

# AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL PUBLIC STATEMENT



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## **Iran: Second anniversary of Neda Agha Soltan's killing highlights near-total impunity for officials**

Two years after the death of Neda Agha Soltan was captured on a mobile phone and came to symbolize the brutal repression meted out by security forces after the disputed presidential election of 2009, Amnesty International is renewing its call on the Iranian authorities to end impunity for officials responsible for unlawful killings, torture and other human rights violations.

Footage of Neda Agha Soltan's dying moments, after being shot in the chest on 20 June 2009 spread around the world via the internet. No one has ever been brought to justice for her death, and instead of investigating it impartially, the Iranian authorities – following an entrenched pattern of cover-up of abuses – resorted to threats, counter-accusations, obfuscation and further violations to try to evade responsibility. A member of the Basij militia witnessed by onlookers as saying, "I did not mean to kill her", whose ID card was posted on the internet, has never been put on trial, but appeared in a documentary shown a year ago on state television, denying responsibility. Arash Hejazi, the doctor who was present at the scene, was forced to seek asylum abroad, fearing for his safety. Neda Agha Soltan's family and friends were made to appear on state television denying the state was responsible, although her father Ali Agha Soltan told BBC Persian in December 2009 that "her killer can only be from the government".

**Neda Agha Soltan** was one of over 70 people killed during the unrest that followed the election. The only instance where any officials have been tried in connection with abuses is in relation to the Kahrizak detention centre where at least four men died as a result of torture or other ill-treatment. Twelve men, believed to be 11 policemen and one detainee, were later tried, two of whom were reportedly sentenced to death, but it remains unclear what has become of the 11 the authorities said had been convicted in connection with abuses against detainees held there. No action has been taken against more senior officials who were implicated by a parliamentary investigation.

Other families also remain in the dark about the exact circumstances of their children's fate such as Parvin Fahimi, who has campaigned to find out the truth about the death from a bullet wound to the heart of her son, 19-year-old **Sohrab Arabi**. He disappeared during a demonstration on 15 June 2009 and his family was then unable to find out any information about him until 11 July when they recognized him from photographs of dead individuals in court. His body had apparently been at the Coroner's Office since 19 June. There remains no information as to what happened to him between 15 and 19 June 2009, including either the exact date, or the circumstances, of his death. The killer of **Kianoush Asa**, who died from a gunshot to the neck during a demonstration on 15 June 2009, has also never been identified.

Claims by the Iranian authorities to have investigated the events at a **Tehran University dormitory** on the night of 14 June 2009 appear to have resulted in victims being imprisoned rather than perpetrators. Up to five students were reported by student organizations to have been killed – although the university authorities later denied this - and many others seriously injured when

unidentified plain-clothes forces stormed the dormitory, arresting hundreds. In May 2011, the Judiciary Spokesman Gholam-Hossein Mohseni-Ejeie (who was Minister of Intelligence at the time of the election) said that 40 individuals had been sentenced to prison terms and fines for the event. However, according to a statement by Tehran University's Islamic Association on 15 June 2011, those in prison are students who were arrested at the time, not those responsible for the attack.

Article 2 (3) of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) to which Iran is a state party requires states to provide an effective remedy for human rights violations, including the possibility of judicial remedy, and for such remedies to be enforced.

Amnesty International deeply regrets the recommendation of the Human Rights Committee of Iran's parliament that Ahmed Shaheed, the newly appointed UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Iran, should not be permitted to enter Iran for a fact-finding visit. The organization calls on the Iranian Government to repudiate this recommendation and to facilitate a visit by the Special Rapporteur at the earliest possible opportunity.

### **Iran's long history of impunity for human rights violations**

Iranian officials have for many years enjoyed near-total impunity for human rights violations including unlawful killings and deaths in custody. Instead, lawyers, journalists and others who have tried to shed light on such violations – such as Shirin Ebadi, Akbar Ganji, Nasser Zarafshan, and Abdolfattah Soltani – have themselves been imprisoned for their efforts.

No one has ever been held to account for the 1988 “**prison massacre**” when between 4,500 and 5,000 political prisoners were summarily executed, largely in secret over several months. In 2009, the authorities bulldozed individual and mass graves in the Khavaran cemetery in Tehran where some of the victims were buried, and planted trees there. Amnesty International has expressed fear that these actions of the Iranian authorities are aimed at destroying evidence of human rights violations and depriving the families of the victims of the 1988 killings of their right to truth, justice and reparation.

Demonstrations by students in July 1999 – known as the “18 Tir demonstrations” were brutally repressed. The authorities only ever acknowledged one death – that of **Ezzatollah Ebrahimnejad** – although the true total was probably higher. No one was ever brought to justice for his death. **Akbar Mohammadi**, a student activist arrested following the demonstrations and initially sentenced to death, died in custody in 2006 apparently after prison authorities failed to provide adequate medical care following a hunger strike

No one has ever been brought to account for the 2003 death in custody of photo-journalist **Zahra Kazemi**, who held dual Iranian-Canadian nationality. According to a governmental enquiry, she died in hospital following detention in Evin Prison as a result of a blow to her skull. Five officials, including three members of Tehran's judiciary, and two Intelligence Ministry officials were arrested in connection with her death. However, four of the five arrested officials were subsequently released and only Mohammad Reza Aghdam, an official of the Ministry of Intelligence, was brought to trial. He was acquitted in 2004, and his acquittal was upheld on appeal in 2005, although a new investigation was ordered into Zahra Kazemi's death. Similarly, the death in custody in suspicious circumstances of **Dr. Zahra Bani Yaghoub** in Hamedan in 2007 has not seen anyone held responsible.

No investigations are known to have taken place into the deaths of at least two protestors - **Sane' Zhaleh** (26) and **Mohammad Mokhtari** (22) - killed during demonstrations called by opposition leaders Mir Hossein Mousavi and Mehdi Karroubi on 14 February 2011 in support of the people of

Egypt and Tunisia. The authorities deemed the demonstrations illegal, and have held the two leaders under house arrest ever since. They also claimed that Sane' Zhaleh – a member of the Kurdish minority and a Sunni Muslim - was a member of the Basij militia who had been killed by demonstrators, but his family denied this. Similarly, the deaths of **Haleh Sahabi** on 2 June 2011 during the funeral of her father after she was apparently hit by a member of the security forces and of **Hoda Saber**, a prisoner of conscience linked to the Nationalist Religious Alliance are not known to be the subject of investigations. Hoda Saber died in custody on 12 June 2011 following a hunger strike launched in protest at Haleh Sahabi's death. According to letter from over 60 of his fellow prisoners, he was beaten and denied adequate medical treatment before his death.

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