

# amnesty international

## IRAN POLITICAL EXECUTIONS

DECEMBER 1988

AI INDEX: MDE 13/29/88

DISTR: SC/CO/GR

In recent months Amnesty International has been gravely concerned by a new wave of political executions in Iran, believed to be the largest since the early 1980s when thousands of political prisoners were executed after summary or no trial.

The recent executions began after the National Liberation Army, (led by the Iraq-based People's Mojahedine Organization of Iran -[PMOI]) made an incursion into western Iran in late July 1988. Groups of people, allegedly collaborators with the NLA, were hanged in public in various towns, their bodies left hanging for many hours. These executions, accompanied by photographs, were reported in the official Iranian press. One account, published in the daily Jomhouriy-e Eslami on 9 August, stated

"On arriving in the town and before reaching their homes the people of Islamabad were fascinated by a new scene in the town's main square, in which they took great delight. The metal structure of a half-finished two-storey construction provided the scene on which the people's gaze was fixed. Bodies were hanging from the bare metal girders on the second floor, looking like motionless pendulums. Three agents of the atheistic grouplet [term used for opposition groups] had been hanged, earlier that morning, on the charges of betraying their fatherland."

At the same time publicity was given to pronouncements from various high-ranking judicial and other officials that opposition elements should be dealt with severely, some apparently proposing that they should be summarily executed as a matter of course.

In the weeks and months that followed, until late October, family visits to political prisoners were banned, and precise information about the prisoners was impossible to obtain. At the same time reports began to circulate that mass executions were taking place in secret. When the ban on prison visits was due to be lifted only some visitors were able to see their imprisoned relatives. Some were informed that they had been executed. They were given the prisoner's will and belongings, and informed of the place of burial. Others were given no information, or received conflicting reports. These people resorted to sending money or medicines to the prisoners, hoping to receive a signed receipt from them in return, or toured government offices, or met religious and judicial officials, seeking information, often in vain. Many relatives queued outside the prisons

hoping for information, or gathered at cemeteries where some resorted to unearthing with their own hands some of the bodies buried in shallow graves in desperate attempts to establish the whereabouts of the prisoners. Relatives of executed prisoners described seeing groups of unmarked graves. The bodies were buried without religious rites, and had not been washed. Some were fully clothed, others covered in a shroud. Because of the shallow burial, the stench of the bodies was overpowering. Some families were warned against public mourning for their executed relatives.

The wife of one of the prisoners, held for three years, told Amnesty International how she had been informed when she went to visit her husband at Evin Prison in August 1988 that he had been moved to a different cell, and that his visiting schedule had been disrupted, but the families of other prisoners gathered outside the prison said they believed he had been executed. After anguished visits back and forth between Evin Prison and the cemetery in the following days, she finally received confirmation at the cemetery that he had been executed, but officials refused to say where he was buried. Directed by other mourning relatives towards a group of shallow, freshly dug graves, all of them unmarked, she saw one that matched the size of her husband's body, and dug the soil away with her hands. The face was covered with blood which she had to clean away before she realized that the body she had uncovered was not that of her husband, but that of a much younger man. She closed his eyes, and re-covered the body. Only several days later did she discover her husband's burial place.

Amnesty International has now received more than 300 names of prisoners executed in recent weeks and months, and fears that the real total could amount to thousands. Many of the victims were members of, or sympathizers with the PMOI, many others were members of secular leftist groups such as Rahe Kargar, factions of the Organization of People's Fedaiyan, and the Tudeh Party. Among the most recent victims were at least 11 mullahs closely associated with Ayatollah Montazeri, Ayatollah Khomeini's designated successor as religious leader. Among the executed are many former students, some of them still at school at the time of their arrest, professional people, including medical doctors and teachers, as well as manual workers. A number of the victims are women, and in some cases several members of a family have been executed. They include an unknown number of prisoners of conscience. A large number of those executed had been imprisoned for several years, and had been tortured, some having suffered similar treatment during the rule of the Shah. Some had been held for years without trial, others had been sentenced to prison terms ranging from several months, following trials in 1980 and early 1981 for distributing leaflets or disturbing the peace at political rallies, to life imprisonment. Amnesty International has been informed of cases of former prisoners having been re-arrested and summarily executed. In most cases it is not known whether there were further judicial proceedings before the executions took place.

Initially a number of officials publicly denied that political executions were taking place. In early December, however, a statement made by President Khamenei broadcast on Tehran radio acknowledged them. The President said

"Do you think we should greet with sweets those who have links from inside prison with the hypocrites [term used for members of the PMOI] who mounted an armed attack inside the territory of the Islamic Republic?...What should we do to them if that contact is

established? They are condemned to death and we will execute them."

Amnesty International has condemned the mass executions as a flagrant violation of the fundamental right to life, and has sent hundreds of thousands of appeals to the Iranian authorities to put an immediate end to the executions, and to spare the lives of the thousands of political prisoners who remain. It is formally submitting the names of more than 300 prisoners believed to have been executed to the Iranian Government for comment.

**INTERNATIONAL SECRETARIAT, 1 EASTON STREET, LONDON WC1X 8DJ, UNITED KINGDOM**

