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Children Our Future



Life as a Child of a Prisoner of Conscience

The nightmare lived by the children of prisoners of conscience: Their life begins with separation from “Mum” or “Dad”. Their childhood is spent either living inside prison, or waiting outside corridors and iron bars to see “Mum” or “Dad” for a brief moment.



Maryam
Akbari
Monfared

My daughter **Sara** is now 11; she was only 3 when I was detained. Sara requires an operation and I want to be by her side, but the regime will not allow it. The thought of not being there for her is unbearable.



Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe

“The thought of brushing her hair and giving her a bath, of being able to take her to the park, and feed her, and sleep next to her - it just kills me”.



A father not only to his son, but to the many destitute children who labour on the streets. He was denied the right to visit his terminal-ly-ill son.

Behnam Ebrahimzadeh: “I endured the horrors of prison for so long. But learning of my son’s terminal illness and my absence from his side was life destroying, and I was knocked down by it.”

Behnam is in prison for his relentless advocacy of human rights and the rights of children labouring on the streets.

He repeatedly requested a day of leave from prison to be able to visit his son in hospital but it was refused endlessly. This was an instrument of pressure to force him into submission.



Gabriella, daughter of Mrs Zaghari-Ratcliffe and her husband Richard, was born in St John’s Wood, north of London. She has been denied the love of her mum and a family life.

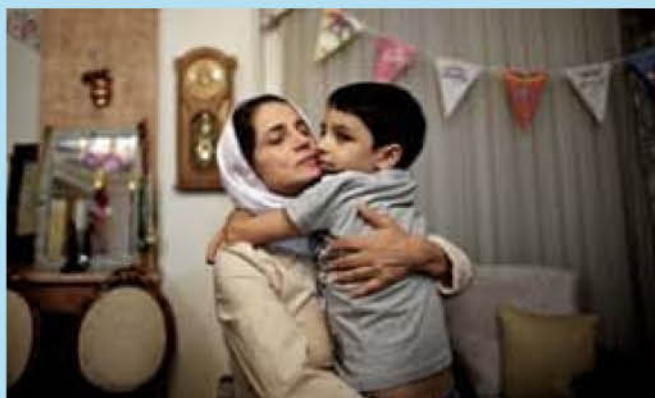
Help us unite these children with their parents



Life as a child of a Prisoner of Conscience



Nasrin Sotudeh and her daughter Mehraveh



Nasrin Sotudeh embracing her son

Nasrin Sotudeh is a human rights lawyer and mother of two. Her sincere commitment to justice and the brave, selfless defence of her clients led to her arrest once in 2010 and again in 2018. She has been denied the chance of mothering her children during both terms of her imprisonment.

Writing from prison to her daughter Mehraveh (19) and her son Nima (11), is the only way for her to express her love and affection for her children and to escape only for a brief moment the unimaginable pressure experienced by a mother in prison.

Her children have been deprived of their Mum's caring arms and cuddles, kisses on the cheeks and forehead. Feeling safe and elevated by their mother's love is taken away from them.

Soheil Arabi, blogger and photographer, is imprisoned for 'insulting Islamic sanctities'. He was awarded an accolade of photography by Reporters Without Borders.



Soheyl Arabi, with his daughter (Right)



Soheil's daughter and mother call for his release (Left)

Mother of two calls upon the world to free her



Captive:
Mrs Nargess
M o h a m m a d i
(Middle), chair
of the Iranian
Bar Association

Mrs Nargess Mohammadi, a human rights advocate has been separated from her children to imprisonment. She writes from captivity on her jailers' intentions: "Tyranny stops us from living. Tyranny coerces our separation and forbids us being together. Tyranny scorches our hearts and afflicts torment on our souls, inflicting physical and mental scars equally. One is visible, the other however is undetectable in spite of severe trauma and upset. Tyranny persecutes us beyond imprisonment, exile and physical torture. It suffocates human existence, in all aspects of life, each moment, at every turn. Irrespective of time or place. Tyranny targets the essence of life."

Help us unite these children with their parents



Children of minorities

The suffering inflicted on us is now also affecting our children



Children of Christian converts are forced to learn the Quran



Christian children in Iran are forced to choose between the study of Islam and dropping out of school.



State sanctioned policy to deny children the right to a future

Christians, Baha'is, Sunni Muslims, Gonabadi Dervishes and followers of the Yaresan religion face systematic increase in arbitrary arrest, torture and lengthy imprisonment. Recent additions to the instruments of fear are forcible closure of businesses, confiscation of property bans on employment in the public sector and denial of access to schools and universities for their children.

They are singled out for being born into a family with a different religion



Righ: **Pastor Yousef Nadarkhani**: I have been sentenced to 12 years imprisonment because I am a practicing Christian. My family and I did not abandon our humanity and consciousness. My children are denied a future and face a lifetime of discrimination, just because I am their father. They have been barred from attending school, and denied a future essential to human life, only for having Christian parents.

Symbols of faith are considered as enemies of the state. Any sign of human expression is crushed; voices, people, families, communities and buildings alike.



The demolition of Dervish monasteries in the cities of Esfahan and Qom



They deserve our love and a place in our hearts.
Iranian children of all faiths deserve a world where life is an opportunity



Children of minorities

Her faith is a reason to deny her advancement in life

Shaghayegh Shoghi, student of applied chemistry was barred from enlisting in a university, just for belonging to the Bahai faith.



ID card and a letter headed document produced at the Esfahan University of Technology.

Translation:

Name: Shaghayegh

Surname: Shoghi

Father's name: Iraj

Department: Applied Chemistry

Level: Bachelor

Translation of the heading above the table (left middle) reads:

Registry of students barred from enlisting in university classes during the first term, year 97-98 (current Persian school year). Table heading reads: Ms Shaghayegh Shoghi. Reason for being barred, under the bottom left corner, reads: 'Other'

Hamed Ahmadi, a Sunni prisoner of conscience, was executed along with 5 others for practicing his faith.

His daughter Mahna, traumatised, found her only escape in the drawing of this tragedy, and her last goodbye with her father, holding her Mum's hands.



Expression of innocence, Mahna's drawing Hamed Ahmadi

Middle Mahna, daughter of Hamed

Left: Mahna's drawing of her father's execution. The drawing shows her mum and her at the bottom left holding hands, grieving at her father's hanging. The words in the middle read: Daddy Hamed. The two words on the bottom left read "Mum" and "Mahna"

Let us join hands and voices for a little girl so brave. We must be sure to voice her cries to the world.



My name is Delaram Akbari. I have been expelled from university because of my religion. I am not the first person, nor will I be the last to have been deprived of the right to education, because of a conscious choice to follow my heart.

They deserve our love and a place in our hearts. Iranian children of all faiths deserve a world where life is an opportunity



Stop Child Labour

Strenuous working hours

Hossein Miterari, a civil activist: "The working hours of child labourers are alarming. In Tehran alone, 44 percent of children who labour on the streets work 10 hours or more every day."

Nahid Tajeddini, Isfahan's member of the Majles (Parliament):

"Statistics indicate that there are between 3 and 7 million working children in Iran."



I am **Dariush** on the right. I want to become a doctor and help sick children. My brother **Payam**, on the left, wants to become an architect and build homes. When we think of our dreams, we smile happily.



I am **Zahra**. I wish I could sleep at night without feeling sore all over.



Homan: I would love to return to school one day, but I am happy to help my brother for now.



Ahmad: I wish that my mum was here too.

Akbar: The load is heavy. But I have to carry on. My sister needs me.



Reza: I am tired and muddy. I want to go home. But I have to wait for the next load of bricks.

What if children came first?

The Iranian regime spends billions on warmongering and military ventures, proxy wars and the supply of their suppressive forces with arms and equipments.

The budget for the current fiscal year for 36 military and suppressive institutions is 11.6 billion dollars.

The lavish spending takes its toll on the lives of millions of children. Children are having to work on the streets to provide for their families, or are simply without a family owing to the poverty caused by suppression and warmongering. They have to drop out of school and endure danger, risk of abduction, abuse and humiliation on the streets.

Together, we will realise a brighter future for children



Stop Child Labour

Atena Daemi, champion of children's rights wrote from prison: "There are 3.2 million children deprived of education in Iran, which is heartrending. They have no voice, as the regime will not allow this. There is a dramatic drop in the age of children who labour on the streets; they are only of an average age of 10 years. It breaks my heart; I cannot be silent knowing of their suffering. "I'm determined to be the voice of children, their rights and innocent, yet precious wishes. I live in hope that our collective efforts will bring about the day when all children will be safe, have a home and no child has to labour. I'm in pursuit of the day that all their sweet faces will smile, feel the warmth of their families, enjoy the happiness they deserve and explore

Azar: Look at my hands, they are coloured because I pick walnuts all day long. You know my mum is very sick, but I am here for her. If I can help with her medical costs, she will be better again. That would make me very happy.



Right: Atena Daemi (handcuffed and taken to prison). Left: Atena's mother campaigning for her daughter's release. Her held up placard reads: "Release Atena Daemi"

their talents and potential. We should all fight for children's rights."

Amir: I enjoy doing my home-work and love going to school, but I mostly skip class, to help my mother and brother with their jobs.



The coloured sheets held up by children of different backgrounds read from right to left: "Education, the right of all children"

Together, we will realise a brighter future for children



Stop Child Marriage



Images of television series in Iran promoting “Child Marriage”

The lives of young girls torn apart



Nasrin (Above): “I am scared as I am being forced into a nightmare”

Nasrin’s letter to her sister after running away from home: “My school friend, Hoda, was wed against her will when she was 13. I will never forget what she went through. She took her life because she could not cope. I am scared as I am being forced into a nightmare.”

The shocking facts about child marriages in Iran

- 17% of all marriages in Iran involve girls under 18 years of age.
- Forced marriages of girls aged between 10 and 14 have surpassed a shocking number of a million.
- Forced marriages of girls between 10 and 14 years old have given rise to a dramatic number of suicide attempts among these blossoms of society.
- Children, forcibly wed at the age of 12, are either divorced or widowed by the age of 10 or 14.
- There are currently 40000 divorced children and 24000 widowed children in Iran.

State- decreed policy is the root cause for the upsurge in child marriages

- Iran currently has an estimated population of 82 million.
- In 2013, the regime’s supreme ruler decreed a policy to increase the population to 150 million.
- Subsequently, President Rouhani issued a four-point directive, devising a scheme to implement this policy.
- The executive, legislative and juridical branches adopted agendas facilitating this effectively state-sanctioned abuse of children.
- State television and media controlled by the government followed suit, promoting child marriages.
- Child marriage of young girls in particular is part of an inhumane scheme to restrict the lives of women to the absolute and suffocate any potential of women and youth and their yearning.

We must restore their childhood to them



Stop Child Marriage

Hear the Plea of The Forgotten Children



Nastaran reads from her journal:

"Today was the saddest day of my life. I was told that I would be wed to an older man who I do not even know.

"I want to remain a child, I am not ready for grown-up life. I wish someone would hear my voice and rid me of this suffering."

Deprived of rights that violate the essence of human life:

- Freedom of choice: Forced to marry spouses their family chooses for them. They are denied the right to determine their own future course of life and relationships.

- Education: After being wed, children are not allowed to continue education.

- Health and the right to life: Statistics from Iran's Ministry of Health and the World Health Organization show that the highest death rates in Iran are among mothers under the age of 18.



Excerpts from a social welfare officer's report:

"I am a social worker reporting on forced marriages among young girls in the Kurdish province of Ilam.

....The tragedy and the horrific experience of children in my country, and particularly young girls, is beyond belief. I couldn't stop tears running down my face, interviewing a sweet girl, Raha, just 13 years of age. The thought of her ordeal is tearing me apart. She was married off to a 50-year-old man. Her childhood, life and dreams have been torn to pieces."

(The aforementioned social worker was expelled from work for opposing the state sanctioned child marriage)

The Iranian regime has tried to silence the voice of children rights activists through suppression and censorship.

Not relenting however, these women have ferociously elevated their activities to new levels, gaining international reputation. They have raised the profile of this inhumane scheme of the regime, despite harsh set-backs, abuse and loss of loved ones, torture and incarceration. Their selfless endurance has inspired the formation of a movement of women and men who devote their lives to the cause of returning childhood to these girls whose blossoming ends so quickly, against their will, at such a young age.

We must restore their childhood to them



Iran's Child Soldiers

Taken hostage by the state to advance the warmongering of the Iranian regime, more than 400,000 children were deployed as soldiers during the eight years of the war with Iraq.

Today, child soldiers are forced to fight for Bashar Al-Assad's regime in Syria.



Victims of warmongering: Children's childhood, youth and future are jeopardized. Child soldiers are voiceless victims. We must be their voice. They are entitled to live in a safe environment, and to grow up away from war.



Child soldiers: Deprived of a chance to develop their human skills, natural talents and to learn the beautiful world of human relationships, kindness and smiles. These young teenagers are instead forced to learn the world of hateful men, facing bullets, bombs and killing.

Thousands of teenagers were killed during an 8 year war prolonged by the Iranian regime. Families in Iran still mourn their children who have perished so soon in life.

Cemeteries are their places of solace. For many families however, the location where their loved ones are buried is unknown.

Instead of learning to create, they are taught only how to destroy.

Mohammad Khatami, the Minister of culture and attaché to the Army. He spearheaded the campaign for the promotion of war and the use of child soldiers. This earned him the trust of the supreme leader who rewarded him with a nomination to run for the position of president. His tenure was from 1997 to 2005.



We must free them from the clutches of war
We must give them a chance to be a child and to be safe



Stop Abuse of Children

Street child labourers are physically and sexually abused by municipality agents
90% of them are sexually assaulted



According to a video clip published by the state-run Asr Iran news, child labourers who work in the streets to earn meagre amounts of money, are abused physically and sexually by municipality agents.



One of the child labourers talked about sexual abuse of her friend by municipal agents. She said: “One day, when I saw Sara, I asked her, “Why are you upset?” She said Municipal agents caught me and mistreated me... They pulled my scarf, and touched me. When I screamed, he stepped away. But when I went to the office of the municipality and told my story, they did not believe me. They said I was making up the story so that they would let me go.”



A girl child labourer said: “I and my two labourers were doing our homework and at the same time selling walnuts when municipal agents came and caught my two brothers. I asked them, ‘what do you want to do with them?’ Then they caught me, too... They took off my older brother’s clothes and started beating him by sticks. My younger brother started crying. Simultaneously, they told me to polish their shoes, I said I won’t. Then they rubbed black polish on my face.”

This is not the first time that the state-run media acknowledge rape of street children. The state-run Salamat News run by the official Iran newspaper published a report in 2017, which included some painful examples of sexual assault on deprived girl children and child labourers. The same story was also reported by the state-run Roknar website.

In a shocking comment made in October 2018, in an interview with state-run Iran ISNA news agency, the managing director of the Tehran Social Services Organization, Reza Ghadimi, claimed that based on a survey of 400 child labourers, 90 percent of them are “molested.”

Together, through our efforts, we will realise a brighter future for children

Children Deserve a Better and Brighter Future



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