



**1988
MASSACRE
OF 30,000 POLITICAL
PRISONERS IN IRAN
REMAINS
UNPUNISHED**

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Women's Committee
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1988 massacre of 30,000 political prisoners in Iran remains unpunished

The final days of July serve as a reminder of the worst crime against humanity since World War II, the massacre of over 30,000 political prisoners in Iran in 1988.

The killings were not only horrific in scale, but remains shrouded in mystery with the regime blocking all attempts to investigate the extent of the massacre.



The vast majority of the victims were supporters of the People's Mojahedin Organization of Iran (PMOI/MEK), the main Iranian opposition. The massacre, however, extended to members and supporters of other political groups, in later stages.

The extrajudicial executions started in the last week of July, peaking on July 28 until August 14, and continuing on to autumn and even the following year in some places.

The overall picture of the 1988 massacre is totally inadequate because the massacre was extensive, carried out in prisons all across the country. In some instances, there were no survivors. For 28 years, the Iranian regime officials refused to acknowledge the executions, or provide any information as to how many prisoners were killed.

The regime continues to suppress any information about the killings, arresting family members who dare to speak out or visit mass graves at the [Khavaran cemetery](#). Every information regarding the massacre is considered top secret.

So, what is known about the massacre has been extracted and pieced together from the limited number of reports by survivors, families who were called to collect the bodies of their loved ones, as well as from scattered acknowledgments made by the regime's officials.

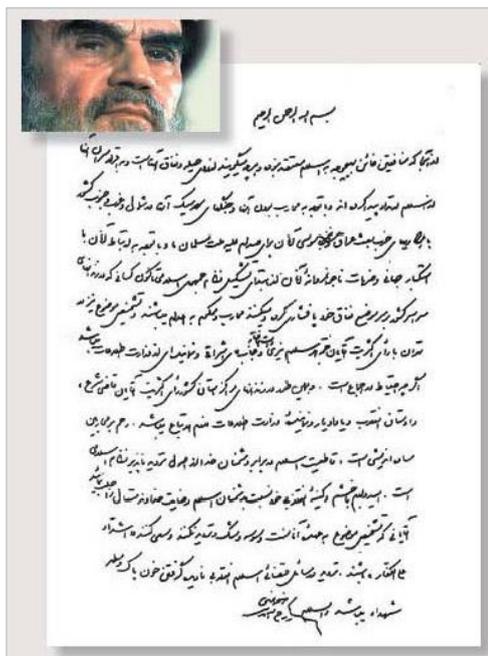
Two years ago, when the Maryam Rajavi launched the Call-for-Justice campaign for the victims of the 1988 massacre, some officials came out to defend the crime against humanity, and at the same time, revealed new information.

A [report on the massacre](#) prepared by human rights barrister Geoffrey Robertson notes, “the killings compare with the 1995 massacre at Srebrenica in terms of the vulnerability of the victims, and they exceed it when measured by the cold-blooded calculations made at the very pinnacle of state power.” Robertson points out that the evidence of international crimes committed by the regime during the massacre are such that the 1948 Genocide Convention imposes a duty to investigate the massacre.

Khomeini decreed the massacre

Based on testimonies of survivors, the massacre had been prepared for from at least a year before.

The order for the massacre came directly from Khomeini in the form of a religious decree (fatwa), ordering the execution of all prisoners who remained steadfast in their support for the opposition People’s Mojahedin of Iran, force which has vowed to topple the mullahs’ regime.



A so-called Amnesty Commission (better known among prisoners as the Death Commission) asked a simple question from every prisoner: do you still support the hypocrites (the regime’s derogatory term used to refer to PMOI/MEK)? Those who answered yes were executed.

According to a testimony given to United Nations human rights rapporteur, [Kamal Afkhami Ardekani](#), a former Evin prison employee, described the massacre thus: “They would line up prisoners in a 14-by-five-metre hall in the central office building and then ask simply one question, ‘What is your political affiliation?’ Those who said the Mojahedin would be hanged from cranes in position in the car park behind the building.”

None of the victims had any new activities while in detention and many of them were minors, aging 15 or 16 at the time of

original arrest and prosecution.

Prisoners were hanged in groups of up to 15, and later transferred out by dump trucks, and buried in unmarked mass graves. There was no mercy on anyone, even young girls and pregnant women.

Torture and execution of women

The haste in executions was so abhorrent many of Khomeini’s closest confidantes had doubts about it. Hossein Ali Montazeri, Khomeini’s heir apparent and the country’s second highest authority at the time, urged for leniency and a slowdown.

In a famous letter to Khomeini which led to his ouster, Montazeri wrote, “If you probably insist on your decision, at least order (the three-man Death Commission) to base their rulings on unanimous vote not that of the majority. And women should also be made exceptions, especially women who have children. And finally, the execution of several thousand people in several days will backfire.”

In a book of memoirs published in December 2000, Montazeri pointed out the vicious tortures practiced especially against young girls and women before execution during the 1988 massacre.

An [audio clip](#) released by Montazeri's family in September 2016, also reveals dreadful details about the massacre of women.

The tape recording from Mr. Montazeri's meeting with members of the Death Commission, included an example about the execution of a 15-year-old girl who had been taken to prison only two days before to break her brother's resistance but since she did not denounce her executed brother, she was executed, as well.

The tape also included reference to the execution of a pregnant woman in Isfahan.



It has been reported that 80 percent of PMOI women detained in the Women's Ward 3 of Evin Prison had been massacred by September 1988. They included Monireh Rajavi, who had two small daughters and was executed only because she was the sister of the Iranian Resistance's Leader Massoud Rajavi. There was also Ashraf Ahmadi, a political prisoner from the Shah's time, with four children.

The victims also included a wide range of people from various professions, including PMOI's female candidates for parliamentary elections Fatemeh Zare'ii from Shiraz, and Zohreh Ainol-Yagheen from Isfahan. Dr. Hamideh Sayyahi and

Dr. Shourangiz Karimian, along with her sister, and National Volleyball Team player Forouzan Abdi were among those executed in the 1988 massacre.

The Call-for-Justice Movement

Two years ago, the Iranian Resistance launched a worldwide campaign to seek justice for the victims of the 1988 massacre.

Maryam Rajavi, the Iranian opposition leader, called on all Iranians to join the campaign and provide the names and pictures of victims as well as any other documents they have, to international bodies and help in the prosecution of regime officials in charge.

The movement has been expanding since it started. The Iranian Resistance has obtained new documents on the massacre, and the campaign has helped build tremendous pressure on the regime as if the massacre had taken place just recently.

New information on the victims, the mass graves, and the officials involved, built up new pressure on the regime. At least 20 senior officials of the regime were forced to defend this crime. The mullahs' supreme leader, Ali Khamenei, expressed anger over why the 1988 massacre is being surrounded by an aura of innocence.

These admissions constitute new testaments to the ruling mullahs' crime against humanity.

The late Asma Jahangir, the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Iran, stated in a [report](#) on August 14, 2017, "Between July and August 1988, thousands of political prisoners, men, women and teen-agers, were reportedly executed pursuant to a fatwa issued by the then Supreme Leader, Ayatollah Khomeini. A three-man commission was reportedly created with a view to determining who should be executed. The bodies of the victims were reportedly buried in unmarked graves and their families never informed of their whereabouts.

“These events, known as the 1988 massacres, have never been officially acknowledged. In January 1989, the Special Representative of the Commission on Human Rights on the situation of human rights in the Islamic Republic of Iran, Reynaldo Galindo Pohl, expressed concern over the ‘global denial’ of the executions and called on Iranian authorities to conduct an investigation. Such an investigation has yet to be undertaken.”

A [report by UN Secretary General António Guterres](#) to the General Assembly about the “Situation of human rights in the Islamic Republic of Iran”, dated October 31, 2017, stated: “The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) continued to receive a large number of complaints from families of the victims of executions which took place in 1988. In a joint statement issued in March, 20 human rights organizations called on the authorities to stop the harassment, intimidation and prosecution of human rights defenders seeking truth and justice on behalf of individuals who were summarily executed or forcibly disappeared during the 1980s and of their families. Among them are [Mansoureh Behkish](#), [Maryam Akbari-Monfared](#) and [Raheleh Rahemipour](#).”

Destruction of the mass graves to remove the evidence

Estimates are that there are more than 120 locations across Iran that contain the remains of the victims of the 1988 massacre. The Iranian authorities have systematically concealed the whereabouts of the remains of these victims.

Information compiled from eyewitnesses and families indicate that the grave sites are often located in deserted areas inside the cemeteries or in their vicinity.

With the Call-for-Justice campaign climaxing in the past couple of years, the regime has stepped up its efforts, originally started in 2003, to destroy the mass graves of the victims of the 1988 massacre in a bid to remove all the evidence of this great crime against humanity.

On July 26, 2018, Amnesty International issued an [urgent action](#), indicating, “The Iranian authorities are building a road over a mass grave and dozens of individual graves in Ahvaz, Khuzestan province, that contain the remains of dozens of political dissidents, both men and women, who were forcibly disappeared and extra judicially killed in the 1980s including during the mass killings of 1988. Since 20 July 2018, photo and video evidence has surfaced, which appears to show that the concrete structure marking the mass grave as well as dozens of individual graves have been smashed to pieces. The graves are now hidden beneath piles of dirt and debris. According to an official board placed at the site, the purpose of the



project is to build a 'boulevard' and create a 21-acre park. The board notes that the project is supervised by the Municipality of Ahvaz."

AI further elaborates in its urgent action statement, "The destruction of the graves follows a three-decade long campaign of enforced disappearance by the authorities which has involved concealing the truth about the fate and whereabouts of those extra judicially killed in 1988, denying families the right to receive and bury the remains of their loved ones according to their traditions, desecrating the grave site by turning it into a rubbish dump, forbidding mourning rituals, and cracking down on any critical public discussion about the killings."

The authorities' decisions to forcibly disappear and secretly execute their loved ones, to conceal the whereabouts of their remains, and to desecrate their graves have caused anguish and distress to the families and constitute a form of torture or other cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment against the families, prohibited under the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

In another [report](#) published in April 2018, Amnesty International and Justice for Iran released the outcome of a joint research which detailed the regime's attempts to destroy the mass graves in Ahvaz, Mashhad, Tabriz, Rasht, Qorveh, Sanandaj, and Khavarn, by bulldozing, hiding the mass graves beneath new, individual burial plots; constructing concrete slabs, buildings or roads over the mass graves; and turning the mass grave sites into rubbish dumps.

According to this report, the authorities appear to be planning actions that would further damage the mass graves.

By such measures, the Iranian authorities have breached Articles 7 and 19 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, and Article 15 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, to both of which Iran is a state party.

Perpetrators must face justice

Many of the leading perpetrators of the 1988 massacre remain alive today and even continue to hold positions of prominence in Iranian politics and law. Over the past 30 years, except for a 4-year period, the Ministry of Justice has been always headed by one of the members of the Death Commissions.

The Iranian Resistance has renewed its call for the international prosecution of all perpetrators of the 1988 massacre and crime against humanity in Iran, who are still in power and hold important positions of authority. They include Ali Khamenei (then President under Khomeini), Hassan Rouhani (then assistant to the acting Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces), and members of the death commission, Mostafa Pour-Mohammadi (Minister of Justice under Hassan Rouhani), Hossein-Ali Nayyeri (head of the Supreme Disciplinary Court for Judges under Rouhani), Morteza Eshraqi (then Prosecutor), and Ebrahim Raeesi (one of the top clerics, member of the Assembly of Experts, and Khamenei's appointed head of Astan Qods-e Razavi foundation, which is an important political and economic powerhouses funding the regime's war efforts).

In her [message to an exhibition held at the City Hall of Paris's First District](#) this summer, Maryam Rajavi said, "The West has remained silent over the past years on mullahs' terrorism and on the massacre of political prisoners in Iran. So, the mullahs have found themselves immune to the international consequences of their crimes. The time has come to end such immunity."



She pointed out, “It is absolutely essential that the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights starts an independent probe into this case and the UN Security Council prepares the arrangements for the prosecution of the leaders of the Iranian regime and those responsible for this massacre.”

The UN Security Council should invoke its Chapter VII powers to establish an international court and prosecutor to fully investigate the massacre and hold the perpetrators accountable.

Such an inquiry, long overdue, is especially crucial in light of the arrest of thousands of peaceful anti-government protesters and reports that numerous protesters died while in custody. Failure to hold Tehran accountable has simply emboldened the ruling theocracy to continue its gross human rights violations.



We will not forget, we will not forgive

In mid-July 2018, on the 30th anniversary of the 1988 massacre of 30,000 political prisoners in Iran, women political prisoners Maryam Akbari Monfared and Golrokh Iraee sent out an [open letter](#) from the Women’s Ward of Evin Prison in which they stressed, “We will not relent until an independent probe is carried out in this case and the perpetrators of this massacre are brought to justice. We will not forgive and we will not forget.”

Maryam Akbari Monfared has lost two siblings in the 1988 massacre and two in the 1980s. She is one of the plaintiffs [demanding justice for the victims](#) and her request has been [accepted](#) by the UN [Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances](#).

[Golrokh Iraee](#) had previously declared, “Maryam (Akbari Monfared) is not alone. She represents thousands of people who have lost members of their families. Our failure to react and follow up these crimes will lead to more horrible crimes.”

In their joint letter in July 2018, the two imprisoned women said, “History has shown that such courage has been invincible throughout history, because it remains eternally in everyone’s hearts and minds and not in the physical existence of the victims.”

“The [clerical] regime has always tried to erase the memories of the 1980s and the 1988 massacre from people’s minds. They try to censor it under various pretexts. They destroy the mass graves and they call the victims, terrorists... They insisted on this goal throughout the years, but they did not know that throughout these years, the families have tried to keep the memories of these victims and keep this part of the history alive, to convey their voice to the world despite massive repression.”

Thirty years are gone but not their memories.

Prosecution and punishment of the perpetrators and masterminds of the 1988 massacre is the right of the people of Iran, the right of humanity, and the right of the PMOI.