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Iran: Respect families' right to commemorate loved ones killed during uprising without reprisals on one-year anniversary

The families of those unlawfully killed by Iran's security forces during the "Woman Life Freedom" uprising in 2022 must be allowed to mark the one-year anniversaries of their deaths, Amnesty International said today, as the Iranian authorities ramp up their campaign of harassment and intimidation against victims' families to enforce silence and impunity.

In [new research](#) published today, Amnesty International details how the Iranian authorities have been subjecting victims' families to arbitrary arrest and detention, imposing cruel restrictions on peaceful gatherings at grave sites, and destroying victims' gravestones. Not a single official has been held to account for the unlawful killing of hundreds of men, women and children by security forces during the authorities' brutal crackdown on the popular uprising that engulfed Iran following the death in custody of Mahsa/Zhina Amini on 16 September 2022. Amnesty International considers the mental pain and anguish inflicted on mourning families by the authorities' abusive practices to be a violation of the absolute prohibition on torture and other cruel, inhuman, and degrading treatment under international law.

"The cruelty of the Iranian authorities knows no bounds. In their sinister attempt to cover up their crimes, the authorities are compounding the anguish and suffering of victims' families by preventing them from demanding justice, truth and reparation or even planting flowers at their loved ones' graves. As the anniversary of the uprising nears, victims' families fear that the authorities will deploy their usual repressive tactics to bar them from holding commemorations," said Diana Eltahawy, Amnesty International's Deputy Regional Director for the Middle East and North Africa.

"The international community must support victims' families by pressing the Iranian authorities in private and in public to respect their right to freedom of expression, association and peaceful assembly. The families must be protected from arbitrary detention, threats and other reprisals. States must also call on the Iranian authorities to release all those who were detained for advocating for truth and justice over the deaths, quash all unjust convictions and sentences against them, and drop all charges against those facing reprisals for speaking out."

Amnesty International has documented in [its latest publication](#) the cases of 36 victims' families from 10 provinces across the country who have been subjected to human rights violations in recent months. They include families of 33 individuals who were unlawfully killed by the security forces during the protests; families of two individuals who were arbitrarily executed in connection with the protests; and family of one torture survivor who committed suicide upon release from detention.

Human rights violations against families for seeking justice, truth and reparation

The violations inflicted against victims' families include: arbitrary arrest and detention; unjust prosecutions on vaguely-worded spurious national security charges, which, in some cases, led to prison and flogging sentences; summoning and subjecting them to coercive interrogations by prosecutors or security forces; putting them under unlawful surveillance; and destroying or damaging the graves of their loved ones.

In July 2023, the mother of 16-year-old Artin Rahmani, who was shot dead by security forces on 16 November 2022 in Izeh, Khuzestan province, said on Twitter: "The authorities of the Islamic Republic killed my innocent son, imprisoned my brother and relatives, and summoned me to the prosecutor's office for the crime of seeking justice for the killing of my child to silence me. Citizens in Iran have no right to protest and any efforts to seek freedom are suppressed with great violence".

The authorities have also tried to bar victims' families from holding ceremonies at the graves of their loved ones, including on the occasion of their birthdays. Families who have defiantly held gatherings have reported the heavy presence of security forces who violently cracked down on ceremonies, taking pictures of those present and beating or arbitrarily arresting family members.

Damaging the graves of those unlawfully killed

Amnesty International [documented and published](#) images depicting the destruction of graves belonging to Mahsa/Zhina Amini and 20 victims from 17 cities. Graves have been damaged with tar, paint and arson; headstones have been broken; and phrases on gravestones describing victims as “martyr” or stating that they died for the cause of freedom have been forcibly erased. The authorities have failed to conduct any investigations to identify those suspected of criminal responsibility for these crimes and bring them to justice or to take measures to prevent the repeated destruction of gravesites.

Some of the graves were damaged by security forces in front of family members; other graves were damaged overnight or at other times when nobody was present after authorities repeatedly threatened to destroy gravestones that depict artwork expressing support for the “Woman Life Freedom” uprising or that contain poetic phrases indicating that victims suffered unnatural deaths caused by political oppression.

In April 2023, the sister of Milad Saeedianjoo, who was fatally shot by security forces in Izeh, Khuzestan province, on 15 November 2022, said on Instagram: “To the person who, on the birthday of my brother, grabbed my hair, tortured me with a baton, trampled on my brother's grave in front of my eyes... What is the verdict you have given yourself for all of this? It has been proven to me who is the murderer of my brother... Our family has not filed a complaint in any court in Iran... because it was futile going to the murderer to file a complaint about the murderer...”

Mahsa/Zhina Amini's family has publicly spoken out about the repeated damage to her grave. The authorities have announced plans to make substantial changes to Aichi cemetery in Saqqez, Kurdistan province, where she is buried, that will make her grave less accessible to the public. Her grave has become a place where families of those unlawfully killed during the protests gather to find collective solace and solidarity and indicate their determination to seek justice.

International action needed to address impunity

Victims' families have faced reprisals for publicly condemning or lodging official complaints about the unlawful killings of their loved ones by security forces, challenging official narratives about their deaths, calling for accountability, holding gatherings for bereaved families, and writing social media posts deemed critical of the authorities.

“In view of the systematic impunity in Iran, Amnesty International calls on all states to exercise universal jurisdiction and issue arrest warrants for Iranian officials, including those with command responsibility, who are reasonably suspected of criminal responsibility for crimes under international law committed during and in the aftermath of the uprising,” said Diana Eltahawy, Amnesty International's Deputy Regional Director for the Middle East and North Africa.