

Iran: Kurdish Share of Executions in 2020

Overview

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 13% 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 (2020)

According to the data collected by the Kurdistan Human Rights-Geneva (KMMK-G), for the period of January 1 to December 31, 2020, 69 Kurdish prisoners have been reported executed but the KMMK-G has been able to identify only the names of 37 of them despite secrecy surrounding executions, and the government's refusal to publish the names and ethnicity of the executed prisoners¹. Thirty-one (31) were executed for murder and four (4) for political reasons, two (2) for drug related offenses and thirty-two (32) unidentified. Over 246 prisoners are reported executed in 2020 in Iran².

Kurdish Share of Executions in 2020

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 BALUCHZAHAI) were Baluchis and the other three (Mustafa SALEHI, Navid AFKARI and Ruhallah ZAM) were Persians.

Various credible NGO's reports such as Impact Iran indicate that over 55% of those executed for affiliation with a political party between 2010 and 2018, were Kurds, while a quarter were Baluchi's and over one-tenth Arabs.³ The UN reports as well highlights that: "Kurdish political prisoners charged with national security offences represent almost half of the total

¹ 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 2020, 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 2020 is from a dataset of 69 executions, applied to a minimum of 37 executions.

² <https://www.iranrights.org/newsletter>

³ Impact Iran fact sheet to UPR: <http://impactiran.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/Death-Penalty-UPR-submission-2.pdf>

number of political prisoners in the Islamic Republic of Iran and constitute a disproportionately high number of those who received the death penalty and are executed.”⁴

The majority of these executions take place after grossly unfair and summary trials and for crimes that do not constitute the “most serious crimes” under international law. In this context, the execution of Kurdish citizens on vaguely worded offenses such as moharebeh or “enmity against God” and fabricated security charges are examples of insufficient and unfair forms of crime formulation. The Kurdish prisoners face unfair trial and are often convicted in proceedings marked by a pattern of alleged abuses including the use of confessions driven under torture and denial of access to a lawyer. The recent cases of Hedayat ABDOLLAHPOUR, Saber SHEKH ABDULLAH, Diako RASULZADEH and Mustafa SALIMI executed in 2020 and as well as the cases of Mr. Ramin Hossein Panahi, Zaniar Muradi, Lukman Muradi, Ahed Shabab, Nasser Azizi, Kamal Ahmadinejad, all members of Kurdish political parties, executed on September 8th, 2018, illustrate such pattern of unfair trials, as well as forced confessions made under torture⁵.

In 2020, we observed a new pattern of the executions of Kurdish political prisoners in Iran by squad firing, group executions and disappearances of the prisoners and their bodies and denial of the last visitation of the family before execution. This pattern was common in the eighties.

The secret execution and enforced disappearances of Mr. Hedayat ABDOLLAHPOUR, a Kurdish political prisoner, on 11 May 2020, in a military base in Oshnavieh, West Azerbaijan Province by squad firing, despite the UN human rights experts’ multiple calls and concerns raised with the Iranian authorities, as well as the group execution of Mr. Saber SHEKH ABDULLAH, Diako RASULZADEH, exemplifies this new pattern of executions of prisoners belonging to ethnic groups and others in Iran.⁶

While the majority of countries (141 of 195) abandoned the death penalty, Iran continues to use capital punishment especially against ethnic groups and in particular the Kurds as a means of control of minorities and populations. It’s also important to highlight that Iran continue to be one of the world’s top executioner countries in the world.

⁴ Report of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Islamic Republic of Iran : <https://undocs.org/A/74/188>

⁵ <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2018/05/iran-imminent-execution-of-kurdish-man-must-be-halted/>

⁶ <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=26036&LangID=E>