

**AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL
PRESS RELEASE**

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Iran: New wave of brutal attacks against Baluchi protesters and worshippers

The Iranian authorities' relentless onslaught against weekly peaceful protests by thousands of protesters and worshippers from Iran's oppressed Baluchi minority in Zahedan, Sistan and Baluchistan province, escalated on Friday 20 October, as security forces resorted to severe beatings, unlawful use of tear gas and water cannons, and carried out mass arbitrary arrests, enforced disappearances, torture and other ill-treatment, said Amnesty International today. The organization called on authorities to refrain from the use of unlawful force during next Friday's protests and uphold the right to freedom of peaceful assembly.

Evidence collected by Amnesty International including interviews with eyewitnesses and video footage paints a bleak picture of brutality against thousands of worshippers and peaceful protesters, including children as young as 10. Hundreds, including scores of children, were violently arrested and many remain forcibly disappeared. Child and adult detainees were subjected to torture and other ill-treatment including severe beatings and injuries from paintball launchers fired at close range.

"The authorities are ramping up their brutality to stop Baluchi protesters from gathering each week in Zahedan. Governments must urgently call on the Iranian authorities to halt the unlawful use of force and firearms against peaceful protesters, stop torturing detainees and release children and all others detained solely for peacefully exercising their rights," said Diana Eltahawy, Amnesty International's Deputy Regional Director for the Middle East and North Africa.

"Systemic impunity in Iran enabled this new wave of torture against protesters including children, underscoring the need for states worldwide to initiate criminal investigations into the crimes under international law committed by Iranian authorities under the principle of universal jurisdiction."

A torrent of gunfire and brutal beatings

Eyewitnesses told Amnesty International that as Friday prayers concluded on 20 October, security forces hurled stones at thousands of worshippers peacefully leaving the Great Mosallah, Zahedan's large prayer site. After about 1,000 protesters left the prayer site and began to peacefully march down Razi Street, security forces encircled the thousands of remaining worshippers exiting the prayer site and ordered them to wait until the "situation calmed".

Minutes later, security forces unlawfully fired tear gas and, on occasion, shotguns towards the peaceful protesters. An eyewitness reported seeing several teenagers with metal pellets

lodged in their heads and chests. A small minority of protesters responded by throwing stones.

Protesters dispersed after security forces used gunfire and water cannon spraying yellow-coloured liquid; the latter facilitating the subsequent identification and arrest of marked protesters.

The security forces chased fleeing protesters, beating and arresting anyone within their reach, including children.

One eyewitness said: **“I saw the security forces beating children as young as 10 as well as young and older people with batons...They dragged protesters across the ground while punching and kicking them.”**

Eyewitnesses also said that security forces fired tear gas inside the Grand Makki Mosque after hundreds of peaceful protesters took refuge there, and violently arrested the staff guarding its entrance.

Eyewitnesses told Amnesty International that security forces continued to carry out arrests even after protesters dispersed, targeting individuals suspected of participating in protests as well as those who filmed the crackdown from a nearby residential building.

The security forces involved in the crackdown included the Special Forces of Iran’s police (*yegan-vijeh*), Revolutionary Guards in uniforms, and plainclothes agents, with some wearing traditional Baluchi clothes and face masks.

Amnesty International’s Crisis Evidence Lab reviewed 32 videos and images from 20 October 2023, which corroborated eyewitness accounts. Five videos and images show young children with open wounds or injuries on their heads.

Mass arrests and torture

Security forces also arrested hundreds of worshippers outside the Great Mosallah. Others were beaten up and warned against attending future Friday prayers there.

Those arrested were taken to Emam Ali sports complex and severely beaten before being transferred to detention centres run by the Revolutionary Guards, the Ministry of Intelligence or the police, where they said they were subjected to further torture and other ill-treatment. Some were later released or moved to the central prison in Zahedan or, in the case of some children, to a juvenile detention centre.

A relative who was allowed to visit two children said they described being severely beaten with batons, with one crying inconsolably.

Another relative told Amnesty International that the prosecution authorities have ordered the detention of their two children for 30 days, but refused to reveal their whereabouts.

Amnesty International obtained accounts highlighting widespread torture and other ill-treatment of detainees, including children, during transfer to and inside detention centres.

A relative of a released adult detainee said security forces beat and kicked the detainees repeatedly all over their faces and bodies: **“Many detainees including children sustained fractures to their hands and legs... I saw a child with a bleeding gash on his cheek. Security forces abandoned him somewhere in the city without even taking him to a medical centre.”**

The relative also described how security forces removed detainees’ shirts and made them stand facing the wall while blindfolded before firing paintball launchers at their backs and hips at close range.

A graphic image he shared with the organization shows penetrating injuries on the victim’s body.

Gearing up for more violence

Eyewitnesses said there was a noticeable increase in the deployment of security forces throughout Zahedan on the morning of the attack, with new checkpoints erected on the streets leading to the prayer site, suggesting a calculated crackdown.

Amnesty International believes that the latest escalation is linked to [heightened efforts](#) to quell weekly protests in Zahedan. Haalvsh, a Baluchi human rights organization outside Iran, has [reported](#) that in September 2023, the chief of Iran’s police, Ahmadreza Radan, threatened local tribal and religious leaders over the weekly protests, which have been taking place since the “Woman Life Freedom” uprising erupted more than a year ago.

Local residents fear that authorities are gearing up for more bloodshed. One woman urged Amnesty International to **“ensure the voices of Baluchi protesters are heard”** saying, **“We have faced violent repression for an entire year. Our situation is dire, and further grim incidents might happen on any given Friday.”**

Amnesty International reiterates calls on the international community to press the Iranian authorities to allow unimpeded access to the [UN Fact Finding Mission](#) to investigate human rights violations related to the uprising.