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**Promotion and protection of all human rights, civil,
political, economic, social and cultural rights,
including the right to development**

Joint written statement* submitted by Nonviolent Radical Party, Transnational and Transparty, a non-governmental organization in general consultative status, Women's Human Rights International Association, Edmund Rice International Limited, France Libertes : Fondation Danielle Mitterrand, non-governmental organizations in special consultative status, International Educational Development, Inc., a non-governmental organization on the roster

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[20 August 2020]

* Issued as received, in the language(s) of submission only.



It is time to bring to justice the perpetrators of the 1988 massacre in the Islamic Republic of Iran

We appeal to the United Nations (UN) and its Member States to investigate the 1988 massacre of political prisoners in the Islamic Republic of Iran and to hold the perpetrators of that ‘ongoing crime against humanity’ accountable.

The 1988 Massacre

Following a fatwa handed down by Supreme Leader Ayatollah Khomeini in mid-July 1988, more than 30,000 political prisoners, primarily affiliated with the People’s Mojahedin Organization of Iran (PMOI or MEK), were secretly mass executed over several months after mock trials lasting just five minutes. Their corpses were doused with disinfectant, packed in refrigerated trucks, and buried at night in mass graves across the country.

Call for accountability and justice

United States of America (U.S.) State Department spokesperson Morgan Ortagus on 17 July 2020 called on¹ the international community to conduct independent investigations into the 1988 massacre and to provide accountability and justice.

She said: “July 19th marks the anniversary of the start of Iran's so-called ‘Death Commissions.’ On the orders of Ayatollah Khomeini, these commissions reportedly forcibly disappeared, and extrajudicially executed, thousands of political dissident prisoners. The current head of the Iranian Judiciary and current Minister of Justice have both been identified as former members of these ‘Death Commissions.’ The Iranian Judiciary is widely perceived to lack independence and fair trial guarantees, and the Revolutionary Courts are particularly egregious in ordering violations of human rights. All Iranian officials who commit human rights violations or abuses should be held accountable. The United States calls on the international community to conduct independent investigations and to provide accountability and justice for the victims of these horrendous violations of human rights organized by the Iranian regime.”

Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) investigate the 1988 massacre

An investigation in 2017² by London-based NGO, Justice for the Victims of the 1988 Massacre in Iran (JVMI), uncovered the identities of 87 Death Commission members. Many still hold senior positions in the Iranian Judiciary or government. They include Judiciary Chief Ebrahim Raisi and Justice Minister Alireza Avaei.

In 2018, Amnesty International also investigated the massacre, pointing out that Khomeini made the decision to carry out this crime against humanity as soon as he was forced to accept a UN-backed ceasefire in the Iran-Iraq War.

In its report “Blood-soaked secrets: Why Iran’s 1988 prison massacres are ongoing crimes against humanity³,” Amnesty International called on the UN to set up an independent investigation to help bring those responsible to justice.

Special Rapporteur’s findings

In 2017, the previous Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Islamic Republic of Iran, Asma Jahangir, informed the General Assembly⁴ :

¹ <https://twitter.com/statedeptspox/status/1284216751941652484>.

² <https://iran1988.org/new-report-published-1988massacre-iran-evidence-crime-humanity/>.

³ <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/mde13/9421/2018/en/>.

⁴ <https://undocs.org/A/72/322>.

“Between July and August 1988, thousands of political prisoners, men, women and teenagers, 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.”

“Over the years, a high number of reports have been issued about the 1988 massacres. If the number of persons who disappeared and were executed can be disputed, overwhelming evidence shows that thousands of persons were summarily killed. Recently, these killings have been acknowledged by some at the highest levels of the State. The families of the victims have a right to know the truth about these events and the fate of their loved ones without risking reprisal. They have the right to a remedy, which includes the right to an effective investigation of the facts and public disclosure of the truth; and the right to reparation.”

On 26 February 2018, Secretary-General António Guterres told the Human Rights Council⁵:

“OHCHR continued to receive letters from families of the victims who were summarily executed or forcibly disappeared during the events of 1988. The Secretary-General remains concerned by the difficulty the families faced in obtaining information about the 1988 events and the harassment of those continuing to advocate for further information related to these events.”

UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Zeid Ra’ad Al Hussein, told NGOs on 9 March 2018:

“The 88 massacre, the allegations of the massacres in 88, the summary executions and enforced disappearances of thousands of political prisoners – men, women and children – we have received a great deal of information from you. ... And the recommendations have been made to the national authorities to investigate independently and impartially of course given all the attention given to this by the victims’ families.”

An ongoing massacre

The fatwa issued by Iran’s Supreme Leader has never been rescinded. On 25 July 2019, in an interview⁶ with the state-run Mosalas magazine, Mostafa Pour-Mohammadi, Advisor to the Judiciary Chief and a former member of the Death Commissions, defended the 1988 massacre and said newly-caught PMOI activists would face the capital punishment.

Thousands of political prisoners are at risk of execution today

In August 2020, political prisoner Mostafa Salehi was executed by the Iranian Judiciary for his role during the anti-government protests of 2018. He was one of a number of protesters to have been sentenced to death in recent months. Thousands of other protesters are also at risk of being secretly executed in the country’s prisons.

Since the Iran protests recommenced in November 2019, the Iranian authorities have carried out the bloodiest crackdown on protesters since the Islamic Revolution in 1979.

Reuters reported⁷ on 23 December 2019: "After days of protests across Iran last month, Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei appeared impatient. Gathering his top security and government officials together, he issued an order: Do whatever it takes to stop them. ... About 1,500 people were killed during less than two weeks of unrest that started on November 15".

Human rights group believe as many as 12,000 protesters have been arrested.

⁵ https://www.ohchr.org/EN/HRBodies/HRC/RegularSessions/Session37/Documents/A_HRC_37_24.docx.

⁶ <https://youtu.be/uAo6w1QOFqw>.

⁷ <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-iran-protests-specialreport/special-report-irans-leader-ordered-crackdown-on-unrest-do-whatever-it-takes-to-end-it-idUSKBN1YR0QR>.

UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Michelle Bachelet on 6 December 2019 expressed alarm⁸ at the treatment of thousands of detainees, as well as continuing arrests reported to be taking place across the country.

The Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) pointed out that at least 7,000 people have reportedly been arrested in Iran since mass protests broke out on 15 November, and the High Commissioner said she is “extremely concerned about their physical treatment, violations of their right to due process, and the possibility that a significant number of them may be charged with offences that carry the death penalty, in addition to the conditions under which they are held.”

“Many of the arrested protesters have not had access to a lawyer, meaning due process is not being respected,” Bachelet said.

Iranian officials have threatened to execute detained protesters. The Wall Street Journal reported⁹ on 24 November 2019:

“‘We have caught all the mercenaries who explicitly confessed that they are mercenaries of the U.S. and the MeK,’ Ali Fadavi, deputy commander of Iran’s Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps, told reporters in Tehran on Sunday, referring to an exiled opposition group that seeks to overthrow the leadership in Tehran.”

“‘The judicial system will give them the maximum punishment,’ Mr. Fadavi said, the ISNA news agency reported.”

On live television on 14 January 2020, Ahmad Alamolhoda, the representative of Iran’s Supreme Leader in Khorasan Razavi Province, described the anti-government protesters as the enemy’s “fifth column” and said they should be executed after drumhead trials.

Time for international action

Crimes against humanity are not bound by the statute of limitations, and even though the 1988 massacre was perpetrated 32 years ago, it is still prosecutable today. Iranian officials brazenly claim Khomeini’s fatwa still stands against the PMOI dissidents. The perpetrators of the 1988 massacre today run the Iranian government and Judiciary. The survivors are still alive, and the evidence is all readily available.

On behalf of our respective NGOs, we appeal to the Human Rights Council to take urgent action to end the impunity enjoyed by Iranian officials and prevent the massacre of detained protesters. Leaders of the Iranian government must face justice for committing crimes against humanity in the recent massive suppression and bloodshed.

We believe that until the international community holds the perpetrators of the 1988 massacre to account, Iran’s authorities would continue to be emboldened to further crack down with impunity on present-day protesters. Iranian officials construe silence and inaction by the international community as a green light to continue and step up their crimes.

We therefore call on the Human Rights Council to set up a commission of inquiry into the 1988 massacre and achieve justice for the victims of that crime against humanity.

We urge High Commissioner Michelle Bachelet to support the launch of independent fact-finding missions into the 1988 massacre and the recent massacre of Iranian protesters.

Furthermore, we appeal to the UN Special Procedures, in particular the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Islamic Republic of Iran, Javaid Rehman, and the Special Rapporteur on the promotion of truth, justice, reparation and guarantees of non-recurrence, Fabian Salvioli, to investigate Iran’s 1988 massacre as part of their mandates.

⁸ <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=25393&LangID=E>.

⁹ <https://www.wsj.com/articles/iran-restores-internet-access-as-protests-subside-but-threatens-more-arrests-11574618022>.

HANDS OFF CAIN, Nouveaux Droits de l'Homme (France), Justice for Victims of 1988 Massacre in Iran (JVMI), Association des femmes Iraniennes en France (AFIF), Comité de Soutien aux Droits de l'Homme en Iran (CSDHI), Association delle Donne Democratiche Iraniane in Italia, Association of Anglo-Iranian Women in the UK, Iran Libero e Democratico (Italia), Iranian youth association in Switzerland, Association des Réfugiés politiques en France, Associazione Medici e Farmacisti Democratici Iraniani in Italia, Association des jeunes Iraniens pour la démocratie et la liberté-Luxembourg, Association IranRef (Belgique), Iranska Kvinnosamfundet i Sverige (Sweden), Anglo-Iranian Professionals, Association of Iranian Political Prisoners-UK, NGO(s) without consultative status, also share the views expressed in this statement.