



STOP IMMINENT DESTRUCTION OF MASS GRAVE SITE OF VICTIMS OF 1988 PRISON KILLINGS

SUMMARY

Immediate action is needed to stop the imminent destruction of a mass grave site in the southern Iranian city of Ahvaz, Khuzestan Province, where the bodies of dozens of the several thousand political prisoners who were extrajudicially executed by the authorities in August and September 1988 are buried. This year marks the 29th anniversary of the mass prisoner killings.

Construction around the site was brought to Amnesty International's attention in May 2017, at which time the organization issued a [press release](#) calling on the Iranian authorities to stop destroying the mass grave site. The organization has since obtained new footage which shows the site is gradually being buried beneath massive piles of construction waste and is, therefore, under increased threat.

OBJECTIVE

- To stop the destruction of the mass grave site in Ahvaz containing the bodies of dozens of victims of the 1988 mass prison killings and ensure that it is preserved and protected until proper, independent investigations can be carried out.

CALLS ON THE IRANIAN AUTHORITIES

- Immediately stop the destruction of the mass grave site in Ahvaz containing the bodies of dozens of victims of the 1988 mass prison killings and ensure that it is preserved and protected until proper, independent investigations can be carried out.
- Stop the harassment and persecution of human rights defenders seeking truth, justice and reparation for past violations, notably the relatives of the victims of mass executions in 1988.
- Conduct a thorough, effective and independent investigation into the extrajudicial executions of 1988, and bring to justice those responsible in fair proceedings without recourse to the death penalty.
- Recognize, in words and practice, that mass graves are crime scenes that require professional forensic expertise to undertake exhumations and ensure preservation of evidence and accurate identification of bodies.

SUGGESTION ACTIONS

1. LETTER WRITING

Please send appeals by letters and emails to the following targets in Iran, using the sample letter in Appendix 1. Where possible, please also send copies of letters to the Iranian embassy in your country.

Given the imminent risk of destruction of the mass grave site, we urge you to undertake this letter writing action as soon as possible.

TARGET	ADDRESS	EMAIL / SOCIAL MEDIA
Chair of Ahvaz City Council Mohammad Jafar Falsafi	131 Soghlat Gharbi Street Amaniyeh Ahvaz, Islamic Republic of Iran	info@ahvaz.ir info@falsafy.net
Secretary General of the High Council for Human Rights Mohammad Javad Larijani	Esfandiar Boulevard Niayesh Intersection Vali Asr Avenue Tehran, Islamic Republic of Iran	larijani@ipm.ir
Deputy for Human Rights and International Affairs, Ministry of Justice Mahmoud Abbasi	Number 1638, Below Vali Asr Square Vali Asr Avenue Tehran, Islamic Republic of Iran Post code: 1416783619	dr.abbasi@sbmu.ac.ir

2. SOCIAL MEDIA ACTION

Please use social media to urgently raise international awareness of the imminent destruction of this mass grave site.

TWITTER

Please target the following authorities with tweets in Persian, English or your own language.

Minister of Foreign Affairs

Mohammad Javad Zarif: @JZarif

Supreme Leader

Ayatollah Ali Khamanei

@khamenei_ir (English-language account)

@Khamenei_fa (Persian-language account)

@Khamenei_ar (Arabic-language account)

@Khamenei_es (Spanish-language account)

Sample tweets are provided below. Please use the hashtag #MassGraves88 in all tweets as this is already being used by activists and included in the video.

#Iran's @JZarif must halt destruction of #MassGraves88 in Ahvaz NOW! Dozens of bodies buried from 1988 mass prisoner killings

Families of victims of 1988 Iran mass prison killings forced to walk through rubbish and debris to visit loved ones @JZarif #MassGraves88

RT to tell #Iran's @khamenei_ir to stop destroying #MassGraves88 in Ahvaz

RT to tell Iran's @JZarif that #MassGraves88 in Ahvaz are crime scenes that must be preserved for investigations

#Iran's @khamenei_ir must end bans on memorials for 1988 mass prisoner killings & stop desecration of #MassGraves88

جمهوری اسلامی ایران باید تخریب #گورهای_جمعی_۶۷ اهواز را متوقف کند. آنجا محل دفن ده‌ها تن از قربانیان کشتار ۶۷ است @Jzarif

خانواده‌های قربانیان کشتار ۶۷ در اهواز برای بازدید از #گورهای_جمعی_۶۷ عزیزان‌شان مجبورند از زباله و نخاله‌های ساختمانی بالا بروند

@khamenei_ir هتک حرمت و تخریب #گورهای_جمعی_۶۷ اهواز باید متوقف شود

@Jzarif #گورهای_جمعی_۶۷ صحنه‌ی جرم هستند و باید برای انجام تحقیقات محافظت شوند

@khamenei_ir به ممنوعیت برگزاری مراسم یادبود برای قربانیان کشتار ۶۷ پایان دهید و از نابودی #گورهای_جمعی_۶۷ جلوگیری کنید

INSTAGRAM

Please use the following message on Instagram and tag the accounts of the Ahvaz City Council officials listed below:

Imminent destruction threatens a mass grave site in the city of Ahvaz, southern Iran, which contains the bodies of dozens of people killed during a wave of extrajudicial executions across the country in August and September 1988. This would destroy crucial evidence of past crimes and deprive the families of their rights to truth, justice and reparation, including the right to bury their loved ones with dignity. Ahvaz City Council must immediately stop the destruction of the mass grave and ensure that it is preserved and protected until proper, independent investigations are carried out. #Iran #MassGraves88 #Ahvaz #humanrights #massgraves #extrajudicialkillings

The following Instagram accounts are those of nine members of Ahvaz City Council:

Mohammad Jafar Falsafi

<https://www.instagram.com/explore/tags/محمدجعفرفلسفی/>

Mehran Babapour

<https://www.instagram.com/mehran.babapour1396/>

Seyed Naser Mousavi Nezhad

https://www.instagram.com/mousavi_nezhad/

Maziar Jahanbakhshi

<https://www.instagram.com/maziarjahanbakhshi/>

Seyed Mohsen Mousavizade

<https://www.instagram.com/seyedmohsenmousavizade/>

Jasem Musapur

<https://www.instagram.com/h.musapur/>

Rahim Kaab Omeyr

<https://www.instagram.com/rahim.kaab.omeyr/>

Fathollah Hajati

<https://www.instagram.com/dr.hajati/>

Mohammad Hadi Ghanavat

https://www.instagram.com/m_hadighanavat/

FACEBOOK

Please use the following message on Facebook along with the video link to raise awareness about this issue:

Imminent destruction threatens a mass grave site in the city of Ahvaz, southern Iran, which contains the bodies of dozens of people killed during a wave of extrajudicial executions across the country in 1988. Amnesty International calls on Ahvaz City Council to immediately stop the destruction of the mass grave and ensure that it is preserved and protected until proper, independent investigations are carried out.

BACKGROUND

The mass grave site in Ahvaz contains the remains of at least 44 people who were among several thousand political prisoners extrajudicially executed across the country in 1988. There are other similar mass graves in Iran, but this action focuses solely on the one in Ahvaz, where there is an imminent risk of the mass grave being destroyed by the city council.

The mass grave site is located on a barren piece of land 3km east of Ahvaz's Behesht Abad cemetery. The prisoners buried there were rounded up and forcibly disappeared before being killed in secret. Their bodies were then dumped at night into freshly dug trenches. The authorities poured concrete over the mass graves immediately after the burial, apparently to prevent family members from digging up the ground and recovering the bodies of their loved ones.

Photographic and video evidence obtained by Amnesty International and the human rights organization [Justice for Iran](#) show bulldozers working on a construction project directly alongside the mass grave site in Ahvaz, as well as piles of dirt and construction debris surrounding the grave. The evidence features in a video created by the two organizations.

The Iranian authorities have made no official announcements about their plans. However, in May 2017, a construction worker told one family member that the work under way to widen the road running alongside the mass grave site would bring the road very close to the site and that the next phase of works would raze the concrete structure completely to clear the area for a "green space" or a commercial development.

Over the past three decades, the Iranian authorities have denied the families of the victims of the 1988 executions the right to give their loved ones a dignified burial and forbidden them from holding commemorative gatherings or decorating the mass grave sites with memorial messages. They have regularly tormented the families by referring to the mass grave sites of the victims of the 1988 executions as "damned land" (*la'nat abad*). In Ahvaz, families have long been forced to walk through piles of rubbish to visit the resting place of their dead loved ones.

To date, no Iranian officials have been investigated or brought to justice for the 1988 extrajudicial executions. Some of the alleged perpetrators continue to hold political office or other influential positions, including in the judiciary.

AUDIOVISUAL MATERIALS

The following video created by Amnesty International and Justice for Iran is available on Amnesty International Iran's YouTube channel: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DmP3zQjFGuo&feature=youtu.be>

BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

Press Release, *Iran: Desecrating mass grave site would destroy crucial forensic evidence*, 1 June 2017, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2017/06/iran-desecrating-mass-grave-site-would-destroy-crucial-forensic-evidence/>

For more information on the background and the efforts of human rights defenders seeking truth, justice and reparation for thousands of prisoners who were summarily executed or forcibly disappeared in the 1980s, see Chapter 10 of *Caught in a web of repression: Iran's human rights defenders under attack*

(Index number: MDE 13/6446/2017), 2 August 2017,
<https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/mde13/6446/2017/en/>

APPENDIX 1: SAMPLE LETTER

Dear members of Ahvaz City Council

I am distressed to learn of the ongoing desecration and destruction of a mass grave site in Ahvaz which contains the bodies of dozens of people killed during the mass extrajudicial executions of several thousand political prisoners across Iran in August and September 1988.

I urge you to immediately stop the destruction of the mass grave site and ensure that it is preserved and protected until proper, independent investigations are carried out and those responsible are brought to justice in fair proceedings without recourse to the death penalty.

I respectfully remind you that mass graves are crime scenes that require professional forensic expertise to undertake exhumations and ensure preservation of evidence and accurate identification of bodies. Families of victims also have the right to truth, justice and reparation, including the right to bury their loved ones in dignity.

Yours sincerely

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APPENDIX 2: SAMPLE PETITION

Urgent action is needed to stop the destruction of a mass grave site in the city of Ahvaz, southern Iran, which contains the bodies of dozens of people killed during a wave of extrajudicial executions across the country in August and September 1988.

During that time, several thousand political prisoners were killed in secret and their bodies were dumped in ditches at night. The authorities have never permitted the victims' families to give their loved ones a dignified burial or hold memorials. In Ahvaz, the authorities poured concrete over the mass graves and the site was subsequently turned into a rubbish dump.

Nearly three decades on since the killings, the authorities are undertaking a construction project that appears aimed at destroying the victims' final resting place. This would erase crucial evidence of past crimes and deprive the families of their rights to truth, justice and reparation, including the right to bury their loved ones in dignity.

Mass graves are crime scenes that must be preserved and protected until proper, independent investigations are carried out and those responsible are brought to justice, in fair proceedings without recourse to the death penalty.