



amnesty international news release

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BIGGEST WAVE OF POLITICAL EXECUTIONS IN IRAN SINCE EARLY 1980S, SAYS

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL

The Iranian authorities have been carrying out the biggest wave of secret political executions since the early 1980s, Amnesty International said today (Tuesday 13 December).

The worldwide human rights organization said the evidence for mass executions was now indisputable, with evidence coming from many sources, including relatives of executed prisoners and recent statements by the authorities themselves.

Amnesty International said it had received information on more than 300 people reported executed since July but that this was almost certainly only the "tip of the iceberg" and the true total could run into thousands.

"Nobody really knows how many people have been put to death - just as nobody knows when the killing will stop, or who will be next to die," Amnesty International said. "Our fears are heightened because thousands of political prisoners are still held in Iran and because many of those executed recently had been imprisoned without trial, or were serving long prison sentences imposed after unfair trials."

Others executed in the latest purge have included suspected political opponents kept in prison after having served their sentences and those who had been re-arrested after release from political imprisonment. Many executed prisoners had been tortured while in detention, Amnesty International said.

Most victims have been left-wing political activists and sympathizers, predominantly members of the People's Mojahedine Organization of Iran (PMOI) but including other groups and factions, such as Rahe Kargar, the People's Fedaiyan Organization and the Tudeh Party, and members of Kurdish opposition groups.

The men and women put to death have ranged from secondary school students seized in 1981 and 1982, through doctors and social scientists to mullahs suspected of supporting Ayatollah Montazeri, designated to succeed Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini.

The secret killings have taken place in prisons throughout Iran, including Evin and Gohardasht in Tehran, and in Tabriz, Mashhad and Shiraz.

The authorities initially denied reports of mass hangings and shootings, but Amnesty International said they had in effect been confirmed by public statements made by Iranian authorities in the past few days, including President Sayed Ali Khamenei.

Amnesty International said the evidence was overwhelming. Many details on executions had come from opposition groups and close relatives of those executed. The sources covered a wide range and their information had been cross-checked.

The relatives include a woman who had dug up the corpse of an executed man with her bare hands as she searched for her husband's body in Jadeh Khavaran cemetery in Tehran in August 1988 - the cemetery is known colloquially as Lanatabad, "The place of the damned."

"Groups of bodies - some clothed, some in shrouds - had been buried in unmarked shallow graves in the section of the cemetery reserved for executed leftist political prisoners," she told Amnesty International. "The stench of the corpses was appalling but I started digging with my hands because it was important for me and my two little children that I locate my husband's grave."

She said the face of the body she unearthed had been covered with blood, which she had had to clean off before she could be sure it was not her husband. She had been unable to continue digging because of guards patrolling the cemetery. Several days later other relatives visiting the site had identified her husband's grave for her.

"Once I knew where he was I could leave," she said.

Her husband, a member of a communist group and a political prisoner under the late Shah, was arrested in early 1985, tortured over several months and convicted after a summary trial at which, as a result of his torture, he was barely conscious. He never learned what his sentence was.

Early in August his wife arrived on a regular visit to Evin Prison to see him - and was told he had been moved.

"My world fell apart," she said. "For days I was given conflicting information. Then they gave me his last testament."

Officials at the cemetery confirmed he had been executed but would not say where he was buried.

Amnesty International said the woman was now outside Iran but wished to remain anonymous for fear of reprisals against her family.

Among other prisoners secretly executed in past months are former secondary school students arrested in the early 1980s for distributing political leaflets or disturbing the peace at political rallies. Some had been kept incarcerated although they had been sentenced to only six months' imprisonment.

One recently executed former student had been held without charge or trial since his arrest in 1982 at the age of 16 - his brother and two other relatives were also executed. Another victim was 17 when he was arrested in 1981 and sentenced to 11 years' imprisonment for supporting the PMOI.

Groups of public hangings of alleged collaborators were first reported this year after the PMOI-led National Liberation Army incursion into western Iran at the end of July.

Family visits to prisons were banned for three months and it became more difficult than ever to obtain firm information on what was happening to the thousands of political prisoners in Iran. Although all visits were meant to resume at the end of October, this has been allowed in some cases only, according to Amnesty International.

Amnesty International said today its members had sent tens of thousands of appeals to the Iranian authorities to stop the executions. The organization opposes the death penalty in all cases as a violation of the right to life and to be free from cruel treatment or punishment. It is particularly concerned about the lack of provisions in Iran for the fair trial of political prisoners and the absence of a right to appeal against death sentences.

The organization is sending a list of names of political prisoners executed recently to the Iranian Government for comment.

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