



Lemkin Institute Statement on the Threatened Execution of Protesters in Iran

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The Lemkin Institute for Genocide Prevention is deeply disturbed by the news of the Iranian Parliament's vote on November 8th in favor of executing arrested protesters, which could impact nearly 15,000 detained people, many of them children. The Lemkin Institute condemns the use of the death penalty for any crime, but especially in response to political protests and legitimate criticism of the Iranian government. Furthermore, the Lemkin Institute points out the similarities between this Parliamentary vote and Ayatollah Khomeini's order in July 1988 to mass execute an estimated 30,000 political prisoners in Iranian jails. The 1988 massacre was carried out by current President Ebrahim Raisi, one of the four members of the "Death Committee for Tehran" at that time. The 1988 massacre has been recognized as a crime against humanity and could arguably also constitute the crime of genocide.

On September 16, 2022, Mahsa (Zhina) Amini, an Iranian-Kurdish woman, died in an Iranian hospital, allegedly for head injuries she sustained at the hands of the Iranian Morality Police, following her arrest for not properly wearing her hijab. Iranian authorities arrested journalists Miloofar Hamedi and Elahe Mohammadi shortly after they exposed Mahsa Amini's death, and they are still being detained to prevent them from following the story more closely. Public outcry immediately followed the news of Mahsa Amini's death and protests have been held continuously across Iran and in the Iranian diaspora. Iranian protesters, especially Iranian women, have risked their lives by publicly defying public order and dress code laws set forth by Iran's Islamic government.

The Iranian government responded to protests by severely limiting, and even cutting off, internet access throughout Iran. However, thousands of courageous Iranians have been able to share information, via social media, about the government and police response to protests and the gross human rights violations the Iranian authorities are committing throughout the country. To date it is estimated that more than 300 people, including men, women, children, and the elderly, have been killed by Iranian security forces in crackdowns on protesters. There have also been numerous reports of physical, psychological, and sexual torture from Iranians who have been arrested and released by the Iranian police as well as reports of protesters being disappeared by Iranian authorities.

The judiciary of the current Iranian regime is an oppressive body used by the Iranian government to implement its authoritarian laws, which rarely, if ever, rules independently in favor of Iranian citizens. On October 24, 2022 the Iranian judiciary spokesperson, Masoud Setayeshi, stated that trials against protesters have already begun, with 315 protesters from Tehran being charged with “assembly and collusion to act against national security,” “propaganda against the state, “ and “disrupting public order.” Four of the 315 protesters have been charged with “spreading corruption on earth with use of weapons to scare the people,” “injuring security officers,” “destruction of public and government property to disrupt national security,” and “combating the Islamic Republic of Iran,” charges that carried the possibility of the death penalty even before the November 8th vote by the Iranian Parliament. Around 638 other indictments have been made in other provinces outside Tehran. Iran’s courts are already violating international human rights law, such as several provisions of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, which Iran ratified in 1975. Amir Raeesian, attorney for Mohammed Ghobadlou, one of the four protesters charged with “corruption on earth,” explained that Judge Abolghasem Salavati refused to allow the accused to be present during his trial.

Following the protests, Iranian lawmakers have been calling for strict punishments for the protesters who have been arrested, with 227 members of Iran’s Parliament signing a letter urging harsher punishment to “serve as a good lesson in the shortest possible time.” On November 8, 2022, just three weeks after Mahsa Amini’s death and the beginning of the protests, the Iranian Parliament overwhelmingly (227 of the Parliament’s 290 members) voted in favor of the death penalty as punishment for protesters who have been arrested. The number of protesters arrested, according to Carnegie Endowment fellow Karim Sadjadpour, is nearing 15,000, including 130 human rights defenders, 38 women’s rights defenders, 36 political activists, 19 lawyers, 38 journalists, 308 university students, and 44 children. This means that there are almost 15,000 people who are now at risk of being executed for exercising an internationally recognized human right to assemble and protest. Given the Islamic Republic of Iran’s history of violating human rights, there is sufficient cause to believe the state will use the death penalty as a tool of political repression and intimidation against the opposition — Iranian civilians. Iran has a history of using such tools to address dissent.

On November 14, 2022, an Iranian court issued the first death sentence to an unnamed defendant who has been convicted of “enmity against G-d” and “spreading corruption on earth.” While the Islamic Republic News Agency has reported that this sentence, and others, can be appealed, the history of Iranian courts provides little evidence to suggest that appeals courts would rule in favor of protesters.

Iranian lawyers and several prominent figures in Iran are calling on the international community to condemn the vote in favor of the death penalty and respond to the actions of the Iranian government. Currently, Iceland and Germany have requested a special session with the United Nations Human Rights Council to discuss the ongoing violations of human rights in Iran. This special session is scheduled to take place later in November. On November 11, 2022, sixteen

UN-appointed independent human rights experts issued a statement urging Iranian authorities to stop using the death penalty as an oppressive tool against protesters and the political opposition. The European Union, the United States, and Canada, among other countries, have issued sanctions against Iran, due to the Iranian government's response to the ongoing protests, calling for Iran to immediately halt their oppression of protesters.

The Lemkin Institute for Genocide Prevention calls attention to our October 7, 2022 Red Flag Alert for Genocide in Iran and reiterates, with fervor, our condemnation of Iran's response to criticism with immense brutality and the state's willingness to commit gross human rights abuses in the form of the violent silencing of dissent, the oppression of women and minorities, and the use of arbitrary detention, torture, and mass murder to protect the authoritarian rule of Ayatollah Ali Khamenei. Mass executions of prisoners would constitute a crime against humanity and possible genocide.

The Lemkin Institute joins the calls of Iranian human rights activists for the international community not only to condemn the violent responses of the Iranian government, but also to take swift action against Iran in the form of boycotts and sanctions. Furthermore, the international community must press for indictments of the leaders of the 1988 massacres, whose impunity has directly contributed to the atrocities being committed by the regime today. Finally, the Lemkin Institute urges solidarity with the protest movement, which is an organic people's liberation movement. At a time when authoritarianism is on the rise around the world, the heroic actions of thousands of courageous Iranian citizens provide a welcome alternative.