concerns and recommendations with the Iranian authorities.

Amnesty International is deeply grateful to the individuals who shared information for this report, without whom this research would not have been possible.
3. BACKGROUND

In the decade following the 1979 Revolution, Iranian authorities laid the foundations of a repressive state apparatus. They enacted legislation that imposed undue restrictions on the peaceful exercise of the rights to freedom of expression, peaceful assembly and association, including the 1981 Press Law, the Islamic Penal Code, the Labour Code and the Law on Political Parties, Societies, Political and Guild Associations, and Islamic or Recognized Minority Religious Associations.

In response to the mass protests that erupted after the disputed 2009 presidential election, the authorities intensified the repression already in place for years. Thousands of people were arrested during the post-election unrest. Most of those detained were released within days but many hundreds were held incommunicado for weeks, effectively victims of enforced disappearances.¹

In the months and years that followed, human rights defenders were prosecuted, jailed, intimidated into silence or forced into exile. Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) that focused on human rights were forcibly closed down by intelligence and security officials and denied registration or operating permits. Among them were the Centre for Human Rights Defenders (CHRD), Human Rights Activists in Iran (HRA), the Association for the Rights of Prisoners, and the Committee for Human Rights Reporters (CHRR). In many cases, their members and founders were arrested and sentenced to imprisonment.

The Iranian authorities claim that they conduct judicial proceedings in a fair and impartial manner. Amnesty International has found that, on the contrary, basic fair trial guarantees are persistently violated, particularly in national security-related cases. Although a new Code of Criminal Procedure introduced several long-overdue reforms in 2015, Iranian legal system continues to lack adequate mechanisms to guarantee the rights of individuals standing trial on criminal charges and confronted by the powerful machinery of the state.²

After President Hassan Rouhani took office in August 2013, his administration immediately began efforts to improve Iran’s image on the global stage, particularly with respect to its nuclear programme. The President stated this would be his priority in order to lift sanctions against Iran and set the country’s economy back on track.

On 24 November 2013, Iran and a group of key actors within the international community, the permanent five members of the UN Security Council – China, France, Russia, the UK and the USA – plus Germany and the EU as a whole, agreed the Joint Plan of Action,³ a time-bound roadmap to reach mutually agreed solutions that “would ensure Iran’s nuclear programme will be exclusively peaceful”.⁴ Under the agreement, Iran undertook a number of measures, including no longer enriching uranium over 5%, and the USA and EU suspended certain sanctions on Iran for the duration of the plan of action.

Since then, diplomatic and economic relations between Iran and the EU, in particular, have improved significantly, providing an opportunity for engagement on human rights issues. The EU has stated that human rights remain an area of concern and “will be a core component” of the EU’s renewed relationship

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¹ For more details, see Amnesty International, From protest to prison: Iran, one year after the election (Index: MDE 13/062/2010).
² For more details, see Amnesty International, Flawed reforms: Iran’s new code of criminal procedure (Index: MDE 13/2708/2016).
³ The Iran Project, Iranian team in Vienna to resume nuclear talks, 9 May 2016, theiranproject.com/blog/2015/05/12/iranian-team-in-vienna-to-resume-nuclear-talks/
As part of this, the EU reinitiated its suspended human rights dialogue with Iran in 2016, which should, in principle, provide a platform to involve civil society organizations and address issues related to human rights defenders, in line with its guidelines on such dialogues with non-EU countries\(^5\) and its Guidelines on Human Rights Defenders.\(^7\)

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4. CRIMINALIZATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS

The election of President Hassan Rouhani to his first term in office in 2013 gave rise to hopes both in Iran and internationally that the human rights situation in Iran might improve. In reality however, Iran’s judiciary and security apparatus have been ramping up already suffocating levels of repression against the country’s courageous human rights defenders. The intensified repression against human rights defenders has dealt another heavy blow to Iran’s embattled human rights movement, a movement still recovering from the crackdown unleashed by the authorities in response to mass protests following the disputed 2009 presidential election result.

Since 2013, scores of human rights defenders have been imprisoned in connection with their peaceful human rights activities. Many more have been subjected to surveillance, interrogations and drawn-out criminal proceedings coercing them into self-censorship. The wave of repression appears to be an attempt on the part of the state’s repressive arms to crush any aspirations for change created by the promises of increased freedoms made during the electoral campaign of President Hassan Rouhani in 2013.

Meanwhile, President Rouhani and his administration have failed to take any meaningful steps to stop these abuses. On the contrary, they have brushed aside reports of abuses in their media interviews and statements to the UN, claiming that Iran’s judiciary is independent and no one in the country is imprisoned solely for peacefully exercising their rights to freedom of expression, association and assembly. In April 2015, for example, Iran’s Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif stated during a US TV appearance: “We do not jail people for their opinions...The government has a plan to improve, enhance human rights in the country as every government should...But people who commit crimes, who violate the laws of a country cannot hide behind being a journalist or being a political activist, people have to observe the law.”8 There is still no indication whether President Rouhani’s administration intends to change course during his second term in office.

The use of national security-related and other serious criminal charges to stifle human rights defenders is not new in Iran, nor are the grossly unfair trials before Revolutionary Courts, which invariably lead to convictions and harsh prison terms against defenders. However, across the board, human rights defenders caught in the web of state repression have been experiencing noticeably worse treatment at the hands of Iran’s abusive criminal justice.

On the one hand, Revolutionary Courts have issued increasingly lengthy prison sentences against human rights defenders, which in many cases have exceeded a decade.9 On the other, the prosecution and judicial

8 PBS, Charlie Rose, “Interview with Mohammed Javad Zarif”, 29 April 2015, www.youtube.com/watch?v=Uz1bBzq-XoA
9 Under the 2013 Islamic Penal Code, individuals convicted and sentenced on multiple charges must serve only the lengthiest single sentence, but judges are required to impose sentences that exceed the statutory maximum for any single offence when they convict defendants of more than three crimes. This has led to a pattern where the authorities bring multiple spurious charges against human rights defenders as a means to ensure lengthier prison terms.
authorities have lowered the threshold for invoking national security-related offences, with courts now citing even informal activities as “evidence” of criminal activity in human rights defenders’ court verdicts. These include visiting the gravesites of those killed during the 2009 post-presidential election protests; having contact with families of victims of human rights violations, including former or current political prisoners; signing petitions in support of human rights; giving interviews to media outlets outside Iran about human rights abuses; and merely discussing human rights on social media such as Facebook or Twitter.

Communication about human rights concerns with international non-governmental organizations (NGOs) such as Amnesty International, or with intergovernmental organizations such as the UN and the EU, has also become “evidence” of criminal activity, and formed the basis of prison sentences against human rights defenders. In her March 2017 report, the UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Iran referred to “reprisals against individuals because of their cooperation or contact with the United Nations human rights mechanisms or representatives” as “a cause for great concern”.10

These include Saeed Shirzad, who is serving a five-year prison sentence in Karaj’s Rajai Shahr prison for his human rights activities, including supporting the families of political prisoners and contributing to reports sent to the UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Iran. He has said that during his interrogations, Ministry of Intelligence officials called him a “UN spy”.11 Another illustrative case concerns Mohammad Maleki, an elderly human rights defender who has been subjected to a travel ban since 2011 in reprisal for his human rights activities, including a letter he wrote to the UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Iran in September 2011 detailing the torture to which he was subjected during his various periods of imprisonment between 1981 and 2009.12

The criminalization of human rights defenders in Iran takes place against the backdrop of ongoing smear campaigns against human rights defenders, particularly on the internet. The authorities routinely portray human rights defenders in official statements and state media outlets as “foreign agents” and “traitors” bent on harming national security and destroying traditional values. The defence of human rights is equated to “espionage”, “collusion against national security”, “incitement to sedition”, and support of the “hypocrites” – a derogatory term used by the authorities to refer to people with real or perceived links to the People’s Mojahedin Organization of Iran (PMOI), a banned opposition group that advocates the overthrow of the Islamic Republic.13

4.1 THE DEFENDERS TARGETED

HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS: WHO ARE THEY?

In line with the 1998 UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders and other international standards, Amnesty International considers a human rights defender to be someone who, individually or in association with others, acts to defend and/or promote human rights at the local, national, regional or international levels, without resorting to or advocating hatred, discrimination or violence.

Human rights defenders come from every walk of life; they may be journalists, lawyers, health professionals, teachers, trade unionists, whistle-blowers, farmers, victims, or relatives of victims, of human rights violations and abuses. They may conduct their human rights defence work as part of their professional role or as volunteers.

Human rights defenders targeted by the authorities include anti-death penalty campaigners, women’s rights activists, trade unionists, human rights lawyers, minority rights activists, and relatives of those summarily executed or forcibly disappeared during the 1980s, who are seeking accountability.

Some groups of defenders, such as anti-death penalty campaigners, women’s rights activists and those seeking truth and justice for the gross human rights violations of the 1980s, have clearly experienced a pattern of intensified repression. This has included shockingly long prison sentences, interrogations which activists have described as unprecedentedly harsh and aggressive, and official statements in state media which routinely label human rights defenders as “foreign agents” and “traitors” bent on harming national security and destroying traditional values.

In many cases, the authorities’ motive appears to have been a desire to curtail their renewed activism and campaigns. The launch of the Campaign for Step by Step Abolition of the Death Penalty (known by its Persian acronym, Legam) and the Campaign to Change the Masculine Face of Parliament by prominent activists in 2014 were important triggers in this relation. So was the release in August 2016 of an audio recording of a meeting in 1988 in which senior officials were heard discussing and defending, for the first time, the details of their plans concerning the mass extrajudicial executions of 1988.

The audio file has revived calls for an inquiry into the killings of several thousand political prisoners in a wave of extrajudicial executions across the country during 1988. This has prompted renewed efforts by the authorities to silence all public discussions about the gross violations committed during the 1980s.

For others like minority rights activists, trade unionists and human rights lawyers, the tempo of repression has remained more or less the same. Since 2013, many trade unionists and human rights lawyers who were jailed during the crackdown following the 2009 presidential election protests have been released from prison after serving their sentences. However, the climate of fear amongst them persists as the authorities continue to resort to harassment, interrogations, fresh criminal cases, and employment bans to prevent them from carrying out their human rights activities.

Among human rights defenders targeted since 2013 are a new crop of young defenders who have emerged despite the intense repression since 2009. These young defenders, many of whom were born after the 1979 Revolution, differ in some respects from their older counterparts. They support human rights without formal training or the support of NGOs, as the authorities have effectively dismantled all independent NGOs in the country that worked on human rights concerns and were critical of the state. Consequently, they pursue their activism independently or as part of informal groups who espouse similar causes. To communicate and organize, they mainly rely on social media and online communication tools.

In turn, the authorities have increasingly used posts related to human rights on Facebook and other social media as “evidence” of criminal activity. Such methods are a renewed attempt to crush human rights defenders and send a chilling message that anyone who dares to speak out against injustice will not be tolerated.

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14 The Iranian authorities have also arrested, sentenced and imprisoned people for posts on Facebook that deal with issues other than human rights. See Amnesty International, *Death sentence for ‘insulting the prophet’* (Index: MDE 13/064/2014).
4.2 SPURIOUS CHARGES, UNFAIR TRIALS

Charges routinely used against human rights defenders are drawn from the Islamic Penal Code and almost always include “gathering and colluding to commit crimes against national security” (Article 610), “forming a group composed of more than two people with the purpose of disrupting national security” (Article 498), and “membership of a group with the purpose of disrupting national security” (Article 499). The definition of these crimes contravene the principle of legality as they are overly broad and vague, and allow the authorities to apply them arbitrarily. Moreover, many of these offences do not amount to internationally recognizable criminal offences.

Other charges from the penal code which are commonly used to prosecute human rights defenders include “spreading propaganda against the system” (Article 500), “insulting the Supreme Leader” (Article 514), and “insulting Islamic sanctities” (Article 513). These offences effectively criminalize the free expression of ideas and opinions, in contravention of Iran’s international human rights obligations.

The trial of human rights defenders under national security-related charges in Iran takes place before Revolutionary Courts. Revolutionary Courts in Iran were established in the aftermath of the 1979 Revolution to summarily try and execute those considered “anti-revolutionary”, including individuals with real or perceived affiliation with the overthrown government of the Shah. More than three decades on, unfair, summary and predominantly secret processes continue to characterize Iran’s Revolutionary Courts, undermining the right to a fair trial.

The criminalization of peaceful dissent constitutes an egregious violation of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, to which Iran is a state party. Issuing criminal convictions and sentences against peaceful dissidents following unfair trial adds a further violation of international law. Amnesty International’s research consistently shows that Revolutionary Courts lack independence and remain particularly susceptible to pressure from security and intelligence forces to convict defendants and impose harsh sentences. Human rights defenders and lawyers in Iran have repeatedly expressed concerns that people appointed to Revolutionary Courts as judges are selected primarily based on their political opinions, religious beliefs and affiliation with intelligence and security bodies and not on the basis of their legal expertise and integrity. They often have no formal qualifications in law or legal training and experience.

Trials of human rights defenders, which take place behind closed doors, are often extremely brief, sometimes lasting just a few minutes. The right to adequate time and facilities to prepare a defence is usually hindered, while defence lawyers are frequently denied full access to case files and are prevented from meeting defendants until shortly before trial.

Human rights defenders have told Amnesty International that, during their trial sessions before Revolutionary Courts, the judge was hostile and biased against them and openly defended the allegations brought against them by intelligence officials. This violates the right to receive a fair hearing before an independent, impartial tribunal, which requires judges to have no interest in or pre-formed opinions about the case before them, and not to act in ways that promote the interests of one of the parties.

All of the human rights defenders whose cases are mentioned in this report were denied access to a lawyer from the time of arrest and during investigations. They were frequently held in prolonged solitary confinement, which may amount to torture, and were given little or no access to their families and lawyers. Many were subjected to torture or other ill-treatment, and compelled to “confess”. Judges failed to order investigations into allegations of torture and other ill-treatment, in breach of Iran’s own Constitution and the Code of Criminal Procedure as well as the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.15

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15 International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, Article 14.3.g, and UN Human Rights Committee General Comment 15, para. 14.
ARASH SADEGHI

“\textquote{The interrogator forced me to strip naked and squat in the interrogation room. He beat me with his belt... sometimes he would squeeze my neck until I felt I was suffocating... On the second day of detention, during interrogations, I heard my wife crying in the next room... They were telling me that they would execute her.}"

Human rights defender Arash Sadeghi, September 2015\textsuperscript{16}

Human rights activist Arash Sadeghi, 30, has been imprisoned in Tehran’s Evin prison since June 2016, serving two separate prison terms totalling 19 years. He is being punished for his peaceful human rights activities including communicating with Amnesty International and providing the organization and other human rights groups with information on the human rights situation in Iran.

Arash Sadeghi was arrested on 6 September 2014 together with his wife, Golrokh Ebrahimi Iraee (see Section 5.1), also a human rights activist and a writer. He was then taken to Section 2A of Evin prison, which is run by the Revolutionary Guards, and held in solitary confinement for six months before being released on bail on 14 March 2015. He reported that during this period, he was repeatedly tortured, including through beatings and sexual humiliation.

He was sentenced to 15 years’ imprisonment in August 2015 after Branch 15 of the Revolutionary Court in Tehran convicted him of spurious charges including “spreading propaganda against the system”, “gathering and colluding to commit crimes against national security”, “insulting the founder of the Islamic Republic” and “spreading lies”. The court also activated a four-year suspended prison sentence from 2011, which similarly related to his peaceful activism.

The court verdict cited over 50 peaceful human rights activities as “evidence” of his involvement in “actions against [national] security”, many of them relating to the dissemination of information about human rights abuses. They include: giving media interviews to BBC Persian, Radio Farda, Radio Zamaneh and the Human Rights Activists News Agency (HRANA); expressing solidarity with prisoners of conscience on Facebook; denouncing physical assaults against political prisoners during a raid on Section 350 of Evin prison in April 2014; writing critical posts on Facebook about the mass executions of political prisoners during the 1980s; joining the Campaign for Step by Step Abolition of the Death Penalty (known by its Persian acronym, Legam); communicating with Amnesty International and other human rights groups outside Iran; and sending information regarding human rights violations to the UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Iran and members of the European Parliament.\textsuperscript{17}

Arash Sadeghi’s trial, which consisted of two sessions before a Revolutionary Court in Tehran in May and June 2015, with each session lasting less than 15 minutes, was grossly unfair. He did not receive legal representation as the authorities denied him the right to choose his defence. They said he could only have a state-appointed lawyer, which he did not accept. No investigation was conducted into his allegations of torture and other ill-treatment. Arash Sadeghi said he told the judge he had been tortured in detention, but he was laughed at and told “everyone says that”.

\textsuperscript{17} See Appendix for the text of the verdict.
The sentence was upheld on appeal in June 2016.

Arash Sadeghi staged a 71-day hunger strike from 24 October 2016 to 3 January 2017 to protest against the imprisonment of his wife for writing a fictional story against the cruel punishment of stoning. As a result, he has developed severe health problems which require hospitalization. However, the Revolutionary Guards have consistently blocked his transfer to hospital in reprisal for his hunger strike.¹⁸

5. ANTI-DEATH PENALTY ACTIVISTS

“Opposition to the death penalty is opposition to the rule of Islam.”

Iran’s Head of Judiciary, Ayatollah Sadeq Amoli Larijani, December 2013

Despite the lack of transparency surrounding its use of the death penalty, Iran is known to be one of the most prolific executioners in the world, second only to China. Amnesty International recorded nearly 1,000 executions in 2015 and at least 567 in 2016. The majority of those executed in Iran were convicted of drug-related offences, despite the fact that such offences do not meet the threshold of the “most serious crimes” to which the use of the death penalty must be restricted under international law. Most of those executed for drug-related offences come from disadvantaged sectors of the population, including members of ethnic minorities and Afghan nationals. The death penalty is also imposed for vaguely worded and overly broad offences and for acts that should not be criminalized at all. Death sentences in Iran are also invariably imposed after unfair trials.

A domestic movement to abolish the death penalty in Iran has re-emerged in recent years, a fact that has not gone unnoticed by the authorities. In 2013, several prominent human rights defenders launched the Campaign for Step by Step Abolition of the Death Penalty, known by its Persian acronym, Legam. In response, the authorities have intensified their repression. Narges Mohammadi, Executive Chairperson of the Centre for Human Rights Defenders and a world-renowned human rights defender, was sentenced to 16 years’ imprisonment, 10 years of which were due to her involvement with Legam. Several other anti-death penalty campaigners including Atena Daemi and Omid Alishenas have been sentenced to imprisonment for peaceful activities such as publishing posts on Facebook criticizing the authorities’ execution record, distributing anti-death penalty leaflets, and participating in gatherings outside prison in solidarity with families of death row prisoners.

In their official statements and court verdicts, the Iranian authorities have described peaceful campaigning against the death penalty as “un-Islamic”. The only form of activism in the area of the death penalty which
Human rights activist Narges Mohammadi, 45, has been imprisoned in Evin prison since her arrest in May 2015. She is the Executive Chairperson of the Centre for Human Rights Defenders. The authorities told her that she was arrested to resume serving a six-year prison sentence from 2011 which stemmed solely from her peaceful human rights activities at the Centre for Human Rights Defenders. However, she believes that her arrest was in reprisal for her meeting with Catherine Ashton, the then EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, on International Women’s Day on 8 March 2014.

Narges Mohammadi was sentenced to an additional 16-year prison sentence in May 2016, following an unfair trial before Branch 15 of the Revolutionary Court in Tehran which convicted her of “forming a group composed of more than two people with the purpose of disrupting national security”, “gathering and colluding to commit crimes against national security”, and “spreading propaganda against the system”. The first charge, which accounts for 10 years of her sentence, was brought in connection with her involvement with Legam.

The “evidence” underlying her two other charges included her media interviews about human rights violations, her participation in peaceful gatherings outside prisons to support families of death row prisoners, her contact with other human rights defenders including Nobel Peace Prize Laureate Shirin Ebadi, her participation in peaceful protests to condemn acid attacks against women, and her 2014 meeting with Catherine Ashton. In September 2016, Branch 36 of the Court of Appeal in Tehran upheld the sentence. In April 2017, Iran’s Supreme Court rejected her request for judicial review.

Narges Mohammadi reported that during her trial session, the judge was hostile and biased against her and openly defended the allegations brought against her by Ministry of Intelligence officials. She said the judge fiercely accused her of attempting to change “divine laws” (ahkam-e elahi) through her anti-death penalty activities. Narges Mohammadi added that the judge did not allow her to defend herself properly. He gave her three written questions and told her that she was only allowed to answer them in writing. She said that every time she tried to speak and expand on her answers, the judge ordered her to stop. Her lawyers were similarly told by the judge that they were not allowed to speak and that, if they wished to make a point, they could do so in writing.

23 Under Iranian criminal law, murder is punishable by “retribution in kind” (qesas), which involves inflicting on the guilty party the same treatment suffered by the victim of the crime. In cases of murder, this power rests with the relatives of the murder victim, who are authorized to demand and carry out the death sentence. They also have the power to pardon the offender and accept financial compensation, known as “blood money” (diyah), instead.

24 Aasoo, ‘Narges Mohammadi, 16 years’ imprisonment for opposing the death penalty and violence’ (in Persian), 12 October 2016, aasoo.org/fa/articles/604
Anti-death penalty campaigner Atena Daemi, 29, has been imprisoned in Evin prison since November 2016, serving a seven-year sentence for her peaceful human rights activities.

She was first arrested by Revolutionary Guard officials on 21 October 2014 and transferred to Section 2A of Evin prison, which is controlled by the Revolutionary Guards. For the first 28 days of detention, she was held in a cell which she said was infested with insects and had no toilet. With the exception of weekends, she was interrogated every day for a month and a half, often for 10 to 11 hours a day.

During most interrogations, she had to sit blindfolded, facing a wall. She was denied access to a lawyer during this entire period. In February 2015, she was released on bail.

She was sentenced to 14 years’ imprisonment in May 2015 after Branch 28 of the Revolutionary Court in Tehran convicted her of “gathering and colluding against national security”, “spreading propaganda against the system,” “insulting the founder of the Islamic Republic of Iran and the Supreme Leader” and “concealing evidence”, all of them charges under the Islamic Penal Code. Her trial in March 2015, which was joint with three other activists, lasted about 45 minutes. The conviction rested on her posts on Facebook and Twitter criticizing the authorities’ execution record as well as her participation in gatherings outside prison in solidarity with families of death row prisoners. Other “evidence” used against her included the distribution of anti-death penalty pamphlets, her visits to the gravesite of those killed during protests following the 2009 presidential election, and her association with human rights defenders and relatives of political prisoners. In September 2016, her sentence was reduced on appeal to seven years.

On 26 November 2016, plain-clothes Revolutionary Guard officials raided her parents’ house and took Atena Daemi to Evin prison to begin serving her sentence. In a letter leaked from prison on 1 December 2016, she said that she was beaten and pepper-sprayed by the officials arresting her after she insisted that they present an arrest warrant. She said that her sister was punched when she attempted to intervene and that, on the way to prison, the officials blindfolded her and repeatedly threatened her by saying that they would open new cases against her.

After her imprisonment, Atena Daemi filed a complaint with the Office of the Prosecutor against the Revolutionary Guards for the violent manner in which she was arrested, but this complaint was never processed. Instead, on 23 March 2017, a criminal court in Tehran sentenced her to three months and one day in prison for “insulting public officers on duty”. Her sisters Ensieh and Hanieh Daemi were convicted on the same charge with suspended prison sentences of three months and one day. On 31 May 2017, an appeal court in Tehran acquitted Atena Daemi and her sisters of the charge and quashed their sentences. Atena Daemi subsequently ended a 54-day hunger strike which she had launched on 8 April in protest at the harassment of her family members and the suspended prison sentence imposed on her sisters.  

25 See Appendix for the text of the verdict.
OMID ALISHENAS

Human rights defender Omid Alishenas, 33, was imprisoned in Evin prison from December 2016 to 15 July 2017, when he was granted a conditional release. He had been serving a seven-year prison sentence for his peaceful human rights work, including opposition to the death penalty.

Omid Alishenas was first arrested by Revolutionary Guard officials on 4 September 2014. He spent over one year in detention before being released on bail on 18 January 2016.

He was sentenced to 10 years’ imprisonment in May 2015 after an unfair trial before Branch 28 of the Revolutionary Court in Tehran, which convicted him of charges including “gathering and colluding to commit crimes against national security” and “insulting the Supreme Leader”. His trial, which was joint with three other activists, only lasted about 45 minutes.

In its verdict, the court listed the following peaceful activities as “evidence” of criminal activity: distributing pamphlets against the death penalty; writing posts on Facebook describing the mass execution of political prisoners in the 1980s as inhumane; associating with “troublesome agents” (a reference to human rights activists); and visiting memorials of those killed during the 2009 unrest referred to in the court verdict as “seditionists”. 27

The verdict also refers to him distributing a film called To Light a Candle, which highlights the denial of the right to higher education to Baha’i students. Omid Alishenas’ prison sentence was reduced to seven years on appeal in September 2016.

His mother Simin Eyvazzadeh, who peacefully protested on a weekly basis in front of Evin prison after his arrest, was herself arrested during one such protest in November 2015. She was taken to Gharchak prison in Varamin, known for its inhumane conditions, and held there for 10 days. In response, Omid Alishenas staged a hunger strike. Simin Eyvazzadeh was eventually sentenced to 91 days’ imprisonment and 74 lashes in connection with her weekly protests calling for her son’s release. 28

“Omid met with families whose children were killed or executed... and prepared [with his activist friends] a statement asking for the execution of a political prisoner to be halted. There was nothing insulting about it... If he was anywhere else in the world he would have got a medal but here they [the authorities] have given him 10 years in prison.”

Simin Eyvazzadeh, Omid Alishenas’ mother, June 2015 29

27 See Appendix for the text of the verdict.
The Iranian authorities appear to fear even the discussion of human rights and the death penalty in artistic outputs and seek to stamp out this form of expression too. This is well-illustrated by the case of writer Golrokh Ebrahimi Iraee, who is currently serving a six-year prison sentence on charges that include “insulting Islamic sanctities” for writing an unpublished story about the practice of stoning. Despite a movement within Iran to ban stoning, the 2013 Islamic Penal Code still allows for it as the punishment for adultery. The authorities have said that “the criminalization of adultery is consistent with an interpretation of Islamic law, and that the punishments outlined in sharia law [including stoning] are effective in deterring crimes and protecting morality”.

GOLROKH EBRAHIMI IRAEE

Writer Golrokh Ebrahimi Iraee, 36, has been imprisoned in Evin prison since October 2016, serving a six-year prison sentence primarily for writing an unpublished story about the practice of stoning. The story describes the emotional reaction of a young woman who watches the film The Stoning of Soraya M, which is based on a true story. The young woman becomes so enraged that she burns a copy of the Qur'an.

Golrokh Ebrahimi Iraee was initially arrested, without an arrest warrant, together with her husband Arash Sadeghi (see Section 4.1) on 6 September 2014 by Revolutionary Guard officials. She was held without access to her family and lawyer until 27 September 2014, before being released on bail. While detained, she was subjected to extended interrogations while blindfolded and repeatedly threatened with execution for “insulting Islam”.

Golrokh Ebrahimi Iraee was sentenced to six years’ imprisonment in August 2015, after two brief sessions before Branch 15 of the Revolutionary Court in Tehran, each lasting less than 15 minutes. She was tried without legal representation. The first lawyer she appointed was put under pressure to withdraw and the second was barred from reading her casefile and representing her. At the first hearing, she was not given the chance to speak in her own defence because the court focused on her husband’s activism and, at the second, she was in hospital recovering from major surgery. She provided the court with her medical records, but her request to adjourn the hearing was rejected. In March 2017, 30 months was reduced from her imprisonment sentence as part of a Nowrooz (Iranian New Year) pardon.

Her husband, Arash Sadeghi, staged a 71-day hunger strike from 24 October 2016 to 3 January 2017 to protest against her imprisonment. Following a global outcry, the authorities were compelled to grant Golrokh Ebrahimi Iraee temporary prison leave on 3 January 2017. However, after Arash Sadeghi ended his hunger strike, the Revolutionary Guards resorted to different punitive tactics. They obstructed the judicial review of the couple’s case by Iran’s Supreme Court by preventing the transfer of the court files from the Revolutionary Court in Tehran. Then, they rearrested and returned Golrokh Ebrahimi Iraee to Evin prison on 22 January despite earlier promises to extend her prison leave until her case had gone

30 Amnesty International is aware of several other cases where the Iranian authorities have criminalized artists for outputs that touched on human rights. They include filmmaker Keywan Karimi, who was prosecuted and sentenced to six year’s imprisonment, partly in connection with his 2012 film Neveshtan Rooye Shahr (Writing on the City), about graffiti written on the walls of Tehran’s streets; and Atena Farghadani, who was sentenced to 12 years and nine months’ imprisonment, later reduced to an 18-month suspended prison sentence, on charges that included “insulting members of parliament through paintings” for drawing a cartoon that criticized parliament for a bill that proposed to restrict access to contraception and criminalize voluntary sterilization.

31 For more details, see Amnesty International, Flawed reforms: Iran’s new code of criminal procedure (Index: MDE 13/2708/2016).

through the judicial review process. Since then, the authorities have not allowed the couple to see one another more than a couple of times.  

6. WOMEN HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS

“I have always said that in a land where it is hard enough to be a woman, a mother or a human rights defender, to be all three is an unforgivable crime... and here I am, in my own homeland, convicted and imprisoned for the crime of being a human rights defender, a feminist, and an opponent of the death penalty.”

Human rights defender Narges Mohammadi in an open letter from inside Evin prison, June 2016

Women in Iran are confronted daily by widespread and entrenched discrimination in law and practice, including in areas of employment, health, education, access to political office, criminal and family law. Compulsory dress codes, including the provisions on compulsory veiling (hijab) in the Islamic Penal Code empower police and paramilitary forces to target women for harassment, violence and imprisonment (Article 638). Violence against women and girls in Iran is prevalent and the authorities have failed to adopt laws criminalizing gender-based violence, although the Vice-President on Women and Family Affairs, Shahindokht Molaverdi, has tried hard to push through a draft bill that has been pending since 2012. Women and girls also remain inadequately protected against early and forced marriage. The legal age for marriage is 13 and fathers can apply for permission to arrange that their daughters are married at an even younger age – and to men much older than their daughters.

Despite this context as well as numerous setbacks, women rights’ defenders are active and make a difference. For example, in October 2015, a group of activists launched the Campaign to Change the Masculine Face of Parliament to push for more pro-equality women candidates for parliament.

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35 For more details, see Amnesty International, You shall procreate: Attacks on women’s sexual and reproductive rights in Iran (Index: MDE 13/1111/2015).

36 For more details, see the Facebook page of the Campaign to Change the Masculine Face of Parliament, www.facebook.com/women4parliament/posts/1687718481444162 (in Persian).
In February 2016, members of the campaign announced in an interview that all their candidates had been disqualified by Iran’s Guardian Council, which vets all individuals who seek candidacy before any election in Iran. Nevertheless, the campaign generated a five-fold increase in the number of women seeking candidacy, highlighting the demand of women for equality and women’s participation in political and public life, and exposed candidates with a history of making sexist remarks.

The authorities responded to the Campaign to Change the Masculine Face of Parliament with renewed repression. Amnesty International’s research shows that, between January and July 2016, more than a dozen women human rights defenders in Tehran were summoned for long, intensive interrogation by the Revolutionary Guards and threatened with imprisonment on national security-related charges for their involvement with the campaign.

The defenders were asked to present themselves to an office of the Revolutionary Guards in Tehran “to provide some explanations”. Once there, they were accused of espionage and collusion with “foreign-based currents seeking the overthrow of the Islamic Republic system”. During interrogation, they were verbally abused, including with gender-based slurs, and pressured to sign letters pledging not to involve themselves in civil society activities again. They were not allowed access to lawyers during interrogation, which lasted in some cases up to eight hours.

The defenders were put under intense pressure to terminate the campaign, which they eventually did on 29 February 2016. Publicly, the authorities aired views that accused women involved with the campaign as agents of a foreign-orchestrated “infiltration project” pursuing the “soft overthrow” of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

“Those who speak of changing the masculine face of parliament and have turned websites, publications and social media into spaces for expressing their erroneous views, are the agents of Western thought… [They] do not have women’s rights at their heart.”

Fereshteh Rouhafza, Deputy Head of the Cultural and Social Council for Women, attacking the Campaign to Change the Masculine Face of Parliament, December 2015.

The renewed assault on women human rights defenders has been accompanied by officials equating feminism with criminality and describing initiatives relating to women’s rights as a “conspiracy” to weaken people’s religious beliefs and values and infiltrate decision-making bodies. This hostile attitude has been shown not only toward women’s rights defenders but also toward lone voices within the government of President Rouhani who have made modest efforts to improve the situation of women’s rights in the country.

The most notable examples are the smear campaigns conducted against the Vice-President on Women and Family Affairs, Shahindokht Molaverdi, in media outlets affiliated with the state’s security apparatus. Her statements raising concern about violence against women, women’s exclusion from sports stadiums and unequal access to employment and maternity leave have been described as “thinly disguised feminist positions” that threaten traditional gender roles and the institution of the family. In December 2015, Yalsarat newspaper, the official media outlet of the semi-official paramilitary group Ansar-Hezbollah, published articles that called Shahindokht Molaverdi a “bitch” and a “whore” who collaborates with “London-based” agents seeking the overthrow of the system.

In a May 2016 article, Keyhan newspaper, a daily with close ties to the Office of the Supreme Leader, warned that women are “one of the first targets of the enemy’s plans for infiltration because… targeting them

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39 Armane Zanan, ‘Founders of the campaign to “Change the Masculine Face of Parliament” are the administrator of enemy’s infiltration [project] in the field of women’ (in Persian), 1 December 2015, bit.ly/2h4BaC4
41 See, for example, BBC Persian, ‘Ansar-Hezbollah’s organ throws sexual insults at Iran’s Vice-President’ (in Persian), 27 December 2017, www.bbc.com/persian/iran/2015/12/151227_139_molaverdi_yalsarat_sexual_insult; Centre for Human Rights in Iran, ‘Sexist publication and lack accountability; Yalsarat’s unprecedented insults against the Vice-President for Women’ (in Persian), 29 December 2015, persian.iranhumanrights.org/1394/10/shahindokht-molaverdi/
would result in the break-up of the family system and this, in the next stages, would lead to the collapse of the religious and political system of society.” The article defined “infiltration” as “the penetration of radical feminist perspectives [into Iranian society and culture], distancing women from the truth of “womanhood” and eliminating the woman’s role in the family”. The article referred to violence against women, women’s access to sports stadiums, and women’s employment as “marginal issues” that are “erroneously” highlighted by the agents of the infiltration project to create “false and hostile media perceptions” against the Islamic Republic of Iran. 

The rhetoric that describes those working on women’s rights as criminals was put on full display in official statements about the arbitrary arrest and detention of Homa Hoodfar, a Canadian-Iranian professor world-renowned for her academic work on issues related to women’s rights.

HOMA HOODFAR

Homa Hoodfar was arrested on 6 June 2016 while on a visit to Iran from Canada. For many years, she has been involved with an international network called Women Living Under Muslim Laws, which seeks to strengthen women’s struggles for equality and human rights in Muslim contexts.

On 24 June 2016, the Prosecutor General of Tehran stated that Homa Hoodfar’s criminal charges were in connection with “her entry into fields concerning feminism and national security offences”. Days earlier, media outlets affiliated with the Revolutionary Guards ran articles claiming that she was “the agent of a feminist network”, implying this was a criminal offence, and that the Campaign to Change the Masculine Face of Parliament was “her latest operation”.

The articles claimed that her work with Women Living Under Muslim Laws was aimed at “disrupting public order” and “prompting socio-cultural changes that can ultimately pave the ground… for a soft overthrow”.

Prior to her arrest on 6 June, Homa Hoodfar was repeatedly summoned by Revolutionary Guards for long, intense interrogation sessions about her feminist beliefs, her work with Women Living Under Muslim Laws and her association with Iranian women’s rights activists and other human rights defenders. During the interrogations, she was denied the right to have a lawyer present. Her lawyer was told that she had been charged with “spreading propaganda against the system” and “collaborating with hostile governments”.

After a sustained global campaign for her release, Homa Hoodfar was freed on 26 September 2016 and subsequently flown to Oman and returned home to Canada from there.

42 Kayhan, ‘How has infiltration happened in the field of women and family affairs?’ (in Persian), 2 May 2016, bit.ly/2s00yYw
43 Mashregh News, ‘Homa Hoodfar is involved in the fields of feminism and national security offences’ (in Persian), 24 June 2016, bit.ly/2SyUcUx
44 Tasmin News, ‘Homa Hoodfar, a member of anti-national security organization WLULM, arrested’ (in Persian), 15 June 2016, bit.ly/2ruFVzYx
47 For more details on the case, see Amnesty International, Health concern for Canadian-Iranian professor: Dr Homa Hoodfar (Index: MDE 13/4787/2016); Amnesty International, Homa Hoodfar freed after global campaign (Index: MDE 13/4909/2016); and Amnesty International, Women’s rights activists treated as ‘enemies of the state’ in renewed crackdown (Press Release, 10 August 2016).
Iran’s intelligence and security bodies subject women human rights defenders to intense surveillance. This includes the monitoring of travel abroad, as seen in the case of Alieh Motalebzadeh below. Such surveillance has served to isolate women human rights defenders and prevent them from connecting with other defenders outside Iran to advance women’s rights. This is part of a policy to nip in the bud any serious attempt to organize to challenge state-sanctioned discrimination.

ALIEH MOTALEBZADEH

Women’s rights activist and photojournalist Alieh Motalebzadeh was arrested on 26 November 2016 by Ministry of Intelligence officials following weeks of harassment by the authorities after she returned to Iran from a workshop in Georgia on “Women’s empowerment and elections”. She was subsequently charged with “gathering and colluding to commit crimes against national security” in relation to her attendance at the workshop and subjected to a travel ban.

Alieh Motalebzadeh was held in solitary confinement in Section 209 of Evin prison until 19 December 2016, when she was released on bail. During this period, she was repeatedly interrogated about why she had attended the workshop and for details about the workshop’s organizers.

She was denied access to her lawyer and allowed only one in-person family visit on 7 December in the presence of her interrogator. The interrogator used this visit to admonish Alieh Motalebzadeh’s husband to “not make a fuss” in reference to his media interviews about his wife’s arrest and detention. The interrogator also threatened her husband and daughter with arrest, and told her husband to stop conducting media interviews about his wife.

Amnesty International understands that the Ministry of Intelligence harassed and interrogated at least 13 other women who attended the workshop in Georgia.

Since her release, Alieh Motalebzadeh and her family are believed to be under heavy surveillance by the authorities.

In November 2014, prominent imprisoned human rights defender Narges Mohammadi (see Chapter 5) wrote an open letter to President Rouhani, explaining how, during her interrogations, Ministry of Intelligence interrogators had bombarded her with questions related to her involvement with various civil society groups, including the Women’s Citizenship Centre (Kanoon Shahrvandi Zanan), a civil society organization which seeks to eliminate discrimination and violence against women. She has said: “The direction in which the interrogations were being taken showed me that, in reality, the focus of the security bodes is on eliminating civil society.”

Narges Mohammadi was also intensely interrogated about a meeting that she and a group of leading women’s rights activists had with Catherine Ashton, the then EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, at the Austrian embassy in Tehran on International Women’s Day on 8 March 2014 as well as her participation in the peaceful protests staged outside of government buildings calling on the authorities to investigate a string of acid attacks on women in the city of Esfahan, central Iran, in October 2014.

The crackdown on women human rights defenders has also included harsh responses to women who oppose compulsory veiling (hijab), claiming women’s rights to freedom of belief and religion and freedom of expression. State media regularly use derogatory terms such as “sluts”, “deviant” and “corrupt” to demean and degrade these women.

Such smear campaigns against women’s rights activists have been manifested most extremely in the case of US-based Iranian journalist and women’s rights activist Masih Alinejad, who is the founder of a popular online campaign called My Stealthy Freedom, which encourages women from Iran to post online pictures of themselves without headscarves by way of opposing compulsory hijab. State-sanctioned media outlets have published concocted articles describing her as a “whore” and claimed that she was “gang-raped after overdosing on cocaine and stripping naked in the streets.” In June 2017, she also received a number of death threats from social media accounts believed to be affiliated with Iran’s intelligence and security forces.

“The question that arises is why, instead of interrogating and detaining those responsible for acid attacks, the security bodies are targeting those who are protesting against the horrific crimes committed against the women of this country. Is it the case that either way, women should be the victims of violence, first as victims of acid attacks and then as [peaceful] protesters against acid attacks?”

Narges Mohammadi in an open letter to President Rouhani, November 2014


Human rights defenders speaking out against compulsory hijab have also been accused of “insulting Islam” and threatened with harsh penalties ranging from imprisonment to the death penalty.

“The judge told me that my opposition to compulsory veiling was tantamount to opposing the clear rulings of the Qur’an and that I had insulted religious sanctities and my sentence should be the death penalty.”

Atena Daemi in a post on her Facebook page, October 2016

As part of the renewed crackdown on women human rights defenders, the authorities have also applied such pressure on both print and online publications that promote women’s rights that they have been forced to close or suspend production, creating a climate of fear that has led to increased self-censorship.

In 2016, during the same period that members of the Campaign to Change the Masculine Face of Parliament were summoned for interrogations, the authorities also targeted the website Feminist School (Madreseh feministi), which posts reports and articles on issues related to feminist theories and practices as well as the state of women’s rights in Iran and globally. People associated with the website, most of whom were also involved with the Campaign, were threatened with imprisonment on national security-related charges if they continued their work on the website; the Feminist School website has not been updated since mid-February 2016.

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53 See the website of Feminist School: www.feministschool.com
7. WORKERS’ RIGHTS ACTIVISTS

“Going by the evidence used to convict [us], it must be said that any effort...to improve the livelihood of teachers and workers in the country amounts to acting against national security.”

Trade unionists Esmail Abdi and Jafar Azimzadeh in a joint statement from Evin prison, April 201654

Undue restrictions on the right to freedom of association and a ban on independent trade unions exist in Iran. However, many workers in Iran have courageously formed such unions as well as workers’ support organizations. They have been driven to do so as a result of unpaid wages, precarious work conditions, staggering inflation and poor living standards.

These workers are human rights defenders as they are striving to ensure the right of everyone to form and join trade unions and enjoy just and favourable conditions of employment, social security, and an adequate standard of living, including access to adequate food, clothing, housing, education and quality health services.

The authorities’ response to their efforts has been persistently harsh. Simply because of their legitimate trade union activities, workers’ rights defenders have been sacked without justification or forced into early retirement; attacked and beaten by the police; subjected to reprisals for peacefully protesting to claim unpaid wages; arbitrarily arrested and detained; tortured and otherwise ill-treated; and sentenced to long prison terms on spurious national security offences.

As with other human rights defenders, trade unionists defending the right to form and join trade unions have been arrested and given harsh prison sentences on trumped-up charges, including “spreading propaganda against the system”, “gathering and colluding to commit crimes against national security” and “forming a group with the purpose of disrupting national security”.55

The court verdicts against trade unionists that Amnesty International has reviewed blatantly reveal the extent to which Iran’s courts cite peaceful trade union activities as “evidence” of “acts against national security” and “anti-revolutionary propaganda”. These activities include: organizing peaceful gatherings, such as ones on International Worker’s Day; attending peaceful protests against poor wages and publishing their photographs online; receiving invitations to attend international meetings of trade unions; signing statements in support of trade union rights; and launching petitions to seek a rise in the national minimum wage.

55 For more details, see Amnesty International, Iran: Release imprisoned trade unionists and uphold workers’ rights (Index: MDE 13/6147/2017).
7.1 INDEPENDENT TRADE UNIONS

Iran’s Labour Code generally permits worker representation only through an Islamic Labour Council or a trade association (also known as a guild society). Under the existing legal framework, an Islamic Labour Council and a trade association cannot exist at the same enterprise. In practice, Islamic Labour Councils have received more support from the government, which has resulted in an organizational monopoly in their favour. On many occasions, the Committee on Freedom of Association, a body created by the International Labour Organization (ILO) to examine complaints about violations of the right to freedom of association, has criticized this practice.

The primary purpose of Islamic Labour Councils, as set out in Iranian legislation, is to support the Islamic Republic rather than trade union rights. The Labour Code states that their purpose is “to propagate and disseminate Islamic culture and to defend the achievements of the Islamic revolution.” Furthermore, candidates standing for election to Islamic Labour Council boards face discriminatory screening procedures, including the need to demonstrate their “practical allegiance” to Islam and show that they are faithful to the rule of the Supreme Leader (velayat-e faqih).

Trade associations are not independent either and must obtain state approval to function. The Labour Code stipulates that “all trade associations and their respective centres shall… draw up their by-laws taking account of applicable statutory provisions and shall submit them to their respective general meetings for approval and to the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs for registration.” The Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs is mandated to determine the conditions of eligibility to become a member or official of the association and to monitor the conduct of elections. Trade associations are required to inform the Ministry of general assemblies at least 15 days before they take place. Ministry officials are entitled to observe, interfere in and disrupt such meetings, and issue measures of suspension and dissolution.

The ILO’s Committee on Freedom of Association has expressed concern that the legislative provisions concerning the registration and validation of trade associations in Iran constitute “grave interference in the
fundamental freedom of association rights of workers and have been applied in a manner so as to infringe upon the independence of their organizations.”

In 2011, the UN Human Rights Committee stated that Iran “should ensure that the right to freedom of assembly and association is guaranteed to all individuals without discrimination”. The UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, the body tasked with overseeing Iran’s implementation of the International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights, similarly recommended in its Concluding Observations in 2013 that Iran “take steps to ensure that independent trade unions can be formed and carry out their activities without interference, including unions of teachers, bus workers and sugar-cane workers, as well as the Iran Free Workers’ Union.” The Committee also called upon Iran “to immediately release labour rights activists and members of independent trade unions currently serving prison sentences who acted in conformity with internationally recognized trade union standards.”

Trade unionist Jafar Azimzadeh, a welder and the Chair of the Free Union of Workers of Iran, was sentenced to six years’ imprisonment in March 2015 after Branch 15 of the Revolutionary Court in Tehran convicted him of “gathering and colluding to commit crimes against national security” and “spreading propaganda against the system”. He also received a two-year ban on “membership in political and social parties, groups or collectives” and “engagement in online space, media and press”.

The conviction was based solely on his peaceful trade union activities, including: his work collecting 40,000 workers’ signatures on a petition for a rise in the national minimum wage; his interviews with media outlets based outside Iran; his involvement with founding the Free Union of Workers of Iran; his participation in the 2009 International Workers’ Day rally in Laleh Park in Tehran and other peaceful demonstrations in front of Parliament and the Ministry of Cooperatives, Labour and Social Welfare; and his meetings with other trade unionist groups, such as the Syndicate of the Workers of Haft Tapeh Sugar Cane Company and the Syndicate of Workers of Tehran and Suburbs Bus Company.

In October 2015, he received a short written summons from the Office for the Implementation of Sentences, which said that he needed to present himself to Evin prison to begin serving his six-year sentence.

JAFAR AZIMZADEH

“We have not done anything other than defending our human dignity and that of other working class people… The [peaceful nature] of our activities, which is aimed at obtaining our lawful, human entitlements, is even obvious from the ‘evidence’ cited in our court cases to support the national security charges brought against us. It is entirely focused on activities such as collecting signatures against wages falling below the poverty line, forming independent trade unions, attending gatherings in front of [government] buildings, and writing grievance letters.”

Trade unionists Esmail Abdi and Jafar Azimzadeh in a joint statement from Evin prison, April 2016

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67 Concluding observations of UN Human Rights Committee: Iran, UN Doc. CCPR/C/IRN/CO/3, para. 26.
68 Concluding observations of UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights: Iran, UN Doc. E/C.12/IRN/CO/2, para. 15.
sentence. The summons indicated that his conviction and sentence had been upheld on appeal even though no decision had been communicated to him. He was arrested on 8 November 2015 to begin serving his six-year sentence. He was released on temporary leave several months later on 30 June 2016, after a 63-day-long hunger strike.

In October 2016, Branch 33 of the Supreme Court rejected the judicial review of Jafar Azimzadeh’s six-year prison sentence. Jafar Azimzadeh may be summoned to prison to begin serving his sentence at any moment.

In May 2017, Jafar Azimzadeh was acquitted of national security-related charges in a separate case, for which a Revolutionary Court in Saveh, Markazi province, had sentenced him to 11 years’ imprisonment in 2015.

7.2 TEACHERS’ TRADE ASSOCIATIONS

The Iran Teachers Trade Association (ITTA),69 which is affiliated with Education International (the world’s largest sectoral global union), has branches in almost all of Iran’s 31 provinces. Of these, at least 17 are officially registered. In recent years, teachers have mobilized to peacefully protest against low wages that have not kept up with inflation, job insecurity, deteriorating quality of education and poor living conditions.

In January 2015, after the Ministry of Education announced an increased budget for the year, teachers staged peaceful protests complaining that the rise was insufficient to provide the necessary increase in wages.70 On 27 January, the ITTA also issued a public statement raising its concerns about the budget.71 Later that year, on 16 April, teachers across Iran joined peaceful protests.72 Among the grievances raised by the teachers were poor wages, imprisonment of teacher trade unionists, and discrimination in employment practices. Further nationwide protests by teachers followed in May.

ITTA members have faced harassment and arrests for years. Just prior to and after the May 2015 protests, several of them were harassed by the authorities, arbitrarily arrested and detained, and prevented from exercising their professions. On 22 July 2015, thousands of teachers attempted to gather in front of parliament to protest against the repression and to demand the release of teacher Esmail Abdi (see below). Security forces disrupted the gathering and arrested scores of teachers. According to an announcement by the Minister of Education on 27 July 2015, the teachers were later released.73

69 The ITTA is a nationwide union with local branches in the provinces of Iran. ITTA-Tehran, of which Esmail Abdi is a member, is the largest branch.
70 Iranian Labour News Agency, ‘The reasons for the protests of the ITTA two days ago’ (in Persian), 22 January 2015, bit.ly/2r0dbDD
71 Iranian Labour News Agency, ‘Demands of the representatives of teachers to the President’ (in Persian), 28 January 2015, bit.ly/2sk5Z9g
72 Iranian Labour News Agency, ‘Thousands of teachers across the country held a silent rally’ (in Persian), 16 April 2015, bit.ly/1Ojiu4U
Branch 15 of the Revolutionary Court in Tehran convicted him in February 2016 of national security offences, including “spreading propaganda against the system” and “gathering and colluding to commit crimes against national security”. The charges stem from his trade union activities, including organizing peaceful demonstrations held by teachers and ITTA members outside parliament in April 2015 in protest against poor wages, the inadequate education budget, and imprisonment of teacher trade unionists; as well as associating with Education International.

His trial was grossly unfair: he was denied access to a lawyer of his choice during the entire investigative phase and his lawyer was not allowed to review his court file before trial. In October 2016, Branch 36 of the Tehran Appeals Court upheld the sentence. He was arrested on 9 November 2016 to begin serving his sentence.

On 30 April 2017, Esmail Abdi began a hunger strike to protest the criminalization of peaceful trade unionists. In an open letter from 22 April 2017, Esmail Abdi asked: “Is it a crime to be a member of a trade association and participate in peaceful demonstrations...? Is it a crime to speak out against the theft of public funds...? Is it a crime to gather signatures petitioning the government to uphold the law?”

Esmail Abdi was first arrested on 27 June 2015, after he went to the Prosecutor’s Office in Evin prison to inquire about a travel ban imposed on him. He was taken to Section 2A of Evin prison and held for 40 days in solitary confinement, without access to a lawyer. On 14 May 2016, he was released on bail, following a two-week hunger strike to protest against the repression of trade unionists.

Before his arrest in June 2015, intelligence officials from the Revolutionary Guards had summoned him for interrogation a number of times, and had pressured him to resign from his ITTA-Tehran position and cancel planned nationwide demonstrations. Once, on 3 May 2015, intelligence officials summoned him and threatened that a suspended 10-year sentence from 2011, also connected to his peaceful trade union activities, would be immediately implemented unless he made a formal announcement on Facebook that he was resigning from his ITTA-Tehran post and cancelled planned nationwide demonstrations that the ITTA had helped organize. Esmail Abdi made the announcement, but the ITTA-Tehran did not accept his resignation. The protest went ahead as planned, with thousands of teachers gathering peacefully in front of parliament in Tehran and outside the offices of the Ministry of Education in different cities.

During interrogations, intelligence officials also warned Esmail Abdi against associating with international organizations, including Education International, and said his participation in their international gatherings was a “red line”. This warning against associating with international organizations blatantly violates Iran’s obligations under international law, including Article 8 (b) of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), which guarantees the right of trade unions to join international organizations.

The prospect of unjust imprisonment looms over several other teacher trade unionists including Mohammad Reza Niknejad, a former board member of ITTA-Tehran, and Mehdi Bohlooli, a member of ITTA, who each face five years’ imprisonment; and Mahmoud Beheshti Langroodi, spokesperson of the ITTA, who has been

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75 For more details on the case, see Amnesty International, Iranian trade unionist faces sixteen years in jail (Index: MDE 13/3843/2016); Amnesty International, Teacher union activist must be released (Index: MDE 13/5332/2016); and Amnesty International, Health fears for jailed Iranian teacher unionist (Index: MDE 13/6260/2017).
sentenced to a total of 14 years in prison following three separate convictions related to his trade union activities. He has received at least five written summons to report to prison to resume serving his sentences, but has said he will not comply with them.

7.3 TEHRAN BUS WORKERS’ UNION

The Syndicate of the Workers of Tehran and Suburbs Bus Company (SWTSBC), a trade union for workers employed by the United Bus Company of Tehran (Sherkat Vahed), was banned after the 1979 Revolution, but re-established in 2004 after many bus workers had not been paid for months. The authorities have never granted the union official registration.

The authorities have consistently harassed, intimidated and prosecuted SWTSBC members, particularly board members, under spurious charges stemming solely from their peaceful activism, including organizing and participating in strikes.

Some members have been imprisoned, including Reza Shahabi, Davoud Razavi and Ebrahim Madadi (see below). Reza Shahabi, who was sentenced to six years’ imprisonment for his peaceful trade union activities, was released on medical leave in October 2014, after spending over four years in prison. However, from November 2016, he started facing renewed pressure to return to prison to complete the remainder of his sentence, which was according to the authorities three months. As of 12 July 2017, Reza Shahabi and Davoud Razavi were subjected to a travel ban, which prevented them from travelling to Geneva, Switzerland, in June 2017 for the 106th International Labour Conference.

Ebrahim Madadi, the deputy head of the SWTSBC, was sentenced to five years and three months in prison in August 2016 after Branch 26 of the Revolutionary Court in Tehran convicted him of “gathering and colluding to commit crimes against national security” and “disrupting public order by participating in illegal gatherings”.

The conviction was based solely on his peaceful trade union activities including attending peaceful gatherings to support workers’ rights and demand increased wages.

The criminal proceedings against Ebrahim Madadi started after he was arrested by Ministry of Intelligence agents on 29 April 2015, in advance of May Day gatherings he was planning to attend.

He spent 22 days in solitary confinement in Section 209 of Evin prison without access to a lawyer or his family before being released on bail. His trial took place nearly a year later, on 16 April 2016. As of 12 July 2017, he was at liberty pending the outcome of his appeal.

Ebrahim Madadi had earlier served a sentence of three and a half years for “acts against national security” in relation to his peaceful trade union activities; he was released in April 2012.

76 For more details, see Amnesty International, Trade unionist given six-year prison sentence (Index: MDE 13/027/2012).
Davoud Razavi, another member of the SWTSBC, was arrested on 29 April 2015 and held in solitary confinement in Section 209 of Evin prison for 22 days before being released on bail on 20 May 2015.

His trial took place on 13 January 2016 before Branch 26 of the Revolutionary Court, which sentenced him in February 2016 to five years’ imprisonment for “gathering and colluding to commit crimes against national security”.

As “evidence” against him, the court listed “organizing gatherings for different excuses including the occasion of International Worker’s Day and low wages”.

The court admonished Davoud Razavi not only for attending “illegal gathering” but also for taking photos that were published online, which the court cited as “anti-revolutionary propaganda”. The court also mentioned an invitation Davoud Razavi had received to attend an ILO international conference and noted that as “evidence” of contact with “opposition labour rights activists outside of Iran”. Nowhere in the documents reviewed by Amnesty International does the court provide any evidence of criminal activity.77

Davoud Razavi has lodged an appeal and, as of 11 July 2017, was awaiting its outcome.

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77 See Appendix for the text of the verdict.
Repression against human rights defenders includes lawyers who represent individuals imprisoned for politically motivated reasons, including prisoners of conscience, or who publicly raise concerns over torture and unfair trials. Lawyers constitute a professional group whose work is often closely related to the promotion and protection of human rights. Their instrumental role in the promotion and protection of human rights is recognized in the preamble of the Basic Principles on the Role of Lawyers, which stipulates that adequate protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms requires that all persons have “effective access to legal services provided by an independent legal profession”.

Following the crackdown unleashed by the authorities in response to the 2009 presidential election protests, scores of human rights lawyers were imprisoned. During the time period looked at in this report, all the human rights lawyers whose cases were known to Amnesty International except for Abdolfattah Soltani (see below) were released after serving their sentences.

However, the climate of fear has persisted as the authorities have continued to subject human rights lawyers, including those recently released from prison, to harassment, interrogations and disbarment to prevent them from carrying out their professional duties and responsibilities effectively. The lawyers who had to escape into exile in 2009 are not able to safely return to the country as they have pending criminal investigations against them.

As a result, only a handful of human rights lawyers now shoulder the enormous task of providing meaningful, independent legal representation to prisoners of conscience. These lawyers often face a range of repressive measures including: arbitrary intervention by the authorities to deny or restrict their visits to their clients; delayed access to court files; lack of appropriate facilities for private consultation and communication with clients; the presence of intelligence agents and prison officials during meetings with clients; and travel bans.

Since 2015, Amnesty International has also documented an emerging pattern where prosecutorial authorities and Revolutionary Courts do not allow political prisoners, including prisoners of conscience, to be represented by lawyers known for their commitment to justice and human rights. The authorities cite as justification Article 48 of Iran’s 2015 Code of Criminal Procedure, which only allows individuals facing national security-related charges to select their lawyer for the investigation stage from a roster of lawyers.

approved by the Head of the Judiciary. Human rights lawyers are frequently told that they are not on the approved list, even though no official list has been made public.

**ABDOLFATTAH SOLTANI**

Human rights lawyer Abdolfattah Soltani has been imprisoned in Evin prison since September 2011, serving a 13-year sentence for carrying out his professional work and defending human rights. He was awarded the International Bar Association’s Human Rights Award in 2012, as well as the Nuremberg International Human Rights Award in 2009.

He is one of the founders of the Centre for Human Rights Defenders in Iran, which was forcibly closed by the authorities in 2008.

Abdolfattah Soltani was first arrested on 16 June 2009 during the post-election unrest. He was held in Evin prison until 26 August 2009, when he was released on bail.

He was rearrested on 10 September 2011 and charged with several trumped-up national security offences including “spreading propaganda against the system”, “gathering and colluding to commit crimes against national security”, “forming a group with the purpose of disturbing national security”, which related to his involvement with the Centre for Human Rights Defenders. He was also charged with “accepting an illegal prize and illegal earnings”, which related to his acceptance, via his wife, Massoumeh Dehghan, of the Nuremberg International Human Rights Award.

In March 2012, he was informed that Branch 26 of the Revolutionary Court in Tehran had convicted him of the charges brought against him and sentenced him to 18 years’ imprisonment. The conviction was based entirely on his human rights work. The court also barred him from practising law for 20 years. In June 2012, his prison sentence was reduced on appeal to 13 years and the ban on practising law to two years.

Since his imprisonment in September 2011, Abdolfattah Soltani has been held in poor conditions and without access to adequate medical care. In recent years, he has been transferred to the prison clinic several times because of chest pains and heart palpitations. However, he has been returned to his cell each time having been given either no medical treatment at all or merely drugs such as aspirin and propranolol to regulate his heartbeat. The prosecutorial authorities have repeatedly refused to grant him medical leave or authorize his transfer to a hospital outside prison to receive specialized treatment, against the advice of his doctors. On one occasion, Abdolfattah Soltani’s family was told by prison officials that the Prosecutor General opposes granting Abdolfattah Soltani medical leave because he remains “steadfast” in his beliefs.

Among lawyers who have been released since 2013 after serving prison sentences stemming from their human rights work are:

- **Nasrin Sotoudeh**, the 2012 Sakharov Prize Laureate, who was released from prison in 2013 after serving three years of a six-year prison sentence in connection with her work as a lawyer, which included defending countless cases of prisoners of conscience and defending juveniles sentenced to death;

- **Mohammad Seyfzadeh**, one of the founding members of the Centre for Human Rights Defenders, who was released from prison in 2016 after serving five years in prison for his role in the centre, which involved advocating for the human rights of political prisoners as well as prisoners facing the death penalty.

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79 For more details, see Amnesty International, *Flawed reforms: Iran’s new code of criminal procedure* (Index: MDE 13/2708/2016).

Mohammad Ali Dadkhah, another member of the Centre for Human Rights Defenders, who was released in 2013 after serving less than a year in prison for his human rights work, which included defending prisoners sentenced to death;

Hamid Reza Moradi. Mostafa Daneshjou. Amir Esiami. Reza Entesari. Afshin Karampour. Farshid Yadollahi and Omid Behrouzi, lawyers of prisoners belonging to Iran’s Gonabadi Dervish religious minority, who were released in 2015 after serving over four years in prison; and

Javeed Hootan Kian, who was released in 2013 after spending nearly three years in prison, during which he reported being tortured and otherwise ill-treated; he had been arrested after an interview with two German journalists about the controversial case of his client, Sakineh Mohammadi Ashtiani, who had been sentenced to death by stoning for “adultery”.

Some of these lawyers including Nasrin Sotoudeh. Mohammad Seyfzadeh and Javeed Hootan Kia have faced disbarment and term-specific bans on practising law and limitations on what types of clients they may represent following their release from prison. Some, like Mostafa Daneshjou, have been denied access to higher education institutes.

NASRIN SOTOUDEH

Human rights lawyer Nasrin Sotoudeh has faced both a ban and restrictions on the types of cases in which she may be involved. Her sentence included a 10-year ban (reduced from 20 years on appeal) on practising law and travelling abroad.81 In August 2014, her husband, Reza Khandan, reported that Nasrin Sotoudeh’s law licence had been reinstated by Branch One of the Disciplinary Tribunal for Lawyers at the Iran Bar Association earlier that month.82 Two months later, Branch Two of the same Tribunal reversed this and barred Nasrin Sotoudeh from practising law for three years.83 She immediately began a sit-in protest in

81 For more details on the case, see Amnesty International, Iran releases prominent human rights lawyer (Press release, 18 September 2013).
83 Iranian Students’ News Agency, ‘Nasrin Sotoudeh has been barred from practising law for three years’, 18 October 2014, bit.ly/2aL9Nwr.
In addition to disbarment, the authorities have resorted to harassment and intimidation in order to prevent human rights lawyers from taking on the cases of political prisoners. During her long legal career, Giti Pourfazel has represented a variety of clients, including prisoners of conscience and human rights defenders. In July 2016, she announced she had stopped practising law and explained that it was because of the persistent harassment she had been facing:

“Most of the cases I took [concerned] individuals who were being persecuted for their political beliefs. I gave interviews and talked about these cases and that’s how I got into all kinds of trouble that continues to this day. It got to a point where I couldn’t continue on that path any longer. I was under a lot of pressure... I kept getting phone calls from them [intelligence officials] and I was summoned many times and asked to sign documents pledging I would never give interviews to foreign channels. But I told them there’s no law against it.”

Giti Pourfazel describing in a media interview the harassment she suffered due to her professional work, July 2016

Massoud Shafiee has represented prisoners of conscience and others imprisoned for political reasons, including US nationals Shane Bauer and Josh Fattal, who were arrested while hiking in the Iraq-Iran border area in July 2009. He was harassed by the authorities after the hikers were released in 2011. In a 2014 interview, Massoud Shafiee said that the Ministry of Intelligence had interrogated him and confiscated his passport, and that he had not been able to work for three years. He said that he had received no instructions to stop work but whenever he took on a client, he would receive a call the next day to revoke his representation.

In June 2015, Atena Farghadani, an artist who was jailed at the time for defending human rights through her paintings, and her lawyer Mohammad Moghimi were charged with “illegitimate sexual relations short of adultery” and “indecency” after they shook hands in prison. Following Mohammad Moghimi’s arrest, there was a period in which Atena Farghadani appeared to have no access to a lawyer since Mohammad Moghimi was barred from meeting her. On 19 October 2015, a criminal court in Tehran acquitted both of them. The court said that, while their act of shaking hands was “religiously forbidden” (haram), it could not be considered an offence in this case because it had not been committed “with the intention to seek sexual pleasure” as stipulated under the Islamic Penal Code.

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84 Reza Khandan wrote about Nasrin Sotoudeh’s protest on his Facebook page and posted a picture of her outside the Iran Bar Association:


87 For more details, see Amnesty International, Iran: Release US hikers following ‘grossly unfair’ trial (Press release, 21 August 2011).

88 Centre for Human Rights in Iran, ‘Three years after I represented three Americans I still cannot work and am on a travel ban’, 4 August 2014, persian.iranhumanrights.org/1393/05/massoud-shafiee/ (in Persian).

89 For more details on the case, see Amnesty International, Iran: Indecency trial of jailed cartoonist and her lawyer for shaking hands absurd (Press Release, 2 October 2015).

90 For more details on the case, see Amnesty International, Iran confirms forced ‘virginity test’ on artist (Index: MDE 13/3878/2016). See also the appendix for the full court verdict.
9. MINORITY RIGHTS ACTIVISTS

Members of religious minorities, including Baha’is, Sufis, Yaresan (Ahl-e Haq), Christian converts, Gonabadi Dervish and Sunni Muslims, suffer discrimination in law and practice, including in education, employment and inheritance, and are persecuted for practising their faith. Disadvantaged ethnic minorities, including Ahwazi Arabs, Azerbaijani Turks, Baluchis, Kurds and Turkmen, also face entrenched discrimination, curtailing their access to employment, adequate housing and the exercise of their cultural, economic, civil and political rights. In the spheres of politics specifically, ethnic or national minorities, which are concentrated in border provinces, have generally criticized the centralization of political life and the absence of any measures to ensure minority self-government.

Iran is a state party to the International Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Racial Discrimination, which imposes specific obligations to prevent, prohibit and eliminate any distinction, exclusion, restriction or preference based on, among others, racial, national or ethnic origin which has the purpose or effect of nullifying or impairing the recognition, enjoyment or exercise, on an equal footing, of human rights. Article 27 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, to which Iran is also a state party, establishes that ethnic, religious and linguistic minorities shall not be denied the right to enjoy their own culture, to profess and practice their own religion, or to use their own language.

Members of minorities who speak out against violations of their human rights face arbitrary arrest, torture and other ill-treatment, grossly unfair trials, imprisonment, and in some cases the death penalty. Human rights defenders who stand up for the rights of Iran’s minority communities are also subjected to ongoing repression, as illustrated below in relation to those campaigning on two long-standing concerns.

9.1 ACCESS TO HIGHER EDUCATION FOR BAHÁ’I S

The Baha’i minority, which numbers between 300,000 and 350,000 people, face systematic persecution in law and practice. The authorities regularly incite hatred and violence against them, describing them as “heretical”, “deviant”, “filthy” and “counter-Revolutionary”.

Baha’is have been denied access to higher education since shortly after the 1979 Revolution. In response, some Baha’is set up the Baha’i Institute for Higher Education in 1987. After repeated acts of harassment and intimidation by the authorities for providing alternative higher education, the authorities detained leaders


of the Institute in May 2011. Tens of people associated with it, including teachers, were sentenced to long terms of imprisonment.\textsuperscript{93}

The authorities have also resorted to arbitrary detention and the misuse of the criminal justice system to silence Baha’i students claiming their right to higher education as well as human rights defenders who have denounced the authorities for discriminating against Baha’i students. Despite the threats and attacks directed against them, Baha’i students are increasingly speaking out when higher education institutions expel them or refuse to register them even though they have passed the admission exams.

Rouhie Safajoo

“Be silent, they say.
“Speak not, be silent.
“And yet I cannot. I have no desire to.
“I shall perish if I do not speak. I have always had a pen since I can remember. The pen is part and parcel of my existence. I cannot be silent.”

Rouhie Safajoo’s poem on her Facebook about a five-year-old Baha’i boy whose parents were imprisoned for teaching at the Baha’i Institute for Higher Education, March 2016\textsuperscript{94}

Baha’i student Rouhie Safajoo, aged 20, was arrested on 8 March 2016 at her home in Karaj, north-west of Tehran, by eight Revolutionary Guard officials who introduced themselves as employees of the state gas company before entering the house. The officials told her that she was being arrested “in relation to her Facebook activities”. They searched the house and asked her to provide the password to her personal accounts, including her email.

In the months leading up to her arrest, Rouhie Safajoo had written several posts on her Facebook account about the violation of her right to higher education and the discrimination she suffered as a Baha’i. Despite passing Iran’s university entrance exam in 2014 and 2015, she had not been allowed to enrol. She had filed a complaint with several state authorities and had written, along with other Baha’i students, an open letter to President Rouhani expressing dismay that his administration had not kept its promise to respect the rights of Baha’is to higher education and non-discrimination.

Following her arrest, Rouhie Safajoo was taken to Section 2A of Evin prison, where she was held in solitary confinement for eight days. She had no access to a lawyer during this period even though she was interrogated every day for four hours. She was not permitted to call her family until five days after her arrest.

During interrogations, she was blindfolded and forced to sit facing a wall. Her interrogators questioned her about her Facebook posts, repeatedly insulting her religious beliefs and calling her “mental”, “brazen” and “stubborn”. Rouhie Safajoo was released on 27 March 2016 after posting bail. She was subsequently summoned to the Office of the Prosecutor where she was charged with “dissemination of lies” under Article 18 of the Cyber Crimes Law. As of 12 July 2017, she was at liberty awaiting her trial date.

\textsuperscript{93} For more details, see Amnesty International, Silenced, expelled, imprisoned: Repression of students and academics in Iran (Index: MDE 13/015/2014).

\textsuperscript{94} The full text of Rouhie Safajoo’s poem is available on her Facebook page: www.facebook.com/photo.php?fbid=1023644417721505&set=a.548757438543541.1073741832.100002278706376&type=3&theater (in Persian).
Navid Khanjani, a founding member of the Committee of Human Rights Reporters, the Committee for Pursuit of the Right to Education for Baha’i Students, and the Association to Oppose Discrimination in Education,95 has been imprisoned in Raja’i Shahr prison since August 2012. He is sentenced to 12 years and five months’ imprisonment for his peaceful human rights activities.

He was first arrested in Esfahan on 2 March 2010 and transferred to Evin prison, where he spent 65 days in detention, 25 of which were in solitary confinement. He was not allowed access to a lawyer while in detention.

During this period, he said he was tortured while interrogated, including by beatings and periods of strangulation while blindfolded.

Navid Khanjani was sentenced to 12 years’ imprisonment in January 2011 after an unfair trial before Branch 26 of the Revolutionary Court in Tehran, which convicted him of “forming a group with the purpose of disrupting national security”, referring to the Association to Oppose Discrimination in Education, “creating unease in the public mind” and “spreading propaganda against the system”.

His sentence was confirmed on appeal in August 2011.

9.2 LINGUISTIC RIGHTS FOR MINORITIES

One of the grievances repeatedly voiced by Iran’s national or ethnic minorities concerns the lack of opportunities to learn, promote and use their own language, in private and in public, freely and without any interference or discrimination.

The protection of linguistic rights for persons belonging to minorities is based on the two pillars of protection for minorities found in international legal instruments: the right to non-discriminatory treatment in the enjoyment of all human rights;96 and the right to the maintenance and development of identity through the freedom to practice or use those special and unique aspects of their minority life – typically culture, religion, and language.97 The Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities calls on states to take positive measures to create favourable conditions for minorities to develop their language. The situation of ethnic and linguistic minorities in Iran falls far short of these standards.

Non-Persian ethnic minorities, who include Azerbaijani Turks, Baluchis, Kurds, Turkmen, Gilakis and Mazandaranis, Lurs and Arabs, make up approximately half of Iran’s population.98 Article 19 of the Iranian Constitution states, “All people of Iran, whatever the ethnic group or tribe to which they belong, enjoy equal rights; colour, race, language, and the like, do not bestow any privilege.” In practice, however, experts have noted the dominant trend through successive Iranian governments to emphasize the ascendancy of the Persian ethnic group and make Persian the only official language for the delivery of administrative services, access to the judiciary and public education.99

95 The Association is an independent organization created around October 2009. Most members are said to be Baha’i students. The organization campaigns for the right to education for those excluded for reason of religious or ethnic identity or on grounds of gender discrimination.
96 International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, Articles 2(1) and 26.
97 International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, Article 27.
In June 2016, the government announced that optional Turkish and Kurdish language courses would be offered in schools in two provinces, Kurdistan and West Azerbaijan, although implementation remained unclear. Members of the Turkmen minority publicly appealed to President Rouhani for a similar dispensation. This is, however, insufficient to address the grievances of Iran’s minority communities, who have historically complained about the use of Persian as the sole medium of instruction at all levels of primary and secondary education, a policy which is believed to have contributed to disproportionately low levels of learning and high dropout rates in provinces populated by non-Persian ethnic minorities.

Other related grievances include the suppression of educational efforts to teach and promote minority languages, the scarcity of publications in minority languages, and the lack of culturally and linguistically inclusive local programming by state radio and television.

Human rights defenders in Iran who speak out against the monolingual and monocultural vision of the state and its exclusion or marginalization of minority communities risk facing harassment, arbitrary arrest and detention. Activists who link their human rights work to their national or ethnic identity risk further violations of their rights including unfair prosecutions and lengthy prison sentences.

As the cases of activists discussed below illustrate, intelligence and security forces frequently associate proponents of minority rights with “separatist currents”, and accuse them of inciting tension to divide the nation and undermine Iran’s territorial integrity.

**ALIREZA FARSHI**

Alireza Farshi, a member of Iran’s Azerbaijani Turkish minority and the founder of an online campaign to commemorate International Mother Language Day, faces lengthy imprisonment for his peaceful activism. He was sentenced to 15 years’ imprisonment in February 2017 after a Revolutionary Court in Baharestan, Tehran province, convicted him of “gathering and colluding to commit crimes against national security” and “founding groups with the purpose of disrupting national security”. The court also sentenced him to two years of internal exile in the city of Bagh-e Malek in southern Khuzestan province.

The court verdict cites a long list of peaceful activities as “evidence” against him. These include attending private gatherings commemorating International Mother Language Day in 2014 and 2015; launching a change.org petition in February 2015 to call on the Iranian authorities to allow commemorative gatherings on International Mother Language Day; and communicating with activists in different cities in relation to organizing events on International Mother Language Day. In the verdict, the court repeatedly dismisses International Mother Language Day as “the day of the so-called mother language” and claims that Alireza

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Farshi’s effort to mark the occasion “pursues anti-security goals under the guise of a so-called cultural activity and activates pan-Turkish and separatist agents… in order to spark ethnic agitations.” 101

The court also criminalizes Alireza Farshi’s leading role in submitting a letter to the head of the UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) in Tehran in February 2015 seeking the organization’s assistance with obtaining official permission to hold a commemorative event on International Mother Language Day in Tehran. The court characterized the communication as “an attempt to exert human rights-related pressure against the regime”.

As “evidence” of Alireza Farshi’s involvement in “criminal” activity, the court also refers to his participation in meetings in 2014 in which civil society activists discussed strategies for campaigning on issues related to their mother language, the disappearance of Lake Urmiah (a giant salt lake in north-western Iran that has experienced severe drought in recent years), and the establishment of an academy for the Azeri Turkish language. The court describes the activists present in these meetings as “seasoned separatist elements” without providing any further explanation.

Alireza Farshi’s posts on Facebook and Telegram are also mentioned as “criminal evidence”. According to the court, these posts reflect Alireza Farshi’s “hostile mentality against the country’s territorial integrity” and “promote separatist thoughts”. In reality, the posts cover a wide range of subjects from the situation of prisoners of conscience belonging to Iran’s Azerbaijani Turkish minority to broad questions related to history, language, nationhood and identity. Alireza Farshi has consistently maintained that he does not espouse separatist causes in his writings.

Alireza Farshi was arrested on 21 February 2015 during a celebration of International Mother Language Day at a friend’s house in Baharestan. He was held in solitary confinement in Section 209 of Evin prison, which is run by the Ministry of Intelligence, until 19 April 2015, when he was released on bail. He was denied access to a lawyer during this period even though he was repeatedly interrogated. A month into his detention, he was granted permission to make a brief telephone call to his mother on the occasion of Nowrooz, the Iranian New Year. As of 12 July 2017, he was at liberty pending the outcome of his appeal.

Alireza Farshi’s case is connected with the cases of three other minority rights activists, Akbar Azad, Behnam Sheikhi and Hamid Monafi, also targeted for their peaceful activism. They have each been sentenced to 10 years’ imprisonment and two years of internal exile in southern cities far from their families’ place of residence.

101 See Appendix for the text of the verdict.
Mohammad Ali Amouri, a 40-year-old minority rights activist from Iran’s Ahwazi Arab minority and a founding member of a now-disbanded cultural rights group called Al-Hiwar (meaning “Dialogue” in Arabic), has been on death row since 2012. Rahman Asakereh, another founding member of Al-Hiwar, aged 41, has been serving a 20-year prison sentence since 2011. Both men have been punished for their peaceful activities at Al-Hiwar, which included promoting Arabic culture and identity through poetry events, language classes and reading sessions, voicing demands for newspapers in the Arabic language, and conducting community education to reform traditional practices among Arab clans which are harmful toward women and girls.

Mohammad Ali Amouri was arrested in January 2011 after he was deported to Iran from Iraq despite being a recognized refugee under UNHCR protection. He had left Iran in 2008 after repeated interrogations and dismissal from his teaching position.

Rahman Asakereh was arrested together with several other founding members of Al-Hiwar shortly after, in February 2011. At the time of his arrest, he was studying for a Master’s Degree in Social Sciences at the University of Ahvaz and was working on a dissertation about the challenges faced by bilingual students in Iran’s education system. He had set up a private library at his home in Ramshir (Khalafabad) where youth could borrow books about Arab history and culture.

The arrests of Al-Hiwar members followed years of harassment by intelligence and security officials, who had repeatedly summoned the activists for interrogation and accused them of “espionage”, “collusion with Ba’athist currents” and “espousal of ethnic tension”.

Following their arrests, Mohammad Ali Amouri and Rahman Asakereh were held for several months in solitary confinement in a secret detention centre in Ahvaz, which was controlled by the Ministry of Intelligence. They have said that, during this period, they were repeatedly tortured, including through sleep and food deprivation, kicking, beatings with electric cables and gas hoses and suspension from the ceiling. The torture was aimed at extracting false “confessions” about the men’s involvement with an armed group intent on overthrowing the Islamic Republic. The exact name and profile of this armed group was never made clear by the authorities.

In June 2012, Mohammad Ali Amouri and Rahman Asakereh stood trial before Branch Two of the Revolutionary Court in Ahvaz. The court dismissed the men’s allegations of torture without ordering an investigation, and relied on their forced “confessions” to convict them of “enmity against God” (moharebeh). Branch 32 of the Supreme Court upheld the sentence in December 2012.

In early 2014, Rahman Asakereh was transferred to Mashhad’s Vakil Abad prison in north-eastern Iran, which is very far from his family’s place of residence in southern Khuzestan province. This has inflicted further pain and suffering on Rahman Asakereh and his wife and four children, who cannot afford the cost of travel to see him.
Human rights defenders seeking truth, justice and reparation for thousands of prisoners who were summarily executed or forcibly disappeared in the 1980s have faced new levels of retribution by the authorities. They include relatives of victims, who have become human rights defenders out of necessity, and younger human rights defenders who have taken to social media and other platforms to discuss the past atrocities.

The renewed crackdown follows recently revived calls for an inquiry into the killings of several thousand political prisoners in a wave of extrajudicial executions across the country in the summer of 1988. This was triggered by the release in August 2016 of an audio recording of a meeting in 1988 in which senior officials are heard discussing and defending the details of their plans to carry out the mass executions.103

The release of the audio recording triggered a chain of unprecedented reactions from high-level officials, leading them to admit for the first time that the mass killings of 1988 were planned at the highest levels of government.104

Since then, several human rights defenders have been subjected to reprisals or prosecution on vague national security-related charges for their peaceful efforts to learn the fate and whereabouts of their loved ones. The persecution signals renewed efforts by the authorities to silence all public discussions about the gross violations committed during the 1980s, with a view to erasing the memory of them from collective consciousness. Ahmad Montazeri, the son of the late Ayatollah Hossein Ali Montazeri, who was at that time

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102 The letter is available at: www.kanoonjb.co/index.php/window/item/4144-bio-m-behkish-pain-of-my-heart-i-did-not-understand
103 The audio file is available on the Soundcloud page of Radio Zamaneh: soundcloud.com/radiozamaneh/yakydruBjded (in Persian).
104 Deutsche Welle Persian, 'The reaction of authorities and public figures in Iran to the release of Ayatollah Montazeri’s audio file', 14 August 2016, bit.ly/2fHeqSt
the Deputy Supreme Leader, was sentenced to 21 years’ imprisonment in November 2016 for posting the audio file on his father’s website though the sentence was later reduced to six years and suspended.105

MANSOUREH BEHKISH

Human rights activist Mansoureh Behkish, who lost six members of her family during the mass executions of the 1980s, was sentenced to seven and a half years in prison in January 2017 after a Revolutionary Court in Tehran convicted her of “gathering and colluding to commit crimes against national security” and “spreading propaganda against the system”.

The conviction stems solely from her peaceful activities to seek truth and justice, including holding commemorative gatherings at her home; visiting the families of victims; taking flowers to Khavaran (a deserted mass gravesite in the south of Tehran), where two of her brothers are believed to be buried in unmarked graves; and posting about Iran’s human rights violations on Facebook and other online platforms. Her conviction and sentence followed two interrogation sessions by Ministry of Intelligence officials during which she was denied the presence of a lawyer, and a trial session in late 2016 that lasted less than an hour.107

Since the 1980s, Mansoureh Behkish has been subjected to repeated harassment, arbitrary arrests and periods of detention by intelligence and security forces in attempts to silence her and stop her going to Khavaran with flowers and pictures. She was given a suspended sentence of four years and six months in 2011 because of her human rights work, particularly with the Mothers and Families of Khavaran, which is comprised of mothers and other family members of political prisoners summarily executed during the 1980s in Iran as well as the Mothers of Laleh Park, which is largely comprised of women whose children were killed, detained or forcibly disappeared in the post-election violence in 2009.108 If her latest sentence is upheld on appeal, the suspended sentence may be activated and she would face up to 12 years in prison.

The mass extrajudicial executions of 1988 began shortly after an unsuccessful armed incursion by the Iraq-based People’s Mojahedin Organization of Iran in July that year. Political prisoners from across the country were rounded up and held incommunicado, with no news of them heard for months afterwards. Reports circulated among relatives that prisoners were being executed in groups and buried in unmarked mass graves. Distraught family members searched the cemeteries for signs of freshly dug trenches.

106 The letter is available at: www.kanoonjb.co/index.php/window/item/4144-bio-m-behkish-pain-of-my-heart-i-did-not-understand
107 For more details, see Amnesty International, Spurious charges for human rights defender (Index: MDE 13/5207/2016).
108 For more details see, Amnesty International, Iran urged to quash prison sentence for ‘Mourning Mothers’ activist (Press release, 13 April 2012).
From late 1988 onwards, families were verbally told by the authorities that their relatives had been killed but the bodies were not returned and most locations of burial sites were not disclosed.

Most of those executed had already spent years in prison for the peaceful exercise of their rights, including undertaking activities such as distributing newspapers and leaflets, taking part in peaceful anti-government demonstrations, and having real or perceived affiliations with various political opposition groups. Some had already completed their sentences but had not been released because they refused to make statements of “repentance”.

Today, it is still not known exactly how many victims were extrajudicially executed and precisely where the victims were buried in secret. To date, no Iranian officials have been investigated and brought to justice for the extrajudicial executions. The authorities have deployed various tactics to destroy evidence of mass graves including bulldozing; turning the sites into unsightly garbage dumps; hiding mass graves beneath new, individual burial spots; and pouring concrete over mass graves.109

They have also regularly tormented their families by referring to mass graves as “the damned land” (a’nat ābad) and describing their loved ones as “outlaws” who did not deserve a proper burial or tombstone. Families have been forbidden from holding commemorative gatherings or decorating the mass gravesites with memorial messages.

MARYAM AKBARI MONFARED

“How do you think you can scare someone in my position into silence?
What have you even left for me that you are threatening to deprive me of?
Don’t you feel ashamed that you are threatening to cut the family visits of a mother?”

Maryam Akbari Monfared, in an open letter from inside Evin prison, November 2016110

Prisoner of conscience Maryam Akbari Monfared filed, from inside prison, a formal complaint with the Office of the Prosecutor in Tehran in October 2016, seeking an official investigation into the mass executions of several thousand political prisoners, including two of her siblings, in 1988; the location of the mass graves where their bodies were buried; and the identity of the perpetrators involved.

To date, the authorities have not processed the complaint. Instead, they have resorted to various punitive tactics. Since October 2016, they have refused to take her to her medical appointments outside prison to receive adequate treatment for her rheumatoid arthritis and thyroid problems. As a result, she is experiencing severe pain in her legs. They have also repeatedly threatened to stop her family visits. In May 2017, she was threatened with an additional three-year prison term and exile to a remote prison.111

Maryam Akbari Monfared was arrested on 31 December 2009 and forcibly disappeared for five months. It later transpired that she had been held in solitary confinement for the first 43 days after her arrest, during which she was subjected to intense interrogations without access to a lawyer. She met her state-appointed lawyer for the first time at her trial, which was limited to one brief hearing lasting less than an hour. She was sentenced to 15 years in May 2010 after Branch 15 of a Revolutionary Court in Tehran convicted her of “enmity against God” (moharebeh). The conviction was solely based on the fact that she had made phone calls to her relatives, who are members of the banned People’s Mojahedin Organization of Iran.

109 For more details, see Amnesty International, Iran: Desecrating mass grave site would destroy crucial forensic evidence (Press release, 1 June 2017).
110 The letter is available at: www.hra-news.org/2016/hranews/a-8510/
111 For more details, see Amnesty International, Reprisal for speaking out against 1988 Massacre (Index: MDE 13/6267/2017); Amnesty International, Prisoner denied treatment for filing a complaint (Index: MDE 13/5090/2016).
(PMOI), and had visited them once in Iraq. Her husband has said that during her trial session, the judge
told her she was paying for the activities of her relatives with the PMOI. Branch 33 of the Supreme Court
upheld the sentence in August 2010.

10.1 REPRISALS FOR PURSUING UN MECHANISMS

In the face of widespread impunity, some human rights defenders have resorted to contacting UN human
rights mechanisms, including the UN Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions
and the UN Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances, to increase the efforts to uncover
the fate and whereabouts of those extrajudicially executed or forcibly disappeared and secure
accountability. This has prompted the authorities to step up their crackdown against relatives of victims.

RAHELEH RAHEMIPOUR

Raheleh Rahemipour was handed down a one-year prison sentence in February 2017 after Branch 15 of the
Revolutionary Court of Tehran convicted her of “spreading propaganda against the system” for giving media
interviews, attending gatherings with the Mothers of Laleh Park, and signing petitions. These activities were part
of her attempts to learn what happened to her niece Golrou Rahemipour, who was born in Evin prison in April 1984.
Golrou was taken away from her mother when she was only 15 days old, ostensibly for medical testing. The family
was subsequently told that Golrou had died. Despite the family’s requests, the authorities never provided a death
certificate, information about her death, or even if and where she had been buried.

Raheleh Rahemipour’s brother Hossein, Golrou’s father,
was arrested in August 1983 along with his pregnant wife
for his affiliation with the Organization of Revolutionary
Workers.

In late August to mid-September 1984, Hossein Rahemipour’s family received a phone call telling them to
pick up his personal effects and that he had “gone to hell”, understood to mean he had been executed.113

In July 2016, the UN Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances stated that it had examined
the cases of Hossein and Golrou Rahemipour and requested information from the authorities.114 Soon after,
Raheleh Rahemipour began receiving threatening phone calls from Ministry of Intelligence officials. On 16
August 2016, she received a written summons from the Office of the Prosecutor in Evin prison to present
herself for interrogation within five days.115 This resulted in the prosecution against her.

On 24 November 2016, a number of UN experts called on the Iranian authorities to cease their harassment
of Raheleh Rahemipour for “trying to learn the fate of her brother and his newborn daughter”.116

112 See, for example, Justice for Iran, ‘The complaint of Maryam Akbari Monfared about the 1988 executions to the
113 For more details, see Justice for Iran, ‘Revolutionary Court: Golroo, the newborn child disappeared in Evin, is a
114 UN Human Rights Council, Communications, cases examined, observations and other activities conducted by the
115 Centre for Human Rights in Iran, ‘Raheleh Rahemipour has been summoned to the Office of the Prosecutor for
investigating the disappearance of a newborn in Evin’ (in Persian), 27 August 2016, persian.iranhumanrights.org/1395/06/raheleh-rahemipour-summoned/
116 UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, ‘UN experts condemn charges against Iranian woman
As of 12 July 2017, Raheleh Rahemipour was at liberty pending the outcome of her appeal. In April 2017, she filed another complaint with the Office of the Prosecutor in Tehran as well as with the Article 90 Commission of parliament, named after the article in Iran’s Constitution empowering the parliament to investigate complaints against any of the three branches of government, to learn about the fate of her niece.

10.2 NEW GENERATION SEEKING TRUTH

Human rights defenders targeted for seeking truth and justice include younger human rights defenders born after the 1979 Revolution who have taken to social media and other platforms to discuss the past atrocities, and attended memorial gatherings held at Khavaran.

For example, human rights activist Amir Amirgholi was imprisoned from December 2014 to May 2017 solely for his peaceful human rights activities, including participating in gatherings at Khavaran to commemorate people executed and buried in mass graves in 1988.

Amnesty International has reviewed court verdicts in which engaging in online discussions about the 1988 massacres has also been cited as evidence of “criminal” activity deemed threatening to national security and insulting to the founder of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

In the case of anti-death penalty activist Omid Alishenas (see Chapter 5), the court verdict mentions “publication of false materials about those executed in 1988 under the pretext of remembering victims” among the list of activities for which Omid Alishenas was convicted of “gathering and colluding to commit crimes against national security” and “insulting the Supreme Leader”.

Atefa Daemi, another young anti-death penalty activist (see Chapter 5), wrote on her Facebook page in 2014, “we have not forgotten the massacres [of the] 1980s” and sarcastically adapted a famous statement by Iran’s first Supreme Leader to criticize Iran’s execution record. This was used to convict her of “insulting the founder of the Islamic Republic of Iran”.

Continued attempts by the authorities to enforce a culture of silence about the atrocities of the 1980s violates the right of families, as well as of society as a whole, to know the truth about past human rights violations.

The right to truth has a collective dimension that ensures society has full knowledge of its past and is an essential element in the fight against impunity that contributes towards the non-repetition of such atrocities. Principle 3 of the UN Updated Set of Principles for the Protection and Promotion of Human Rights through Action to Combat Impunity states:

“A people’s knowledge of the history of its oppression is part of its heritage and, as such, must be ensured by appropriate measures in fulfilment of the State’s duty to preserve archives and other evidence concerning violations of human rights and humanitarian law and to facilitate knowledge of those violations.”
11. THE RIGHT TO DEFEND HUMAN RIGHTS

International human rights law and standards guarantee the right to defend human rights as an autonomous and independent right. The UN Declaration on the Right and Responsibility of Individuals, Groups and Organs of Society to Promote and Protect Universally Recognized Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms (the Declaration on Human Rights Defenders), adopted by consensus by the General Assembly in 1998, recognizes the right of everyone, “individually and in association with others, to promote and strive for the protection and realization of human rights and fundamental freedoms at the national and international levels” (Article 1). Human rights defenders are thus defined on the basis of their activities, more than on their identity or status.

The Declaration on Human Rights Defenders does not create new rights, but rather articulates existing rights in a context applicable to the work of human rights defenders. These rights are afforded legal protections via other international instruments that can be legally binding, including the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights; Iran is a state party to both of them. The Declaration recognizes the crucial role that human rights defenders play in the advancement of human rights, which often exposes them to additional and specific risks, thus requiring specific measures for their protection.

States bear the ultimate responsibility to protect human rights defenders, to prevent and effectively address allegations of human rights violations and abuses committed against them and related to their human rights work, and to ensure that they can carry out their work in a safe and enabling environment. Article 2 of the Declaration on Human Rights Defenders specifically calls on states to adopt the necessary steps to ensure that the human rights referred to in the Declaration are effectively guaranteed as they are crucial for any type of human rights work. These include rights to freedom of expression, peaceful assembly and association.

Article 19 of the ICCPR states that “everyone shall have the right to freedom of expression; this right shall include freedom to seek, receive and impart information and ideas of all kinds, regardless of frontiers, in writing or in print, in the form of art, or through any other media of his choice.” Paragraph 3 establishes that the right to freedom of expression may be subject to certain restrictions, but only if these are provided by law and are necessary and proportionate to a legitimate aim (the respect of the rights or reputations of others, and the protection of national security or of public order or of public health or morals). Any restrictions on freedom of expression on the internet must also comply with these criteria.117

The UN Human Rights Council has recognized that people have the same right to freedom of expression online as they do offline, and condemned state “measures to intentionally prevent or disrupt access to or dissemination of information online in violation of international human rights law”.118

The UN Human Rights Committee, the authoritative body overseeing implementation of the ICCPR, has stated that “extreme care must be taken by States parties to ensure that treason laws and similar provisions relating to national security… are crafted and applied in a manner that confirms to the strictest requirements

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117 Report of the Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of the right to freedom of opinion and expression, UN Doc. A/66/290, pp. 6-7.
of paragraph 3 [of Article 19]”. Furthermore, the Committee has explained that “it is not compatible with paragraph 3 [of Article 19] to invoke such laws to suppress or withhold from the public information of legitimate public interest that does not harm national security or to prosecute journalists, researchers, environmental activists, human rights defenders, or others, for having disseminated such information”.  

The rights of peaceful assembly and the right to association, including the right to form and join unions, which are, respectively, enshrined in Articles 21 and 22 of the ICCPR, are also crucial to the work of human rights defenders. The Declaration on Human Rights Defenders specifically acknowledges “the legitimacy of participation in peaceful activities to protest against violations of human rights”. Public assemblies have long been a tool used by human rights defenders to influence decision makers and, despite increasing activism online, peaceful protests remain a significant method of communicating dissatisfaction with the authorities.

The right to freedom of association, for its part, allows for individuals to form or join formal or informal groups to take collective action, and requires states to create an environment in which associations can function effectively and to refrain from imposing stringent conditions on registration that might operate as undue restrictions. States also have an obligation to abstain from unduly obstructing the exercise of this right, including the right to seek, secure and use resources, including from foreign or international sources.

In December 2013, the UN General Assembly adopted a resolution recognizing that women of all ages who engage in the promotion and protection of human rights, and people who engage in the defence of the rights of women and gender equality, play an important role. The resolution calls upon institutions at the international, regional and national level to recognize the crucial role of women human rights defenders and grant them protection in accordance with their obligations.

These obligations include the responsibility of states “to ensure that the promotion and protection of human rights are not criminalized or met with limitations in contravention of their obligations and commitments under international human rights law”. The specific activities listed in the resolution include trade union activities, marches, peaceful demonstrations and assemblies that aim to promote and protect human rights.

\footnote{119 UN Human Rights Committee, General Comment 34, Article 19, Freedoms of opinion and expression, UN Doc. CCPR/C/23/34, para. 30.}
\footnote{120 Report of the Special Rapporteur on the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and of association, UN Doc. A/HRC/20/27, para. 60.}
\footnote{121 Report of the Special Rapporteur on the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and of association, UN Doc. A/HRC/23/39, para. 8.}
\footnote{122 UN General Assembly, Resolution adopted on the Promotion of the Declaration on the Right and Responsibility of Individuals, Groups and Organized of Society to Promote and Protect Universally Recognized Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms: protecting women human rights defenders, UN Doc. A/RES/68/181.}
12. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The ongoing repression against human rights defenders in Iran has been a sign of the determination of the state's repressive apparatus to crush hopes for improvement heralded by the election campaign of President Hassan Rouhani in 2013 and to curtail renewed activism. Anyone standing up for human rights has been at increased risk of arrest and prosecution, creating an intense climate of fear. In case after case, prosecution authorities and Revolutionary Courts, which work under the influence of intelligence and security bodies, have cited peaceful human rights activities as “evidence” of criminal activity against national security.

Despite the pervasive assault on their rights and freedoms, human rights defenders in Iran remain steadfast in their commitment to justice. They continue their brave struggle across the country’s key battlegrounds for human rights, advocating for the abolition of the death penalty, campaigning for women’s rights, defending independent trade unions, demanding equal rights and opportunities for ethnic and religious minorities, and seeking truth, justice and reparations for the gross human rights violations of the 1980s.

The Iranian authorities – from the judiciary to the executive branch – should stop denigrating human rights defenders as “criminals” bent on harming national security. Instead, they should recognize the role they can play in promoting a fairer and more just society and guaranteeing the human rights of all those living in Iran.

12.1 RECOMMENDATIONS TO IRAN

Amnesty International calls on the Iranian authorities to implement the following recommendations:

Recognition and protection of human rights defenders

- Release immediately and unconditionally all human rights defenders imprisoned solely for peacefully exercising their rights to freedom of opinion and expression, association and assembly through their human rights work.
- Quash, without delay, all criminal convictions and sentences issued against human rights defenders which stem from their peaceful human rights work.
- Ensure that the criminal justice system is not misused to target or harass human rights defenders and refrain from bringing criminal charges or any other punitive proceedings against human rights defenders that stem solely from the peaceful exercise of their human rights.
- Stop the harassment and persecution of families of the victims of mass killings in the 1980s and guarantee their rights to truth, justice and reparation, including by conducting a thorough, effective and independent investigation into the extrajudicial and summary executions and enforced disappearances, and bringing to justice those responsible in fair proceedings without recourse to the death penalty.
- Take all necessary legislative and other measures to prevent, deter and punish acts of intimidation and reprisals against human rights defenders in relation to their communications and interactions with international and regional organizations.
Publicly recognize, in law and practice and across all three branches of the government, the legitimate work of human rights defenders in Iran, and refrain from using language that stigmatizes, abuses, disparages or discriminates against human rights defenders, including characterizing them as “terrorists”, “spies”, “traitors” or “threats to national security”.

Ensure women human rights defenders have access to the specific protection they need against gender-based threats and violence they may face due to their work.

Translate into Persian and relevant minority languages, and promote and widely disseminate in Iran the UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders, and adopt comprehensive national legislation for its effective implementation, in consultation with human rights defenders and in accordance to their wishes.

Establish national human rights institutions independent of the judiciary and state, and provide them with the necessary human and financial resources to carry out their duties effectively, including a specific mandate to monitor the situation of human rights defenders.

Implement a public awareness campaign about the work of human rights defenders and ensure it is widely disseminated.

Extend an invitation to the UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Iran and the UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders to conduct visits without restrictions on duration or scope and ensure they are allowed to meet with human rights defenders without hindrance.

Criminal justice system

Ensure that no one is subjected to arbitrary arrest and detention, criminal prosecution and imprisonment solely for the peaceful exercise of their rights to freedom of opinion and expression, association and assembly, including for exercising these rights through online social media platforms, and release immediately and unconditionally anyone so detained.

Establish independent and impartial bodies to investigate allegations of human rights violations promptly, thoroughly and effectively, and to provide reparations to victims and affected families in accordance with international human rights standards.

Take effective measures to prohibit and prevent all forms of torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment, including the delay or denial of adequate medical care for people in custody, and ensure that those suspected of such abuses are investigated and brought to justice in fair proceedings and without recourse to the death penalty. Victims should have an enforceable right to reparations in accordance with international law and standards.

Ensure that all trials meet international standards for fair trial, including by ensuring that all arrested people have access to a lawyer of their choice immediately following their arrest and throughout the investigation stage.

Ensure that no one is coerced into testifying against themselves or others or to “confess” guilt and that no such “confessions” are accepted as evidence in court, except against a person accused of torture or other ill-treatment as evidence that the “confession” or other statement was made.

Abolish Revolutionary Courts as they are fundamentally unfair and lack internationally recognized standards of impartiality and judicial independence.

Commute all death sentences and order a moratorium on executions in line with the December 2007 UN General Assembly resolution calling for a worldwide moratorium on executions.

Ensure that all individuals in custody, pending their release, receive adequate health care to the same standard as available in the community, including prevention, screening and treatment, free of charge and without discrimination.

Ensure that prisoners who require specialist treatment are transferred, free of charge, to medical centres or outside hospitals, whenever such treatment is not available in prison.
Legislative reform

- Repeal or amend, with a view to bringing into conformity with international law, vaguely worded provisions of the Islamic Penal Code that unduly restrict the rights to freedom of expression, association and peaceful assembly, such as Articles 498, 499, 500, 508, 513, 514, and 610.
- Ensure that restrictions on freedom of expression are narrowly and clearly defined, and do not exceed those which are permissible under international law.
- Lift stringent requirements in laws for the registration of associations, including NGOs and trade unions, which might operate as undue restrictions to their formation and operation.
- Initiate legislation to allow workers to exercise their right to form and join independent trade unions and to collectively bargain in line with Iran’s obligations under international law.
- Review as a matter of urgency all legislation with a view to removing all provisions that discriminate against or have a discriminatory impact on persons belonging to ethnic or national, religious and linguistic minorities.
- Issue directives and take effective measures to counter the discriminatory application of laws in order to ensure that all Iran’s minority communities enjoy their full range of civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights.
- Take measures so that members of minority communities can be taught in their mother tongue and have adequate opportunities to learn their mother tongue.
- Review as a matter of urgency all legislation in Iran in order to identify and remedy all laws that discriminate directly against women or have a discriminatory impact on women.
- Adopt comprehensive legislation and exercise due diligence to prevent, investigate and punish gender-based violence, including domestic violence and marital rape.
- Repeal Article 638 of the Islamic Penal Code to abolish compulsory veiling (hijab), which violates women’s rights to freedom of belief and religion, freedom of expression and the principle of equality and non-discrimination.
- Repeal laws that criminalize consensual sexual relations between adults, including adultery and consensual sexual activity between same-sex adults.
- Review all legislation under which a convicted person may be killed by the state, with the immediate aim of reducing the scope of the death penalty and with a view to the eventual abolition of the death penalty.

International human rights mechanisms

- Ensure the full and prompt implementation of the Concluding Recommendations of the UN Human Rights Committee, the UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, the Committee on the Rights of the Child and the Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.
- Ratify promptly and without reservation the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and its Optional Protocol; the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment; the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance; the Optional Protocols to the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights; and the ILO Conventions concerning Freedom of Association and Protection of the Right to Organise (1948) and the Right to Organise and Collective Bargaining (1949).
- Withdraw the reservation to the Convention on the Rights of the Child considering that it is of a general nature and incompatible with the object and purpose of the Convention, and ratify the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child.
- Allow international scrutiny of the human rights situation in Iran, including by allowing unhindered visits by UN special human rights procedures as well as independent international human rights organizations such as Amnesty International.
12.2 RECOMMENDATIONS TO OTHER GOVERNMENTS

As Iran continues to take steps to strengthen economic and diplomatic ties with global partners, Amnesty International makes the following recommendations to all states:

- Use all opportunities in relations with Iran, up to the highest level and in public settings, to call on the Iranian authorities to recognize and promote the work of human rights defenders and to protect them.

- Raise the cases of individual human rights defenders detained in prison or facing other reprisals in dialogues with Iran.

In the light of EU's renewed bilateral human rights dialogue with Iran, Amnesty International makes the following additional recommendations to the EU and its member states:

- During all political dialogues, including human rights dialogues and other bilateral discussions, urge the Iranian authorities to immediately and unconditionally release all human rights defenders imprisoned solely for their peaceful human rights activities, including those who have been persecuted for speaking with EU officials.

- Ensure that, when visiting Iran, officials of the EU and its member states meet with human rights defenders, including those in jail, and seek assurances from the Iranian authorities that no individuals will be targeted for reprisals following meetings with EU officials.

- Ensure that discussions on the relations of the EU and its member states with Iran reflect commitments to protect and support human rights defenders.
APPENDIX: COURT VERDICTS

Iran’s criminal justice system has no clear legal provisions with regard to making court judgements publicly available, contrary to Iran’s obligations under international human rights law and standards. In many cases, particularly those concerning national security offences, lawyers are not even permitted to obtain a copy of a judgment against their client; instead they are often only allowed several hours or less to review the judgement at the court and take handwritten notes. In cases where a written verdict is issued, lawyers or individuals may fear reprisals from the authorities if the verdicts are shared publicly.

The lack of public access to court judgements through a public register has resulted in Iran’s criminal justice system often being shrouded in secrecy, particularly in national security-related cases.

For this report, Amnesty International was able to obtain court verdicts in the cases of eight human rights defenders; these verdicts provide direct proof of the pattern of courts citing peaceful human rights activities as “evidence” of criminal activity. For this reason, Amnesty International has considered it important to include them in this appendix.

123 Article 14(1) of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, to which Iran is a state party, provides that “any judgement rendered in a criminal case or in a suit at law shall be made public”. The obligation to ensure that courts’ judgements are made public is part of making the administration of justice public and open to public scrutiny.
ARASH SADEGHI AND GOLROKH EBRAHIMI IRAEE

The following is a transcribed copy of the verdict\(^\text{124}\) in Persian, handed down by Branch 15 of the Revolutionary Court in Tehran against Arash Sadeghi (see Chapter 4.2) and Golrokh Ebrahimi Iraee (see Chapter 5) in June 2015. The verdict details Arash Sadeghi’s conviction on the charges of “spreading propaganda against the system”, “gathering and colluding to commit crimes against national security”, “insulting the founder of the Islamic Republic” and “spreading lies”, and his sentence of 15 years’ imprisonment. The verdict also activates a four-year suspended prison sentence from 2011.

In the same verdict, details of Golrokh Ebrahimi Iraee’s conviction on the charges of “spreading propaganda against the system” and “insulting Islamic sanctities” are presented.

\(^{124}\) Courtesy of the Human Rights Activists Network Agency (HRANA).
 أهم فعالیت‌های متحملین به شرح زیر می‌باشند:

- ملاقات و دیدار از حدود هشت هفته زندانی امنیتی آزاد شده
- دیدار با خانواده‌ها و یک‌پارچه به همراه تعدادی از ناگفته‌های هم‌بندی زندان اورنگ
- دیدار با خانواده‌ها و کشته شده‌ها به دست انتخابات و دهه شست
- شرکت در کنسرت‌های عالی و در مراکز زندان امنیتی در فضاهای فیسبوک
- انجام داده و مدیریت آنها در فیسبوک با نام‌های فری سعدی‌خیراب و احمد مهران‌پور
- توسط متحملین، رزیسی اول و دوم
- تکه و امشب مذکر اینخطاب به احمد شهید و خانم ناکی بیلای

ارتباط نوید کامران با برخی متحملین اتفاق‌های از جمله، پیمان عارف، مهربان غرو و فخر

العملان محتملی نامزدگان عضو گروه‌های کارکنان ارتش صادقی، می‌باشد که به هدایت نامه‌های
در سلسله اتفاق‌های امنیتی در فضاهای مجازی و حقیقی مشارکت داشته‌اند.

در اقدامی نهایی برای تبلیغ بازیافت بسیار است که از دستگاه‌های نامزدگان خبری از اینکه قهرمان‌ها به
گزارشات و معاون اطلاعات فرادری، تاریخ‌های تهیه و افکار ملی و مصوب متبین و مصوب برای
کشی‌های استاد و مدارک ابزاری است که از آن‌ها از عوامل اطلاعات
الکترونیکی آزمایش و از اطلاعات موجود در فضاهای مجازی، که متعلق به متحملین بوده است،
شده و هم‌برنگه گردیده است و به‌خاطر اینکه متحملین در شبکه اجتماعی فیس بوک و فضای
محارب صحنه‌ای را ویرایش و یا باز نمایش و یا در معرض دید اصل آزادی و مدیریت می‌کردند و وقتی
آن‌ها به انجام اینکه به همراه همکاری افراد صادقی و ارتباط و همکاری و
مساهمی گزینه‌ای از انتخابات و اصلاحات آنها، یک‌پارچه‌ها و خبرگزاری‌ها و شبکه‌های اپ‌ماهواره‌های
(اعم‌از
- رادیوی و تلویزیون‌ی) معاهده و اخلاق نظام مقدس جمهوری اسلامی ایران و دشوار فعل در
تصمیم‌گیری فاعلیت‌های زندانیان در مقابل زندان اورنگ و این بین گروه‌هایی از مكتب
(عناصر دانشجویی چهار) (عناصر دانشجویی لیبرال) (پردازه) (گروه شورای اجتماع انجمن اسلامی
دانشجویان اطلاع طلب) و... ضمن ترغیب دیگر دانشجویان باشد و در دادگاه اسات
فسایی دانشگاه‌ها داشته است.

آرش صادقی در این راستا یکی از افرادی است که توسط مهمی دارند که توسط راهنماهای
سازمان شناسایی فرآیند گرفته از این‌گونه دانشجویی‌ها به مجموعه دیده و تدوین‌برداری
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الملک و ارسال گزارش‌های مختص از نقض حقوق بشر در ایران

- انتشار اخبار کذب در مورد شرایط زندانیان
- برجام کردن نظام به خاک و خون کشیدن مردم
- حمایت از عناصر نفی ای در جریان تصاویر غلامی‌ها خسروی و دیگران مطالعی در حمایت سازمان
- نگارش مطالعه منتفی در حمایت از گروه‌های منتفی و گروه‌های معاند و غیر اسنادی غواصی
- عادام های دهه نشست
- تهیه دیگران برای اعلام حسومت در تجمع درواشی
- حسومت در تجمع غیرقانونی درواشی
- حسومت در مراسم و پرناش های عناصر ضد اقتلاع
- ارتباط و همکاری با رسانه‌های پیگیری

مصوبه‌ای به نوشته و سابقه‌ای صحیح اعلام ملی: به کسب جلود ون و ایک (سای) امریکا

وایسته به وزارت امور خارجه امریکا(رادیو/رادیو رادیو زمانه نور انلیو...)

ارتباط دادن، نیک‌کردن جنایه‌های زندانی با شکایت‌ها ماهواره ای و سابقه‌ای دکتر شده

ارسال اخبار و گزارش‌هایی به رادیو‌های مبهمان به دستگاه‌های قضایی و ارسال این گزارش‌ها و

خبرهای رادیو رسانه‌های دکتر شده

ارتباط با سریل منتفی (پن‌ریز، جویید، پرورانش)

مصوبه‌ای به خوانه کمکی در مورد وضعیت بیدشان در افترا و سیاسی تجاوز‌های زندانها در ایران

مصوبه‌ای به محمد رزدان پیام خیربگار رادیو فرد در مورد تقصی حقوق اطاعت های باید و در ایران

نیهگر گزارش‌های منتفی از نقض حقوق شرودینگر و ارسال پیام های جریان زمانه دکتر شده

سایت جرس

عصبین در گروه‌های لام (لو کار) و امضای بیانیه‌های این مجموعه
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تمامده با لنکوکیه‌ی‌که‌ در داخل ۳۰۰ و رگ‌ای شهور داشته است از داخل زندان خبره‌ای غیر
و اعترافی برای رسانه‌های‌شده انقلاب ارسال کرده است.

مهم‌ترین، در تروری خبره‌ای غیر و اعترافی و اعجاب جنگ روانی از داخل زندان برای خاصی دارد. نمی‌دهد آن
بولد کردن خبره‌ای‌رو در غلبه حواشی دروزدن ماه در ۲۵۰ میلیارد.

ایجاد درگیری‌های متعدد با مستندین‌زندان در دو الاف و دو سی‌آر و مشت به صورت زندانیان
ضرب و شتم یکی از کارشناسان برون‌شر در حین برگزاری نامرباه داده است کارشناس نامرباه
یا همسرش بردگانی کرده که در بازیتهٔ دوره‌ای ها از این دفع کنید بوده غنیه‌ها به انتان
رسیده که در گزارش صفحه ۱۲۳ و ۱۲۴ دکتر شده است.

نامرباه‌هایی‌چه‌در مرجع بارگیری و آنه‌بعد از انزا او مالک‌هایی‌خود ندارند و نیاز به
پرانت جستن از گذشته‌خود نشد.

- متهم چنین دو گزارش ایرانی:

- یکی از فعالیت‌های نامرباه‌به‌شرح زیر می‌باشد:

- کتاب‌نامه‌ها و مقدمات و تهیه خوراک برای رسانه‌های‌ضد انقلاب و حمایت از عناصر سازمان
- ترویجی، منافعی و فعالیت‌های‌تبلیغی‌علیه‌نظام
- اقدام به‌فعالیت‌های‌امروزی‌و‌ محل امتنی کشیده‌در فآین‌ترویج و حمایت چراغ‌شده‌پاپائنت، بحث به‌زندانی‌امتنی‌در قابل‌نهایت‌گزاره‌و‌ارسال‌برای‌احمد‌علی‌مهاجرین‌بازمانده
- در گزارش‌شناسان متفاوت و کتاب (از‌طرح‌لاره‌مودن‌زارد) که برای‌نامه‌‌اه‌حمید‌شهدت‌ارسال
- کرده‌اهدام به‌سیاه‌زمان‌علیه‌نظام‌نامه‌که‌در‌صفحه‌های ۳۲۷ و ۳۲۸ به‌آن‌اشاده‌شد
- است

- حمایت‌آ‌عصب‌خی‌خواه‌که‌مردی‌و‌نشر‌مطالب‌متفاوت‌در‌دفاع‌از‌نامرباه

- توهین به مقدمات در دفترچه شخصی

- مخالفت‌با‌حكم‌فساد‌از‌طرح‌گزارش‌مطالب‌متفاوت

آتش‌زنی‌درانه‌که‌در‌بارگیری‌های‌نیاز‌باسته‌و‌آن‌را‌صرف‌یک‌داستان‌عنوان‌کرده‌که‌می‌شنید

- داستان‌فرخ درست که مردم‌گنگ‌محی‌می‌بوده‌و‌در‌پی‌ان‌نیاز‌می‌پیدا

- فعالیت‌تبلیغ‌علیه‌نظام‌از‌طرح‌نهای‌خواه‌که‌برای‌رسانه‌های‌ضد‌انقلاب

- سیاه‌زمان‌گزارش‌و‌متهم‌گردن‌نظام‌به‌شکسته‌(اشتره‌به‌کوریکر)

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شرکت در تجمع غیر قانونی مهاجمانعاملها خسروی

برگزار جلساتی مخفی در خانه و کافی شب با عنوان حقوق زنان در جامعه

شرکت در کلیه تجمعات سال 78 ممنه نامبرده در روزهای اعتراضات در حوالی میدان انبلاژ بوده است. از همین رو در تمام تجمع حضور فعال داشته است

دیدار با خانواده زندانیدها و مددجویان 78 و دهه شست همراه همسرش آرش صادقی

ارتباط با تعدادی از عوامل اعتراضات 78 متوجه مردم و رضا محمدی و دیدار با خانواده

نامبرده

نامبرده گلرخ ایرانی در حین بازجویی و بعد از آن همچنان از عملکرد های ضد آمینی خود دفاع و حاضر به برانت جشن از گذشته خود نشست.

متنی می‌تواند دیده و چهارم و کشف یکسوز و ماهمه از متهم ریفی بنیج و دیگر شواهد و قران می‌تواند به‌کاریشان محور و مسلم است لذا با استنادی به 150 و 644 و 708 قانون جرایم انسانی و ماده 178 و 177 قانون معاهده انسانی معنویت 373 و ماده 120 قانون معاهده انسانی و ماده 9 قانون ممنوعیت بکارگیری تجهیزات دریافت ماهمه به متهم ریفی اول و آرش صادقی را مورد اتهام بند الف (اجتماعی و برای ارتباط برای ارائه امتنع کشور) به تجدید 7 سال و 6 ماه حبس و در مورد اتهام بند ب (فعالیت تبلیغی علیه نظام جمهوری اسلامی) به تجدید 18 ماه حبس و در مورد اتهام بند پ (توهین به فعاليت علیه نظام جمهوری اسلامی) به تجدید 3 سال حبس و در مورد اتهام بند ت (تشریح)) در فعالیت معایب و تشکیل گروه‌ها به تجدید 3 سال حبس محروم از ا anon در مورد اتهام بند ال (فعالیت علیه نظام جمهوری اسلامی) به تجدید 18 ماه حبس و در مورد اتهام بند ب (توهین به مقدسات اسلام) به تجدید 5 سال حبس محروم از ا anon در مورد اتهام بند د (فعالیت تبلیغی علیه نظام جمهوری اسلامی) به تجدید 18 ماه حبس و در مورد اتهام بند ب (توهین به آئیر) ضمن افتاده از انتقالات از ماهمه به حبس در انتقال 3 میلیون ریال جزای نفی محروم می‌تواند نمایی از انتقال با استنادی به فعالیت معایب و تشکیل گروه‌ها به حکم رجوع حضرتی و طرح 24 روز قابل اعتراض در دادگاه می‌شود

تهران است.
The following is the verdict, in Persian, handed down by Branch 28 of the Revolutionary Court in Tehran against Atena Daemi (see Chapter 5) and Omid Alishenas (Chapter 5) in May 2015. The verdict sentences Atena Daemi to 14 years’ imprisonment for “gathering and colluding against national security”, “spreading propaganda against the system”, “insulting the founder of the Islamic Republic of Iran and the Supreme Leader” and “concealing evidence”. In September 2016, on appeal, her sentence was reduced to seven years’ imprisonment.

During the same trial, Omid Alishenas was sentenced to 10 years’ imprisonment for charges including “gathering and colluding to commit crimes against national security”, “spreading propaganda against the system” and “insulting the Supreme Leader”. In September 2016, his sentence was reduced on appeal to seven years’ imprisonment.
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The following is the verdict, in Persian, that Branch 26 of the Revolutionary Court in Tehran issued against Davoud Razavi, sentencing him to five years' imprisonment for "gathering and colluding to commit crimes against national security".
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Mashaallah Ahmadzadeh - Deputy Secretary 2nd Committee of Isfahan
ATENA FARGHADANI AND MOHAMMAD MOGHIMI

In the following verdict\textsuperscript{125}, in Persian, from October 2015, Atena Farghadani and her lawyer Mohammad Moghimi were acquitted of “illegitimate sexual relations short of adultery” and “indecency”, charges which had been brought against both of them for shaking hands in prison in June 2015.

\textsuperscript{125} Courtesy of the Human Rights Activists Network Agency (HRANA).
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ALIREZA FARSHI

The following is a copy of the court verdict, in Persian, issued against Alireza Farshi. A Revolutionary Court in Baharestan, Tehran province, sentenced him to 15 years’ imprisonment in February 2017 after he was convicted of “gathering and colluding to commit crimes against national security” and “founding groups with the purpose of disrupting national security”. The court also sentenced him to two years of internal exile in the city of Bagh-e Malek in southern Khuzestan province.
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SHAHAM KOONATI

DAFTAMIRI KE ELASTAN TEHRAN

SAL KASHANI (KHAMEN HADAKI) GHOMI (EJEMI ASLAMAY DE) MEYRE (DE) SHAPARAN (DE)

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CAUGHT IN A WEB OF REPRESSION

IRAN’S HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS UNDER ATTACK

The Iranian authorities are intensifying their crackdown against human rights defenders, who have already been working under suffocating levels of repression. Human rights defenders are routinely portrayed in official statements and court verdicts as “criminals” and “foreign agents” bent on harming national security. Since 2013, dozens of human rights defenders have been imprisoned on spurious national security-related charges based solely on their peaceful human rights activities. Many others have faced surveillance, interrogations and drawn-out prosecutions, coercing them into silence.

This report looks at the brave struggle of human rights defenders across the key battlegrounds for human rights in Iran and highlights the repression they face through 45 illustrative cases. They include anti-death penalty campaigners, women’s rights activists, trade unionists, human rights lawyers, minority rights activists, and those seeking truth, justice and reparation on behalf of those extrajudicially executed during the 1980s and their families.

Amnesty International urges the Iranian authorities to release all imprisoned human rights defenders immediately and unconditionally, and to create a safe and enabling environment in which defenders can defend and promote human rights without fear of reprisals. This is an essential step towards guaranteeing the human rights of all those living in Iran.