

0001 hrs gmt Wednesday 17 November 1993

IRAN: @SERIOUS VIOLATIONS CONTINUE
AMID POLITICAL AND RELIGIOUS REPRESSION

Serious human rights violations persist in Iran, and there is mounting concern about the sharp increase in the number of Iranian opposition figures killed outside the country, Amnesty International said today.

In a new report, the organization highlights the cases of victims of long-term imprisonment, unfair trial, torture and execution, many of them members of religious and ethnic minorities.

Said Amnesty International: "Political prisoners have spent years in prison after unfair trials, and more are being condemned to join them every year. Real or imagined political opponents are targeted, along with religious minorities such as Baha'is and Christian converts, and members of ethnic minorities like Kurds, Baluchis and Arabs. Women have been flogged for violating Islamic dress codes, prisoners have been tortured and political dissidents have been executed."

And the violations continue: as recently as last month a cartoonist, Manouchehr Karimzadeh, was given a ten-year prison sentence because of a cartoon he produced for Farad magazine in 1992, after a court overturned his previous sentence of one year imprisonment. He joins the ranks of other prisoners of conscience in Iran - Amnesty International is calling for all of them to be freed.

The new report also cites several cases of opposition activists from different political opposition groups, killed outside Iran in the last 18 months: Sadegh Sharafkandi, the Secretary General of the Kurdistan Democratic Party of Iran (KDPI), and three others were gunned down by masked gunmen in Berlin in May 1992. Prosecutors in Germany have charged that the ringleader of the attack was an agent of the Iranian secret service who received orders to carry out the killings from his superiors in Tehran.

In a similar case, Ali Akbar Ghorbani of the People's Mojahedin Organization of Iran, another opposition group, was abducted in Istanbul in June 1992. His mutilated corpse was discovered eight months later. The Turkish Interior Minister accused an "Islamic fundamentalist group with Iranian links" of killing him and two Turkish writers.

Killings such as these have continued this year - recent victims include two members of the Baluchi Naroui tribe shot dead outside their home in Karachi in March 1993; the Rome representative of the opposition National Council of Resistance Movement of Iran, who was murdered the same month; and two others, Mohammed Ghaderi and Braham Azadifar, both associated with the KDPI, who were killed in separate incidents in Turkey in August.

According to Amnesty International, the pattern of attacks on opposition activists strongly suggests that at least some may have been victims of extrajudicial executions by Iranian Government agents.

"The government's routine denials ring hollow," said the organization. "We know of no steps taken by the government to thoroughly investigate the alleged involvement of its officials in these killings."

"Many Iranians in exile live in constant fear of extra-judicial execution, a threat extended to non-Iranians too - such as the British writer, Salman Rushdie, and individuals involved in publishing or translating his work, The Satanic Verses, which provoked a fatwa calling for his killing in February 1989.

"The government must take urgent action to improve its human rights record," Amnesty International said. "The cycle of violations has to be brought to an end if there is to be any hope for human rights in Iran."

Amnesty International's new report endorses recommendations to the Iranian Government made by the Human Rights Committee - a body of international legal experts, which monitors states parties implementation of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights - in July 1993, aimed at bringing Iran's human rights law and practice into line with international standards.

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