

## AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL

### PRESS RELEASE

**Embargoed until 08:00 GMT 3 August 2022**

#### **Iran: Robust international action needed to end cycles of protest bloodshed**

The international community must hold the Iranian authorities to account for the torrent of violence which their security forces unleashed on protesters in the south-west of Iran in May 2022 with complete impunity, Amnesty International said today.

The organization's new research briefing "*They are shooting brazenly*": Iran's militarized response to May 2022 protests documents how Iran's security forces unlawfully fired live ammunition and birdshot in May 2022 to crush largely peaceful protests over soaring food prices and a deadly building collapse.

Amnesty International verified that four people were killed in connection with the protests and documented a pattern of birdshot injuries amounting to torture amongst protesters and bystanders, including children. The authorities imposed internet shutdowns and mobile network disruptions to block peoples' ability to communicate with each other and to conceal their crimes.

"In May, people took to the streets in cities across the south-west of Iran to protest rising food prices and demand justice for the victims of a deadly building collapse. The authorities' militarized response laid bare once again their utter disregard to the sanctity of human life and international legal standards on the use of force and firearms," said Diana Eltahawy, Amnesty International's Deputy Director for the Middle East and North Africa.

"Rightful outrage among people in Iran about state corruption, inflation, unemployment, low or unpaid wages, food insecurity, as well as political repression is likely to lead to more protests, and Iran's security forces will continue to feel emboldened to kill and injure protesters if they are not held accountable. With avenues for justice completely closed domestically, Amnesty International reiterates the urgent need for the UN Human Rights Council to establish an independent investigative and accountability mechanism to collect, consolidate, preserve, and analyse evidence of the most serious crimes under international law committed in Iran to enable future fair prosecutions."

To investigate the authorities' unlawful use of force, Amnesty International reviewed and analysed extensive video footage, official statements and state

media reports, and spoke to human rights defenders and journalists in contact with affected individuals and communities.

### **Unlawful use of force and documented deaths**

Amnesty International found that Iran's security forces demonstrated a total disregard for the principles of legality, necessity and proportionality in crushing widespread protests over soaring food prices that erupted in Khuzestan province in early May and then spread to Chaharmahal and Bakhtiari province, both in south-west Iran, between 12 and 17 May.

Audiovisual evidence examined by the organization's Crisis Evidence Lab indicates that security forces fired weapons loaded with live ammunition and birdshot on multiple occasions during the protests.

At least three people, **Behrouz Eslami**, **Jamshid Mokhtari** and **Sa'adat Hadipour** were killed in Chaharmahal and Bakhtiari province in connection with the protests between 14 and 17 May. Another person, **Hamid Ghasempour**, was critically injured on 13 May and a local resident reported that he died shortly afterwards, but Amnesty International was unable to obtain corroborating information. A member of parliament also reported on 15 May the death of an unnamed person in Khuzestan province, in connection with the protests over rising food prices.

While a minority of protesters engaged in stone-throwing and acts of arson and vandalism, security forces responded with unnecessary or excessive force, preventing the vast majority of protesters who remained peaceful in exercising their right to freedom of peaceful assembly and expression. In all the video footage reviewed by Amnesty International, protesters posed no imminent threat of death or serious injury to security forces or others, which is the threshold required for the use of lethal force under international standards.

In separate widespread protests between 23 and 31 May 2022 in the city of Abadan, Khuzestan province, following the deadly collapse of an unfinished building that killed dozens of people, the authorities unleashed force, wholly unlawfully as protests were peaceful in nature. This involved security forces firing shotguns at crowds of grieving protesters. In at least one video examined by Amnesty International, audible shots were likely from discharging live ammunition.

### **Torture and other ill-treatment**

Security forces unlawfully fired birdshot in both sets of protests, injuring protesters and bystanders. Videos reviewed by Amnesty International show classic spray patterns of birdshot wounds to the backs, buttocks, legs and/or heads of those injured.

Birdshot is inherently indiscriminate and designed to cause a level of widespread harm that is always unnecessary and excessive for the achievement of legitimate objectives and their use violates the prohibition on torture and other ill-treatment.

Reviewed footage also shows security forces beating a woman and a restrained man, and misusing tear gas and water cannon to disperse peaceful protesters.

**International action needed for cycles of protest bloodshed**

The Iranian authorities' unlawful use of force during the crackdown on the May 2022 protests reflects increasing militarization of the policing of protests in recent years, which has left hundreds of protesters and bystanders, including children, dead and thousands of others injured since December 2017.

This is fuelled by the country's crisis of systemic impunity where crimes under international law and other serious human rights violations, including extrajudicial executions and other unlawful killings by security forces, have gone uninvestigated and unpunished.

Amnesty International echoes the concerns of the UN Special Rapporteur on Iran that given the absence of conditions for accountability at the domestic level, the international community must respond to the "alarmingly high numbers of injuries and deaths" and fulfil its "important role in ensuring accountability".

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