

## AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL PUBLIC STATEMENT

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# INVOLVEMENT OF IRAN'S FORMER DIPLOMATS IN COVERING UP THE 1988 PRISON MASSACRES

Iran's former diplomats have played a critical role in denying and disseminating misinformation about the prison massacres of 1988, as part of a global cover-up of the mass killings orchestrated by the Iranian authorities. This cover-up not only robbed those directly affected and society at large of the right to truth, but also contributed to entrenching impunity, compounding the suffering of survivors and relatives, and facilitating the ongoing commission of the crime against humanity of enforced disappearance and other crimes under international law.

This extended public statement builds on Amnesty International documentation of the issue of diplomatic cover-up in the organization's 2018 report *Blood-soaked secrets: Why Iran's 1988 prison massacres are ongoing crimes against humanity* (hereafter *Blood-soaked Secrets*), which documented the enforced disappearance and secret extrajudicial execution of thousands of imprisoned political dissidents in Iran between late July and early September 1988, and the decades-long plight of their families for truth, justice, and reparation.<sup>1</sup> The report concluded that the Iranian authorities had committed the crimes against humanity of murder, extermination, enforced disappearance, persecution, torture and other inhumane acts against political dissidents and their families. It emphasized that the crime against humanity of enforced disappearance continues while the Iranian authorities continue to conceal the fate of the victims and the whereabouts of their remains. It called for the establishment of an international mechanism to address impunity for these crimes under international law, and ensure that survivors and families of those forcibly disappeared and secretly killed are provided with truth, justice and reparation.

The present statement details the critical role Iranian diplomats around the world played in the cover-up, highlighting that although some diplomats deny having any direct knowledge of the prison massacres at the time, despite mounting evidence, which began to emerge in August 1988, they continued to deny the killings, spread misinformation, and oppose an international investigation. Iranian diplomats around the world and government officials in Iran made similar and sometimes identical comments, dismissing reports of mass executions in 1988 as "propaganda from opposition groups" and claiming that the killings had occurred in the context of the armed incursion of the People's Mojahedin Organization of Iran (PMOI), an opposition group that advocates the overthrow of the Islamic Republic system and was based in Iraq at the time.

Amnesty International has documented evidence pointing to the involvement of various former diplomatic representatives and government officials in the cover-up, including Iran's then Permanent Representative to the UN in New York, **Mohammad Jafar Mahallati**, Iran's Permanent Representative to the UN in Geneva, **Sirous Nasseri**; Iran's Chargé d'Affaires in Ottawa, Canada, **Mohammad Ali Mousavi**; the Iranian Chargé d'Affaires in London, UK, **Mohammad Mehdi Akhoundzadeh Basti**; the First Secretary of Iranian Embassy in Tokyo, Japan, **Raeisia** (first name unknown); the Minister of Interior, **Abdollah Nouri**, the Minister of Foreign Affairs; **Ali Akbar Velayati**, and Deputy Foreign Ministers, **Mohammad Hossein Lavasani** and **Manouchehr Mottaki**.

Iran's then Permanent Representative to the UN in New York, Mohammad Jafar Mahallati, played a particularly active role in seeking to undermine credible reports by the then UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Iran, and Amnesty International, and to weaken the UN's response. For instance, he undertook efforts in late November and early December 1988 to block the adoption of a resolution by the UN General Assembly that expressed concern about the mass executions.

It is Amnesty International's position that all former diplomatic officials who participated in the cover-up and repeated the government's false narrative around the prison massacres, notwithstanding the extent of their knowledge of the truth, have a responsibility to fully disclose what they knew about the mass extrajudicial executions of 1988, how the cover-up was coordinated and conducted, what instructions they received to promote the denials, who gave them the instructions,

<sup>1</sup> Amnesty International, *Blood-soaked secrets: Why Iran's 1988 prison massacres are ongoing crimes against humanity* (Index: MDE 13/9421/2018), 4 December 2018, [amnesty.org/en/documents/mde13/9421/2018/en](https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/mde13/9421/2018/en)

to whom in capital did they transmit the reports of serious allegations raised by the UN and Amnesty International, and what responses they received. This includes cooperating and giving testimony to relevant investigations and judicial proceedings seeking to hold those responsible accountable, as well as non-judicial processes seeking to establish the truth. To the extent that any such actions are restricted by diplomatic immunities, the government of Iran should waive the immunities ensuring that both victims and the whole Iranian society can finally access their right to truth.

Amnesty International has repeatedly called for those who ordered, planned or carried out the extrajudicial executions of 1988 and the ongoing enforced disappearances arising from them to be criminally investigated and prosecuted for past and ongoing crimes against humanity. In line with established principles of command responsibility in international criminal law, Amnesty International has called for criminal investigations and prosecutions to include in their scope superiors who knew or should have known that a subordinate was committing or about to commit a crime but did not take all reasonable and necessary measures within their power to prevent, repress or punish the crime.

Amnesty International has long maintained that entrenched impunity for crimes under international law, such as those committed in the context of the 1988 prison massacres, has emboldened the Iranian authorities to trample on human rights and commit mass unlawful killings for decades with no fear of consequences.<sup>2</sup> This is manifested in the Iranian authorities' bloody crackdown<sup>3</sup> on the ongoing popular uprising in Iran, sparked by the death in custody of Mahsa (Zhin) Amini, on 16 September 2022, days after being arrested by the so-called "morality" police amid credible reports of torture and other ill-treatment.<sup>4</sup>

Consistent with the patterns highlighted in this public statement and other reports by Amnesty International in relation to the 1988 prison massacres,<sup>5</sup> the Iranian authorities today are once again seeking to deny and cover-up the truth, through an array of abusive tactics including intimidation of survivors and families, restrictions on burials and commemorations, destruction of evidence, and disruption of communication networks.<sup>6</sup> Ahead of the special session of the UN Human Rights Council on Iran on 26 November 2022 and a UN Security Council informal meeting on 2 November 2022, Iranian

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<sup>2</sup> Amnesty International, "Iran: International action needed to break authorities' cycle of protest bloodshed" (Index: MDE 13/3546/2021), 20 January 2021, [amnesty.org/en/documents/mde13/3546/2021/en](https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/mde13/3546/2021/en); Amnesty International, "Iran: Presidency of Ebrahim Raisi a grim reminder of the crisis of impunity" (Index: MDE 13/4314/2021), 19 June 2021, [amnesty.org/en/documents/mde13/4314/2021/en](https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/mde13/4314/2021/en); Amnesty International, "Iran: A decade of deaths in custody unpunished amid systemic impunity for torture", 15 September 2021, [amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2021/09/iran-a-decade-of-deaths-in-custody-unpunished-amid-systemic-impunity-for-torture](https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2021/09/iran-a-decade-of-deaths-in-custody-unpunished-amid-systemic-impunity-for-torture); Amnesty International, "Iran: ailing prisoners left to die amid crisis of impunity for fatal denial of medical care", 12 April 2022, [amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2022/04/iran-ailing-prisoners-left-to-die-amid-crisis-of-impunity-for-fatal-denial-of-medical-care](https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2022/04/iran-ailing-prisoners-left-to-die-amid-crisis-of-impunity-for-fatal-denial-of-medical-care); Amnesty International, "Iran: Details of 321 deaths in crackdown on November 2019 protests" (Index: MDE 13/2308/2022), 29 July 2022, [amnesty.org/en/documents/mde13/2308/2022/en](https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/mde13/2308/2022/en); Amnesty International, "Iran: They are shooting brazenly: Iran's militarized response to May 2022 protests" (Index: MDE 13/5789/2022), 3 August 2022, [amnesty.org/en/documents/mde13/5789/2022/en](https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/mde13/5789/2022/en); Amnesty International, "Iran: Walls erected around graves of massacre victims show urgent need for international investigation", 13 September 2022, [amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2022/09/iran-walls-erected-around-graves-of-massacre-victims-show-urgent-need-for-international-investigation](https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2022/09/iran-walls-erected-around-graves-of-massacre-victims-show-urgent-need-for-international-investigation)

<sup>3</sup> Amnesty International, "Iran: Deadly crackdown on protests against Mahsa Amini's death in custody needs urgent global action", 21 September 2022, [amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2022/09/iran-deadly-crackdown-on-protests-against-mahsa-aminis-death-in-custody-needs-urgent-global-action](https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2022/09/iran-deadly-crackdown-on-protests-against-mahsa-aminis-death-in-custody-needs-urgent-global-action); Amnesty International, "Iran: Leaked documents reveal top-level orders to armed forces to 'mercilessly confront' protesters", 30 September 2022, [amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2022/09/iran-leaked-documents-reveal-top-level-orders-to-armed-forces-to-mercilessly-confront-protesters](https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2022/09/iran-leaked-documents-reveal-top-level-orders-to-armed-forces-to-mercilessly-confront-protesters); Amnesty International, "Iran: At least 82 Baluchi protesters and bystanders killed in bloody crackdown", 6 October 2022, [amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2022/10/iran-at-least-82-baluchi-protesters-and-bystanders-killed-in-bloody-crackdown](https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2022/10/iran-at-least-82-baluchi-protesters-and-bystanders-killed-in-bloody-crackdown); Amnesty International, "Iran: UN must act urgently after authorities unlawfully kill eight protesters in less than 24 hours", 27 October 2022, [amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2022/10/iran-un-must-act-urgently-after-authorities-unlawfully-kill-eight-protesters-in-less-than-24-hours](https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2022/10/iran-un-must-act-urgently-after-authorities-unlawfully-kill-eight-protesters-in-less-than-24-hours); Amnesty International, "Iran: Urgent international action needed to stop mass killings of Baluchi protesters" (Index: MDE 13/6193/2022), 10 November 2022, [amnesty.org/en/documents/mde13/6193/2022/en](https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/mde13/6193/2022/en); Amnesty International, "Iran: Swift action by UN Human Rights Council essential after latest horrifying protester killings", 22 November 2022, [amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2022/11/iran-swift-action-by-un-human-rights-council-essential-after-latest-horrifying-protester-killings](https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2022/11/iran-swift-action-by-un-human-rights-council-essential-after-latest-horrifying-protester-killings); Amnesty International, "Iran: Killings of children during youthful anti-establishment protests" (Index: MDE 13/6104/2022), 9 December 2022, [amnesty.org/en/documents/mde13/6104/2022/en](https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/mde13/6104/2022/en)

<sup>4</sup> Amnesty International, "Iran: Urgent international action needed to ensure accountability for Mahsa Amini's death in custody" (Index: MDE 13/6060/2022), 27 September 2022, [amnesty.org/en/documents/mde13/6060/2022/en](https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/mde13/6060/2022/en)

<sup>5</sup> Amnesty International, "Iran: World turning blind eye to crisis of mass enforced disappearance", 28 August 2019, [amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2019/08/iran-world-turning-blind-eye-to-crisis-of-mass-enforced-disappearance](https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2019/08/iran-world-turning-blind-eye-to-crisis-of-mass-enforced-disappearance); Amnesty International, "Iran's 1988 massacres: Authorities violating torture prohibition through cruel treatment of victims' families", 26 June 2019, [amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2019/06/irans-1988-massacres-authorities-violating-torture-prohibition-through-cruel-treatment-of-victims-families](https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2019/06/irans-1988-massacres-authorities-violating-torture-prohibition-through-cruel-treatment-of-victims-families); Amnesty International, "Iran: Shocking statements by senior official highlight impunity for 1988 prison massacre" (Index: MDE 13/0815/2019), 30 July 2019, [amnesty.org/en/documents/mde13/0815/2019/en](https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/mde13/0815/2019/en); Amnesty International, "Iran: New evidence reveals deliberate desecration and destruction of multiple mass gravesites", 30 April 2018, [amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2018/04/iran-new-evidence-reveals-deliberate-desecration-and-destruction-of-multiple-mass-gravesites](https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2018/04/iran-new-evidence-reveals-deliberate-desecration-and-destruction-of-multiple-mass-gravesites)

<sup>6</sup> Amnesty International, "Iran: Authorities covering up their crimes of child killings by coercing families into silence", 9 December 2022, [amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2022/12/iran-authorities-covering-up-their-crimes-of-child-killings-by-coercing-families-into-silence](https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2022/12/iran-authorities-covering-up-their-crimes-of-child-killings-by-coercing-families-into-silence)

diplomats – similarly to their predecessors nearly 35 years ago - sought to undermine the international response to the crimes committed in the context of the authorities' lethal protest crackdown and oppose an international investigation.<sup>7</sup>

## 1. AN INTERNATIONAL COVER-UP

From as early as 16 August 1988, a stream of reports by UN Special procedures, human rights organizations and international media were published and numerous letters and appeals by Amnesty International activists, members of parliaments, trade union activists and others around the world, were submitted to the Iranian authorities, raising concerns about mass executions throughout Iran. In an annex to this public statement, Amnesty International has provided a sample of such global public responses to reports on mass executions of Iranian prisoners from August 1988 to January 1989.

As documented in *Blood-soaked Secrets*, government officials and diplomats around the world responded to them with denials. Statements made by government officials and diplomats to UN Special Procedures, foreign officials, Amnesty International delegates and the media at the time and in the months following the enforced disappearances and extrajudicial executions demonstrate that there was a well-coordinated strategy orchestrated by the government of Iran and implemented by its representatives around the world to deny the killings, spread misinformation, and obstruct an effective international response to the crimes.

Iranian diplomats around the world and government officials in Iran made similar and sometimes identical comments, consistently dismissing reports of the mass executions of July-September 1988 as “propaganda from opposition groups.” They also consistently falsely claimed that the killings reported had occurred in the context of the armed incursion by the PMOI or involved PMOI members who had been tried for involvement in the armed incursion and executed.

Some notable examples of such denials by Iranian diplomats at the time include the following:

- Iran’s then Permanent Representative to the UN in New York, **Mohammad Jafar Mahallati**, repeatedly dismissed detailed reports about mass executions in 1988 and 1989, describing them as “false claims and fake evidence by terrorist groups”, misrepresenting the executions as “battlefield killings”, and submitting on behalf of his government films and other documents to the UN to support the false claims.<sup>8</sup>
- During a meeting with Amnesty International delegates at the Iranian embassy in Ottawa, Canada on 22 December 1988, the chargé d’affaires at the time, **Mohammad Ali Mousavi**, said that “the only executions which have taken place occurred as self-defensive killings in the context of battle during the July invasion by the PMOI.” The diplomat added that Amnesty International had been unduly influenced by the negative image of Iran created by other bodies, including the PMOI and the media.<sup>9</sup>
- During a meeting with Amnesty International delegates at the Iranian embassy in Oslo, Norway on 23 December 1988, the chargé d’affaires at the time denied that any “massacres” had occurred in Iran since the 1979 revolution, but he referred to “tens of thousands of terrorists” in Iran and said the government was obliged to “defend” the people.<sup>10</sup>
- During an interview with the BBC World Service in December 1988, the then Iranian chargé d’affaires in London, **Mohammad Mehdi Akhondzadeh Basti** was asked about reports of mass executions published by Amnesty International. The Iranian diplomat said, “These allegations were made purely to damage the sincere and serious efforts by Iran to establish peace and tranquility in the area.”<sup>11</sup> The BBC reporter subsequently asked if he was suggesting the reports were “fabricated”. He replied, “They [Amnesty International] had no contact with the Iranian Embassy in London and no contact with the government. After the ceasefire, certain dissidents were aligned with the enemy and infiltrated the country, some [were] captured and tried. These people were given a fair trial... and brought to justice.”<sup>12</sup>
- In an article published by the Tehran Times, a state-affiliated English-language newspaper in December 1988 or January 1989, Mohammad Mehdi Akhondzadeh Basti said that there was no basis for Amnesty International’s

<sup>7</sup> Amnesty International, “Iran: Landmark UN fact-finding mission marks long-awaited turning point in tackling systematic impunity”, 24 November 2022, [amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2022/11/iran-landmark-un-fact-finding-mission-marks-long-awaited-turning-point-in-tackling-systematic-impunity](https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2022/11/iran-landmark-un-fact-finding-mission-marks-long-awaited-turning-point-in-tackling-systematic-impunity)

<sup>8</sup> Cross reference to section 2 below as well as Amnesty International, *Blood-soaked secrets: Why Iran’s 1988 prison massacres are ongoing crimes against humanity* (Index: MDE 13/9421/2018), 4 December 2018, [amnesty.org/en/documents/mde13/9421/2018/en](https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/mde13/9421/2018/en).

<sup>9</sup> The records of the meeting are on file with Amnesty International.

<sup>10</sup> The records of the meeting are on file with Amnesty International. The name of the chargé d’affaires is not recorded.

<sup>11</sup> The transcript of this radio interview is on file with Amnesty International.

<sup>12</sup> The transcript of this radio interview is on file with Amnesty International.

“wild accusations”. The article alleged that Amnesty International’s information was largely based on “propaganda from opposition groups.”<sup>13</sup>

- During a meeting with Amnesty International delegates at the Iranian embassy in Tokyo, Japan on 3 March 1989, the then first secretary, **Raessinia**, expressed his concern that the information regarding the mass executions “may have been acquired exclusively from countries in the western block” and that “there are always mistakes in information provided by Western countries.”<sup>14</sup>
- During the 45th session of the UN Commission on Human Rights on 6 March 1989, Iran’s then Permanent Representative to the UN in Geneva, **Sirous Nasseri**, dismissed a follow-up report about the mass executions by the UN Special Representative on Iran in January 1989, which “contain[ed] a list of persons executed during the second half of 1988”<sup>15</sup> and noted that “there were in all probability several thousand victims.”<sup>16</sup> Sirous Nasseri claimed that “140 names on that were false as the names of the individuals said to have been executed did not appear in the registers of the prisons, hospitals or even cemeteries investigated. That fact indicated that those individuals had not been executed but had died in battle during the invasion of Iranian territory in July 1988.”<sup>17</sup>
- In a letter submitted to the UN Special Representative on 26 June 1989, Iran’s deputy minister of foreign affairs **Mohammad Hossein Lavasani** stated that, “the Islamic Republic of Iran cannot, and will not, hold itself committed to answering allegations originated from certain terrorist groups and war-time traitors” and dismissed the list of execution victims appended to the January 1989 report of the Special Representative as a list that “could very easily be prepared by any opposition group”.<sup>18</sup> The letter continued to claim that “140 out of the total list of persons alleged to have been executed in Tehran are forgeries and virtually non-existent individuals, which clearly proves the information provided by the terrorist groups to be purely false and to have been conveyed only for self-serving political purposes.”<sup>19</sup>
- In a meeting with the UN Special Representative on 15 October 1990, Iran’s deputy minister of foreign affairs **Manouchehr Mottaki** handed over a list “giving official Government information on the alleged executions of 3620 people mentioned in different reports of the Special Representative” between October 1988 and February 1990. The official reply did not acknowledge a single execution carried out in 1988.<sup>20</sup> The authorities claimed that “the names of 2,109 persons allegedly executed cannot be recognized.” For the remaining 1,511, they provided vague comments that included claiming the reported execution victims were alive, “studying in Iranian universities”, “working in different organizations of the Islamic Republic” or “studying abroad”; that they were dead due “to natural causes” or “street clashes and clashes with border troops”; that they “had achieved martyrdom while confronting the Revolution’s enemies”; that they “were released from prison”; that they had “never been arrested”; that they had “sought shelter in foreign countries”; or that they were “held as prisoners of war in Iraq”.<sup>21</sup>

These false denials reflect similar denials made by government officials in Iran during the same period. For example:

- In an interview broadcast by Tehran Radio on 13 February 1989, the then Speaker of Parliament **Ali Akbar Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani** stated that, following the armed incursion of the PMOI, some people had been executed for having participated in or collaborated with the invading force. He added that the thousands of PMOI

<sup>13</sup> Amnesty International made a reference to this interview in an internal campaigning document that it sent to its campaign co-ordinators on 6 January 1989. The document is on file with Amnesty International.

<sup>14</sup> The records of the meeting are on file with Amnesty International. The first name of the first secretary is not recorded.

<sup>15</sup> Special Representative of the UN Commission on Human Rights, *Interim report on the situation of human rights in the Islamic Republic of Iran*, 2 November 1989, UN Doc. A/44/620, [digitallibrary.un.org/record/81360?ln=en](http://digitallibrary.un.org/record/81360?ln=en), para. 59.

<sup>16</sup> Special Representative of the UN Commission on Human Rights, *Report on the human rights situation in the Islamic Republic of Iran*, 26 January 1989, UN Doc. E/CN.4/1989/26, [digitallibrary.un.org/record/55465?ln=en](http://digitallibrary.un.org/record/55465?ln=en), para. 16.

<sup>17</sup> Special Representative of the Commission on Human Rights, *Interim report on the situation of human rights in the Islamic Republic of Iran*, 2 November 1989, UN Doc. A/44/620, [digitallibrary.un.org/record/81360?ln=en](http://digitallibrary.un.org/record/81360?ln=en), para. 59.

<sup>18</sup> Special Representative of the UN Commission on Human Rights, *Interim report* (previously cited), p. 6.

<sup>19</sup> Special Representative of the UN Commission on Human Rights, *Interim report* (previously cited), p. 6. The list appended to the January 1989 report of the UN Special Representative contained the names of 1,084 “persons allegedly executed in the Islamic Republic of Iran during [the] period July-December 1988” and noted that “there were in all probability several thousand victims.” The Iranian authorities claimed that there were “140 forged names” in the list of reported execution victims, and did not comment on the fate and whereabouts of the remaining 944 people mentioned in the annex of the UN Special Representative’s report.

<sup>20</sup> Special Representative of the UN Commission on Human Rights, *Interim report on the situation of human rights in Iran*, 6 November 1990, UN Doc. A/45/697, [digitallibrary.un.org/record/102668?ln=en](http://digitallibrary.un.org/record/102668?ln=en), para. 220.

<sup>21</sup> Special Representative of the UN Commission on Human Rights, *Interim report* (previously cited), Appendix VII, p. 94.

supporters reported as having been executed had in fact been killed or captured during the incursion and that the PMOI was trying to disguise its losses by giving their names as execution victims.<sup>22</sup>

- Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani's diaries, which were published in 2010, suggest that he repeated the same claim in a meeting that he and Iran's then Minister of Foreign Affairs, **Ali Akbar Velayati**, had with the then French minister of foreign affairs, Roland Dumas, on 5 February 1989. The diary notes that during the meeting, "we [Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani and Ali Akbar Velayati] stated that Monafeqin [the PMOI] had lost their people during the Mersad Operation [the name of Iran's counter-insurgency operation against the PMOI armed incursion of July 1988] and in order to justify their mistake, they had exaggerated the issue of executions."<sup>23</sup>
- In an interview with a French television reporter in late 1988 or early 1989, Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani was asked about Amnesty International's reports about the execution of thousands since July 1988.<sup>24</sup> He stated: "This is part of the same hostile propaganda that has been going on against us and we believe that Amnesty International and some other centres move under the influence of our enemies. What has in fact happened here is that... about four or five thousand [members of the PMOI] attacked our country from Iraq with all their resources and very few of them managed to return [to Iraq] alive. Such massive casualties are unbearable for a guerrilla organization which recruits its members with great difficulty outside the country and they must somehow persuade their sympathizers. Therefore, they have made up this issue of mass executions in order to disguise the people whom they lost during this foolish armed confrontation as tragic execution cases."
- On 13 December 1988, the Austrian national public service broadcaster, Österreichischer Rundfunk (ORF) aired what the ORF presenter described as the comments of Iran's then prime minister, **Mir Hossein Mousavi**, "on the allegations of executions". Mir Hossein Mousavi said: "One of the issues we have been criticized for is related to the Mersad Operation [the name of Iran's counter-insurgency operation against the PMOI armed incursion of July 1988]. In this operation, a number of Mojahedin [PMOI members], whom we call monafeqin [hypocrites], because they are two-faced and lie to their people, and because they have committed murder and pillage in our country, worked hand in hand with Saddam [Hussein, Iraq's former president] to wage an attack to conquer Bakhtaran [in Kermanshah province, western Iran] and move towards Tehran. They had plans to carry out killings. Well, we repressed them. What else should we have done? Should we have opened the gates of our cities to them? Should we have opened the gates of Tehran so they could establish a presence and kill people? In this context, we have no mercy and our system does not deprive itself of the right to defend itself and take decisive action."<sup>25</sup>
- In a meeting with the UN Special Representative on Iran in Tehran on 24 January 1990, **Abdollah Noori**, the then interior minister, denied the mass executions and again claimed that reports of mass killings was a propaganda campaign run by the PMOI in order to conceal their casualties at the battlefield: "In order to conceal the defeat of the invaders, a campaign had been organized abroad alleging that invaders captured on the battlefield had been executed en masse, together with imprisoned members of the same group."<sup>26</sup>

## 2. OFFICIAL EFFORTS TO WEAKEN INTERNATIONAL REACTION IN THE FACE OF MOUNTING EVIDENCE

The Iranian government's strategy of denials and misinformation at the international level persisted throughout 1988 and 1989 in the face of mounting evidence that the massacres had taken place. Iran's then Permanent Representative to the UN, Mohammad Jafar Mahallati, played a particularly active role seeking to undermine credible reports by the UN Special Representative and Amnesty International and to weaken the UN's response.

<sup>22</sup> Amnesty International, *Iran: Over 900 executions announced in five months* (Index: MDE 13/019/89), 19 June 1989, [amnesty.org/en/documents/mde13/019/1989/en](https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/mde13/019/1989/en)

<sup>23</sup> Hashemi Rafsanjani, "خاطرات روزانه آیت‌الله هاشمی رفسنجانی / سال ۱۳۶۷ / کتاب «پایان دفاع ، آغاز بازسازی»", 2010. The entry is also available online at Ayatollah Hashemi Rafsanjani Documents Centre, "کشته شدن یک تبعه فرانسوی در مرصاد \*\*\* جبران شکست مرصاد با خبر "اعدام ها""", 5 February 1989, [bit.ly/3TzhMdk](https://bit.ly/3TzhMdk)

<sup>24</sup> The exact date of this interview by Hashemi Rafsanjani is not known. An extract of the interview was cited by several state media outlets in 2017. See, for example, Habilia, "پاسخ‌های جالب آیت‌الله هاشمی رفسنجانی به خبرنگار فرانسوی درباره ماجرای ۶۷", 7 May 2017, [bit.ly/3B69jY0](https://bit.ly/3B69jY0)

<sup>25</sup> Aparat, "نفاع میرحسین موسوی از اعدام منافقین در سال ۶۷", [aparat.com/v/RasiP](https://www.aparat.com/v/RasiP). See also Amnesty International, "Q&A on involvement of Iran's former prime minister in denial and distortion campaign surrounding 1988 prison massacres" (Index: MDE 13/3032/2020), 9 September 2020, [amnesty.org/en/documents/mde13/3032/2020/en](https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/mde13/3032/2020/en)

<sup>26</sup> Special Representative of the UN Commission on Human Rights, *Report on the situation of human rights in Iran*, 12 February 1990, UN Doc. E/CN.4/1990/24, [digitallibrary.un.org/record/85464](https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/85464), para. 119.

## 2.1 DENIALS AND MISINFORMATION FOLLOWING THE UN SPECIAL REPRESENTATIVE'S INTERIM REPORT OF OCTOBER 1988

On 13 October 1988, the UN Special Representative on the situation in Iran issued an interim report about the mass executions, which stated:

“According to information received by the Special Representative in September 1988, a large number of prisoners, members of opposition groups, were executed during the months of July, August and early September 1988. Most of those allegedly executed were reported to be members of the Peoples’ Mojahedin Organisation, but some 20 supporters of other opposition groups such as the Tudeh party and the Peoples’ Fadayan Organization of Iran (Majority) were also reported to have been executed.”<sup>27</sup>

The interim report referred specifically to multiple reports which warned of mass executions having been carried out in prisons across Iran in late July and early August 1988. For example, the report stated:

“On 26 August 1988, it was alleged that on 28 July 1988, 200 persons described as political prisoners, sympathizers of the Mojahedin Organization, had been massacred in the central hall of Evin prison. It was further alleged that, from 14 to 16 August 1988, 860 bodies of ‘executed political prisoners’ had been transferred from Evin prison in Tehran to Behesht Zahra cemetery... In addition, approximately 80 members of the Peoples Mojahedin Organization, mostly prisoners or former prisoners, were allegedly executed in early August 1988 in the towns of Mashhad, Kermanshah, Arak and Varamin, and in the prisons of Evin, Shiraz and Malayer.”<sup>28</sup>

The interim report also raised concerns “about reports that all family visits to political prisoners in Evin prison in Tehran and a few other detention centres, have been suspended since August 1988.”<sup>29</sup>

A subsequent report by the Special Rapporteur from January 1989 indicates he met with Iran’s Permanent Representative Mohammad Jafar Mahallati twice after his interim report was issued in October 1988. As reported by the Special Rapporteur, during the first meeting on 20 November 1988, Mohammad Jafar Mahallati “indicated that he intended to present a procedural decision under which the Iranian Government would express its commitment to co-operate with the Special Representative in all respects before the end of 1988, for the purpose of carrying out his mandate provided that a consensus with the other sponsors could be found in due time.”<sup>30</sup> During the second meeting on 29 November 1988, Mohammad Jafar Mahallati denied all reports of mass executions:

“He [The Permanent Representative] indicated that many killings [raised in the interim report of October 1988] had in fact occurred on the battlefield, in the context of the war, following the invasion of the Islamic Republic of Iran by the organization called the National Liberation Army (NLA) [of the PMOI]. The Permanent Representative showed the Special Representative a videotape produced by NLA, which he qualified as political and propaganda material, indicating that films of that nature were regularly being broadcast into the Islamic Republic of Iran from the NLA headquarters in Iraq. He said that that fact in itself discredited the information provided by that organization to the Special Representative.”<sup>31</sup>

The UN Special Representative on Iran added that Mohammad Jafar Mahallati “requested the Special Representative to include the film among the documents handed over to him by the Iranian Government.”<sup>32</sup> Based on that request, in his January 1989 report, the UN Special Representative on Iran summarized the content of the video as follows:

“The compiled video films presented an important military operation that was launched from bases located in Iraq in July 1988. Its code-name was ‘Eternal Light’, and it was qualified as ‘a new phase of NLA’. In the course of that operation, NLA apparently penetrated at least 150 kilometres into the Islamic Republic of Iran. NLA claimed the capture of several military garrisons... NLA also claimed to have killed 40,000 members of the Iranian military forces. After initial success, the offensive was halted and finally repulsed.”<sup>33</sup>

## 2.2 DENIALS AND MISINFORMATION AROUND THE UN GENERAL ASSEMBLY RESOLUTION OF DECEMBER 1988

Mohammad Jafar Mahallati reiterated Iran’s denials on 3 December 1988 days prior to the adoption of a resolution by the UN General Assembly on 8 December 1988 that expressed “grave concern” about “a renewed wave of executions in the

<sup>27</sup> Special Representative of the UN Commission on Human Rights, *Interim report on the situation of human rights in the Islamic Republic of Iran*, 13 October 1988, UN Doc. A/43/705, [digitallibrary.un.org/record/49935?ln=en](http://digitallibrary.un.org/record/49935?ln=en), para. 47.

<sup>28</sup> Special Representative of the UN Commission on Human Rights, *Interim report* (previously cited), paras 31 and 48.

<sup>29</sup> Special Representative of the UN Commission on Human Rights, *Interim report* (previously cited), para. 51.

<sup>30</sup> Special Representative of the UN Commission on Human Rights, *Report on the human rights situation in the Islamic Republic of Iran*, 26 January 1989, UN Doc. E/CN.4/1989/26, [digitallibrary.un.org/record/55465?ln=en](http://digitallibrary.un.org/record/55465?ln=en), para. 6.

<sup>31</sup> Special Representative of the UN Commission on Human Rights, *Report* (previously cited), para. 7.

<sup>32</sup> Special Representative of the UN Commission on Human Rights, *Report* (previously cited), para. 11.

<sup>33</sup> Special Representative of the UN Commission on Human Rights, *Report* (previously cited), para. 12.

period July-September 1988” targeting prisoners “because of their political convictions.”<sup>34</sup> According to an Iranian state media report, right before the vote, he called the resolution “unjust” and said “a terrorist organization based in Baghdad [the capital of Iraq]”, in reference to the PMOI, was the main source of the “fake information” it contained. According to the same report, after the adoption of the resolution, he welcomed the decrease in support for the resolution among UN member states compared to previous years and described the efforts in support of the resolution as a “game doomed to failure”. He added, “we will continue cooperation [with the UN Human Rights Commission] with a view towards clarifying truths and rejecting allegations, but now, this cooperation must be towards removing the obstacles that this present resolution has created”<sup>35</sup>

According to international media reports, in the weeks leading to the adoption of the resolution, Mohammed Jafar Mahallati had tried to have the resolution “dropped” or “watered down” and conditioned the cooperation of Iran with a UN Human Rights Commission investigation on the removal of critical references to Iran’s systematic human rights violations including mass executions and the adoption of “a softer text that would merely welcome Teheran’s decision to cooperate with the Human Rights Commission investigation and instruct the commission’s representative to visit Iran and prepare a report.”<sup>36</sup> According to a New York Times (NYT) article from 26 November 1988, Mohammed Jafar Mahallati told the General Assembly’s Third Committee on 26 November 1988 that “Iran would admit a United Nations human rights investigator and cooperate if the resolution is watered down” and that “the committee has to choose between a confrontation or a cooperative approach”.<sup>37</sup> On 1 December 1988, the NYT reported that “the group of countries sponsoring the original resolution refused to go as far as Iran wanted.” The response of Mohammed Jafar Mahallati was described by the NYT as follows,

**“Iran’s chief delegate, Mohammed Mahallati, accused the countries sponsoring the resolution of prejudice against his Government. He said that by approving it, the assembly panel had put ‘obstacles in the way of Iranian cooperation with the special representative.’ Such obstacles would need to be cleared before the human rights representative could visit Iran.”<sup>38</sup>**

### **2.3 DENIALS AND MISINFORMATION FOLLOWING FURTHER REPORTS BY AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL AND THE UN IN LATE 1988 AND 1989**

On 13 December 1988, Amnesty International published a briefing concluding that “the evidence for mass executions was now indisputable” and that “it had received information on more than 300 people reported executed since July but that this was almost certainly only the ‘tip of the iceberg’ and the true total could run into thousands.”<sup>39</sup> Amnesty International reported that “the secret killings have taken place in prisons throughout Iran” and revealed information about the profile of execution victims who “included suspected political opponents kept in prison after having served their sentences and those who had been re-arrested after release from political imprisonment”. The organization also expressed concern about the concealment of victims’ fate or whereabouts from their relatives and the burial of bodies in shallow, unmarked mass graves. Amnesty International said at the time that “[m]any details on executions had come from opposition groups and close relatives of those executed... and their information had been cross-checked.”<sup>40</sup> The organization added, “its members had sent tens of thousands of appeals to the Iranian authorities to stop the executions” and “is sending a list of names of political prisoners executed recently to the Iranian government for comment.”<sup>41</sup>

On 26 January 1989, the UN Special Representative on Iran published a report which referred to “the global denial of the wave of executions”<sup>42</sup> by the Iranian authorities and challenged the Iranian authorities’ claims that killings took place in the context of armed conflict with the PMOI. He specified:

<sup>34</sup> UN General Assembly, Resolution 43/137: Situation of human rights in the Islamic Republic of Iran, adopted on 8 December 1988, A/RES/43/137, [un.org/en/ga/search/view\\_doc.asp?symbol=A/RES/43/137](http://un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A/RES/43/137), para. 5.

<sup>35</sup> *Ettelaat*, “مصاحبه محلاتي پيرامون قطعنامه اخير سازمان ملل”, 3 December 1988, p. 14.

<sup>36</sup> New York Times, “Iran Says It Will Aid U.N. on Human Rights Study”, 26 November 1988; New York Times, “Deal for U.N. Rights Inquiry in Iran Crumbles”, 1 December 1988.

<sup>37</sup> New York Times, “Iran Says It Will Aid U.N. on Human Rights Study”, 26 November 1988.

<sup>38</sup> New York Times, “Deal for U.N. Rights Inquiry in Iran Crumbles”, 1 December 1988.

<sup>39</sup> Amnesty International, “Biggest wave of political executions in Iran since early 1980s” (Index: MDE 13/031/88), 13 December 1988, [amnesty.org/en/documents/mde13/031/1988/en](http://amnesty.org/en/documents/mde13/031/1988/en); Amnesty International, “Iran: Political executions” (Index: MDE 13/029/88), December 1988, [amnesty.org/en/documents/mde13/029/1988/en](http://amnesty.org/en/documents/mde13/029/1988/en)

<sup>40</sup> Amnesty International, “Biggest wave of political executions in Iran since early 1980s” (previously cited).

<sup>41</sup> Amnesty International, “Biggest wave of political executions in Iran since early 1980s” (previously cited).

<sup>42</sup> Special Representative of the UN Commission on Human Rights, *Report on the human rights situation in the Islamic Republic of Iran*, 26 January 1989, UN Doc. E/CN.4/1989/26, [digitallibrary.un.org/record/55465?ln=en](http://digitallibrary.un.org/record/55465?ln=en), para. 68.

“In his interim report [of October 1988] the Special Representative referred to information he received in September 1988 alleging that a large number of prisoners, members of various opposition groups, had been executed during the months of July, August and September 1988. Since that date, the Special Representative has continued receiving persistent reports about a wave of executions of political prisoners... The Special Representative has received more than 1,000 names (see annex), but it was alleged that there were in all probability several thousand victims... Many of the people said to have been executed had been serving prison terms for several years, while others were former prisoners who were rearrested and then executed. It would therefore seem unlikely that these persons could have taken part in violent activities against the Government, such as participation in the NLA incursion into the western part of the Islamic Republic of Iran in July 1988.”<sup>43</sup>

Despite these detailed reports by the UN and Amnesty International and their calls on the authorities to conduct investigations, Mohammad Jafar Mahallati continued to advance the government’s strategy of denial and distortion. On 28 February 1989, he sent a letter from the Permanent Mission of the Islamic Republic of Iran to the UN in New York to Amnesty International which again “denied the existence of any political executions”<sup>44</sup> and repeated the claim that those reported as having been executed were:

“individuals who, as admitted by themselves, had in an offensive against Iran killed 40,000 Iranians defending their Islamic homeland... and persons with direct organizational contacts with the army [of the People’s Mojahedin Organization] which invaded the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Iran, and which, through a treacherous espionage network, realized the enemy’s aggressive intentions.”<sup>45</sup>

The letter also reiterated his earlier denials that dismissed reports of mass executions as “false claims and fake evidence by terrorist groups”:

“[T]he Permanent Mission of the Islamic Republic of Iran while requesting clarification from Amnesty International on the allegations contained in its report of 13 December 1988, suggests that Amnesty International refrain from preparing any report on the basis of false claims and fake evidence given by terrorist groups.”<sup>46</sup>

According to UN records, Mohammad Jafar Mahallati sent to the UN Secretary General a copy of the letter addressed to Amnesty International and requested that “it is circulated as a document of the General Assembly under item 12 of the preliminary.”<sup>47</sup>

### 3. RESPONSIBILITY FOR THE COVER-UP

The Iranian authorities’ coordinated strategy to deny and distort the truth about the prison massacres of 1988 was carried out in many instances by its diplomatic representatives, and served to shield the Islamic Republic system from increased scrutiny and accountability at the international level. Despite the number of government officials and diplomats who appear to have been involved in the cover-up and the important role this played in denying truth, justice and reparation to the victims and their families, to date, no one has accepted responsibility or been held responsible.

In an interview with journalist Masih Alinejad on 16 June 2022, Mohammad Jafar Mahallati claimed that while working as Iran’s Permanent Representative to the UN in New York, he was not aware of the mass executions of 1988.

“Today everyone including various groups acknowledge that it [the 1988 prison massacre] was carried out very secretly and extensive information did not exist and even the Prime Minister and the President deny that they knew... I had absolutely no information and in the office of Iran’s Permanent Representative to the UN in New York, there is not one telex or one document [indicating] that any information was given to the ambassador. I absolutely had no information.”<sup>48</sup>

He added,

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<sup>43</sup> Special Representative of the UN Commission on Human Rights, *Report* (previously cited), paras 15-18, 68, 72.

<sup>44</sup> Permanent Representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran to the United Nations in New York, *Letter addressed to the UN Secretary General*, 28 February 1989, UN Doc. A/44/153, [digitallibrary.un.org/record/58276?ln=en](http://digitallibrary.un.org/record/58276?ln=en), p. 4.

<sup>45</sup> Permanent Representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran to the United Nations in New York, *Letter addressed to the UN Secretary-General* (previously cited), p. 5.

<sup>46</sup> Permanent Representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran to the United Nations in New York, *Letter addressed to the UN Secretary-General* (previously cited), p. 5.

<sup>47</sup> Permanent Representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran to the United Nations in New York, *Letter addressed to the UN Secretary-General* (previously cited), p. 1.

<sup>48</sup> VOA Farsi, “نسخه کامل گفت‌وگو با جعفر محلاتی، سفیر جمهوری اسلامی در سازمان ملل در زمان اعدام‌های دهه ۶۰”, 17 June 2022, [youtube.com/watch?v=R-FU-QaAcv0](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=R-FU-QaAcv0), minute 2:46.



**"A human bears responsibility based on his information. Responsibility is proportional to knowledge. If anyone says otherwise [concerning] an ambassador or a non-ambassador, it is irrelevant... A human takes action based on their information not on the basis of assumptions. How could I know something about which I had no information?"<sup>49</sup>**

To date, there is no evidence to indicate whether this ambassador had been briefed by his government that the crimes had occurred. However, having received numerous reports from credible international sources described above, he was clearly aware of the serious allegations of mass executions, yet continued to actively promote the government's denials and undermine calls for independent investigations and accountability.

During the same interview, Mohammad Jafar Mahallati added:

**"Ambassadors have specific instructions. They [superior authorities] state what is your duty and what tasks you must perform and necessarily, ambassadors are not informed from top to bottom about the details of events that occur in [their] countries."<sup>50</sup>**

Victims and their families have a right to truth, which they have been denied for nearly 35 years. Those officials who participated in the cover-up and repeated the government's false narrative around the prison massacres, notwithstanding the extent of their knowledge of the truth, have a responsibility to fully disclose what they knew, what instructions they received to promote the denials, who gave them the instructions, to whom in capital did they transmit the reports of serious allegations raised by the UN and Amnesty International, and what responses they received.

Mohammad Jafar Mahallati did note in the interview about communicating with his government in the capital:

**"When I became aware, that is when Mr Galindo Pohl [the UN Special Representative on the situation of human rights in Iran] stated that executions were likely taking place, I immediately talked to the Government of Iran [suggesting] that the Representative of [the Commission of] Human Rights goes to Iran."<sup>51</sup>**

To date, he has yet to provide any further information on what measures he took to address the reports with his government or the responses received.

As outlined above, UN records show that the UN Special Representative on the situation of human rights in Iran issued his first interim report about the allegations of mass executions on 13 October 1988 and subsequently discussed the concerns with Mohammad Jafar Mahallati in person on 20 and 29 November 1988 (see Section 2.1 above). As noted above, UN records and international media reports further show that Mohammad Jafar Mahallati conditioned visits to Iran by the UN Special Representative on removal of critical references to the mass executions in the December 1988 resolution of the General Assembly (see Section 2.2 above).

At a minimum, Mohammad Jafar Mahallati should shed light on the nature and content of the instructions he received from his superiors in Tehran, based on which he misrepresented the executions as battlefield killings during this 29 November 1988 meeting with the UN Special Representative. He should also reveal what instructions he received and from who to undertake efforts in late November and early December 1988 to undermine the resolution of the UN General Assembly that expressed concern about the mass executions. He should also provide similar information on the letter he sent on behalf of Iran's Permanent Mission to the UN in New York to Amnesty International on 28 February 1989 dismissing reports of mass executions as "false claims and fake evidence by terrorist groups."

## 4. THE RIGHT TO TRUTH AND JUSTICE

### 4.1 CRIMINAL INVESTIGATION AND PROSECUTION

Amnesty International has repeatedly called for those who ordered, planned or carried out the extrajudicial executions of 1988 and the ongoing enforced disappearances arising from them to be criminally investigated and prosecuted for past and ongoing crimes against humanity.<sup>52</sup> Individuals who must be criminally investigated in this regard include Shari'a

<sup>49</sup> VOA Farsi, "نسخه کامل گفت‌وگو با جعفر محللاتی، سفیر جمهوری اسلامی در سازمان ملل در زمان اعدام‌های دهه ۶۰" (previously cited), minute 4:29.

<sup>50</sup> VOA Farsi, "نسخه کامل گفت‌وگو با جعفر محللاتی، سفیر جمهوری اسلامی در سازمان ملل در زمان اعدام‌های دهه ۶۰" (previously cited), minute 2:33. Mohammad Jafar Mahallati made these comments in response to a question that asked how as Iran's ambassador, he could have not known that mass executions were taking place in Iran in 1988.

<sup>51</sup> VOA Farsi, "نسخه کامل گفت‌وگو با جعفر محللاتی، سفیر جمهوری اسلامی در سازمان ملل در زمان اعدام‌های دهه ۶۰" (previously cited), minute 5:10.

<sup>52</sup> Amnesty International, "Conviction of former Iranian official over involvement in 1988 prison massacres landmark step towards justice", 14 July 2022, [amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2022/07/iran-conviction-of-former-iranian-official-over-involvement-in-1988-prison-massacres-landmark-step-towards-justice](https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2022/07/iran-conviction-of-former-iranian-official-over-involvement-in-1988-prison-massacres-landmark-step-towards-justice); Amnesty International, "Presidency of Ebrahim Raisi a grim reminder of the crisis of impunity" (Index: MDE 13/4314/2021), 19 June 2021, [amnesty.org/en/documents/mde13/4314/2021/en](https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/mde13/4314/2021/en); Amnesty International, "Ebrahim Raisi must be investigated for crimes against humanity", 19 June 2021, [amnesty.org/en/latest/press-release/2021/06/iran-ebrahim-raisi-must-be-investigated-for-crimes-against-humanity](https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/press-release/2021/06/iran-ebrahim-raisi-must-be-investigated-for-crimes-against-humanity); Amnesty International, "UN

judges, prosecutor generals and assistant prosecutors, prison officials and ministry of intelligence representatives who were members of the so-called “death commissions” which condemned prisoners to death.<sup>53</sup> Among them are:

- **Ebrahim Raisi** - He was the deputy prosecutor general of Tehran in 1988 and a member of the Tehran “death commission”. He was later the prosecutor general of Tehran between 1989 and 1994, the first deputy head of the judiciary from 2004 to 2014, the country’s prosecutor general from 2014 to 2016, the head of the judiciary from 2019 to 2021 and Iran’s current president since June 2021.
- **Alireza Avaei** - He was tasked with participating in the Dezful “death commission” as the prosecutor general of Dezful and was the minister of justice from 2017 to 2021.
- **Hossein Ali Nayyeri** - He acted as the Shari’a judge in the Tehran “death commission”. He was promoted to the position of the deputy head of Iran’s Supreme Court in 1989 and remained in this post until September 2013. He was subsequently appointed as the head of the Supreme Disciplinary Court for Judges, a position which he holds today.
- **Mostafa Pour Mohammadi** - He was the representative of the ministry of intelligence in the “death commission” in Tehran. He was the minister of justice between 2013 and 2017 and is currently a senior advisor to the head of the judiciary.
- **Mohammad Hossein Ahmadi** - He was the Shari’a judge of Khuzestan province in 1988 and a member of the Khuzestan “death commission”. He is currently a member of the Assembly of Experts, a constitutional body that has the power to appoint or dismiss Iran’s Supreme Leader.

In line with established principles of command responsibility in international criminal law, Amnesty International has called for criminal investigations and prosecutions to include in their scope superiors who knew or should have known that a subordinate was committing or about to commit a crime but did not take all reasonable and necessary measures within their power to prevent, repress or punish the crime.

Criminal investigations must also address the criminal liability of any officials suspected of aiding or abetting, or otherwise assisting or facilitating the extrajudicial executions and/or the subsequent concealment of the fate of those forcibly disappeared and secretly killed, including the causes and circumstances of their executions, and the whereabouts of their remains.

All states have a duty under international law to investigate and, where sufficient evidence exists, prosecute and punish those responsible for crimes under international law, including extrajudicial executions, enforced disappearances, torture and crimes against humanity. Inappropriate defences - such as invoking superior orders as a defence to such crimes - or other barriers to justice prohibited by international law - such as prescription and amnesties for crimes under international law - must not be applied.

International standards confirm victims’ access to justice to be a vital component of states’ obligations to provide effective remedies. It is also an essential element of the state’s positive obligation to prevent the arbitrary deprivation of life and ensure human rights.

## 4.2 TRUTH RECOVERY MECHANISMS

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calls for accountability on 1988 prison massacres marks turning point in three-decade struggle”, 9 December 2020, [amnesty.org/en/latest/press-release/2020/12/iran-un-calls-for-accountability-on-1988-prison-massacres-marks-turning-point-in-three-decade-struggle](https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/press-release/2020/12/iran-un-calls-for-accountability-on-1988-prison-massacres-marks-turning-point-in-three-decade-struggle); Amnesty International, “World turning blind eye to crisis of mass enforced disappearance”, 28 August 2019, [amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2019/08/iran-world-turning-blind-eye-to-crisis-of-mass-enforced-disappearance](https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2019/08/iran-world-turning-blind-eye-to-crisis-of-mass-enforced-disappearance); Amnesty International, “Shocking statements by senior official highlight impunity for 1988 prison massacres”, 30 July 2019, [amnesty.org/en/documents/mde13/0815/2019/en](https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/mde13/0815/2019/en); Amnesty International, “Iran’s 1988 massacres: Authorities violating torture prohibition through cruel treatment of victims’ families”, 26 June 2019, [amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2019/06/irans-1988-massacres-authorities-violating-torture-prohibition-through-cruel-treatment-of-victims-families](https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2019/06/irans-1988-massacres-authorities-violating-torture-prohibition-through-cruel-treatment-of-victims-families)

<sup>53</sup> The “death commissions” bore no resemblance to a court and their proceedings were summary and arbitrary in the extreme. They operated outside any existing legislation and were not concerned with establishing the guilt or innocence of defendants in relation to any internationally recognized criminal offence. There was no possibility of appeal at any point during the process. The prisoners were asked if they were prepared to express repentance for their past political beliefs and activities and denounce their political groups in writing. In some cases, they were also asked if they were prepared to execute or inflict harm on fellow dissidents. Many prisoners did not realize that their answers to these questions could make the difference between life and death. Some thought they were appearing before a pardon committee. Prisoners were not informed that they were condemned to death until shortly before their executions; sometimes they only learned about their impending fate when they were given a pen and piece of paper and told to write down their last wishes. Even then, they did not know when and how they would die until they were lined up before a firing squad or nooses were put around their necks. For more information, see Amnesty International, *Blood-soaked secrets: Why Iran’s 1988 prison massacres are ongoing crimes against humanity* (Index: MDE 13/9421/2018), 4 December 2018, [amnesty.org/en/documents/mde13/9421/2018/en](https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/mde13/9421/2018/en)

In addition to criminal investigations and prosecutions, Amnesty International has repeatedly called for the establishment of a competent, independent and impartial truth commission, commission of inquiry or other appropriate mechanism to establish fully the truth regarding the mass enforced disappearances and extrajudicial executions of July-September 1988, with powers to compel current and former officials to testify.

All former and current Iranian diplomats and ministry of foreign affairs representatives must be summoned to testify and fully cooperate with such truth mechanisms, including by sharing any information and records that they have about the instructions that the Iranian government gave to its diplomats from August 1988 onwards to counter global outcries over the mass executions, including the identities of those involved in developing and issuing such instructions and any relevant discussions that took place.

Under international law and standards, the right to know the truth is a collective right that ensures society's access to information that is essential for the workings of democratic systems, and it is also a private right for relatives of the victims, which affords a form of reparation.<sup>54</sup> Principle 2 of the Updated Set of Principles to Combat Impunity states: "Every people has the inalienable right to know the truth about past events concerning the perpetration of heinous crimes and about the circumstances and reasons that led, through massive or systematic violations, to the perpetration of those crimes. Full and effective exercise of the right to the truth provides a vital safeguard against the recurrence of violations."

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<sup>54</sup> Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, Report No. 136/99, case 10.488, *Ignacio Ellacuría et al. (El Salvador)*, 22 December 1999, para. 224.

# ANNEX – EARLY DOCUMENTATION OF MASS EXECUTIONS

A stream of human rights reports and international media articles were published and numerous letters and appeals were submitted to the Iranian authorities from as early as 16 August 1988, raising concerns about mass executions in prisons throughout Iran.

Despite this, the Iranian government failed in its obligations, under international human rights law, to conduct investigations and take urgent action to restore family visitations which had been suspended since July 1988, publicly reveal the truth about the fate and whereabouts of prisoners who had been forcibly disappeared, and intervene to halt the executions.<sup>55</sup>

International media reports, UN communications, and the tens of thousands of appeals by Amnesty International's members were met initially with silence and then with denial from Iran's representatives abroad (see Section 2 above).

The compilation below highlights some of the human rights reports and media articles that were issued about the mass executions of 1988 from 16 August 1988 to January 1989.

## AUGUST 1988

On 16 August 1988, Amnesty International issued its first Urgent Action expressing concern about "evidence that a new wave of political executions is taking place in Iran."<sup>56</sup> The organization called on its members to send telegrams, telexes and letters to the head of Iran's Supreme Court and a member of Iran's Supreme Judicial Council, Abdulkarim Mousavi Ardebili, and the Minister of Justice, Hassan Ebrahim Habibi, and to send a copy of the appeals to the diplomatic representatives of Iran in their respective countries. The appeals urged "the commutation of all outstanding death sentences and an end to executions in Iran."<sup>57</sup>

On 17 August 1988, the Financial Times published an article, written by their correspondent in Iran Edward Mortimer, which stated, "Iran has resorted to mass executions of political prisoners." The article noted, "systematic executions of leftist prisoners, both Marxist and Islamic ... greatly accelerated ... particularly since the incursion into western Iran by Iraqi-backed Islamic leftists (People's Mujahedin)."<sup>58</sup> The Financial Times further reported:

**"The people executed were in prison long before these events. Some had been given death sentences which had been suspended... Others had been given prison sentences of which they had already served the greater part, while yet others were still on trial... The Islamic leftists are sent for burial to a particular area – lots 91 and 92 – in Tehran's Beheshte Zahra main cemetery where in recent days there has been a 'traffic jam' of bereaved relatives. The Marxists, assumed to be unbelievers, have been buried in a cemetery east of Tehran, another part of which is used by the Baha'i community. There, according to a witness who does not wish to be identified, trenches were filled with at least 58 corpses between July 27 and August 10. The bodies were tightly packed, head to foot, and covered with no more than two inches of soil. Dogs and vultures disturbed the graves... For two months leftist prisoners have been denied all meetings with their families, and in the past four weeks families have not been notified officially of the executions of their sons or husbands."<sup>59</sup>**

On 18 August 1988, the Australian Financial Review published an article entitled "Genocide, prison killings in wake of Iran-Iraq truce", which reiterated the information reported by the Financial Times a day earlier.<sup>60</sup> The same day, the Associated Press issued an article, citing a statement published by the PMOI on 18 August, which claimed, "the government in Tehran has executed thousands of its activists and supporters in recent weeks and secretly buried them in mass graves". The Associated Press noted that there had been "no independent confirmation of the claim". The article

<sup>55</sup> Amnesty International, "Q&A on involvement of Iran's former prime minister in denial and distortion campaign surrounding 1988 prison massacres" (Index: MDE 13/3032/2020), 9 September 2020, [amnesty.org/en/documents/mde13/3032/2020/en](https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/mde13/3032/2020/en)

<sup>56</sup> Amnesty International, "Iran: UA 219/88 Iran: Death penalty: Political executions" (Index: MDE 13/013/88), 16 August 1988, [amnesty.org/en/documents/mde13/013/1988/en](https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/mde13/013/1988/en). For more details on the significance of this Urgent Action and how it provides a contemporaneous snapshot of some of the developments at the time that were raising fears among families of imprisoned political dissidents and others that a wave of political executions was underway, see Amnesty International, "Q&A on involvement of Iran's former prime minister in denial and distortion campaign surrounding 1988 prison massacres" (Index: MDE 13/3032/2020), 9 September 2020, [amnesty.org/en/documents/mde13/3032/2020/en](https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/mde13/3032/2020/en), p. 4-5.

<sup>57</sup> Amnesty International, "Death penalty: Political executions" (Index: MDE 13/013/88), 16 August 1988, [amnesty.org/en/documents/mde13/013/1988/en](https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/mde13/013/1988/en)

<sup>58</sup> Financial Times, "Gulf peace fails to end internal bloodshed", 17 August 1988; Edward Mortimer, "Iran and Iraq Turn on Domestic Opponents: How Gulf peace has failed to end the bloodshed", Financial Times, 17 August 1988.

<sup>59</sup> Edward Mortimer, "Iran and Iraq Turn on Domestic Opponents: How Gulf peace has failed to end the bloodshed" (previously cited).

<sup>60</sup> Australian Financial Review, "Genocide, prison killings in wake of Iran-Iraq truce", 18 August 1988.

also cited a statement by a leftist opposition group, which said “‘group after group’ of Mujahedeen activists, political prisoners and ‘collaborators’ were executed in the past month.”

On 26 August 1988, the Reuters News reported on a statement published by the PMOI the same day which said, “Iran had executed hundreds of political prisoners last month and urged the U.N. to send a mission to investigate.”<sup>61</sup>

On 26 August 1988, the UN Special Rapporteur on Summary and Arbitrary Executions sent cables to the Iranian minister of foreign affairs concerning “allegations that since July 1988, a large number of prisoners, said to be members or supporters of groups or organizations opposing the Government, had been executed and several others were facing imminent execution in various parts of the country.”<sup>62</sup> The Special Rapporteur added that, “according to information received, a number of prisoners had their sentences of imprisonment changed to the death sentence or were executed even though their terms of imprisonment had been completed”.

## SEPTEMBER 1988

On 2 September 1988, Amnesty International issued its second Urgent Action, which “condemn[ed] the political executions carried out in Iran during the last month, which are reportedly still continuing” and referred to a speech by Abdulkarim Mousavi Ardebili on 5 August 1988 that indicated that many imprisoned PMOI supporters were at risk of execution.<sup>63</sup> Amnesty International added that “it is concerned by the continuing ban on family visits to political prisoners in Evin Prison in Tehran and elsewhere which has fueled speculation that hundreds of political prisoners may have been executed.” Once again, the organization mobilized its membership to send appeals to Iranian authorities, “calling for an immediate end to these political executions” and “asking for details of the procedures by which death sentences are being passed and approved.”<sup>64</sup>

On 6 September 1988, the Guardian published an article reporting on warnings by activists that Iran’s “government aims to wipe out opposition.” The article reported,

**“Iranian human rights campaigners allege that the Government is pressing ahead with a wave of executions aimed at wiping out its political opponents... Most at risk today, it seems, are the many – possibly running into thousands – political prisoners who last month started a hunger strike to protest against the torture and executions. All meetings with their families have since been suspended.”<sup>65</sup>**

On 9 September 1988, Amnesty International issued a statement that “condemned Iran for a series of political executions over the past month and said it had reports that the killings were continuing.” Amnesty International added that the ongoing suspension of family visits “fuelled speculation that hundreds of political prisoners have been executed.” The organization’s statement was covered by various media outlets including the Globe and Mail,<sup>66</sup> the Washington Post,<sup>67</sup> the Associated Press<sup>68</sup>, New York Times,<sup>69</sup> and the Reuters News.<sup>70</sup>

On 9 September 1988, the Reuters News also reported that “hundreds of Iranian exiles staged a noisy demonstration near United Nations headquarters [in New York] on Friday to protest against alleged mass execution of political dissidents in Iran.”<sup>71</sup>

On 9 and 10 September 1988, the Associated Press and New York Times also reported that “an Iranian man poured gasoline over his head Friday and set himself afire outside UN headquarters, and Iranian dissidents said it was to protest against executions of government opponents in his homeland.”<sup>72</sup> The two articles cited concerns raised by Amnesty

<sup>61</sup> Reuters News, “Mujahideen urge UN to probe executions in Iran”, 26 August 1988.

<sup>62</sup> UN Special Rapporteur on Summary or Arbitrary Executions, *Report*, 6 February 1989, UN Doc. E/CN.4/1989/25, [digitallibrary.un.org/record/56189?ln=en](http://digitallibrary.un.org/record/56189?ln=en), p. 28, para. 142. See also Special Representative of the UN Commission on Human Rights, *Interim report on the situation of human rights in the Islamic Republic of Iran*, 13 October 1988, UN Doc. A/43/705, [digitallibrary.un.org/record/49935?ln=en](http://digitallibrary.un.org/record/49935?ln=en), para. 69. Note that the former document identifies 26 August 1988 and the latter document 24 August 1988 as the date when the Special Rapporteur sent his cable.

<sup>63</sup> Amnesty International, “Iran: Death penalty: Political executions”, 2 September 1988 (Index: MDE 13/014/88), [amnesty.org/en/documents/mde13/014/1988/en](http://amnesty.org/en/documents/mde13/014/1988/en)

<sup>64</sup> Amnesty International, “Iran: Death penalty: Political executions” (previously cited).

<sup>65</sup> The Guardian, “Government aims to wipe out opponents, say activists”, 6 September 1988.

<sup>66</sup> Globe and Mail, “Around the world Iran condemned for executions”, 10 September 1988.

<sup>67</sup> Washington Post, “Executions Condemned”, 10 September 1988.

<sup>68</sup> Associated Press, “Iranian burns self in protest as others denounce executions in Iran”, 9 September 1988.

<sup>69</sup> New York Times, “Man sets himself afire outside United Nations”, 10 September 1988.

<sup>70</sup> Reuters News, “Iranian exiles rally to protest alleged mass executions”, 9 September 1988.

<sup>71</sup> Reuters News, “Iranian exiles rally to protest alleged mass executions” (previously cited).

<sup>72</sup> Associated Press, “Iranian burns self in protest as others denounce executions in Iran”, 9 September 1988; New York Times, “Man sets himself afire outside United Nations”, 10 September 1988.

International that “a ban on family visits to political prisoners in Evin prison, in Tehran, the Iranian capital, ‘fuelled speculation that hundreds of political prisoners have been executed’.” The articles also noted that “Amnesty International had appealed to its members on 2 September to pressure Iran to halt the executions.” On 11 September 1988, media outlets reported that the man who had put himself on fire, identified as Mehrdad Imen, died of his injuries at the age of 32.<sup>73</sup>

On 14 September 1988, the UN Special Rapporteur on Summary and Arbitrary Executions once again sent cables to the Iranian minister of foreign affairs concerning “allegations that since July 1988, a large number of prisoners, said to be members or supporters of groups or organizations opposing the Government, had been executed and several others were facing imminent execution in various parts of the country.”<sup>74</sup>

On 20 September 1988, the Associated Press reported that “one hundred members of [the US] Congress have signed an appeal to U.N. Secretary-General Javier Perez de Cuellar in an effort to halt “mass executions of political prisoners” in Iran.” According to the Associated Press, the appeal noted that the “dramatic increase in mass executions of political prisoners ... as reported by the international press as well as the (opposition) People’s Mujahedeen of Iran, has shocked the world.”<sup>75</sup>

On 21 September 1988, the Reuters News similarly reported on the appeal of the 100 US congress members who “urged the United Nations to probe and publicise what they call a recent mass increase in political killings in Iran.”<sup>76</sup>

On 28 September 1988, the UN Special Representative on the situation of human rights in Iran similarly wrote to Iran’s permanent representative to the UN in Geneva, Sirous Nasseri, raising concerns that he had “received information about a wave of executions that was allegedly taking place in the Islamic Republic of Iran since the month of July 1988” and asking for a response.<sup>77</sup>

## OCTOBER 1988

On 3 October 1988, the Times reported that “hundreds of suspected Iranian dissidents have been executed and thousands more arrested over the past two months”. The article stated,

**“The mass arrests and summary executions of suspected members of the People’s Mujahedin Organization of Iran, and other left-wing groups and Iranian Kurds ... began after Iran accepted the UN ceasefire Resolution 598 in July and the Iranian Mujahedin’s New Liberation Army, based in Iraq, launched a cross-border attack towards the city of Kermanshah.”<sup>78</sup>**

On 13 October 1988, the UN Special Representative on the situation of human rights in Iran issued the interim report discussed in detail in Section 2 above, which raised concerns about “recent reports of a renewed wave of executions in the period from July to September 1988”.<sup>79</sup> The report stated that, according to information received by the UN Special Representative in September 1988, “a large number of prisoners, members of opposition groups, were executed during the months of July, August and early September 1988.”<sup>80</sup>

On 20 October 1988, Amnesty International issued another Urgent Action, which said, “further confirmation that a wave of political executions has taken place in recent months emerged in a statement by Ayatollah Montazeri, Ayatollah Khomeini’s [then] designated successor, to the annual meeting of the Association of Muslim Students held earlier this month and reported in the British newspaper the Independent on 15 October 1988.” Ayatollah Montazeri was reported to have said: “People have complained to me that their relatives, while serving short prison sentences for political offences, have been executed without any explanation.” Amnesty International said, “the ban on family visits to political prisoners is believed to be continuing, which makes specific information about the extent of the executions impossible to obtain”, but

<sup>73</sup> New York Times, “Man who set himself afire as protest dies”, 11 September 1988; New York Times, “Man sets himself afire outside United Nations”, 10 September 1988.

<sup>74</sup> UN Special Rapporteur on Summary or Arbitrary Executions, *Report*, 6 February 1989, UN Doc. E/CN.4/1989/25, [digitallibrary.un.org/record/56189?ln=en](http://digitallibrary.un.org/record/56189?ln=en), p. 28, para. 142. See also Special Representative of the UN Commission on Human Rights, *Interim report on the situation of human rights in the Islamic Republic of Iran*, 13 October 1988, UN Doc. A/43/705, [www.un.org/en/ga/search/view\\_doc.asp?symbol=A/43/705](http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A/43/705), para. 69.

Note that the former document identifies 24 August and the latter document 26 August as the date when the Special Rapporteur sent his cable.

<sup>75</sup> Associated Press, “House Members Make Appeal to UN For Political Prisoners in Iran”, 20 September 1988.

<sup>76</sup> Reuters News, “US congressmen urge UN probe of executions in Iran”, 21 September 1988.

<sup>77</sup> Special Representative of the UN Commission on Human Rights, *Interim report on the situation of human rights in the Islamic Republic of Iran*, 13 October 1988, UN Doc. A/43/705, [digitallibrary.un.org/record/49935?ln=en](http://digitallibrary.un.org/record/49935?ln=en), para. 10.

<sup>78</sup> The Times, “Wave of executions as Iran turns on dissenters”, 3 October 1988.

<sup>79</sup> Special Representative of the UN Commission on Human Rights, *Interim report* (previously cited), para. 80.

<sup>80</sup> Special Representative of the UN Commission on Human Rights, *Interim report* (previously cited), para. 47.

added that the organization “is persuaded that there have been very substantial numbers of political executions in Iran in the last ten weeks.”<sup>81</sup> Once again, Amnesty International mobilized its members to send appeals to Abdulkarim Mousavi Ardebili and Hassan Ebrahim Habibi, “calling for an end to political executions” and “the recommencement of family visits to political prisoners.”<sup>82</sup> Copies of the appeals were also sent to the diplomatic representatives of Iran in various countries.

## NOVEMBER 1988

On 8 November, Amnesty International issued another Urgent Action that reiterated the concern that “there have been substantial numbers of political executions in Iran in the last three months.” The Urgent Action stated:

**“A ban on visits by family members to their relatives in prison continues to make it very difficult to ascertain the number of executions that have taken place. Some opposition groups put the figure at over 2000 while a wide range of opposition opinion agrees that hundreds of executions have taken place... There have reports from witnesses of large numbers of bodies being discovered in shallow graves in the area of Behesht-e Zahra cemetery in Tehran usually reserved for executed political prisoners, and in other parts of the country.”<sup>83</sup>**

On 9 November 1988, the UN Special Rapporteur on Summary or Arbitrary Executions sent a letter to the Iranian government, reiterating “the allegation that, since July 1988, a large number of prisoners had been executed in various parts of the country, without trial or with a trial of a summary nature. The victims allegedly included members and supporters of organizations and groups opposing the Government, and also Kurdish prisoners.”<sup>84</sup> The Special Rapporteur “requested information on the alleged occurrence of summary or arbitrary executions and in particular the legal proceedings following which the alleged executions might have been carried out.”<sup>85</sup>

On 10 November 1988, Amnesty International issued another Urgent Action, which again stated that “since July it has received reports of the executions of hundreds of political prisoners, among them prisoners whose prison sentences had apparently been changed to the death sentence”. The organization also reported, for the first time, that “the ban on visits by the families of political prisoners ... has now been partially lifted, [but] many families are still not being allowed access to detainees.”<sup>86</sup> The organization once again mobilized its members to send appeals to Abdulkarim Mousavi Ardebili and Hassan Ebrahim Habibi, copying Iran’s diplomatic representatives abroad, “asking for details of the procedures by which the death sentences were passed and approved; calling for an end to political executions in Iran; [and] urging that all political prisoners be allowed visits from their families.”

On 11 and 15 November 1988, the UN Special Rapporteur on Summary or Arbitrary Executions sent cables to the Iranian Government, asking for information on the fate of dozens of peoples whose names had been reported to the UN, and reiterating “allegations that since July 1988, a large number of prisoners, said to be members or supporters of groups or organizations opposing the Government, had been executed.”<sup>87</sup>

Between 17 and 29 November 1988, Amnesty International issued four more Urgent Actions raising concern about the execution of hundreds of political dissidents, including prisoners of conscience, in secret and noting the names of dozens of individuals whose cases had been brought to the attention of the organization and were feared to be executed or in danger of execution. The organization mobilized its members to send appeals to various authorities who included, in addition to Abdulkarim Mousavi Ardebili and Hassan Ebrahim Habibi, President Sayed Ali Khamanei and Speaker of Parliament Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani. Copies were also sent to diplomatic representatives of Iran in different countries.

On 28 November 1988, the Reuters News reported that two Iranians living in West Germany whose brothers were “among those executed in Iran in the past three months ... had appealed to Foreign Minister Hans-Dietrich Genscher to raise the alleged executions during a two-day official visit which started on Sunday night [27 November 1989].” The article referred

<sup>81</sup> Amnesty International, “Death penalty: Political executions” (Index: MDE 13/017/88), 20 October 1988, [amnesty.org/en/documents/mde13/017/1988/en](https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/mde13/017/1988/en)

<sup>82</sup> Amnesty International, “Iran: Death penalty: Political executions” (previously cited). previously cited)

<sup>83</sup> Amnesty International, “Fear of torture/fear of execution: Iran” (Index: MDE 13/020/1988), 8 November 1988, [amnesty.org/en/documents/mde13/020/1988/en](https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/mde13/020/1988/en)

<sup>84</sup> UN Special Rapporteur on Summary or Arbitrary Executions, *Report*, 6 February 1989, UN Doc. E/CN.4/1989/25, [digitallibrary.un.org/record/56189?ln=en](https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/56189?ln=en), p. 28, para. 146.

<sup>85</sup> UN Special Rapporteur on Summary or Arbitrary Executions, *Report*, (previously cited), para. 147.

<sup>86</sup> Amnesty International, “Iran: Further Information on UA 235/88 - Iran: Political executions”, 10 November 1988 (Index: MDE 13/021/1988).

<sup>87</sup> UN Special Rapporteur on Summary or Arbitrary Executions, *Report*, 6 February 1989, UN Doc. E/CN.4/1989/25, [digitallibrary.un.org/record/56189?ln=en](https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/56189?ln=en), p. 28, paras 142, 144.

to “a United Nations report published earlier this month [which] cited allegations that in three days in July some 860 bodies of “executed political prisoners” were transferred from Tehran’s Evin prison to a cemetery.”<sup>88</sup>

## DECEMBER 1988

Between 1 and 22 December 1988, Amnesty International issued seven further Urgent Actions, which raised concern about the execution of hundreds of political dissidents, including prisoners of conscience, in secret and noted the names of dozens of individuals whose cases had been brought to the attention of the organization and were feared to be executed or in danger of execution.<sup>89</sup> As with the previous Urgent Actions, the appeals were directed at various authorities including, in addition to Abdulkarim Mousavi Ardebili and Hassan Ebrahim Habibi, Sayed Ali Khamanei, Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani and the minister of foreign affairs, Ali Akbar Velayati. Copies were also sent to diplomatic representatives of Iran in different countries.

Between 1 and 23 December 1988, the UN Special Rapporteur on Summary or Arbitrary Executions also sent five cables to the Iranian government, which referred to “allegations that since July 1988, a large number of prisoners, said to be members or supporters of groups or organizations opposing the Government, had been executed” and asked for information on the fate of about 120 prisoners who were feared to be executed or in danger of execution.<sup>90</sup>

On 8 December 1988, the UN General Assembly issued a resolution which expressed “grave concern... that there was a renewed wave of executions in the period July-September 1988 whereby a large number of persons died because of their political convictions.”<sup>91</sup>

On 13 December 1988, Amnesty International also issued the briefing paper and press release discussed in subsection 2 above, which said, “the evidence for mass executions was now indisputable” and that “it had received information on more than 300 people reported executed since July but that this was almost certainly only the ‘tip of the iceberg’ and the true total could run into thousands.” The organization published detailed information about the profile of the execution victims; the concealment of their fate or whereabouts from their relatives; the burial of the bodies in shallow, unmarked mass graves; and the government warnings issued against public mourning.

On 15 December 1988, the European Parliament issued a resolution stating that it was “horrified at reports that thousands of opponents... have been executed in Iran over the course of the last four months.”<sup>92</sup> The resolution called on the Iranian government to halt the executions immediately and urged that “an approach be made to the Iranian authorities to admit a team of international observers to visit prisons and investigate the reports of executions”.

## January 1989

On 26 January 1989, the UN Special Representative on Iran published a report which referred to “the global denial of the wave of executions”<sup>93</sup> by the Iranian authorities and challenged the Iranian authorities’ claims that killings took place in the context of armed conflict with the PMOI. He specified:

**“In his interim report [of October 1988] the Special Representative referred to information he received in September 1988 alleging that a large number of prisoners, members of various opposition groups, had been executed during the months of July, August and September 1988. Since that date, the Special Representative has continued receiving persistent reports about a wave of executions of political prisoners. These reports were made available by various sources, including non-governmental organizations in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council and other bodies directly concerned by the alleged wave of executions. In addition, the Special Representative received hundreds of petitions and letters from private individuals around the world, including members of parliament from Australia, France,**

<sup>88</sup> Reuters, “Iranians appeal to Genscher, allege political executions”, 28 November 1988.

<sup>89</sup> Amnesty International, “Iran: fear of execution” (Index: MDE 13/027/1988), 1 December 1988, [amnesty.org/en/documents/mde13/027/1988/en](https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/mde13/027/1988/en); Amnesty International, “Iran: fear of execution” (Index: MDE 13/028/1988), 5 December 1988, [amnesty.org/en/documents/mde13/028/1988/en](https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/mde13/028/1988/en); Amnesty International, “Iran: Follow-up to medical letter-writing action – Iran: Mass execution of political prisoners including Drs Ahmad Danesh and Borsu Bagheri” (Index: MDE 13/030/1988), 14 December 1988, [amnesty.org/en/documents/mde13/030/1988/en](https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/mde13/030/1988/en); Amnesty International, “Iran: Fear of execution” (Index: MDE 13/033/1988), 12 December 1988, [amnesty.org/en/documents/mde13/033/1988/en](https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/mde13/033/1988/en); Amnesty International, “Iran: Fear of execution” (Index: MDE 13/034/1988), 16 December 1988, [amnesty.org/en/documents/mde13/034/1988/en](https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/mde13/034/1988/en); Amnesty International, “Iran: Fear of execution” (Index: MDE 13/035/1988), 21 December 1988, [amnesty.org/en/documents/mde13/035/1988/en](https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/mde13/035/1988/en); Amnesty International, “Iran: Fear of execution” (Index: MDE 13/036/1988), 22 December 1988, [amnesty.org/en/documents/mde13/036/1988/en](https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/mde13/036/1988/en)

<sup>90</sup> UN Special Rapporteur on Summary or Arbitrary Executions, *Report*, 6 February 1989, UN Doc. E/CN.4/1989/25, [digitallibrary.un.org/record/56189?n=en](https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/56189?n=en), p. 28, paras 142, 144.

<sup>91</sup> UN General Assembly, Resolution 43/137: Situation of human rights in the Islamic Republic of Iran, adopted on 8 December 1988, A/RES/43/137, [un.org/en/ga/search/view\\_doc.asp?symbol=A/RES/43/137](https://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A/RES/43/137), para. 5.

<sup>92</sup> European Parliament, “Joint resolution replacing Docs B 2-1127 and 1149/88”, 15 December 1988.

<sup>93</sup> Special Representative of the UN Commission on Human Rights, *Report on the human rights situation in the Islamic Republic of Iran*, 26 January 1989, UN Doc. E/CN.4/1989/26, [digitallibrary.un.org/record/55465?n=en](https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/55465?n=en), para. 68.



Germany, Federal Republic of, Ireland, and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, as well as members of the European Parliament from several countries, and trade-union and church officials, expressing deep concern at the alleged wave of executions and calling for United Nations intervention to bring such executions to a halt.

The precise number of alleged victims of the recent wave of executions has not been reported. The Special Representative has received more than 1,000 names (see annex), but it was alleged that there were in all probability several thousand victims...

Many of the people said to have been executed had been serving prison terms for several years, while others were former prisoners who were rearrested and then executed. It would therefore seem unlikely that these persons could have taken part in violent activities against the Government, such as participation in the NLA incursion into the western part of the Islamic Republic of Iran in July 1988...

The global denial of the wave of executions which allegedly took place from July to September of last year and, according to recent information, continued in October, November and December 1988, is not sufficient to dismiss the allegations as unfounded. Within the framework of normal procedures for the international monitoring of human rights, concrete allegations should be refuted in concrete terms. Therefore, circumstantiated replies are needed to clarify the facts. There is no doubt that an invasion of Iranian territory was undertaken by rebel Iranian groups in July 1988, and that bloody battles ensued in towns and villages along the border with Iraq. None the less the allegations received from several sources, including non-governmental organizations, and reported in the media, referred to summary executions in places that were not affected by military operations. Many allegations contained names, places and dates of supposed executions, and some of them referred to persons arrested long before those events had taken place and to former prisoners who were rearrested. These allegations deserve to be the subject of detailed investigation and information from the Government concerned, in conformity with international practice. In particular, it may be expected that the application of the norms on fair trial with respect to each case should be investigated and the results of that investigation reported."<sup>94</sup>

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<sup>94</sup> Special Representative of the UN Commission on Human Rights, *Report* (previously cited), paras 15-18, 68, 72.