



AI Index: MDE 13/4480/2021
19 July 2021

Rights Groups: Iranian Dissidents Remain at Risk Worldwide Without International Action

We, the undersigned human rights and civil society organizations, are deeply alarmed by the alleged attempt by Iranian state agents to [kidnap](#) Iranian-American dissident journalist and activist [Masih Alinejad](#) from U.S. soil. The alleged plan to abduct Alinejad was apparently part of a wider scheme of targeting Iranian dissidents, including those living in Canada and the United Kingdom, and was allegedly orchestrated by four Iranian nationals who have been charged [with conspiracy to kidnap](#), according to an [indictment](#) unsealed on July 13, 2021, in Manhattan federal court.

This was not an isolated incident. There is a history of such abductions by agents of the Islamic Republic of Iran, reflecting the authorities' long-standing pattern of repressing peaceful dissent by people inside and outside Iran.

For example, the [dissident journalist Ruhollah Zam](#) was abducted by Iranian state agents during a trip to Iraq from his home in France and forcibly returned to Iran where he was later subjected to torture and other ill-treatment and [executed](#) in December 2020 after an unfair trial. In late July 2020, Iranian-born U.S. resident and German national [Jamshid Sharmahd](#) was abducted during a flight stopover in Dubai and forcibly removed to Iran where he has since been arbitrarily detained at an undisclosed location in [circumstances akin to enforced disappearance](#). Habib Chaab, an Iranian-Swedish dual national, currently detained in Iran, is also [believed](#) to have been arbitrarily detained outside the country in October 2020 and removed to Iran. In June 2021, the BBC urged the UN Human Rights Council to “[safeguard](#)” Iranian employees who've been [harassed](#) by Iranian state agents and threatened with kidnapping. Since the 1980s, Iranian dissidents have been assassinated abroad in circumstances indicating that they were [extrajudicially executed by Iranian state agents](#). Victims of such extrajudicial executions include former Iranian Prime Minister [Shapur Bakhtiar](#) in France in 1991, and dissident singer [Fereydoun Farrokhzad](#), [three leaders of the Kurdistan Democratic Party of Iran](#), and [an interpreter](#) in Germany in 1992.

There is a significant risk that Iranians will continue to be targeted by agents of the Islamic Republic of Iran if the international community does not address Iranian authorities' violent and unlawful activities to crush dissent.

Likewise, governments should give notice that such actions cannot be taken with impunity and search for, identify and implement tools of accountability including judicial, political, diplomatic, and symbolic.

This should be a top priority for governments that are engaged in negotiations with the Islamic Republic of Iran.

All Iranians have a right to peacefully express themselves without fear of persecution or death—yet the Iranian government is trying to crush this right not only inside Iran but in other countries as well. The growing cases of abduction of dissidents by agents of the Islamic Republic of Iran and the latest allegations concerning the foiled kidnapping plan should alert the international community to the urgent need for policies to be formulated to address the fact that Iranian dissidents, wherever they reside, are at risk because of Iranian authorities' disregard for law and life.

We call on the international community, and especially those engaged in negotiations with the Islamic Republic of Iran, including the U.S. and European governments to:

- Publicly condemn in the strongest terms and seek accountability and non-repetition for the human rights violations and crimes under international law committed by the Iranian authorities both in Iran and

extraterritorially to crush freedom of expression and peaceful dissent, including abductions, enforced disappearances, arbitrary detention, torture, extrajudicial or arbitrary executions, threats, harassment, and electronic surveillance;

- Undertake comprehensive and coordinated reviews of national laws, mechanisms, and best practices regarding the prevention, investigation, and assessment of and protection against threats and risks faced by Iranian journalists, human rights defenders or others targeted for their peaceful expression and activities. In particular, assess and strengthen the implementation of the duty to warn, including in situations outside national territories where states have the power, control, or authority over the enjoyment of the right to life;
- Call on Iranian authorities to release all individuals imprisoned for the peaceful expression of their opinion and belief, reveal the whereabouts of those forcibly disappeared, and ensure that pending release, all detainees are protected from torture and other ill-treatment and provided with adequate medical care, a lawyer of their choosing, regular communication and contact with their family, and where relevant, consular assistance.

We further call on states whose nationals or residents have been targeted by Iranian authorities including the U.S, Canada, the UK, Sweden, France, and Germany to:

- Investigate, in accordance with criminal law standards, allegations of abduction, enforced disappearance, arbitrary detention, torture and other ill-treatment, and/or arbitrary or extrajudicial execution of their residents or nationals, or threats thereof, for the purpose of determining individual liability, including criminal liability of high-level officials, and pursue criminal prosecutions, as appropriate.

Given the crisis of impunity prevailing in Iran for crimes under international law and grave human rights violations, we further reiterate our call on the UN Human Rights Council to:

- Establish an independent investigatory and accountability mechanism to collect, consolidate, preserve, and analyze evidence of the most serious crimes under international law committed by the authorities of the Islamic Republic of Iran, in accordance with general standards of admissibility in criminal proceedings in order to facilitate fair and independent criminal proceedings in national, regional or international courts or tribunals that have, or may have in the future, jurisdiction over the crimes being investigated.

Center for Human Rights in Iran

Amnesty International

PEN America

Human Rights Watch

Iran Human Rights Documentation Center

The Center for Supporters of Human Rights

Abdorrahman Boroumand Center for Human Rights in Iran

Justice for Iran

Siamak Pourzand Foundation

United for Iran