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IRAN: GROSS HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS CONTINUE AMID OFFICIAL SECRECY.

Despite official secrecy in Iran -- where the authorities try to hide their appalling human rights record from outside scrutiny -- Amnesty International has found a persistent pattern of imprisonment, political executions and suspected extrajudicial killings.

"People are not told why they have been arrested and the procedures for political arrests, detention and trial are rarely made public," the human rights organization said in a report released today. "Access to lawyers is almost always denied and political detainees have spent up to 10 years behind bars before their relatives knew where they were."

The 17-page report documents cases of long-term political prisoners held after unfair trials or without trial, the large number of political executions, and the suspected extrajudicial execution of government opponents both inside and outside Iran.

Sixteen years after the establishment of the Islamic Republic of Iran, large numbers of political prisoners have spent years languishing in jail in appalling conditions :

- Abbas Amir Entezam, a former deputy prime minister of the Provisional Government of Mehdi Bazargan, who was arrested in December 1979 and charged with espionage for the United States of America, described in a letter he wrote from prison in 1994 the nightmare he endured since his arrest:  
"I spent 15 months in prison before I was told why I had been incarcerated ...I have been subjected to various forms of torture during my captivity. I was repeatedly beaten by my interrogators '[...] a number of times I was told that my execution was imminent, and I was instructed to write my will."
- Ali Bloori was arrested in Mahabad in 1982 while in his final year of high school and was charged with membership of the Kurdistan Democratic Party of Iran (KDPI). His family did not know of his whereabouts until 1994.
- Houshang Amjadi Bigvand, a 55-year-old landowner and his cousin Jamshid Amiri Bigvand, a 56-year-old chemical engineer, were arrested in September 1988. They spent one year in incommunicado detention, during which they were reportedly held in solitary confinement for long periods and tortured. Their families were not informed of their whereabouts until mid-1989.

Amnesty International is urging the Iranian Government once again to act decisively to introduce the necessary legal and practical measures to end these violations, and to release immediately and unconditionally all prisoners of conscience.

The organization is also calling for a review, through an independent judicial body, of the detention of all political prisoners who are held without trial or were unfairly tried, and to grant all such prisoners prompt and regular access to lawyers of their own choosing.

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In the last 16 years, tens of thousands of suspected government opponents have been executed. In addition, a number of political prisoners who have been sentenced to death -- some after grossly unfair trials by the Islamic Revolutionary Courts in previous years -- are still on death row.

Among recent cases of suspected extrajudicial executions of government opponents both inside and outside Iran, are four prominent leaders of religious minority groups -- three Christians and a Sunni Muslim -- who were found dead in suspicious circumstances.

"Even Iranian dissidents who have fled abroad are not safe: over the past 15 years scores based outside Iran have been assassinated in circumstances suggesting that they may have been extrajudicially executed by Iranian Government agents," Amnesty International said.

In the past 18 months, the pattern of attacks on opposition activists has continued:

- Taha Kermanj, a 35-year-old Iranian refugee in Turkey and active member of the KDPI, was killed in Corum on 4 January 1994.
- AbuBakir (Kamran) Hedayati, an active member of the KDPI who has been living in Sweden for many years, was severely injured on 17 January 1994 by a letter-bomb delivered to his home in Stockholm.

The human rights organization is also urging the Iranian Government to set up immediate thorough and independent investigations into all allegations of torture and the extrajudicial killings committed both inside and outside Iran.

"For years the government has turned away human rights organizations, including Amnesty International, which want to investigate human rights issues," the organization said.

Despite repeated attempts by Amnesty International to visit Iran, the government has rejected all requests to observe trials, conduct fact-finding visits inside the country, and hold government talks.

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