

URGENT ACTION

FOUR AHWAZI ARAB MEN SECRETLY EXECUTED

Ali Khasraji, Hossein Silawi, Jasem Heidary and Naser Khafajian, from Iran's Ahwazi Arab minority, were executed in secret in Sepidar prison on 28 February 2021. The Iranian authorities are concealing the full truth about their fate as well as the location of their graves and are refusing to return their bodies to their families, thereby committing the ongoing crime of enforced disappearance. Ahwazi Arab prisoners of conscience Mohammad Ali Amouri, Jaber Alboshokeh and Mokhtar Alboshokeh continue to be denied adequate health care.

TAKE ACTION: WRITE AN APPEAL IN YOUR OWN WORDS OR USE THIS MODEL LETTER

*Head of judiciary, Ebrahim Raisi
c/o Embassy of Iran to the European Union
Avenue Franklin Roosevelt No. 15,
1050 Bruxelles
Belgium*

Dear Mr Raisi,

On 28 February 2021, **Ali Khasraji, Hossein Silawi, Jasem Heidary and Naser Khafajian**, from Iran's Ahwazi Arab minority, were executed in secret without prior notice to them or their families. The Iranian authorities have not provided death certificates or returned their bodies to their families. Men in plainclothes, who did not identify themselves but believed to be agents from the ministry of intelligence, told the families that the men would be buried in "la'nat abad" ("damned land") without specifying a location. By concealing the full truth about the men's executions, hiding their bodies and failing to return them to their families, the authorities are committing the ongoing crime of enforced disappearance.

Ahwazi Arab prisoners of conscience **Mohammad Ali Amouri, Jaber Alboshokeh and Mokhtar Alboshokeh** remain unjustly imprisoned in Sheiban prison, Kuzestan province, where they are serving a life sentence solely because of their peaceful work with a now-disbanded cultural rights group called Al-Hiwar ("Dialogue" in Arabic). Jaber Alboshokeh suffers from a dental infection and Mokhtar Alboshokeh from a jawbone infection, but the authorities have been denying them access to a dentist for months.

On 28 February, Ali Khasraji, Hossein Silawi and Jasem Heidary were taken from solitary confinement in Sheiban prison to Sepidar prison, and Naser Khafajian, who had been forcibly disappeared since April 2020, was transferred to Sepidar prison from Dezful prison, Khuzestan province. The men had brief family visits that day, though none were told this was to be a last visit before their executions were to be carried out. Following this visit, their relatives were taken to separate rooms at the prison. Shortly after, Ali Khasraji's relative was taken to an area with four black bags; a prison guard opened one bag to reveal Ali Khasraji's body. According to an informed source, Jasem Heidary's body was also shown to his relative. On 1 March 2021, state media reported the executions of Ali Khasraji, Hossein Silawi and Naser Khafajian.

I ask you to immediately reveal the full truth about the secret executions of Ali Khasraji, Hossein Silawi, Jasem Heidary and Naser Khafajian and the location of their remains and return their bodies to their families. I further urge you to release Mohammad Ali Amouri, Jaber Alboshokeh and Mokhtar Alboshokeh immediately and unconditionally. Pending their release, they must be provided with adequate health care, including transfer to outside facilities for treatment unavailable in prison.

Yours sincerely,

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

According to an informed source, on the day of the executions, ministry of intelligence agents phoned the families of Ali Khasraji, Hossein Silawi, Jasem Heidary and Naser Khafajian and said one person from each family would be permitted to have a prison visit that day. Agents instructed family members to wait at a public space in Ahvaz, Khuzestan province, where they were then blindfolded and driven to an unknown location, revealed to be Sepidar prison upon arrival. At the prison, the families had visits with all four men. According to an informed source, bruising was visible on all four men, raising concerns that they had been tortured or otherwise ill-treated, and the lips of Ali Khasraji, Hossein Silawi and Jasem Heidary had not healed from when they sowed them shut on hunger strike. After the visit and the execution of the men, ministry of intelligence agents told the four families that they were not permitted to hold public memorials or invite family to their home to mourn, and that they were only permitted to hold a private memorial without visitors. There has also been an alarming rise in executions of ethnic minority prisoners since mid-December 2020 in Iran, which includes the execution of Ali Motairi, also a member of Iran's Ahwazi Arab minority, on 28 January 2021, and the executions of at least 20 Baluchi prisoners.

In January 2020, the judiciary spokesperson had announced that three men had been sentenced to death in relation to an armed attack on a police station in Ahvaz on 14 May 2017 that led to the death of two officials. While the spokesperson did not identify them by name, the case details he revealed indicated that he was referring to Hossein Silawi, Ali Khasraji and Naser Khafajian. That same month, prison officials told the three men that they had been sentenced to death for the May 2017 attack. They were convicted and sentenced following unfair trials and never given copies of their verdicts. On 8 October 2020, the Iranian government wrote to the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights that "the case [against these three men] is still pending" and that "since the legal proceedings have not hitherto been completed, it is inadmissible to raise the issue of ... capital punishment."

Jasem Heidary was sentenced to death following an unfair trial which convicted him of collaboration with armed opposition groups. His verdict was upheld in November 2020. On 23 January 2021, Ali Khasraji, Hossein Silawi and Jasem Heidary sewed their lips shut and went on hunger strike in protest at their prison conditions, denial of family visits, and the ongoing threat of execution. They ended their hunger strike in mid-February 2021.

Under international law, the crime of enforced disappearance continues until the state releases information pertaining to the fate or whereabouts of the individuals concerned, and this requires, when the disappeared person is found to be dead, returning the remains to their family, who have the right to dispose of those remains according to their own tradition, religion or culture. The anguish inflicted on families due to the continuing uncertainty around the fate of their loved ones and the location of their remains violates the absolute prohibition on torture and other ill-treatment.

Khuzestan province has a large Arab population who generally self-identify as "Ahwazi Arabs". Despite Khuzestan's natural resource wealth, the province suffers from severe socioeconomic deprivation and high levels of air and water pollution. Continued under-investment in Khuzestan province by the central government has exacerbated poverty and marginalization. Ahwazi Arabs face entrenched discrimination curtailing equal access to education, employment, adequate housing and political office. Despite repeated calls for linguistic diversity, Persian remains the sole language of instruction in primary and secondary education in the province.

PREFERRED LANGUAGE TO ADDRESS TARGET: Persian, English

You can also write in your own language.

PLEASE TAKE ACTION AS SOON AS POSSIBLE UNTIL: 13 May 2021

Please check with the Amnesty office in your country if you wish to send appeals after the deadline.

NAME AND PREFERRED PRONOUN: Naser Khafajian, Ali Khasraji, Hossein Silawi, Jasem Heidary Mohammad Ali Amouri, Jaber Alboshokeh, Mokhtar Alboshokeh (all he/him)

LINK TO PREVIOUS UA: <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/mde13/2237/2020/en/>