

# International Liberty Association Newsletter

Churchill House • 120 Bunns Lane • London NW7 2AS

**W:** www.iliberty.org.uk • **E:** info@iliberty.org.uk • **T:** 020 8452 3481

## EDITORIAL

As we enter March, though the winds still blow and the air is chill, we can sense Spring is on its way as the days grow longer, with more blue skies and warmer sunshine. Our hearts lift as we look forward to building on our achievements and seeing more perpetrators of crimes against humanity brought to justice, further reduction in executions and improvements to the level of human rights abuse in Iran.

But, as we were preparing this bulletin, our attention was gripped by the dreadful news of Russian planes bombing Ukraine and we felt it important to voice our sympathy and concern here for all the innocent victims in this unfolding drama.

Also to say how moving it is to see the Syrian people, who have themselves been enduring Russian bombing since 2015, sending messages of support and offering practical advice from their personal experience.

This feeds our vision of peoples of all nations living in harmony, meeting the challenges of life with peaceful cooperation and finding ways of addressing conflict without resorting to violence. The perpetrators must be stopped and held accountable so the world knows that these barbaric ways are no longer acceptable.

... continued on p.2

## EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT ADOPTS RESOLUTION REGARDING EXECUTIONS AND OTHER HUMAN RIGHTS ABUSES IN IRAN



MEP Susanna Ceccardi

Following a widespread campaign, members of the European Parliament held a formal session on Thursday 17 February 2022, adopting a resolution that condemns the rising number of executions in Iran.

The MEPs also denounced the

mullahs' regime for the 1988 massacre of over 30,000 political prisoners and demanded an independent, international investigation into this horrific case. They also demanded prosecution of Iranian regime officials, especially the ... continued on p.2

## A GREAT ACHIEVEMENT: REPORT BY UN SPECIAL RAPPOREUR ON HUMAN RIGHTS IN IRAN FOCUSES ON EXECUTIONS AND REGIME IMPUNITY

**Javaid Rehman, United Nations Special Rapporteur for Human Rights in Iran** published his report for the forty-ninth session of the Human Rights Council to be held in Geneva from 28 February to 1 April 2022.

The report underlines a rising trend of human rights violations by the clerical regime. The ongoing human rights violations in Iran necessitate a joint international effort to hold the regime accountable.

The report refers to 275 recorded executions in 2021 and concludes that: "The Special Rapporteur



remains deeply concerned at the high number of death sentences and executions in the Islamic Republic of Iran, including for acts that do not amount to the ... continued on p.3



## European Parliament resolution in regards to human rights abuses in Iran *continued from p.1*

current president, Ebrahim Raisi.

“Here in the European Parliament, we raise our voice in defence of the Iranian people,” said **MEP Anna Fotyga**, Secretary-General of the European Conservatives and Reformists Party and former Foreign Minister for Poland. She continued:

“Since 1988, the massacre, there are ongoing crimes against humanity. We speak about the so-called death penalty, but what kind of penalty is that? In many cases it is just extra-judiciary crime and simply swift executions without



even the pretence of judicial or court proceedings,” She went on to say: “Words are not enough. Our action is needed because what we see in Iran – also with the financing of terrorists outside and meddling in the region and even in our territories – requires our action and



very strong sanctions.”

The EP resolution criticises the Iranian regime for at



least 275 execution, including at least two child offenders and 10 women, in 2021.

“I wonder if we are being too generous to the Iranian regime because when we speak of the death penalty, even with unreserved rejection of it, as is the case, it

suggests a previous judicial procedure, some kind of legality. That is not the case. In fact, there is no death penalty in Iran. There are sheer executions: state murder as a form of crime against humanity,” said **MEP Javier Zarzalejos**.

In the resolution, the MEPs also expressed their abhorrence regarding the mullahs’ “systematic use of torture in Iranian prisons” and strongly condemned “the steadily deteriorating human rights situation in Iran, especially for persons belonging to ethnic and religious minorities, based on systemic political, economic, social and cultural discrimination.”

“Women in Islamic fundamentalist regimes are the ones who pay the highest price. I have in my eyes the images of a shocking video, where a husband beheading his seventeen-year-old wife, accused of adultery, walks the streets smiling, exposing her head like a trophy.

In Iran, a man who kills his 14-year-old daughter faces eight years in prison; a woman who takes off her veil risks up to 24,” said **MEP Susanna Ceccardi** of the Identity and Democracy Party.

In her speech she also referred to the 1988 massacre of over 30,000 political prisoners across Iran, many young men and women, some even high school and college students.

### Editorial *continued from p.1*

In relation to Iran, we are pleased that, due to our persistent and widespread collective efforts, through campaigns, rallies, demonstrations, conferences, together with the on-going continuous protests inside Iran itself, public opinion is being mobilised to such a degree that we are witnessing more measures being taken, in Iran and across the world, to address the issues of

human rights violations.

In particular, the impunity with which the Iranian regime has committed atrocities for four decades is at last being acknowledged and robustly called into question, from the voice of the European Parliament, in the report of the UN Special Rapporteur for Human Rights in Iran, at the London meeting relating to the 1988 massacre and November 2019 uprising in Iran.

This is great news that we must build on.

There are two events to celebrate in March, International Women’s Day and NoRuz, the Persian New Year. Let the contemplation of the courage of the Iranian women as they continue to play a leading role in the struggle for freedom and equality and the promise of renewal and regeneration offered by the New Year inspire us all.



## Report by UN Special Rapporteur on human rights in Iran focuses on executions and regime impunity *continued from p.1*

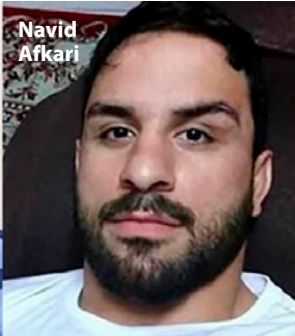
‘most serious crimes’ and following unfair trials.”

An excerpt from Mr Rehman’s report follows:

“The Special Rapporteur is alarmed by reports of secret executions in connection with protests, with death sentences issued in these cases following unfair trials and after the systematic use of torture to extract forced confessions.”



**Mostafa Salehi**



**Navid Afkari**

The report also refers to the executions of Iran’s national wrestling champion **Navid Afkari**, who was executed on 12 September 2020, and **Mostafa Salehi**, hanged on 5 August 2020.

Mostafa and Navid were both arrested during nationwide protests in 2018.

The UN Special Rapporteur also underlined the mass killing of peaceful protestors during the protests across Iran in 2019 and the continuous torture of those arrested during or after the demonstrations. Over 1,500 protesters were killed during the November 2019 uprising, mainly by direct shooting at protesters. None of the perpetrators of this crime have been brought to justice and Mr. Rehman underlined that “Impunity for those actions and a lack of accountability prevail.”

Further excerpts from the report follow:

“The Special Rapporteur continued to receive consistent reports of the use of forced confessions under torture as evidence for death penalty convictions, and the continued lack of investigations into torture allegations.” “As elaborated in the Special Rapporteur’s report to the General Assembly, the serious shortcomings in the legal framework and justice system, together with systemic violations of due process and fair trial,

render most, if not all, executions in the Islamic Republic of Iran ‘arbitrary deprivation of life’.

An emblematic case is that of **Khezzr Ghavidel**, arrested in 2013 and sentenced to death for carrying drugs. His case was pending a decision at the Supreme Court when he was executed on 10 September 2020. Almost a year after his execution, in July 2021, the Supreme Court overturned his death sentence.

In its response, the Government rejected the notion of arbitrary deprivation of life and all allegations of due process violations contained in the report. It stressed that due process and fair trial were guaranteed in law and practice.”

“At least two child offenders have been executed since 1 January 2021. On 2 August 2021, **Sajad Sanjari** was secretly executed for allegedly killing a man when he was 15 years old. Mr. Sanjari was first sentenced to death in January 2012. He stated that he had acted in self-defence after the man had tried to rape him, a claim that the court rejected. He was granted a retrial based on article 91 of the Penal Code, which exempts children under the age of 18 from the death penalty in cases where there is uncertainty about their full mental development. In November 2015, the court sentenced him to death again, concluding that he had attained “maturity” at the time of the

crime, without referring him to the Legal Medicine Organization for an assessment and dismissing the opinion of an official court adviser that Mr. Sanjari had not attained maturity at the time of the crime.

The Government denied the allegation of secret execution, stating that the man’s lawyer had been “present in the court a week before that and at the time of the enforcement of Qisas” and that the assessment of the mental development of the individual by the initial court had been more accurate, compared to the assessment in the retrial. (Qisas is an Islamic term for a punishment analogous to the crime such as ‘an eye for an eye’ or ‘a life for a life’.)

**Arman Abdolali** was executed on 24 November 2021. Mr. Abdolali was sentenced to death for a crime he allegedly committed while he was under 18 years of age, following a process marked by multiple violations of fundamental human rights, including the use of a forced confession extracted under torture that Mr. Abdolali subsequently recanted in court. His allegation of torture was not investigated. Over the course of three weeks, dating from 13 October 2021, his execution was scheduled and postponed six times, despite calls by special procedure mandate holders and other human rights mechanisms to halt the execution. The Special Rapporteur is alarmed at the mental anguish – amounting to torture – caused by the practice of repeated transfers of child offenders to solitary confinement in preparation for their execution, only for the execution to be postponed at the last minute.”







## PRESS CONFERENCE AFTER 463-SIGNATURE LETTER CALLING FOR AN INTERNATIONAL INQUIRY INTO 1988 MASSACRE



As the latest part of an extensive global campaign, on Thursday 27 January 2022, the UK-based **Justice for the Victims of the 1988 Massacre in Iran (JVMI)** held a press conference at Church House in London, to reiterate its longstanding call for an international inquiry into what has been called the Iranian regime's single worst crime against humanity. The press conference was preceded on Tuesday by the publication of an open letter addressed to the **United Nations Human Rights Commission** and signed by 463 prominent individuals and institutions.

"We are concerned that lack of accountability for the perpetrators by the international community could embolden the Iranian authorities to commit further atrocities against dissident protesters and political prisoners, as was witnessed during the deadly crackdown on the nationwide protests of 2019," the letter said.

The protests in question broke out spontaneously across nearly 200 cities and towns in November of that year but were promptly crushed by authorities who opened fire on crowds using live ammunition. Approximately 1,500 peaceful demonstrators were

killed in this fashion, and thousands of others were arrested. Many then faced torture over a period of several months, as detailed in an **Amnesty International** report titled "Trampling Humanity."

Former UN Human Rights Section Chief in Iraq and JVMI President, **Tahar Boumedra**, described the letter and its underlying campaign as "the largest international call on the UN in history by the international expert and human rights community to hold Iranian officials accountable over the 1988 massacre."

Boumedra led the press conference alongside former UK Minister for International Development, **Baroness Verma**, and **Struan Stevenson**, a former Scottish member of the European Parliament and current director of the **Campaign for Change in Iran**. Baroness Verma used the event to comment upon the potential impact of the letter, noting that it would likely reinforce the prior finding of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights that there are "no legal barriers to an international inquiry into the massacre."

The letter itself urged the Human Rights Council "to urgently

challenge the impunity enjoyed by Iranian officials by mandating an international investigation into the 1988 mass executions and enforced disappearances of thousands of political prisoners which constitute ongoing crimes against humanity."

The reference to "impunity" was reminiscent of a number of previous statements from JVMI and other organizations, including one from Amnesty International which referred to the June election of Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi as a "grim reminder that impunity reigns supreme" in the country's leadership.

In 1988, Raisi was one of four officials who sat on the Tehran "death commission" which oversaw the interrogation and execution of political detainees in Evin and Gohardasht Prisons.

His personal authority was later expanded to other localities upon Khomeini's direct order, apparently as a result of his particular commitment to fully implementing the fatwa.

During the conference, Baroness Verma noted that Western governments had been at least vaguely aware of the mass killings while they were still ongoing and concluded that those governments have ... *continued on p.5*



### Calling for an international inquiry into 1988 massacre *continued from p.4*

a responsibility to challenge Iran's impunity by using the United Nations as a forum to push for international inquiries into this and other crimes against humanity by Iran's regime.

Struan Stevenson's remarks at the conference emphasized Raisi's leading role in the crackdown of protests in November 2019, which took place

while he was head of Iran's judiciary. Mr Stevenson then went on to highlight some of the means by which individual countries and individual entities within those countries might exert pressure on Iranian human rights abusers while waiting for the United Nations to open the requested inquiry.

He noted that he had personally filed a request for Raisi to be arrested in the event that he set foot

on Scottish soil. This apparently prevented the Iranian president from attending the COP26 climate change summit in Glasgow.

Stevenson also noted that similar requests had been presented to legal authorities in other countries, before declaring that Raisi "had better be warned that if he sets foot, perhaps anywhere in the West... he could face imminent arrest, and his impunity will end."

## PERSECUTION OF IRANIAN CHRISTIANS ACCELERATED IN 2021 AS PART OF BROADER REPRESSIVE TREND



**Open Doors**, a non-governmental organization defending Christian communities throughout the world, produces an annual ranking of countries based on the danger they pose to Christians living or visiting them. Unsurprisingly, Iran ruled by the clerical regime consistently ranks among the most dangerous – eighth in the latest ranking.

Open Doors partnered with three other organizations in order to publish an overview of what Iranian Christians faced in 2021. The report confirmed that perennial issues of persecution and interference with Christian worship persisted during that year and arguably worsened, especially following the June

instalment of well-recognized human rights violator Ebrahim Raisi as the nation's president.

The report on "Rights Violations Against Christians in Iran" acknowledged that Raisi played a leading role in the execution of thousands of political prisoners during the 1980s and it noted that "few international observers anticipated improvements" under his leadership, "and rights' violations continue to be widely reported."

Those violations often take the form of raids on private, home-based, churches, many of which lead to arrest and prosecution. The report also notes that more mainstream churches have been subject to

property seizures, which continued in 2021.

The report points out that the Iranian judiciary denies arresting anyone based solely on their faith, but it adds that authorities find a pretence for carrying out those arrests by labelling home churches as gatherings of "enemy groups" or a "Zionist Christian cult", intended to undermine national security. Furthermore, the law formally criminalises such gatherings as proselytization to Muslims if they are conducted in the Persian language, or if they grant admission to converts from Islam.

In February 2021, the regime's Penal Code was amended to increase the penalties for proselytization or "engaging in propaganda that educates in a deviant way contrary to the holy religion of Islam." That "crime" now carries a five-year prison sentence, and several individuals have been prosecuted accordingly. The recent joint report identifies more than a dozen individuals sentenced in 2021 to prison terms of between three months and five years, based on their Christian faith.

The report also emphasises that this figure only represents the number of convictions that could be independently verified. The Iranian regime's judicial system is notoriously secretive, and the statistics cited by NGOs are largely the result of investigative work by activists inside Iran. This work is unlikely to be comprehensive, however, and it is widely assumed that there are invariably arrests, prosecutions, and convictions that go unreported.





## FOR THE OCCASION OF THE ANNIVERSARY OF THE 1979 REVOLUTION IN IRAN AND INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY



February 11, the anniversary of the 1979 Revolution which deposed the Shah's regime in Iran, is a reminder of Iranian women's struggle for women's rights in Iran which should be celebrated on 8th March, International Women's Day.

The widespread participation of Iranian women in recent uprisings is reminiscent of their role during the 1979 revolution against the monarchic dictatorship in Iran.

The most important indicator of the impact of women as a force of change in any social movement in Iran has been their willingness to be present at the scene and pay the high price for freedom and equality.

Only a week after the 1979 Revolution, Khomeini began his onslaught on women's freedoms with a clampdown on women's rights. Gender discrimination and misogyny are the ideological essence of the regime founded by Khomeini who, earlier, when a female reporter asked him about the role of women in an Islamic government, replied "it is not the time to talk about this issue".

Soon after the 1979 Revolution, Khomeini revealed his true colours.

Below is a brief history of the steps the mullahs took during their rule to gradually deprive Iranian women of their rights:

**26 February 1979:** Khomeini's office announced that the Family

Protection Act was going to be repealed. Legislated under the Shah's regime, the Act offered some limited benefits to women in their family life.

**27 February 1979:** The Women's Social Services Act was revoked.

**28 February 1979:** Gender discrimination was extended to the sports arena and women's athletic tournaments were cancelled.

**2 March 1979:** Women were banned from judgeship. Hundreds of female judges and juristic interns were left in limbo.

**4 March 1979:** The right of divorce was granted exclusively to men, enabling them to unilaterally decide to divorce at any time of their liking.

**7 March 1979:** Khomeini issued a fatwa on the compulsory veil, obliging women who worked in government offices to cover their hair at work.

**22 May 1979:** The first time a woman was flogged in public.

**12 July 1979:** The first time three women were executed on the charge of committing vice.

**3 February 1980:** A government directive was issued obliging female doctors and nurses to wear the compulsory veil at work.

**19 April 1980:** Female singers were summoned to court, intimidated and humiliated, and forever forbidden from singing.

**29 June 1980:** For the first time,

two women were stoned to death in Kerman, southern Iran. The verdict was carried out even before being made a law by the mullahs' parliament (Majlis) many months later.

By the end of **1981**, sex-segregation was implemented for public transport, recreation centres, the seaside, and other public areas.

In **1983**, the legal marriage age for girls was decreased to the age of 9. Then, almost a decade later, in 1991, it was increased conditionally to 13.

Thereafter, according to Article 1041 of the Civil Code reformed and amended on 5 November **1991**: "Marriage of girls before 13 solar years and boys before 15 solar years is conditioned on the permission of the guardian on the condition that a qualified court deems it appropriate."

Khomeini's crackdown on women's rights and freedoms, was a decision taken knowingly and deliberately, as a prelude to absolute suppression of everyone's rights and freedoms in Iran.

Yet, despite four decades of inhuman oppression, Iranian women have never remained silent, but expanded their struggle and taken the leadership role in protests and have paid a heavy price for it as well. The courageous women of Iran will carry on their struggle until they bring freedom and equality to their country.



## NEWS IN BRIEF

### CORONAVIRUS FATALITIES ACROSS IRAN PASS 510,000



According to figures collected by activists from various credible sources in Iran, as of 21 February 2022, the number of Covid fatalities has surpassed 510,000. Covid-19 deaths have been rising due to the clerical regime's policies and practices.

On Monday 21 February 2022, Iran's health minister wrote a letter to the director-general of customs demanding the return of 820,000 doses of vaccine donated by Poland. In explaining the reason for the return of the vaccines, the head of the Health Ministry's Public Relations Centre said: "Despite the initial paperwork, the 820,000 doses of vaccine originated from the United States."

### MORE EXECUTIONS IN IRAN

The clerical regime executed **Hamed Kheradmand**, 35, in Zahedan Central Prison on 19 February, **Kazem Yousefi**, 40, in Isfahan Central Prison on 16 February, **Mossayeb Faraji**, 34, in Kermanshah's Dizelabad Prison, and **Mokhtar Valizadeh** in Shiraz Adelabad Prison on 13 February.



According to the independent sources, since Ebrahim Raisi took office at least 271 people have been hanged.

In August 2021, the Iranian regime's self-proclaimed "moderate" president,

Hassan Rouhani, ended his eight-year tenure with over 5,000 executions, handing over the responsibility of "implementing God's order", a term he used to justify hangings, to Ebrahim Raisi. The regime's Supreme Leader installed Raisi, an illiterate judiciary official who rose through the regime's ranks due to his ruthlessness, to serve as the bogeyman to intimidate Iran's increasingly restive and defiant society.

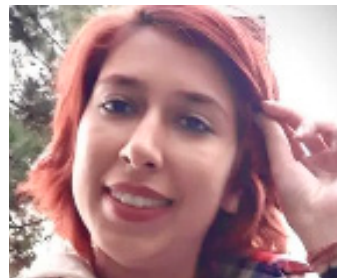
### TEACHERS CONTINUE PROTESTING DESPITE ARRESTS

Teachers across Iran have been protesting for their rights and the rights of pupils to free education, despite arrests and intimidation. The protesting teachers have been calling for release of their colleagues who are unjustly



imprisoned and for their salaries for be raised to above the poverty line. While the regime is paying huge sums to Revolutionary Guards who suppress people, teachers are paid a bare minimum, well below the poverty line.

### REGIME USES VIOLENT PRISONERS TO INTIMIDATE POLITICAL PRISONERS



#### **Saba Kord Afshari**

was beaten, on Sunday, 20 February, by a violent prisoner while prison authorities were watching.

According to the news from inside Qarchak Prison, at 12:30 pm on February 20th, an ordinary prisoner attacked Saba in the prison's corridor, grabbed her neck from behind and tried to strangle her. Another inmate helped and rescued Saba. During all this time, prison officials stood by and watched without taking any action. They purposely mix prisoners of conscience with dangerous criminals to put pressure on them by intimidation.

### 50-YEAR-OLD FREIGHT CARRIER DIES UNDER LOAD IN THE COLD



On Sunday, February 20th, a hard-working, 50-year-old 'kulbar' (freight carrier) froze to death under his heavy load in the Nowsud border area, Western Iran. His name was **Ali Darvishanfard**, a married man and father of two. He was a resident of Thalass Babajani city in Kermanshah Province, western Iran.





## FORUGH FARROKHZAD – THE POET OF ALL AGES



February 13 was the anniversary of the passing away of **Forugh Farrokhzad**, one of the greatest poets of our time who focused her attention on the plight of women and the misogyny that had made her life like living in a prison.

Her life and inspiring work was cut short by a car accident in February 1967 when she was 32 years old.

For Forugh Farrokhzad, poetry was a means to achieving a goal. She equated being a poet with being human, saying, “One must be a poet

at all times, not just during poetry.”

In her poetry, Forugh longed for a bright future that was free of oppression and darkness:

*Someone is coming,  
someone is coming,  
someone who in his heart is with us,  
in his breathing is with us,  
in his voice is with us,  
someone whose coming  
can't be stopped  
and handcuffed and thrown in jail...*

Forugh Farrokhzad's works have been translated into many languages including English, Turkish, Arabic, Chinese, French, Spanish, Japanese, German, and Hebrew.

In addition to writing poetry, Forugh focused on cinema.

In 1962, she made *The Dark House* featuring lepers and their living conditions in a leper colony. The film reflected Forugh's deep emotions about disadvantaged people.

Her film won the Best Documentary Award at the Oberhausen Film Festival in Germany in 1963.

“Cinema is a means of expression for me,” Forugh said of her cinematic debut. “If I've written poetry all my life, it doesn't mean that poetry is the only means of expression. I like cinema. I will work in any other field

I can. If I can't write poetry, I'd act in the theatre. If I can't act, I'd make a movie. What's important is for me to be able to express myself.”

“A thousand years of literary history will recognize Forugh as the greatest woman poet,” said Mohammad Reza Shafi'i Kadkani, a contemporary poet. “No intellectual has fought tradition better than Forugh did.”

Forugh held the deep belief that love is the only cure for humanity. She wrote:

“Do goodness then forget it,  
someday it will grow.”

The mullahs' misogynous regime banned Forugh's books at the annual book exhibitions. The regime also prohibited publishers and bookstores from displaying her posters.

In 2016, Forugh Farrokhzad's home in Tehran's Darrouss neighbourhood was demolished and the state-run Mehr news agency reported at the time that a five-story residential building was being built in place of her home. The regime was hoping that she would be forgotten. However, Forugh Farrokhzad has found her home in the hearts and minds of people around the globe who care for humanity, equality, and peaceful coexistence.

**Join us for NoRuz  
and Easter feast**  
**Saturday 7 May 2022**  
**3pm–7pm**

**at St Mary's Church,  
Wyndham Place, W1H 1PP**

**Please contact ILA by email,  
telephone or post to confirm your  
attendance. Entrance fee: £10**

