IRAN: HARROWING ACCOUNTS OF TORTURE COMMITTED WITH IMPUNITY – NEW FINDINGS ON AFKARI BROTHERS

This extensive analysis issued on the International Day in Support of Victims of Torture presents Amnesty International’s documentation of the harrowing details of torture and other ill-treatment inflicted on unjustly jailed protesters Vahid Afkari and Habib Afkari since their arbitrary arrest in 2018, and shows how Iran’s prosecution and judicial authorities have ignored or dismissed the numerous complaints that they have filed from inside prison in search of truth, justice and reparation.

Brothers Vahid Afkari and Habib Afkari are serving lengthy prison terms in Adelabad prison in Shiraz, Fars province, following convictions in multiple grossly unfair trials, in which courts essentially relied on torture-tainted “confessions”, despite repeated requests by the defendants to exclude their “confessions” and order independent and impartial investigations. Since September 2020, the authorities have subjected them to renewed torture and other ill-treatment in apparent retaliation for speaking out against the enforced disappearance of their brother Navid Afkari, who was executed in secret on 12 September 2020. Since then, Vahid Afkari and Habib Afkari have been held in windowless solitary confinement cells, either together in a single cell or separately, and denied access to adequate healthcare, meaningful contact with other prisoners, fresh air, telephone calls and face to face family visits.

The organization renews its calls on the Iranian authorities to release Vahid Afkari and Habib Afkari as they are arbitrarily detained, and ensure that pending their release, they are held in conditions meeting international standards for the treatment of prisoners. Those reasonably suspected of torture must be criminally investigated, and if enough admissible evidence against them is found, prosecuted in fair trials. They include officials at the investigation unit of Iran’s police (Agahi), Ministry of Intelligence agents, prison officials in Adelabad prison, and investigators at Branches 8 and 10 of the Office of the Special Prosecutor for Criminal Affairs and Security Offences in Shiraz, Fars province.

Amnesty International recalls that the ongoing travesty of justice suffered by Afkari brothers is reflective of the protracted torture epidemic in Iran, with prisoners, including those detained in connection with the protests of November 2019, being routinely subjected to various methods of torture including beatings, floggings, electric shocks, stress positions, mock executions, waterboarding, sexual violence, forced administration of chemical substances, and deliberate deprivation of adequate medical care. Those reasonably suspected of torture and other ill-treatment are hardly ever investigated, let alone held to account.

Given the systematic impunity that prevails in Iran for widespread torture and other ill-treatment and other crimes under international law and human rights violations, including unlawful killings and past and ongoing crimes against humanity related to 1988 prison massacres, Amnesty International renews its calls on member states of the UN Human Rights Council to establish an independent mechanism aimed at ensuring accountability.

METHODOLOGY

For this detailed analysis, in addition to conducting in-depth interviews with informed sources, Amnesty International closely examined the official case files of Vahid Afkari, Habib Afkari and their late brother Navid Afkari, including witness statements, indictments and first instance and appeal verdicts. The organization also reviewed and analysed the numerous written complaints submitted by Afkari brothers to various officials, their appeal submissions, their lawyer’s request for a retrial, their medical records, and the forensic reports of the Legal Medicine Organization of Iran, a forensic institute working under the supervision of the judiciary. Amnesty International also analysed the audio recordings of the trial session of Vahid Afkari and Navid Afkari before Branch 1 of Criminal Court 1 of Fars province on 24 September 2019.
TORTURE DURING THE INVESTIGATION STAGE – VAHID AFKARI

Vahid Afkari and Navid Afkari were arrested by seven armed plain clothes agents from the Investigation Unit of Iran’s police (Agahi) at their house in Shiraz, Fars province, on 17 September 2018. Their arrests followed their participation in the protests¹ that had taken place across Iran including in Shiraz, between late July and early August 2018 and also between late December 2017 and early January 2018. Vahid Afkari and his lawyers maintain his and his brothers’ participation was peaceful in nature.

Following his arrest on 17 September 2018, Vahid Afkari was transferred to a detention centre run by Branch 5 of Agahi in Shiraz, where he was held in solitary confinement in a 2m x 2m cell until around 23 October 2018, without access to the outside world. The authorities concealed his fate and whereabouts for about 12 days after his arrest from his family, thereby committing enforced disappearance - a crime under international law.

Both in his written complaints and in court, Vahid Afkari said that between 17 September 2018 and 23 October 2018, he was repeatedly subjected to torture and other ill-treatment to make incriminating statements against himself and his brother Navid Afkari. This included being punched, kicked, and beaten with sticks and cables while blindfolded. Vahid Afkari said that he was also subjected to various forms of psychological torture aimed at obtaining forced “confessions”, including death threats, the persistent use of degrading verbal insults and profanities and invasion of his privacy which involved the interrogators reading his personal diary and making lewd or mocking comments. Interrogators also threatened to imprison, kill or otherwise harm his family members, including to sexually assault his mother and sister. The authorities acted on some of these threats, arresting Vahid Afkari’s older father and brother-in-law on 29 September 2018. Vahid Afkari’s father was released on bail after several hours while his brother-in-law was held for two days and then released on bail.

Vahid Afkari went on hunger strike twice in the weeks following his arrest in protest at the constant torture to which he said he was subjected and the pressure to “confess” to his and his brother’s, Navid Afkari’s, involvement in activities which they repeatedly said they had not committed. According to a complaint that he submitted to the Judicial Disciplinary Prosecutor on 29 May 2019, shortly after his arrest, he went on hunger strike for a week. He started his second hunger shortly afterwards on around 6 October 2018 (see Figure 1.1 in Annex 1). According to two official notes included in the case file, dated 14 October 2018 and 20 October 2018, prison guards reported to senior prison officials and the investigators leading on his case that Vahid Afkari had said that by waging a hunger strike, he sought to commit “a slow suicide” to emphasize that he is “innocent” and to bring his plight to the attention of judicial authorities (see Annex 2).

Around 21 October 2018, while on hunger strike, Vahid Afkari was transferred to Adelabad prison, where he was again placed in solitary confinement. His cell was located in a section under the oversight of security and intelligence bodies that is colloquially referred to by prison officials and prisoners as “Ebrat” (Admonition) and is notorious for its cruel and inhumane conditions. According to former prisoners, inmates held in this section are cut off from the outside world and denied access to face to face family visits, telephone calls, fresh air, and natural light. At best, they are allowed to have irregular visits from their immediate family members from behind a glass screen. Common complaints include a lack of proper ventilation and heating and cooling facilities, filthy walls and floors, lack of regular access to bathing facilities, unhealthy levels of dampness, and mold infestation. There are frequent reports from the section of physical assaults against inmates by prison guards, as well as the practice of withholding food and/or water from prisoners as punishment.

On 26 October 2018, while still on hunger strike, Vahid Afkari attempted suicide by injuring his neck with a piece of broken glass. While he was transferred to hospital for a surgical operation, medical records, reviewed by Amnesty International, indicate that two days later, his treatment was interrupted, and he was returned to prison against medical advice.

In a complaint to the Judicial Disciplinary Prosecutor, dated 29 May 2019, Vahid Afkari wrote that following the interruption of his treatment and return to Adelabad prison, his surgical incisions got repeatedly infected, in what he

¹ Slogans chanted at these protests expressed a mix of economic and political grievances – ranging from complaints over poverty, high unemployment, corruption and inequality – to demands for the release of political prisoners and outright rejection of the Islamic Republic system.
believed to be the result of the high levels of dampness in his cell and his lack of access to post-operative care (see Figure 1.1 in Annex 1).

Vahid Afkari was held in the “Ebrat” section for about two weeks, and then moved to one of the solitary cells in Adelabad prison referred to as “Judicial Suites” or “Ershad” (Guidance), where he spent about 80 further days in solitary confinement in poor conditions and without access to medical care.

In late November 2018, Vahid Afkari was transferred from Adelabad prison to the detention centre of the Ministry of Intelligence in Shiraz known as Pelak-e 100 and held there incommunicado and in solitary confinement for more than a week. According to complaints written by Vahid Afkari from inside prison and an informed source interviewed by Amnesty International, during this period, he was subjected to further physical and mental torture and other ill-treatment, and this time, the torture, especially threats to kill or otherwise harm his family members, was particularly difficult to endure and forced him to make incriminating statements against himself and Navid Afkari.

Vahid Afkari was returned to Adelabad prison in February 2019. In the early hours of 2 April 2019, Vahid Afkari attempted suicide again, this time through overdosing on sleeping tablets. He was admitted, on an emergency basis, to Namazi hospital, where he was unconscious for one day. When he regained his consciousness, he found himself bound to the bed with chains and shackles. According to an informed source, the security forces repeatedly refused to remove the restraints and grant him access to toilet facilities. This forced him to hold his urine leading to bladder and kidney pain and, on at least one occasion, to urinate on himself while lying down.

According to a medical note seen by Amnesty International, the security forces prematurely returned Vahid Afkari from hospital to prison against the explicit warnings of the medical professionals that this would put him at a serious risk of reduced consciousness and low oxygen levels possibly leading to cardiac arrest and death. The hospital authorities documented these warnings in a note, stating, “the security forces would be responsible for the consequences [of his premature discharge], including his death.” At the bottom of the note, there is a sentence, handwritten and finger stamped by Vahid Afkari, which states that “I, Vahid Afkari, the son of Hossein, give my consent, in a state of perfect sanity, to be discharged from Namazi hospital, and the responsibility of all the consequences will rest with myself” (see Annex 3). An informed source told Amnesty International that Vahid Afkari was forced, under conditions of duress, to make this declaration.

Following his return to Adelabad prison, Vahid Afkari was placed in solitary confinement for about two weeks in the “Ershad” section, without access to any physical or mental health care. In a complaint to the Judicial Disciplinary Prosecutor on 29 May 2019, he wrote that upon entering this section, prisoners are stripped naked and forced to wear prison clothes which are ripped, filthy and stained with blood marks. He further reported that in this section, prisoners do not have access to blankets and heating facilities, and that authorities regularly cuff the hands and feet of those who complain and beat them severely (see Figures 1.2 and 1.3 in Annex 1). During this period, Vahid Afkari was taken, while blindfolded, before the Office of the Special Prosecutor for Criminal Affairs and Security Offences in Shiraz several times for further questioning (see Figure 1.3 in Annex 1). He was subsequently moved to one of the general wards of Adelabad prison which holds convicted prisoners.

According to an informed source, for two months after his attempted suicide, the Iranian authorities banned Vahid Afkari from having family visits, and told his distressed family that he should be “punished” for attempting suicide.

On 16 May 2019, the investigation stage against Vahid Afkari was completed and Branch 10 of the Office of the Special Prosecutor for Criminal Affairs and Security Offences in Shiraz formally charged him with multiple offences related to “national security”. This followed an earlier charge of “accessory to murder”, which was formally laid against him by Branch 8 of the Office of the Special Prosecutor for Criminal Affairs and Security Offences in Shiraz on 21 February 2019. In both cases, the charges were essentially based on torture-tainted “confessions”.

**TORTURE DURING THE INVESTIGATION STAGE – HABIB AFKARI**

Habib Afkari was arrested by plain clothes Ministry of Intelligence agents in Shiraz on 13 December 2018 after he spent months going to various state bodies, including the police, prosecution office and courts in Shiraz to seek information.
about the reasons for his brothers' arrests and their place of detention and case status. During this period, he had been repeatedly threatened with arrest if he did not stop seeking information.

Following his arrest, he was blindfolded and taken to an unidentified location, which he later learned was the detention centre of the Ministry of Intelligence in Shiraz, known as Pelak-e 100. For the next 35 days, he was held there incommunicado, in solitary confinement, with the authorities concealing his fate and whereabouts and thereby subjecting him to enforced disappearance, a crime under international law. In a written statement made before the lead investigator of Branch 10 of the Office of the Special Prosecutor for Criminal Affairs and Security Offences in Shiraz on 29 July 2019, Habib Afkari wrote that he was kicked, punched, beaten and verbally abused immediately upon arrival to the detention centre, and when he asked the Ministry of Intelligence agents where he was, they told him, “this is a place where we pull out your testicles and make roosters lay eggs”. In the same document, Habib Afkari reported that the smell was foul in his solitary confinement cell because its toilet unit was clogged. He added that a bright lamp was on 24 hours a day, causing him growing mental distress (see Annex 4).

In the document submitted to the lead investigator of Branch 10 of the Office of the Special Prosecutor for Criminal Affairs and Security Offences in Shiraz on 29 July 2019 and an earlier complaint submitted to the then prosecutor general of Shiraz in May 2019, Habib Afkari wrote that between 13 December 2018 and 17 January 2019, his interrogators at the Ministry of Intelligence repeatedly subjected him to torture and other cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment to force him to write a series of incriminating statements against himself and his brothers. He noted that he initially resisted but, as the days went by, the torture intensified and there came a point when he was no longer able to withstand further torture and felt like he was dying. According to complaints written by Habib Afkari from inside prison and an informed source interviewed by Amnesty International, as a result of torture, Habib Afkari's left shoulder was dislocated, leading to tears, and his left wrist and one of the toes in his right foot were fractured (see Figures 5.3 and 5.4 in Annex 5). An official medical note from 30 October 2019 confirms these injuries (see Annex 6).

In both complaints, Habib Afkari wrote that for several days in a row, intelligence agents chained him while blindfolded to a chair, which was itself fixed to a wall, and wrapped his face and head in a plastic sheet in a way that obstructed his breathing and made him feel like he was suffocating. He wrote that one of the agents present told him each time he tightened the plastic sheet over his head, "tell me whenever you decide to write [the incriminating statements dictated by the authorities] and I will remove the plastic wrap" (see Figures 5.2 and 5.3 in Annex 5).

This account is supported by a separate complaint written by Habib Afkari's brother Navid Afkari to the head of Criminal Court 2 of Shiraz on 20 January 2020. Navid Afkari wrote therein that, in January 2019, while he was held in Pelak-e 100, he was taken to a room and shown his brother Habib being chained by his hands and feet to a chair, which was fixed to a wall, and having his head and face wrapped in a plastic sheet. Navid Afkari wrote, “right after seeing this scene, I started crying and begging. I wanted to hit my head against a wall and kill myself”. In the same complaint, Navid Afkari wrote that in late December 2018, the intelligence agents had taken him to a room and removed his blindfold, and he saw Habib Afkari sitting on a chair with his hands and feet tied and being severely kicked and punched by a number of officials who were yelling profanities (see Annex 7).

In his written complaints to the lead investigator of Branch 10 of the Office of the Special Prosecutor for Criminal Affairs and Security Offences in Shiraz and the prosecutor general of Shiraz, Habib Afkari also wrote that one night, the intelligence agents tied his hands behind his the back, took him to a dark room, threw him on the ground, and pulled his hands up so intensely that his left shoulder got dislocated. Habib Afkari stated that after this happened, he heard one of the torturers saying that they might have broken his shoulder and the other torturer responding, “it doesn’t matter. If he [Habib] keeps acting so stubborn, I will also burst his testicles.” Habib Afkari wrote that he screamed from pain for about 15 minutes until a person came in, untied his hands and “crucely twisted” his hand to reposition the humerus into the shoulder socket and the pain was so intense that he felt his blood pressure drop and he nearly fainted. He added that immediately afterwards, one of the officials made him sit on a chair and told him while yelling profanities, “you have no option but to write whatever I dictate”. Habib Afkari wrote, “from this point onwards, my brain no longer functioned, and I lost the ability to think. I started writing under duress almost everything they dictated to me” (see Figures 5.3 and 5.4 in Annex 5).

In addition to the torture described above, in his complaints, Habib Afkari wrote that he was also tortured through the deliberate denial of medical care. He reported that while in detention, he suffered from severe toothaches, but the
authorities refused to give him any painkillers, and as a result, he was left screaming and constantly hitting his head against a wall in pain. He noted that in response to his repeated requests to see a doctor, the authorities said while mocking and swearing at him, “once you are terminated [implying death], we will take you to a doctor, but not now” (see Figure 5.2 in Annex 5).

In two separate written statements submitted to the lead investigators at Branches 10 and 8 of the Office of the Special Prosecutor for Criminal Affairs and Security Offences in Shiraz on 25 April 2019 and 7 May 2019, respectively, Habib Afkari wrote that he also suffered from severe headaches and seizures as a result of torture, for which he did not receive medical care, and described being punched to the chest near his heart (see Annex 8 and Figure 9.1 in Annex 9). In the 7 May 2019 statement, Habib Afkari also reported that Ministry of Intelligence repeatedly told him that he was held in a detention centre run by the Ministry of the Intelligence and in such facilities, “there is no oversight” and “we [Ministry of Intelligence agents] are capable of doing anything” (see Figure 9.2 in Annex 9).

In all his complaints, Habib Afkari wrote that he was also subjected to various forms of psychological torture. The interrogators repeatedly held him in cells where he could hear his brother Navid Afkari screaming and crying from pain, and told him, “if Navid dies under torture, you will be responsible”; and suggested that if he wrote the dictated statements that incriminated him and his brother, they would stop torturing Navid Afkari (see Figure 5.1 in Annex 5). The interrogators also threatened that if he did not “confess”, they would kill or otherwise harm his brothers, mother, wife, and/or pregnant sister. Habib Afkari wrote that these threats caused him severe mental distress and drove him to “the threshold of madness” (see Annex 8 and Figure 9.1 in Annex 9).

Habib Afkari was moved from Pelak-e 100 to Adelabad prison on 17 January 2019 and placed in one of the general wards of the prison that houses prisoners of conscience and others imprisoned for politically motivated reasons.

**CONVICTIONS BASED ON TORTURE-TAINTED “CONFESSIONS”**

Vahid Afkari has been sentenced to 33 years and nine months’ imprisonment as well as two years of “mandatory residence” in Ardabil province in the northwest of Iran and 74 lashes in three separate grossly unfair trials involving six charges. This consists of:

- Twenty-five years’ imprisonment for being “an accessory to murder”, imposed by Branch 1 of Criminal Court 1 of Fars province, on 15 October 2019 and upheld by Branch 39 of the Supreme Court, on 25 April 2020.
- One year and nine months’ imprisonment and 74 lashes for 1) “disrupting public order” (seven and a half months and 74 lashes), 2) “insulting public officials on duty” (six months) and 3) “defying public officials on duty” (seven and a half months). The original sentence imposed by Branch 116 of Criminal Court 2 of Shiraz on 24 July 2019 for these charges was four years and six months’ imprisonment, but this was reduced by Branch 27 of the Appeal Court of Fars province on 8 February 2021.
- Seven years’ imprisonment followed by two years of “mandatory residence” in Ardabil province, which is over 1,000km away from his home province of Fars, for 1) criminal activity falling short of “spreading corruption on earth” as per the explanatory note² to article 286 of the 2013 Islamic Penal Code³ (five years and mandatory residence) and 2) “insulting the Supreme Leader” (two years), imposed by Branch 2 of the Revolutionary Court of Shiraz on 24 December 2020, and upheld by Branch 39 of the Supreme Court on 23 February 2021.

Five of the above six charges are vague and overly broad “national-security” related charges. They are not internationally recognizable charges and have been consistently used to criminalize the exercise of the rights to freedom of expression,

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² Legal articles in Iran are sometimes accompanied by one or several explanatory notes, referred to as tabṣāreh in Persian, which clarify the scope of the article, provide exceptions or introduce additional legal restrictions or offences.

³ Article 286 of the 2013 Islamic Penal Code defines “spreading corruption on earth” (effad-e fel-arz) as follows: “Whoever, in a widespread manner, commits crimes against individuals’ physical integrity, crimes against national security, spreads falsehood, causes disruption in the economic system of the country, commits arson and destruction, distributes poisonous or dangerous substances, runs corruption and prostitution centres or aides and abets them, in a manner that causes severe disruption in the public order of the country, creates insecurity or causes extensive damage to the physical integrity of individuals or private and public property, or spreads corruption or prostitution on large scale is ‘corrupt’ on earth and shall be sentenced to death.” The Note (tabṣāreh) to this article states that “if, based on the totality of evidence available, the court cannot establish the [defendant’s] intent to cause widespread disruption in public order, create insecurity, cause extensive damage, or spread corruption or prostitution on a large scale, and/or cannot establish the defendant's knowledge of the impact of their actions, and the crime committed does not fall within the scope of any other criminal law provisions, the perpetrator shall be sentenced to ta'zir imprisonment of degree five or six.” Under article 19 of the 2013 Islamic Penal Code, a ta'zir prison term of degree five ranges from two to five years and a ta'zir prison term of degree six ranges from six months to two years.
association and peaceful assembly in Iran. Some of the alleged activities cited in the prosecution’s case involved peaceful conduct such as “repeated” participation and chanting in protests characterized as “unlawful” by the authorities and writing slogans on walls. The other cited activities involved alleged discussions that the authorities claim the brothers had at various times in 2018 about possibly committing arson and assault to fight against the Islamic Republic system, but never carried out. The authorities do not provide any evidence in this relation and solely rely on the defendant’s forced “confessions”.

The only charge which is an internationally recognizable offence is “accessory to murder”, which pertains to the fatal stabbing of an intelligence agent on 2 August 2018, purportedly in revenge for his role in suppressing protests in Shiraz earlier that day. Navid Afkari was charged with “murder” in the same case. Amnesty International’s research shows that the prosecution authorities failed to present any credible evidence for this charge; Vahid Afkari was convicted essentially on the basis of the torture-tainted “confessions” made by him and his brother Navid Afkari (see below).

Habib Afkari has been sentenced to a total of 15 years and eight months’ imprisonment, 74 lashes and a fine in two separate grossly unfair trials involving eight charges. This consists of:

- Seven years and eight month’s imprisonment, 74 lashes and a fine for 1) “gathering and colluding to commit crimes against people’s lives and properties” (four years), 2) “defying public officials on duty” (two years and four months), 3) “disrupting public order” (eight months and 74 lashes), 4) two counts of “deliberately inflicting injuries with a sharp object” (eight months), and 5) “insulting public officials on duty” (a fine). The original sentence imposed by Branch 116 of Criminal Court 2 of Shiraz on 24 July 2019 was 16 years and one months’ imprisonment, but this was reduced by Branch 27 of the Appeal Court of Fars province on 8 February 2021.

- Eight years’ imprisonment for 1) “membership in a group for the purpose of disrupting national security” (five years), 2) “insulting the Supreme Leader” (two years), and 3) “spreading propaganda against the system” (one year), imposed by Branch 1 of the Revolutionary Court of Shiraz on 20 June 2020, and upheld by the Supreme Court in March 2021.

As with the case of Vahid Afkari, seven of the above eight charges are vague and overly broad “national-security” related charges. The only internationally recognizable charge in Habib Afkari’s case is “deliberately inflicting injuries with a sharp object”, which accounts for eight months of his prison sentence. Amnesty International’s research shows that the prosecution authorities failed to present any credible evidence for this charge and relied on his torture-tainted “confessions”.

1. RETRACTION OF TORTURE-TAINTED CONFESSIONS DURING THE INVESTIGATION STAGE

According to information recorded in the case file, Navid Afkari and Vahid Afkari were separately brought before Branch 10 of the Office of the Special Prosecutor for Criminal Affairs and Security Offences in Shiraz on 24 April 2019 – that is over seven months after their arrest – to formally respond to the accusations made against themselves both verbally and in writing. At this point, they had not yet been notified of the charges against them in writing. There, Navid Afkari is recorded as having retracted his “confessions” in his own hand writing, stating: “Whatever I have said or written in the [detention centres of] Agahi and the Ministry of Intelligence has been due to threats, pressure, and repeated and recurrent mental and physical torture. The accusations are all fabricated, baseless, and total falsehoods” (see Annex 10).

Vahid Afkari is similarly recorded as having retracted his “confessions” in his own hand writing, stating: “All of the statements extracted from me during the past period in [the detention centres of] Agahi and the Ministry of Intelligence were obtained under pressure and I only wrote what the respective officials dictated to me. Now that I am in a better situation and away from mental and physical pressure, I fully deny the statements extracted from me.” (See Figure 11.1 in Annex 11). Vahid Afkari further stated: “I was threatened that if I did not confess, my mother would be arrested and I would never see my brothers [alive] again; this led me to attempt suicide” (see Figure 11.2 in Annex 11).

Information recorded in the case file indicates that on 25 April 2019, Habib Afkari also formally retracted his “confessions” before the lead investigator of Branch 10 of the Office of the Special Prosecutor for Criminal Affairs and Security Offences in Shiraz, stating in writing that they were extracted through torture while held incommunicado and in solitary confinement in the detention centre of the Ministry of Intelligence, Pelak-e 100 (see Annex 12).
Between April 2019 January 2020, Vahid Afkari, Habib Afkari and Navid Afkari wrote to various prosecution authorities from inside prison, detailing the torture they had suffered at the hands of Agahi officials and intelligence agents during the investigation stage in order to “confess”, and asking that those suspected of criminal responsibility, including the lead investigator at Branch 8 of the Office of the Special Prosecutor for Criminal Affairs and Security Offence in Shiraz, be investigated and held to account. These complaints were all dismissed without effective, independent and impartial investigations (see below).

2. RETRACTION OF TORTURE-TAINED CONFESSIONS DURING THE TRIAL STAGE

Navid Afkari and Vahid Afkari informed Branch 1 of Criminal Court 1 of Fars province that they had been tortured to “confess”. This was communicated to the court in writing including in the submission filed on 13 August 2019 and verbally in the trial sessions on 3 August 2019 and 24 September 2019. On each occasion, the defendants explicitly requested that the court exclude their torturer-tainted “confessions” and order an independent and impartial investigation.

In the 13 August 2019 submission addressed to the head of Branch 1 of Criminal Court 1 of Fars province, Navid Afkari wrote that he had repeatedly denied the charges brought against him and his brother before the lead investigators of Branches 8 and 10 of the Office of the Special Prosecutor for Criminal Affairs and Security Offences in Shiraz, and complained to them that he had been tortured by Agahi officials and Ministry of Intelligence agents interrogating him to make incriminating statements against himself and his brother (see Figure 13.2 in Annex 13). He reported that his complaints were not only deliberately ignored by the lead investigators and omitted from the charge sheets issued, but on at least two occasions in October 2018 and November 2018, the lead investigator of Branch 8 of the Office of the Special Prosecutor for Criminal Affairs and Security Offences in Shiraz came to where he was held (the detention centres run by Branch 5 of Agahi and the Ministry of Intelligence, respectively), and explicitly ordered that he be tortured to give incriminating answers (see Figures 13.3. and 13.4 in Annex 13).

In the 13 August 2019 submission, Navid Afkari further complained that during the first trial session on 3 August 2019, he informed the presiding judge that he had been tortured to “confess” and referred to two medical notes in this relation, but the judge refused to order an investigation, and told him, “Maybe you were injured in another way while in the detention centre or in prison” (see Figures 13.1 and 13.2 in Annex 13). One of the two medical notes, prepared by a prison doctor and dated 17 September 2018, confirmed that he was in good health at the time of his arrest. The other, which was issued by the Legal Medicine Organization of Iran, a forensic institute under the supervision of the judiciary, and dated 29 May 2019, confirmed that he had suffered a broken bone in his right hand, but added that due to the passage of time, and the fact that he was not medically examined right after the injury occurred, it was impossible to determine with certainty the date of the incident leading to the injury and the causes and circumstances around it (see Annex 14).

The audio recordings of the second trial session, held on 24 September 2019, reveal that the court again dismissed Navid Afkari’s and Vahid Afkari’s complaints without ordering investigations, in contravention to international and Iranian law. When Navid Afkari and Vahid Afkari tried to describe how they had been repeatedly tortured to “confess” and asked the court to exclude their torture-tainted “confessions” as evidence and order an investigation, the presiding judge interrupted them and refused to hear the torture allegations. In the audio recordings, the judge is heard dismissing Navid Afkari’s arguments that the court has a duty to establish the voluntary nature of the “confessions” and suggesting that the torture-tainted “confessions” of the defendants are valid because they are in their own handwriting. At one point, Navid Afkari informed the judge that one of the ways in which he was tortured involved being held in a cell where sexual assault was prevalent. In response, the judge is heard saying mockingly, “Then you should watch for yourself”. Navid Afkari, Vahid Afkari and their family understood this as an implied threat of sexual assault.

In the audio recordings from the 24 September 2019 session, Navid Afkari and Vahid Afkari are heard referring to Article 169 of the 2013 Islamic Penal Code and insisting that the court is obliged on this basis to order an investigation to establish whether their “confessions” were obtained voluntarily or through coercion. This article states: “A confession which is taken under coercion, force, torture, or mental or physical abuses or ill-treatment, shall not be given any validity and weight and the court is obliged to investigate the accused again”. In the audio recordings, the judge is heard first asking Navid Afkari and Vahid Afkari, in a mocking tone, to state the content of this article. Ultimately, as Navid Afkari and Vahid Afkari persist in their request, the judge is heard promising that any incriminating statements previously made by the defendants outside the court and before the prosecution authorities would not be of probative value.
Despite this, in the verdict issued several weeks later on 15 October 2019, Branch 1 of Criminal Court 1 of Fars province cited the torture-tainted “confessions” of Navid Afkari and Vahid Afkari as proof of guilt. The court stated in its verdict that Navid Afkari and Vahid Afkari had raised allegations of torture “under the influence of what they had been taught [by fellow inmates] in prison and their idea was that by denying the reality, they may be able to evade punishment”.

In dismissing Navid Afkari’s allegations of torture and admitting his torture-tainted “confessions” as evidence against him and his brother Vahid Afkari, Branch 1 of Criminal Court 1 of Fars province deliberately ignored a written affidavit from a fellow inmate, who had stated that in October 2018, while held in the detention centre of Agahi in Shiraz, he had witnessed Navid Afkari being tortured by Agahi agents. In his affidavit, the inmate stated as follows: “I saw two plain clothes agents severely beating Navid Afkari with tubes and batons while he was lying on the ground and covering his head with his hands. They hit his hand several times forcefully and, while yelling insults and swear words, they told him that the truth was whatever they said.” He added that several hours later, he saw Navid Afkari again, and Navid Afkari told him while crying that one of the interrogators had broken his hand during the beatings. The information recorded in the case file and the audio recordings of the trial session on 24 September 2019 reveal that Navid Afkari repeatedly asked the court to allow him to call this witness, but the judge presiding over the session refused simply stating that the court would consider the request when the session ends, and if deemed “necessary”, would summon the witness at a later point.

Vahid Afkari, Habib Afkari and Navid Afkari also retracted their “confessions” during their trials before Branch 116 of Criminal Court 2 of Shiraz and the Revolutionary Court of Shiraz, saying they were extracted under torture and other ill-treatment. Despite this, the written verdict of Branch 116 of Criminal Court 2 of Shiraz, which is less than two pages and concerns all three brothers, cites “the clear confessions of the accused during the investigation stage before the police, the Ministry of Intelligence, and the Office of the Prosecutor” as proof of guilt. The verdict of Branch 2 of the Revolutionary Court of Shiraz against Vahid Afkari and Navid Afkari and the verdict of Branch 1 of the Revolutionary Court against Habib Afkari also similarly hold that it is “evident” from the “confessions” of the defendants that they engaged in “criminal” conduct. In the case of Vahid Afkari and Navid Afkari, Branch 2 of the Revolutionary Court of Shiraz further comments that the defendants “failed to offer any evidence to prove that their confessions were extracted through torture at the Ministry of Intelligence”.

3. RETRACTION OF TORTURE-TAINTED CONFESSIONS DURING THE APPEAL STAGE

Branch 39 of the Supreme Court, which upheld the verdict of Branch 1 of Criminal Court 1 of Fars province against Vahid Afkari and Navid Afkari, also dismissed the allegations of torture without ordering an investigation. In its verdict, the Supreme Court acknowledged that Vahid Afkari and Navid Afkari had retracted their “confessions” saying they were obtained under torture and other ill-treatment. The Supreme Court also confirmed that a witness had submitted a written affidavit in support of Navid Afkari’s allegations of torture. Nevertheless, the Supreme Court proceeded to characterize the forced “confessions” obtained during the investigation stage as “incontrovertible” proof of guilt, and said “the allegation of coercion, duress and torture raised by them [Navid Afkari and Vahid Afkari] is not evidenced by decisive proof”.

Vahid Afkari, Navid Afkari and Habib Afkari also raised their concerns in their appeal submissions to the Appeal Court of Fars province in August 2019, which reviewed the verdict of Branch 116 of Criminal Court 2. Habib Afkari specifically stated in his submission that while held in the detention centre of the Ministry of Intelligence Pelak-e 100, Ministry of Intelligence agents “inflicted the most severe forms of physical and mental torture on me in order to coerce me into making false statements.”

According to an informed source interviewed by Amnesty International, during their appeal hearing on 5 February 2020, they further reiterated that it was unlawful for the court of first instance to rely on their forced “confessions” and called for an investigation. Despite all this, Branch 27 of the Appeal Court of Fars province upheld their convictions on 8 February 2021, and made no mention, in its verdict, of the concerns related to torture and the defendants’ retraction of their forced “confessions”.

VIOLATIONS OF THE RIGHT TO REMEDY AND REPARATION

In addition to raising their allegations of torture before the prosecution authorities and judges leading on their prosecution and presiding over their trials, Vahid Afkari, Habib Afkari and their late brother Navid Afkari resorted to various other prosecution and oversight entities to seek truth, justice and reparations, but to no avail.
1. COMPLAINT TO THE PROSECUTOR GENERAL OF SHIRAZ

Navid Afkari filed two complaints with the prosecutor general of Shiraz on 22 April 2019 and 1 May 2019, respectively, against the lead investigator at Branch 8 of the Office of the Special Prosecutor for Criminal Affairs and Security Offences in Shiraz, as well as Agahi officials and Ministry of Intelligence agents reasonably suspected of involvement in his torture. Habib Afkari also filed a complaint with the prosecutor general of Shiraz in late May 2019 against the Ministry of Intelligence agents he suspected of involvement in his torture. The prosecutor general failed to conduct an effective, independent and impartial investigation. Instead, as information included in the case file indicates, he instructed in writing that the complaints are processed and examined by the same investigator at Branch 10 of the Office of the Special Prosecutor for Criminal Affairs and Security Offences in Shiraz, who had led on preparing the charge sheet against the three brothers by Branch 10 of the Office of the Special Prosecutor for Criminal Affairs and Security Offences in Shiraz on 16 May 2019.

Navid Afkari and Habib Afkari wrote to the prosecution authorities multiple times between July and September 2019, noting the complicity of the assigned investigator in the violations that were the subject of their complaints and requesting that their case be assigned to a different investigator who had the necessary objectivity and impartiality. They also wrote to the investigator himself, asking him to recuse himself. Information recorded in the case file indicates that these requests were rejected.

Documents in the case file indicate that on 29 July 2019, Habib Afkari was taken before the lead investigator at Branch 10 of the Office of the Special Prosecutor for Criminal Affairs and Security Offences, and there, he was asked by the investigator to write a brief statement about the torture and other ill-treatment that he alleged he had endured. According to an informed source, Navid Afkari was summonsed the same way, but the lead investigator did not include his written statement in the case file, which indicates the investigator's failure to process the complaint lawfully. According to an informed source, during these meetings, the brothers asked the lead investigator to grant them access to the video recordings of their interrogation sessions, which they said would prove that they were subjected to torture and other ill-treatment, but the investigator claimed that the video files had been erased.

Navid Afkari again raised concerns about the impartiality of the lead investigator at Branch 10 of the Office of the Special Prosecutor for Criminal Affairs and Security Offences in a separate complaint addressed to the Prosecutor of Government Employees. He wrote that the lead investigator summoned the eyewitness whom Navid Afkari had introduced in support of his torture complaint, on 14 October 2019, and threatened him with criminal prosecution and lengthy imprisonment if he testified. According to an informed source, the eyewitness held his ground and testified in support of Navid Afkari, but the lead investigator again did not include this key evidence in the case file pertaining to the complaint.

Documents in the case file further indicate that prosecution authorities and prison officials only agreed to transfer Navid Afkari and Habib Afkari for medical examination following months of negotiations and forced the prisoners to cover the associated expenses.

Eventually, on 30 October 2019, a medical note was issued for Habib Afkari, confirming that tears were evident in his left shoulder and that his left wrist and one of the toes in his right foot had fractured (see Annex 6). According to an informed source, for Navid Afkari, the prosecution authorities and the Legal Medicine Organization of Iran deemed it unnecessary to issue a new medical note as one already existed in his case file from 14 May 2019 confirming that he had suffered a broken bone in his right hand (see Annex 14).

On 13 July 2020, Branch 10 of the Office of the Special Prosecutor for Criminal Affairs and Security Offences issued a written decision dismissing the complaints of Habib Afkari and Navid Afkari. The decision, which consists of one paragraph, holds that Habib Afkari and Navid Afkari failed to provide any evidence to substantiate their allegations of torture. The decision falsely claims that Navid Afkari was not willing to be transferred to the Legal Medicine Organization of Iran for examination of possible torture marks in his body, and omits any reference to the medical note from 14 May 2019 and the eyewitness testimony provided by a former prisoner. Regarding Habib Afkari, the decision claims that the medical note by the Legal Medicine Organization of Iran dated 30 October 2019 has stated that the recorded injuries were “old” and determining their date of occurrence would not have been possible; in fact, no such statement was made in the issued medical note (see Annex 6).

Habib Afkari and Navid Afkari subsequently appealed the decision to Branch 110 of Criminal Court 2 of Shiraz. On 3 March 2020, the court rejected the appeal without giving any reasons.
2. COMPLAINT TO THE PROSECUTOR OF GOVERNMENT EMPLOYEES

Navid Afkari filed a complaint with the Office of the Prosecutor of Government Employees in Tehran against the lead investigator at Branch 8 of the Office of the Special Prosecutor for Criminal Affairs and Security Offences in Shiraz as well as Agahi officials and Ministry of Intelligence agents reasonably suspected of involvement in his torture on 26 May 2019. Habib Afkari and Vahid Afkari filed similar complaints on 25 August 2019.

In late August 2019, the Office of the Prosecutor of Government Employees in Tehran put the lead investigator at Branch 8 of the Office of the Special Prosecutor for Criminal Affairs and Security Offences in Shiraz under investigation for “abuse of position” and “ill-intentioned and unrighteous conduct”, as per Articles 576 and 605 of the 1996 Islamic Penal Code and delegated the task of investigation to Branch 5 of the Assistant Prosecution Office (dadyaree) in Shiraz as the complainants and the complainee were based there. According to Article 576, if a government employee “abuses their position” and “prevents” the implementation of official orders or laws, they shall not be employed as a civil servant for between one to five years. According to Article 605, “ill-intentioned and unrighteous conduct” is punishable by up to three months’ imprisonment or up to 1,500,000 rials (equivalent six US dollars) under article 605 of the 1996 Islamic Penal Code.

In the autumn of 2019, a local assistant prosecution officer (dadyar) in Shiraz interviewed Navid Afkari, Habib Afkari and Vahid Afkari; reviewed the medical records of the three brothers; obtained and recorded the testimony of a former inmate witnessing Navid Afkari being tortured; and summoned the lead investigator at Branch 8 of the Office of the Special Prosecutor for Criminal Affairs and Security Offences in Shiraz for questioning. Information recorded in the judiciary’s online case management system indicates that in February 2020, the local assistant prosecution officer in Shiraz completed the investigation, and returned the documentation gathered to Tehran.

Information recorded in the judiciary’s online case management system indicates that at a later date, the charge of “abuse of position” was removed from the list of charges, and a reference was added to the charge of “corporal mistreatment and abuse”, which is defined under Article 578 of the 1996 Islamic Penal Code.

On 29 April 2020, a prosecution official in the Office of the Prosecutor of Government Employees in Tehran issued a decision clearing the lead investigator at Branch 8 of the Office of the Special Prosecutor for Criminal Affairs and Security Offences in Shiraz of the abovementioned charges concerning “corporal mistreatment and abuse” and “ill-intentioned and unrighteous conduct”, and dismissing the complaints filed by Navid Afkari, Habib Afkari, Vahid Afkari. The same day, this decision was referred to the chief Prosecutor General of Government Employees in Tehran for his approval. The complainants were not granted access to this aspect of their case file, and therefore have no information on the subsequent steps taken in this case. However, a written decision issued by Branch 1058 of Criminal Court 2 of the Judicial Complex related to Government Employees on 18 May 2020 suggests that the chief Prosecutor General of Government Employees in Tehran only partially approved the 29 April 2020 decision; he agreed to clear the lead investigator at Branch 8 of the charge related to “corporal mistreatment and abuse”, but held that the Office of the Prosecutor of Government Employees in Tehran does not have the jurisdiction to decide on the charge related to “ill-intentioned and unrighteous conduct”. This aspect of the case was referred to Branch 1058 of Criminal Court 2 of the Judicial Complex related to Government Employees, which, on 18 May 2020, ordered for the charge to be dropped.

Information available suggests that no action was taken to investigate the allegations of torture raised by Habib Afkari, Vahid Afkari and Navid Afkari against Agahi officials and Ministry of Intelligence agents.

3. COMPLAINT TO THE MILITARY PROSECUTOR OF FARSW Province

Navid Afkari, Habib Afkari, and Vahid Afkari also submitted complaints to the Military Prosecutor of Fars province from inside prison against Agahi officials and Ministry of Intelligence agents suspected of involvement in their torture. The complaints of Navid Afkari and Habib Afkari were formally registered on 5 November 2019; Vahid Afkari was formally registered on 21 January 2020.

The Office of the Military Prosecutor of Fars province has not been consistent in the way it has handled the complaints of the three brothers.

It dismissed the complaints of Navid Afkari and Habib Afkari on 17 December 2019 on grounds that it lacked jurisdiction, without providing a reasoned written decision. Their family were simply informed of this result through an electronic notification from the judiciary’s online case management system. This is while in early November 2019, an official at the Office of the Military Prosecutor indicated to the family that the complaints would be processed by preparing a formal cover letter addressed to the Ministry of Intelligence and the intelligence unit (herasat) of Agahi and asking the family to take the cover letter to the offices of these bodies in Shiraz in person along with a copy of their complaints. At that time,
the official at the Office of the Military Prosecutor told the family that in the cover letter, they had specifically asked Ministry of Intelligence and Agahi officials to reply to their requests for information and provide access to the video recordings of the interrogations conducted at their detention centers.

The complaint of Vahid Afkari has remained open. On 4 January 2021, an investigator from the Office of the Military Prosecutor of Fars province visited Vahid Afkari in prison and interviewed him about the details of his complaint. Vahid Afkari and his relatives are not aware of any further actions. When following up on the status of the complaint, Vahid Afkari’s family has been told by the Office of the Military Prosecutor of Fars province that Ministry of the Intelligence and Agahi officials have failed to reply to their requests for information or provide access to the video recordings of the interrogations conducted at their detention centers.

4. COMPLAINT TO THE JUDICIAL DISCIPLINARY PROSECUTOR

Navid Afkari, Vahid Afkari and Habib Afkari also wrote separate complaints addressed to the Judicial Disciplinary Prosecutor against the lead investigator at Branch 8 of the Office of the Special Prosecutor for Criminal Affairs and Security Offences in Shiraz as well as Ministry of Intelligence agents and Agahi officials reasonably suspected of involvement in their torture, and their family filed them in person between May and June 2019. The Office of the Judicial Disciplinary Prosecutor verbally informed the family that their mode of operation does not involve informing complainants about the status of their complaints. According to an informed source, when the family pressed for updates, an official at the Office of the Judicial Disciplinary Prosecutor accused the family of seeking to evade justice by “using the issue of torture to secure acquittals.”

5. COMPLAINT TO A LOCAL PROSECUTION OFFICE IN SHIRAZ

Navid Afkari and Vahid Afkari also submitted two complaint forms to a local prosecution office in Shiraz on 24 January 2020 against the First Lieutenant of Agahi, whom they identified by name, and other Agahi officials and Ministry of Intelligence agents they suspected of involvement in their torture. On 11 April 2020, Branch 31 of the Assistant Prosecution Office (dadyari dadasa) of Region 1 of Shiraz dismissed the complaints in a written decision that consists of one paragraph. With respect to the case of Navid Afkari, the decision simply states that Branch 10 of the Office of the Special Prosecutor for Criminal Affairs and Security Offences in Shiraz had already considered and dismissed his allegations, and as such, it ordered the case is closed. The decision stated that the complainants had not provided sufficient evidence to prove their allegations of torture, and as such closed the case.

REPRISAL FOR SPEAKING OUT

The Iranian authorities have not only refused to conduct prompt, independent and impartial investigations into the complaints of Afkari brothers, but also subjected them further ongoing torture or other ill-treatment.

Vahid Afkari and Habib Afkari reported being subjected to severe beatings in Adelabad prison in Shiraz on 5 September 2020 before being placed in solitary confinement cells in apparent retaliation for asking about the fate and whereabouts of their brother Navid Afkari, who had been removed to an unidentified location on 3 September; he was executed in secret on 12 September 2020. Since then, they have been held in windowless solitary confinement cells, either together in a single cell or separately. Prison authorities are denying them access to meaningful contact with other prisoners, fresh air, telephone calls and face to face family visits. They are also being deliberately denied adequate health care, including for torture-related injuries. Both suffer from chronic spine pain; Habib Afkari also suffers from toothaches and needs specialized dental care.

Since September 2020, Vahid Afkari and Habib Afkari and their family have repeatedly complained to numerous prison, prosecution and judicial authorities about the their prolonged isolation, and requested that they be moved back to the general ward, but to no avail. The authorities have not provided any explanation as to the basis on which Vahid Afkari and Habib Afkari are being held in prolonged isolation and denied their rights as prisoners. Nor have the authorities identified which official body has issued the order to keep Vahid Afkari and Habib Afkari in isolation in cells designed for solitary confinement.

The family of Vahid Afkari and Habib Afkari has also been targeted for harassment and intimidation.

Around April 2019, the lead investigator of Branch 8 of the Office of the Special Prosecutor for Criminal Affairs and Security Offences in Shiraz filed a complaint against the father of Afkari brothers, Hossein Afkari, accusing him of “libel against a judicial official” and of “insulting a judicial official” through “attributing” to the lead investigator “the crime of torture.”
On 20 June 2019, Branch 109 of Criminal Court 2 of Shiraz convicted Hossein Afkari of these charges, without referring to any evidence and considering the serious allegations of torture raised by Hossein Afkari’s children, and sentenced him to one year’s imprisonment and 74 lashes, but held that in light of his past record and “the prospect for his reform”, half of his prison term and half of his flogging sentence shall be suspended.

On 28 August 2019, Branch 32 of the Criminal Court of Appeal of Fars province quashed the conviction and sentence of Hossein Afkari, in the case of “libel against a judicial official” because the lead investigator had withdrawn his complaint and in the case of “insulting a judicial official” because the court found that sufficient evidence had not been presented.

In the weeks following the execution of Navid Afkari in secret, the threats against his family also intensified. According to an informed source, for weeks following Navid Afkari’s execution, judicial authorities and police, intelligence and security agents repeatedly threatened the family warning them against speaking out further. They included threats to kill Habib Afkari and Vahid Afkari in custody, transfer them to a remote prison away from their home province of Fars or to keep them in solitary confinement for the entire duration of their prison sentences, and threats to detain or kill all members of the family.

The authorities forced the family to bury Navid Afkari at night immediately after his execution in a remote cemetery in the village of Sangar in the county of Sepidan, which is around 75km away from Shiraz, in the presence of intelligence and security officials. They threatened that if the family insisted on examining the body of Navid Afkari or burying him in a cemetery inside Shiraz or holding a funeral ceremony, they would not return Navid Afkari’s body to his family and bury him themselves in a secret unmarked grave.

The authorities did not allow the family to see the body of Navid Afkari prior to the burial; they brought the body to the burial site at night while wrapped in a white shroud and forced the family to immediately bury it. According to an informed source, one member of the family managed to pull down the shroud for a few seconds away from the sight of the intelligence agents and saw signs indicating that Navid Afkari’s nose was broken.

To date, the authorities have prevented the family from installing a gravestone for Navid Afkari and subjected his burial place, which is covered by a simple concrete slab, to desecration. In November 2020, unidentified individuals believed to be affiliated with security and intelligence agents erased a memorial message that his family has written over the concrete slab covering the burial site, which referred to Navid Afkari as a “martyr” (see Annex 15).

In December 2020, while the family was attempting to flatten the ground around his burial place and install a gravestone, local authorities came to the cemetery, bulldozed the area around his burial site, and detained his father and one of his brothers for several hours. The governor of Sepidan county confirmed the incident in a media interview on 18 December 2020, citing as “reason” the failure of the family to respect “construction guidelines” and obtain a “construction permit” (see Annex 16).

In February 2021, unidentified individuals believed to be affiliated with security and intelligence agents desecrated the gravesite by damaging the memorial message that the family had engraved over the concrete slab covering the burial site. The memorial message referred to Navid Afkari as “a world champion” and a “national hero” (see Annex 17).

CRISIS OF SYSTEMIC IMPUNITY

The painful ordeal of Afkari brothers echoes the crisis of systemic impunity that prevails in Iran for widespread use of torture and other ill-treatment in Iran’s prisons and detention centres, including beatings, floggings, electric shocks, stress positions, mock executions, waterboarding, sexual violence, forced administration of chemical substances, and deliberate deprivation of medical care.

Victims and their families have no access to justice domestically as Iran’s judiciary, which must in principle conduct transparent and independent investigations and ensure justice and accountability, is itself a key driver of human rights violations and crimes under international law. Intelligence, and security bodies, as well as prosecution officials involved in carrying out arrests and conducting interrogations, fall under the supervision of the judiciary. Iran’s prisons and detention centres are also managed by the judiciary.

The crisis of systemic impunity prevailing in Iran has enabled individuals reasonably suspected of responsibility for crimes under international law and gross violations of human rights to avoid justice and, instead, rise to powerful positions, as witnessed mostly recently with the presidency of Ebrahim Raisi, who must be investigated for crimes against humanity. This situation has not only had a devastating impact on victims and their families, but also eroded the rule of law and facilitated the repetition of crimes under international law and human rights violations in Iran in a widespread, as well as systematic manner.
RECOMMENDATIONS

Amnesty International renews its calls on the Iranian authorities to:

- Release Vahid Afkari and Habib Afkari as they are arbitrarily detained, quash their unjust convictions and sentences, and drop all charges related to their peaceful participation in protests. If charged with any internationally recognizable criminal offence, retrial proceedings must meet international standards of fair trial and exclude coerced confessions;

- Ensure that pending their release, they are held in conditions meeting international standards for the treatment of prisoners, including access to adequate health care and their families;

- Conduct independent, impartial and thorough criminal investigations against those reasonably suspected of ordering, committing, aiding or abetting the commission of torture against Vahid Afkari, Habib Afkari and their late brother Navid Afkari, and if enough admissible evidence against them is found, prosecute them in fair trials before ordinary civilian courts without recourse to death penalty. Those criminally investigated should include officials at the investigation unit of Iran’s police (Agahi), Ministry of Intelligence agents, prison officials in Adelabad prison, and investigators at Branches 8 and 10 of the Office of the Special Prosecutor for Criminal Affairs and Security Offences in Shiraz, Fars province; and

- Ensure that Vahid Afkari, Habib Afkari and their family are granted with full and effective reparation proportionate to the gravity of human rights violations and harm suffered.

Amnesty International also renews its calls on member states of the UN Human Rights Council to:

- Take concrete steps to address the crisis of systematic impunity in Iran, including by establishing an impartial and independent mechanism to collect, consolidate, preserve, and analyse evidence of the most serious crimes under international law committed in Iran in a manner that meets general standards of admissibility in criminal proceedings in order to facilitate future fair and independent criminal proceedings.
ANNEX 1 – COMPLAINTS WRITTEN BY VAHID AFKARI

The followings are excerpts from a complaint written by Vahid Afkari to the Judicial Disciplinary Prosecutor on 29 May 2019.

In the complaint shown in Figure 1.1, he describes how following the interruption of his hospital treatment for injuries sustained after his first suicide attempt and return to Adelabad prison in October 2018, his surgical incisions got repeatedly infected, in what he believed to be the result of the high levels of dampness in his cell and his lack of access to post-operative care. He further describes how in the following months, he suffered further torture at the hands of Ministry of Intelligence officials, leading him to attempt to commit suicide for the second time.

In the complaint shown in Figure 1.2, he describes that after he attempted suicide again in April 2019, he was admitted, on an emergency basis, to Namazi hospital, but the authorities again prematurely returned him to Adelabad prison, and placed him in solitary confinement for about two weeks in the “Ershad” section, without access to any physical or mental health care. He writes that upon entering this section, prisoners are stripped naked and forced to wear prison clothes which are ripped, filthy and stained with blood marks.

At the bottom of the two complaints depicted in Figure 1.2 and in Figure 1.3, he further reports that in the “Ershad” section, prisoners do not have access to blankets and heating facilities, and that authorities regularly cuff the hands and feet of those who complain and beat them severely.

In the complaints shown in Figure 1.3, he also describes how he was taken several times, while blindfolded, for questioning to an unidentified location, which he was later told by the authorities was the Office of the Special Prosecutor for Criminal Affairs and Security Offences in Shiraz. He notes that during the questioning, he was blindfolded, and the investigator of Branch 8 of the Office of the Special Prosecutor for Criminal Affairs and Security Offences in Shiraz withheld his identity and title. As such, he writes that he was not able to distinguish him from the officials who had interrogated and tortured him at the detention centres of Agahi and Pelak-e 100, and for this reason, he resisted answering him and this led to further torture.
فرم ویژه مکاتبات مجدد جویان

شرح درخواست: معرفی مورد را فقط در محدوده صفحه بیان نمایید:

مدوسامان واسیع و حمایت و تأمین مالی مورد را بتوانند، ولی ارائه دهنده این پیام که مراکز محلی می‌باشد.

درباره مادریت: عضوی از همیاران در مورد عقیده که هرگونه دیده باید به مدارک مربوطه درمان می‌گردد.

طرحی مبنی بر این است که ممکن است در مورد عقیده که هرگونه دیده باید به مدارک مربوطه درمان می‌گردد.

از طرف مادریت: دوباره پیام را ارائه دهنده است. ولی ارائه دهنده این پیام که مراکز محلی می‌باشد.

در صورتی که نشان دهنده نشان دهنده است، باید به مدارک مربوط به این پیام مراجعه کنند.

نتیجه: شامل نشان دهنده است. باید به مدارک مربوط به این پیام مراجعه کنند.

شماره ثبت در دفتر مرکزی: 1008946735

تأیید رئیس امور خارجی
ANNEX 2 – OFFICIAL NOTES REGARDING VAHID AFKARI’S ATTEMPTED SUICIDE

The following are two official notes, dated 14 October 2018 and 20 October 2018 and signed by prison guards and Agahi officials, which report to senior prison officials and the investigators leading on Vahid Afkari’s case that he had waged a hunger strike and said that by doing so, he sought to commit “a slow suicide” to emphasize that he is “innocent” and to bring his plight to the attention of judicial authorities.
ANNEX 3 – MEDICAL WARNING FROM NAMAZI HOSPITAL AGAINST VAHID AFKARI’S DISCHARGE

The following is a medical note from April 2019 signed by medical professionals at Namazi hospital warning that Vahid Afkari’s premature discharge and return to prison would put him at a serious risk of reduced consciousness and low oxygen levels possibly leading to cardiac arrest and death. At the bottom of the note, there is a sentence, handwritten and finger stamped by Vahid Afkari, which states that “I, Vahid Afkari, the son of Hossein, give my consent, in a state of perfect sanity, to be discharged from Namazi hospital, and the responsibility of all the consequences will rest with myself.”

An informed source told Amnesty International that Vahid Afkari was forced, under conditions of duress, to make this declaration. The names and signatures of various officials are also seen at the bottom of the note, which indicates that they were notified of the warning.
ANNEX 4 – WRITTEN STATEMENT BY HABIBI AFKARI TO LEAD INVESTIGATOR

The following is an excerpt from a written statement made by Habib Afkari before the lead investigator of Branch 10 of the Office of the Special Prosecutor for Criminal Affairs and Security Offences in Shiraz on 29 July 2019, wherein he describes how he was physically assaulted and verbally abused immediately upon arrival to the detention centre of the Ministry of Intelligence in Shiraz, and when he asked the Ministry of Intelligence agents where he was, they told him, “this is a place where we pull out your testicles and make roosters lay eggs”. Habib Afkari further reports that the smell was foul in the solitary confinement cell where he was held in for 35 days because its toilet unit was clogged. He adds that a bright lamp was on 24 hours a day, causing him growing mental distress.
ANNEX 5 – COMPLAINTS BY HABIBI AFKARI TO PROSECUTOR GENERAL

The followings are excerpts from a complaint submitted by Habib Afkari to the then prosecutor general of Shiraz in May 2019, wherein he describes how between 13 December 2018 and 17 January 2019, his interrogators at the Ministry of Intelligence repeatedly subjected him to torture and other cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment to force him to write a series of incriminating statements against himself and his brothers. He notes that he initially resisted but, as the days went by, the torture intensified and there came a point when he was no longer able to withstand further torture and felt like he was dying.

In the complaint reproduced in Figure 5.1, Habib Afkari describes how the interrogators repeatedly held him in cells where he could hear his brother Navid Afkari screaming and crying from pain, and told him, “if Navid dies under torture, you will be responsible”; and suggested that if he wrote the dictated statements that incriminated him and his brother, they would stop torturing Navid Afkari.

Figure 5.2 depicts a complaint by Habib Afkari which describes how while in detention, he suffered from severe toothaches, but the authorities refused to give him any painkillers, and as a result, he was left screaming and constantly hitting his head against a wall in pain. He noted that in response to his repeated requests to see a doctor, the authorities said while mocking and swearing at him, “once you are terminated [implying death], we will take you to a doctor, but not now”.

At the bottom of complaints shown in Figure 5.2 and in Figure 5.3, he describes how for several days in a row, intelligence agents chained him while blindfolded to a chair, which was itself fixed to a wall, and wrapped his face and head in a plastic sheet in a way that obstructed his breathing and made him feel like he was suffocating. He writes that one of the agents present told him each time he tightened the plastic sheet over his head, “tell me whenever you decide to write [the incriminating statements dictated by the authorities] and I will remove the plastic wrap”.

At the bottom of complaints shown in Figure 5.3 and in Figure 5.4, he describes how one night, the intelligence agents tied his hands behind his the back, took him to a dark room, threw him on the ground, and pulled his hands up so intensely that his left shoulder got dislocated. Habib Afkari states that after this happened, he heard one of the torturers saying that they might have broken his shoulder and the other torturer responding, “it doesn’t matter. If he [Habib] keeps acting so stubborn, I will also burst his testicles.”

In the complaint shown in Figure 5.4, he adds that immediately afterwards, one of the officials made him sit on a chair and told him while yelling profanities, “you have no option but to write whatever I dictate”. Habib Afkari writes, “from this point onwards, my brain no longer functioned and I lost the ability to think. I started writing under duress almost everything they dictated to me”. 
Figure 5.1

فرم ویژه مکاتبات محدود جویان

رضا میرعمالی

شماره لیست در دفتر مدعی:

تأیید رییس انتدبرگاه:

تأیید مقام مسئول (غرب مهدی النبیه است):

اثر انگشت مدعی:

متن درخواست: دری‌کردن ارام را فقط در مبنای مرحبا نمایید:

شکایت عمومی شورای عالی استادان مهندسی است. در این شکایت، همچنین نکته‌هایی در مورد یک حداقل پایه‌ای از حیات مراکز اطلاعاتی مطرح می‌شود. در این شکایت، نیاز به همکاری در امور اطلاعاتی مطرح می‌شود. در این شکایت، نیاز به همکاری در امور اطلاعاتی مطرح می‌شود. در این شکایت، نیاز به همکاری در امور اطلاعاتی مطرح می‌شود. در این شکایت، نیاز به همکاری در امور اطلاعاتی مطرح می‌شود. در این شکایت، نیاز به همکاری در امور اطلاعاتی مطرح می‌شود.
شرح درخواست: خرید خود را فقط در هنگام صبح یا نیمه صبح پانزدهم

| شماره لیست در دفتر مددکار: |

تأیید مقام مسئول (مجرد مهر زامی است): [بسته]

کوپ: فرمی که تا پایان سال ۹۸ می‌تواند، مراقبت‌ها برای مراحل اخراج را به خاطر داشته باشند، می‌تواند در مورد سه گروه اطلاعات:

- شرح درخواست
- توضیحات
- شماره لیست در دفتر مددکار

| توضیحات پیشنهادی: [بسته] |
فرم ویژه مکاتبات مجدد جویان

شماره ثبت در دفتر مدرک:

تأیید مقدم ستوان (ضربه مرگ‌آمیز است):

تأیید م personn

لذتی: فرمایش به دستور قضایی فرمان قضایی، سمتلین زاده، راستی قاضی، در صورتی که می‌تواند تأثیر گذار بگذارد، تأیید می‌کند.

تأیید رئیس اداره:

شماره ژانویه 1360

تأیید مقدم ستوان (ضرع مهر الزایی است):

تأیید م personn

لذتی: فرمایش به دستور قضایی فرمان قضایی، سمتلین زاده، راستی قاضی، در صورتی که می‌تواند تأثیر گذار بگذارد، تأیید می‌کند.

تأیید رئیس اداره:

شماره ژانویه 1360

تأیید م personn

لذتی: فرمایش به دستور قضایی فرمان قضایی، سمتلین زاده، راستی قاضی، در صورتی که می‌تواند تأثیر گذار بگذارد، تأیید می‌کند.

تأیید رئیس اداره:

شماره ژانویه 1360

تأیید م personn

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شماره ژانویه 1360

تأیید م personn

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تأیید رئیس اداره:

شماره ژانویه 1360

تأیید م personn

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تأیید رئیس اداره:

شماره ژانویه 1360

تأیید م personn

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تأیید رئیس اداره:

شماره ژانویه 1360

تأیید م personn

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تأیید رئیس اداره:

شماره ژانویه 1360

تأیید م personn

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تأیید رئیس اداره:

شماره ژانویه 1360

تأیید م personn

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تأیید رئیس اداره:

شماره ژانویه 1360

تأیید م personn

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تأیید رئیس اداره:

شماره ژانویه 1360

تأیید م personn

لذتی: فرمایش به دستور قضایی فرمان قضایی، سمتلین زاده، راستی قاضی، در صورتی که می‌تواند تأثیر گذار بگذارد، تأیید می‌کند.

تأیید رئیس اداره:

شماره ژانویه 1360

تأیید م personn

لذتی: فرمایش به دستور قضایی فرمان قضایی، سمتلین زاده، راستی قاضی، در صورتی که می‌تواند تأثیر گذار بگذارد، تأیید می‌کند.

تأیید رئیس اداره:

شماره ژانویه 1360

تأیید م personn

لذتی: فرمایش به دستور قضایی فرمان قضایی، سمتلین زاده، راستی قاضی، در صورتی که می‌تواند تأثیر گذار بگذار
ANNEX 6 – NOTE FROM LEGAL MEDICINE ORGANIZATION OF IRAN REGARDING HABIB AFKARI

The following is an official medical note from the Legal Medicine Organization of Iran, dated 30 October 2019, which confirms that tears were evident in Habib Afkari’s left shoulder and that his left wrist and one of the toes in his right foot had fractured.
ANNEX 7 – COMPLAINTS BY NAVID AFKARI TO COURT

Figure 7.1 depicts a complaint written by Habib Afkari’s late brother Navid Afkari to the head of Criminal Court 2 of Shiraz on 20 January 2020 wherein he describes how, in January 2019, while he was held in the detention center of the Ministry of Intelligence, he was taken to a room and shown his brother Habib being chained by his hands and feet to a chair, which was fixed to a wall, and having his head and face wrapped in a plastic sheet. In Figure 7.2, he writes, “right after seeing this scene, I started crying and begging. I wanted to hit my head against a wall and kill myself”.

Figure 7.1
ANNEX 8 – STATEMENTS BY HABIB AFKARI TO LEAD INVESTIGATOR

This is an excerpt from a written statement made by Habib Afkari before the lead investigator at Branch 10 of the Office of the Special Prosecutor for Criminal Affairs and Security Offences in Shiraz on 25 April 2019 wherein he reports being punched to the chest near his heart, and describes how he suffered from severe headaches and seizures as a result of torture, for which he did not receive medical care. He also describes how while held in solitary confinement for 35 days, the interrogators threatened that if he did not “confess”, they would kill his brothers and/or other members of his family.
ANNEX 9 – COMPLAINTS BY HABIBI AFKARI REGARDING HIS TORTURE

The following images are excerpts from a written complaint submitted by Habib Afkari to the lead investigator at Branch 8 of the Office of the Special Prosecutor for Criminal Affairs and Security Offences in Shiraz on 7 May 2019 wherein he describes being subjected to various forms of torture and other ill-treatment to “confess”.

In the complaint reproduced in Figure 9.1, Habib Afkari lists the various forms of physical and psychological torture to which he was subjected to “confess”, includes beatings, and threats to kill or otherwise harm his brothers, mother, wife, and/or pregnant sister. Habib Afkari writes that these threats caused him headaches, seizures and severe mental distress and drove him to “the threshold of madness”.

In another complaints shown in Figure 9.2, he reports that Ministry of Intelligence repeatedly told him that he was held in a detention centre run by the Ministry of the Intelligence and in such facilities, “there is no oversight” and “we [Ministry of Intelligence agents] are capable of doing anything”.

شرح درخواست: عرضه خود را فقط در همان صفحه بیان نمایید:

اول: امتیازهای مصرفی


نام مراجعه کننده: 


شماره نیست در دفتر مجدد کاری:


تأیید مقام مستقیم (ضرر مرگ رامی است):


تأیید رئیس انتکاب کاره:


تأیید مقام مستقیم (ضرر مرگ رامی است):
Figure 9.2
ANNEX 10 – RETRACTION OF TORTURE-TAINTED “CONFESSIONS” BY NAVID AFKARI

The following is an excerpt from a hand-written statement made by Navid Afkari before Branch 10 of the Office of the Special Prosecutor for Criminal Affairs and Security Offences in Shiraz on 24 April 2019. He calls for the charges brought against him to be dropped, stating: “Whatever I have said or written in the [detention centres of] Agahi and the Ministry of Intelligence has been due to threats, pressure, and repeated and recurrent mental and physical torture. The accusations are all fabricated, baseless, and total falsehoods.”
ANNEX 11 – RETRACTION OF TORTURE-TAINTED “CONFESSIONS” BY VAHID AFKARI

The following is an excerpt from a hand-written statement by Vahid Afkari before Branch 10 of the Office of the Special Prosecutor for Criminal Affairs and Security Offences in Shiraz on 24 April 2019 wherein he retracts his “confessions” saying they were extracted through torture and other ill-treatment.

In the first statement, shown in Figure 11.1, he states: “All of the statements extracted from me during the past period in [the detention centres of] Agahi and the Ministry of Intelligence were obtained under pressure and I only wrote what the respective officials dictated to me. Now that I am in a better situation and away from mental and physical pressure, I fully deny the statements extracted from me.”

In the second statement, shown in Figure 11.2, he states: “I was threatened that if I did not confess, my mother would be arrested and I would never see my brothers [alive] again; this led me to attempt suicide.”

Figure 11.1
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>اسم السجل</th>
<th>شعبة</th>
<th>تاريخ</th>
<th>موضوع</th>
<th>جوانب</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Figure 11.2**
ANNEX 12 – WRITTEN STATEMENT BY HABIBI AFKARI RETRACTING HIS “CONFESSIONS”

The following is an excerpt from a hand-written statement by Habib Afkari before Branch 10 of the Office of the Special Prosecutor for Criminal Affairs and Security Offences in Shiraz on 24 April 2019 wherein he retracts his “confessions” saying they were extracted through torture and other ill-treatment.
ANNEX 13 – NAVID AFKARI’S SUBMISSIONS TO COURT

The followings are excerpts from Navid Afkari’s submission to the head of Branch 1 of Criminal Court 1 of Fars province on 13 August 2019.

In the statement seen in Figure 13.1, Navid Afkari writes that he repeatedly denied the charges brought against him and his brother before the lead investigators of Branches 8 and 10 of the Office of the Special Prosecutor for Criminal Affairs and Security Offences in Shiraz, and complained to them that he had been tortured by Agahi officials and Ministry of Intelligence agents interrogating him to make incriminating statements against himself and his brother.

In the statements seen in Figure 13.1 and in Figure 13.2, he writes that during the first trial session on 3 August 2019, he informed the presiding judge that he had been tortured to “confess” and referred to two medical notes in this relation, but the judge refused to order an investigation, and told him, “Maybe you were injured in another way while in the detention centre or in prison”.

In statements shown in Figures 13.3 and 13.4, he reports that on 18 September 2018 – that is a day after his arrest – Agahi officials transferred him to a location, which they did not identify to him; there, he was questioned, while blindfolded and without his knowledge, by the lead investigator and subjected to beatings and slurs of a sexual nature to sign several incriminating statements without even being allowed to read them. Navid Afkari writes that he only realized several months later that the location to which he had been taken on 18 September 2018 was the Office of the Special Prosecutor for Criminal Affairs and Security Offences in Shiraz and the individual who had questioned him was the lead investigator.

As seen in Figure 13.4, he writes that on at least two occasions in October 2018 and November 2018, the lead investigator of Branch 8 of the Office of the Special Prosecutor for Criminal Affairs and Security Offences in Shiraz came to where he was held (the detention centres run by Branch 5 of Agahi and the Ministry of Intelligence, respectively), and explicitly ordered that he be tortured to give self-incriminating answers.
فرم ویژه مکاتبات مدعو جویان

شرح درخواست: عرضه خواش در مورد صفحه بالا نشان داده شد:

درخواست مقدماتی پرداختن به سمت مداوم و تمایل غالب، در مورد تعداد زیاد از داده‌هایی که ممکن است بررسی‌های اجرایی و نظرسنجی‌های مختلفی پیش گیرند.

درخواست، مسئولیت‌های جدیدی را به دانشمندان و محققان ماهیتی یاد می‌دهد. در این راستا، درخواست، مطرح می‌کند که این مسئولیت‌ها به عنوان نیکوکاری و بهداشت عمومی منجر شود.

درخواست، مسئولیت‌های جدیدی را به دانشمندان و محققان ماهیتی یاد می‌دهد. در این راستا، درخواست، مطرح می‌کند که این مسئولیت‌ها به عنوان نیکوکاری و بهداشت عمومی منجر شود.

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تأیید رییس امورگاه:

نام‌های ویژه که بدون مسئولیت در آزمایش شدند مراجعه می‌شوند، مسئولیت اجرای درخواست شده مسئولیت مناسبی داشته و ترتیب اجرای داده شود.
شرح فرم ویژه ملاحظات مسدده چونیان

شماره لیست در دفتر کاری:

تأیید مقام مستند: (ضرب مهر الزامی است)
ANNEX 14 – NOTE FROM LEGAL MEDICINE ORGANIZATION OF IRAN REGARDING NAVID AFKARI

The following is an official medical note, issued by the Legal Medicine Organization of Iran, a forensic institute under the supervision of the judiciary, and dated 29 May 2019, which confirms that Navid Afkari suffered a broken bone in his right hand. However, it adds that due to the passage of time, and the fact that he was not medically examined right after the injury occurred, it was impossible to determine with certainty the date of the incident leading to the injury and the causes and circumstances around it.
ANNEX 15 – PICTURES FROM DESECRATION OF NAVID AFKARI’S BURIAL SITE IN NOVEMBER 2020

The following pictures show the gravesite of Navid Afkari before and after it was subjected to desecration in November 2020 by unidentified individuals believed to be affiliated with security and intelligence agents. The desecration involved erasing a message that his family had written over the concrete slab covering the burial site, which referred to Navid Afkari as a “martyr”.

[Images of the gravesite before and after desecration]
ANNEX 16 – A PICTURE FROM DESECRATION OF NAVID AFKARI’S BURIAL SITE IN DECEMBER 2020

The following picture shows the state of the area around Navid Afkari’s burial site in December 2020 after local authorities bulldozed the area around his burial site, and detained his father and one of his brothers for several hours in apparent retaliation for their attempts to flatten the ground around Navid Afkari’s burial site burial place to install a gravestone.
ANNEX 17- PICTURES FROM DESECRATION OF NAVID AFKARI’S BURIAL SITE IN FEBRUARY 2021

The following two pictures are from the gravesite of Navid Afkari before and after it was subjected to desecration in February 2021 by unidentified individuals believed to be affiliated with security and intelligence agents. The desecration involved damaging the memorial message that the family had engraved over the concrete slab covering the burial site. The memorial message referred to Navid Afkari as “a world champion” and a “national hero”.

![Before desecration](image1.jpg)

![After desecration](image2.jpg)