

Human Rights Violations in Kurdistan of Iran



Interim Annual Report on the Situation of Human Rights in Kurdistan of Iran for the period: 1st January to October 25th, 2021

Kurdistan Human Rights Association-Geneva
(KMMK-G)

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* For information regarding the collected data, please contact KMMK-G.



Introduction

This report provides up-to-date data and analysis on the situation of human rights in Kurdistan of Iran from January 1, 2021 until October 25th, 2021, prepared for the attention of the UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Iran, the Office of Human Commissioner the OHCHR, UN agencies, media, governments and public attention.

Similar to previous Islamic Republic administrations, the current presidency of Raisi continue its security approach toward Iranian Kurdistan and other ethnic and religious groups. The persecution, execution, imprisonment and indiscriminate and blind killings of *Kulbaran* (border couriers or tradesmen) remain alarmingly high. This report specifically addresses executions, political prisoners, indiscriminate killings of *Kolbaran* (Border Couriers) and landmine incidents affecting Kurdish civilians from January 1, 2021 until October 25th, 2021.

Every year KMMK-G provides the details of data collected in each aforementioned category in Persian attached to its annual human rights violations in Kurdistan report.

Background

State-Sponsored Violence and Discriminations against Kurdish Citizens

Kurdistan, the country of the Kurds, is divided among Iran, Turkey, Iraq and Syria. Iranian Kurdistan covers an area of 111,705 km², comprising four western provinces of Kermanshah, Ilam, Wermê or Urumyeh (West Azerbaijan) and Kurdistan, situated in northwest Iran. Their population is estimated between 11–13 million people. Most of the Kurds are Muslims: 66% Sunni, 27% Shi'a and the others are: Yarsan, Yazidis, Qadiriyya, Naqeshbandiyya, Christians and Jews.

For decades, ethnic minorities in Iran, including Kurds, Ahwazi-Arabs, Azerbaijani-Turks, Baluchis and Turkmen, have faced entrenched discrimination, curtailing their access to education, employment, adequate housing and political participation. Continued under-investment in minority-populated regions exacerbated by poverty and marginalization. Despite repeated calls for linguistic diversity, Persian remains the sole language of instruction in primary and secondary education.

Iranian Kurdistan like Iranian Baluchistan, Ahwaz and Turkmenistan suffer a high level of unemployment and discriminatory policies of “the gozinesh”, religious monitoring based on one specific sect of Islam. According to the UN



Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, the Iranian 1995 Selection Law based on Religious and Ethical Standards known as the “gozinesh” impairs the equality of opportunity or treatment in employment for persons belonging to ethnic and religious minorities.

Despite the diversity of ethnic constituents of Iran, only the Persian-Shiite group holds ultimate state power, and Article 1 of the Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran declares the Twelver Shi’a School of Islam as the formal religion of the state.

The current government maintains the policies of its predecessors and adheres to a system of governance based on the ideology of one country, one nation, one language and one religion. These elements perpetuate systemic and systematic discrimination against and repression of all ethnic and religious minorities in the country. Governmental participation by members of ethnic or religious minorities such as Kurds, Sunni Baloch people, Yarsan or Baha’is is severely restricted, preventing such individuals from assuming the presidency or occupying any significant governmental position.

Recent Developments: Crackdowns on Kurdish Civil Activists in Kurdistan, Baluchistan & Ahwaz

Kurdistan

In the early days of 2021, an ongoing wave of arbitrary arrests, incommunicado detention, and enforced disappearances by the Iranian authorities, targeting scores of people from Iran’s disadvantaged Kurdish minority has taken place. By February 12th, 2021, at least, 135 individuals (122 men and 13 women) from Iran’s Kurdish minority, including civil society activists, labour rights activists, environmentalists, writers, university students and formerly imprisoned political activists as well as individuals with no known history of activism, have been arrested by the intelligence unit of Iran’s Revolutionary Guards or ministry of intelligence agents, at times in a violent manner.¹

To date, the Iranian authorities have failed to provide any information about the reasons for the arrests, but according to credible information gathered from informed sources, there are serious concerns that the arrests are due to the individuals’ peaceful exercise of their rights to freedom of opinion, expression and association, including through involvement in peaceful civil society activism and/or perceived support for the political visions espoused

¹ See joint report of 36 NGOs: <https://kmmk-ge.org/urgent-international-action-needed-to-secure-release-of-kurdish-activists-and-others-arbitrarily-detained-in-iran/>



by Kurdish opposition parties seeking respect for the human rights of Iran's Kurdish minority.

Based on past patterns of documented human rights violations by the Iranian authorities, many of those detainees have gone through torture and other ill-treatment aimed at extracting forced "confessions", and that these may be later used in grossly unfair trials for spurious national security related offences.

These abusive detention conditions, which are in violation of both Iranian law and international human rights law, are placing the detainees at a serious risk of torture and other ill-treatment, which is practiced on a widespread and systematic basis in detention centers run by Iran's security and intelligence bodies.

Revolutionary Guards and ministry of intelligence agents have subjected the families of detainees to threats and insults when they have sought information about their loved ones and warned them against speaking to the media or communicating with UN human rights bodies.

These abuses of due process render the latest arrests and detention, virtually in all cases, arbitrary and therefore unlawful.²

Baluchistan

In the end of February 2021, a series of violent events and unrest took place in Baluchistan, when Revolutionary Guards have shot and killed at least 10 fuel couriers, known as sookhtbar, in Sistan and Baluchistan Province at the border with Pakistan, after a two-day stand-off triggered by the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps blocking the road to the city of Saravan. During these events over 23 people may have been killed in all.

Ahwaz

In mid-July 2021, a series of protests over the water shortage and mismanagement of water erupted in over 20 major cities across the Ahwazi-Arab region. The government's response to the peaceful demands of the protestors for accessing of water were met with violence by state security forces and over dozen Arab citizens were killed. The protests continued for over two weeks with further protests breaking out in support elsewhere in Iran, including in Tehran and Lorestan province.

² Joint Appeal of 37 NGOs: Urgent International Action needed To secure Release Of Kurdish Activists in Iran: <https://kmmk-ge.org/urgent-international-action-needed-to-secure-release-of-kurdish-activists-and-others-arbitrarily-detained-in-iran/>



Methodology

The Iranian authorities refuse to provide accurate data on executions, landmines, Kolbaran (border couriers) and other issues. In order to get the most credible data, KMMK-G collects and verifies up-to-date information in the following ways: (a) conducting interviews with the family of the victims, (b) conducting interviews with the lawyers of the victims, (c) contacting and receiving information from various institution, on-the-ground local networks, as well as informants within authorities and governmental entities, (d) monitoring the Islamic Republic's official statements, state media and publications, (e) receiving information from informal news agencies, and (f) partnering with the Human Rights Section of Kurdpa News Agency in obtaining on-the-ground information.

I. Executions

Iran: Kurdish Share of Executions in 2021

The state-sponsored violence and the application of death sentences against Iranian ethnic groups and in particular the Kurdish people is increasing dramatically and disproportionately. While the Kurdish population constitutes only 15% of the total 80 million population, the number of Kurdish executions for political and security related charges is over 55%.

Iran has one of the highest execution rates globally. Kurdish prisoners face unfair trials and are often convicted in proceedings marked by a pattern of abuses including the use of confessions made under torture and the denial of access to a lawyer.

Year in Review (2021)

The Kurdistan Human Rights Association-Geneva (KMMK-G) has been able to identify the identity of at least 56 Kurdish prisoners who have been reported executed for the period of January 1 to October 25th, 2021, despite secrecy surrounding executions, and the government's refusal to publish the names and ethnicity of the executed prisoners³. Twenty-five (25) were executed for murder and nineteen (19) for drug related offenses. Eleven

³ The data collected on-the-ground on Kurdish executions varies. This can be partially due to the fact that some executions are carried out secretly or that some families may have been intimidated not to report. KMMK-G has come across data as high as 69 executions in 2021, often with accompanying metadata. However, KMMK-G has decided to state the least verifiable number of executions that its on-the-ground sources have compiled. The metadata used to calculate approximate desegregation of executions reported in 2021 is from a dataset of 69 executions, applied to a minimum of 56 executions.



Kurdish political prisoners were killed inside prisons and under torture. Over 222 prisoners are reported executed in 2021 in Iran⁴.

There is a new scaring trend of elimination of Kurdish political prisoners in Iranian jail. Since January 2021, at least, eleven (11) Kurdish political prisoners were killed in suspicious manners inside Iranian prisons often under torture and beatings according to their families and prison witnesses. The names of these political prisoners are:

- ✓ Mr. Bahman Uqabi (from Islamabad, 35 years old, arrested in 2019) died under torture in Kermanshah Dizelabad prison on 15th January 2021,
- ✓ Mr. Mehrdad Taleshi (from Diwandareh, 21 years old, arrested in 2020) was reported killed under torture in Tehran Avin infamous prison on 1st January 2021,
- ✓ Mr. Shahab Darunparwar, from Islamabad (35 years old) was killed in a suspicious manner in Dizelabad Kermanshah prison on 21st March 2021,
- ✓ Mr. Jamal Mohammadi /From Ilam, arrested in 2019) was killed in a suspicious manner in Ilam Prison on 15th of May 2021,
- ✓ Mr. Amir Rezai (from Urumiyeh, arrested in 2001) was killed under torture in Urumiyeh Central Prison on 17th May 2021,
- ✓ Mr. Shamsaddin Tatari (from urumiyeh) was killed in a suspicious manner in Urumyieh Central prison on 12th of June 2021,
- ✓ Mr. Rahman Ahmadian (from Urumyeh, 38 years old, arrested in 2021) was killed under torture in Urumyieh central prison on 16 July 2021,
- ✓ Mr. Yaser Mangury (from Piranshahr, 31 years old) was killed under torture in Urumyieh Central prison on 8 September 2021,
- ✓ Mr. Assad Ramin (from Naghada, arrested in 2021) was killed under torture on 20 September 2021,
- ✓ Mr. Dawood Rahimi (from Naghada, arrested in 2021) was killed under torture in the Itela'at Center of Naghada on 20 September 2021,
- ✓ Mr. Amir Hossein Hatami (from Sirwan town of Ilam, 22 years old) was killed under torture on 23rd of September in Tehran Big Prison.
- ✓

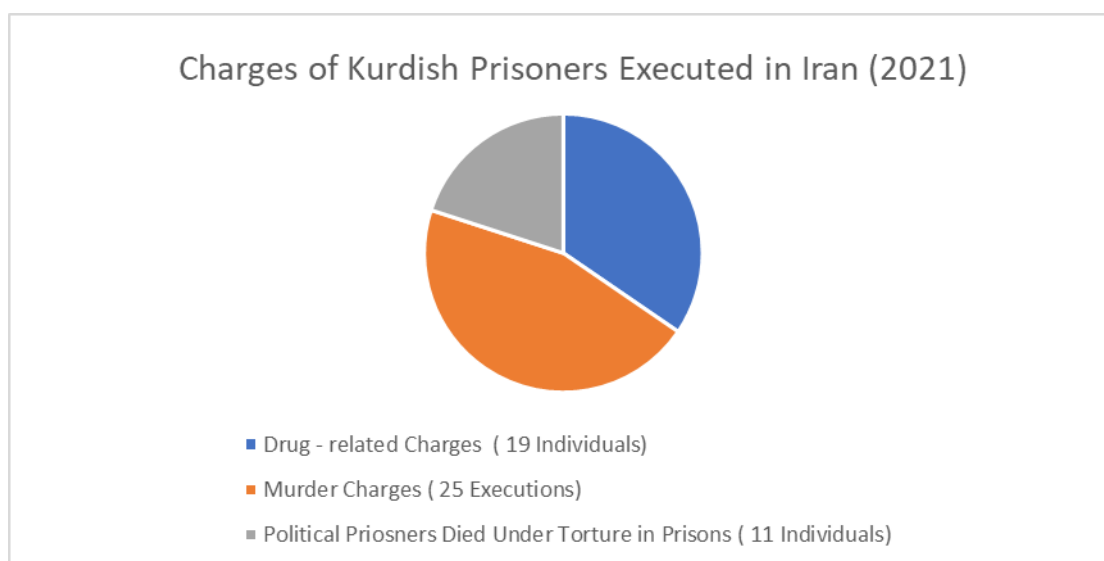
In 2020, nine (9) political prisoners were executed in Iran, four of them namely Hedayat ABDULLAHPOUR, Mustafa SALIMI, Saber SHEKH ABDULLAH and Diako RASULZADEH[1]), were Kurds, two (Abdulbaset DEHANI and Abdulhameed BALUCHZAH) were Baluchis and the other three (Mustafa SALEHI, Navid AFKARI and Ruhallah ZAM) were Persians.

The data collected by Abdorrahman Boroumand Center indicates that in the period of January 1 till October 25th, 2021 over 221 prisoners were executed in

⁴ <https://www.iranrights.org/newsletter>

Iran.⁵ According to the data collected by the Kurdistan Human Rights Association-Geneva (KMMK-G) from January 1 to October 25th, 2021 at least 56 Kurdish prisoners have been executed. More than a quarter of the overall number of executions in Iran belong to the Kurds thus far in 2021.

It is noteworthy to highlight that there is an obvious increase in drug-related executions of Kurdish citizens. According to our data, nineteen (19) Kurdish prisoners were executed for drug-related offenses since January 2021. The Kurdish share of executions is increasing dramatically and disproportionately.



II. Political Prisoners

Similar to previous years, the share of Kurdish political imprisonment remains dramatically high in the first ten months of 2021 (until October 25th 2021). According to on-the-ground findings of KMMK-G, Kurdish political prisoners represent almost half of the total number of political prisoners in the country.⁶

According to KMMK-G's collected data, 498 Kurdish citizens were detained/arrested from January 1 till October 25th, 2021, many of whom sentenced to long years of imprisonment and were charged with crimes related to civic activism and membership of Kurdish political parties.⁷ Among these prisoners, there are individuals who are workers, teachers, *Koulbars*

⁵ Boroumand Foundation : < <https://www.iranrights.org/newsletter> > (English)

⁶ United for Iran's Prisoners' Atlas: < <https://ipa.united4iran.org/en/prisoner/> > (English)

Note: United for Iran's database reports on 954 cases of Kurdish citizens currently imprisoned. See also KMMK-G 2020 annual report: <https://kmmk-ge.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/KMMK2020-1.pdf>

⁷ Please note that KMMK-G has a list of these detainees/prisoners in Persian. Since turning the list into English is beyond the bandwidth of KMMK-G at this time, it can be disclosed in Persian upon request.

(border couriers), artists, and human rights activists, environmental activists, journalists, lawyer, students, photographer, cultural activists, and others alike.

In this context, according to the data received by KMMK-G, there are 55 civic activists, 12 cultural activists, 15 environmental activists, 5 journalists, 8 labour activists, 7 students, 5 former political prisoner, 1 athlete, 2 singers, 10 beliefs and opinion activists, 1 poet, 1 Yarsan belief activist. Many of the reported detentions/arrests this year are in relation to the wave of crackdown against Kurdish civil activists in Kurdistan.

Without adherence to fundamental principles such as due process and fair trial, at least 139 of these detainees were charged with alleged “political and security”-related crimes, facing sentenced such as long years of imprisonment up to 40 years, lashes and heavy financial penalty and death penalty.

For instance, Mr. Saeed Mohammad Hosseini, a Kurdish environmental activist from Naghada (Wermê or Western Azerbaijan province) was sentenced to 40 years imprisonment for the fabricated crimes of moharebeh (imaginary crime against God) and membership of a Kurdish political party. Mr. Saeed Mohammad Hosseini was tried by the judge Jawad Ghulami in Mahabad Revolutionary Court in April 2021 and his 40 years jail sentence was announced to him on 25th May 2021 by the same Court.⁸



Evidently, the Kurdish community remains one of the most suppressed groups in the country, with individuals being persecuted, arrested and in many cases sentenced to death due to their alleged activism.

⁸ Photo by Kurdpa.

III. Extra-judicial Executions of Kolbaran (border couriers or tradesmen)

Despite successive Islamic Republic administration's pledges to change its security approach toward Iranian Kurdistan, the indiscriminate killing of Kurdish Kolbaran (border couriers or tradesmen) is increasing dramatically. The indiscriminate and blind killing of Kurdish Kolbaran (plural for Kolbar) takes place in blatant violation international obligations. Border security forces involved in indiscriminate and blind killings do not even respect Iranian domestic laws, which authorize the use of lethal force only as a last resort.

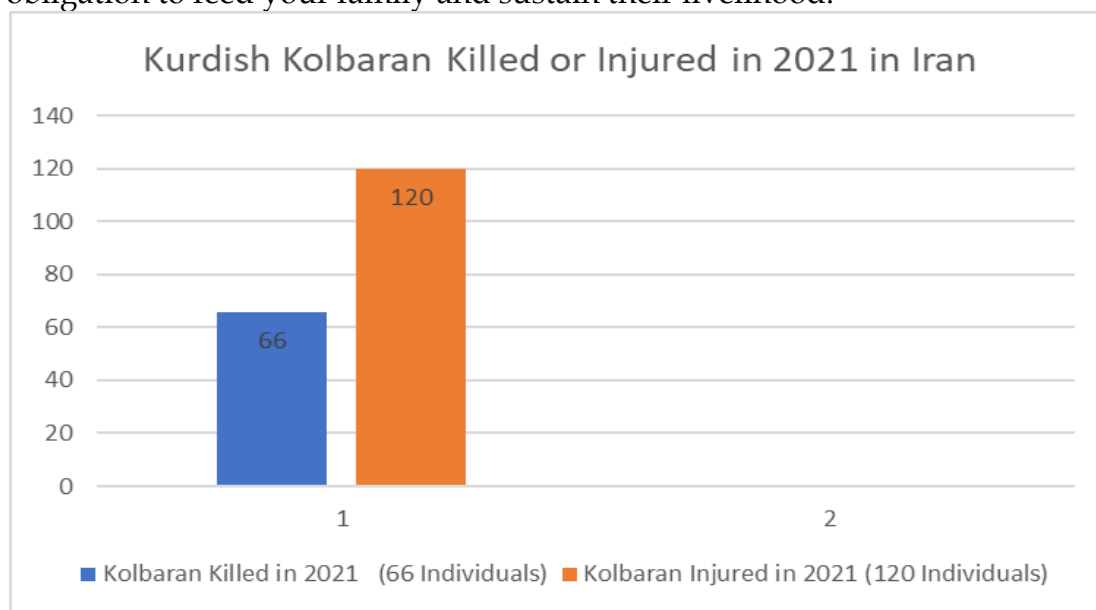
KMMK-G has received reports of indiscriminate and blind killings of 66 Kolbar from January 1 till October 25th, 2021, with another 152 individuals working as Kolbar injured at the border due to reasons such as shooting and landmine explosions among others. This brings the total incidents reported regarding shootings and discriminate killings of Kolbaran to 218 during the time period of discussion. Moreover, many kolbaran (tradesmen) were arrested and their goods were confiscated by the authorities thus far in 2021. In addition, hundreds of horses belonging to Kurdish Kulbaran were also shot dead.

The latest victim of Iranian border official direct killing of Kurdish kolbar (border couriers) is Mr. Jian Alipur the brother of the well-known Kurdish political prisoner Mr. Hooshmand Alipur. Mr. Jian Alipur was shot dead in the Sardasht border area on 14th October 2021. Jian was married and father of 2 kids.



Due to high rates of unemployment, and land contamination caused by landmines and explosive remnants of the Iran-Iraq war that hamper seriously the daily life of civilians particularly the farmers, the nomads, the shepherds and traders, the Kurdish youth and farmers from four Kurdish provinces of

Kermanshah, Kurdistan, Ilam and Wermê (West Azerbaijan) engage in smuggling commodities, such as tea, tobacco and fuel to earn a living. As the 26-year-old Taha Ghaffari, Iran's champion in track and field who has also received medals in Asia, and yet still working as a Kolbar in Iranian Kurdistan (Marivan) to support his family told the state-run Fars News in a recent interview, "Kolbari [Being a Kolbar] is not a profession. It is an obligation to feed your family and sustain their livelihood."⁹



IV. Landmine Incidents Affecting Kurdish Civilians

Various international bodies and entities such as the Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) on Iran (2010) and the Committee on the Rights of the Child (January 2016) have made observations and recommendations, urging the Islamic Republic to clear its territory of landmines and all the remnants of the Iran-Iraq war (1980-1988). Nevertheless, despite international and domestic efforts, the Islamic Republic refuses to cooperate with international NGOs and entities, and to ratify the Ottawa Mine Ban Treaty.

According to KMMK-G's data, thus far this year (January 1, 2021 till October 25, 2021) a total of 28 Kurdish citizens have been the victims of landmine explosions; 13 Kurdish civilians were killed and 16 were wounded due to landmines explosions and unexploded remnants of the Iran-Iraq war, which ended a long time ago in 1988.

It is also important to note that according to Iranian official statistics, during the eight years-long Iran-Iraq war (1980-1988), more than 20 million landmines have been planted in Iranian Kurdistan and Khuzestan province that hamper seriously the daily life of civilians particularly the farmers, the nomads, the shepherds and traders. Essentially, an area of about 4 million and 200 thousand hectares is contaminated by mines and explosive materials.

⁹ Fars News: < <https://goo.gl/wCm6Rw> > (Persian)



Iranian Kurdistan is the most affected area by landmines and undetonated ammunitions. The reason for this was armed conflict of 1980-1993 between government forces and Kurdish combatants. Reportedly, the Iranian Army planted unknown number of mines around their barracks and compounds in many villages and cities in Kurdistan.

Conclusion

The Islamic Republic does not seem even remotely willing to stop its outrageous human right violations. Iran's policy of instilling fear and intimidation among members of ethnic nationalities, in particular Kurds, remained actively and aggressively in place thus far in 2021. Meanwhile, the emergence of the Kurds as an inevitable part of a viable solution to a stable Middle East increases Islamic Republic's paranoia of its Kurdish populations at home, despite Kurds' modest request for equality and federalism.

The Supreme Leader, Ali Khamenei, as well as the Islamic judiciary and the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC), fear even the slightest signs of empowered ethnic communities, Kurds in particular. Yet, the Supreme Leader remains the ultimate decision-maker of the country. In short, despite repeated calls from the United Nations to the Iranian authorities in regard to human rights violations, the Islamic Republic's policy to suppress Kurdish populations remained as forceful as ever in 2021.

Recent crackdown on Kurdish civil activists in Kurdistan emerged in 2021 and general strikes in other ethnic territories such as Baluchistan and Ahwaz attest to the growing frustration of ordinary Iranian citizens with economic and political hardships in the country. Instead of effectively addressing these grievances, the Islamic Republic responds by detaining peaceful protestors and intensifying existing repressive measures.

About KMMK-G

The Kurdistan Human Rights Association - Geneva (KMMK-G) was established in 2006 to promote democracy, respect for human rights, and social development in and beyond Iranian Kurdistan. KMMK-G strives to serve as a bridge between the Kurdish and Iranian civil society on the one hand and the United Nations agencies and International institutions on the other. Since its inception, KMMK-G has actively participated in every session of the UN Human Rights Council and other relevant UN human rights mechanisms, including the Forum on Minority Issues. Over the years, the Association has frequently submitted reports on human rights situation in Iran's Kurdistan to various UN treaty bodies and in various UN Committees' meetings. KMMK-G has regular media outreach to Kurdish and Persian media and sponsors cultural events for the Kurdish community in Europe.



As a part of its advocacy efforts, KMMK-G is hosting regularly panels and seminars in Human Rights Council sessions in Geneva and as well as at the Swiss and EU Parliaments to promote the rights of ethnic groups in Iran. Recently, the group partnered with Geneva Graduate University and Impact Iran to organize a workshop on the rights of Iran's ethnic groups and also a panel at Human Rights Council with the participation of the UN Special Rapporteur for Iran and Madam Shirin Ebadi the Peace Nobel Laureate. In December 2019, KMMK-G has also partnered with Renew Europe Group in the EU Parliament in Brussel and organized an important panel on the situation of the Iran main ethnic groups.

KMMK-G prepares annual human rights in Kurdistan of Iran reports, and provides detailed annexes of data collected to the office of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Iran, as well as other relevant entities along with its annual reports. Click here for its www.kmmk-ge.org.