

## AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL

### PRESS RELEASE

#### **Iran: Shameful anniversary celebrations amid decades of mass killings and cover-ups**

The Iranian authorities' refusal to acknowledge let alone ensure accountability for the 1988 prison massacres - the worst incident of secret mass killings committed since the establishment of Islamic Republic of Iran - has perpetuated cycles of crimes under international law and cover-ups designed to extinguish any form of political opposition, said Amnesty International as the Islamic Republic celebrates its 44<sup>th</sup> anniversary.

In an extended public statement [“Involvement of Iran’s former diplomats in the cover-up of 1988 prison massacres”](#), Amnesty International commemorates the victims of the mass enforced disappearances and extrajudicial executions of the 1980s, and details the critical role played by diplomatic representatives of the Islamic Republic of Iran in denying the massacres, spreading misinformation and opposing an international investigation in the face of mounting credible evidence.

Over four decades later, current Iranian officials employ similar strategies to [cover up](#) and weaken international responses to crimes under international law and other serious human rights violations as they try to crush ongoing nationwide protests. The demonstrations were sparked by the death in custody of [Mahsa \(Zhin\) Amini](#) in September 2022, following credible reports of her torture and other ill-treatment.

“The authorities of the Islamic Republic of Iran have maintained an iron grip on power for decades through the commission of horror after horror with absolute impunity. They continue to systematically [conceal](#) the fate and whereabouts of thousands of political dissidents they extrajudicially killed in the 1980s and dumped in unmarked graves. They hide or [destroy](#) mass gravesites, and harass and intimidate survivors and [relatives](#) seeking truth, justice and reparation,” said Diana Eltahawy, Amnesty International’s Deputy Director for the Middle East and North Africa.

“Such crimes are not relics of the past. The anniversary arrives amid a horrific wave of bloodshed around the latest protests, as well as [arbitrary executions](#) and [death sentences](#) targeting protesters. This highlights the

need for urgent global action from countries around the world to bring Iranian officials involved in crimes under international law to justice in fair trials.”

Amnesty International has long [called](#) for the international community to [take action](#) to end impunity for past and continuing crimes against humanity arising from the [1988 prison massacres](#). In 2021, the UN Working Group on Enforced and Involuntary Disappearances joined the [call](#) for an international investigation.

### **Cover-up of 1988 prison massacres**

Between 1988 and 1990, 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 then based in Iraq.

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

As Iran’s Permanent Representative to the UN in New York at the time, 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 by Amnesty International, and to weaken the UN’s response. In November 1988, he denied reports of mass executions at a meeting with the UN Rapporteur and falsely claimed that “many killings had in fact occurred on the battlefield.”

In December 1988, he described a UN resolution that expressed concern about the executions of July-September 1988 as “unjust” and said that “a terrorist organization based in Iraq” was the main source of “fake information”. According to media reports, in the weeks leading up to the adoption of the resolution, Mohammed Jaafar Mahallati tried to have the resolution “dropped” or “watered down” and conditioned Iran’s cooperation with the UN on the removal of critical references to Iran’s systematic human rights violations, including the mass executions, and pushed for the adoption of “a softer text that would merely welcome Tehran's decision to cooperate with the [UN] Human Rights Commission”.

On 28 February 1989, Mohammad Jafar Mahallati also sent a letter to Amnesty International which again “denied the existence of any political executions” and described victims as “individuals who, as admitted by themselves had in an offensive against Iran, killed 40,000 Iranians”.

### **Cover-up of protest killings of 2022**

Current Iranian officials are resorting to similar tactics to discredit a new generation of protesters and dissidents as “rioters”, deny involvement in hundreds of unlawful killings, and resist calls for international investigations and accountability.

In the lead up to a [special session](#) at the UN Human Rights Council in November 2022 on Iran’s lethal crackdown on protesters, Iranian officials in Geneva distributed lengthy briefings, which blamed the killings of protesters on “hired terrorists”, “suicides” or “accidents” or questioned the death of some victims.

In November 2022, [Amir Saeed Irvani](#), Iran’s current Permanent Representative to the UN in New York, called on states to refrain from supporting an informal meeting of members of the UN Security Council regarding Iran’s lethal crackdown on protesters, which he described as a “mischievous disinformation campaign”. Ignoring a vast body of evidence on the unlawful killing of [hundreds of protesters and bystanders](#), including [children](#), by Iran’s security forces, he claimed that “the right to free expression and peaceful assembly has been recognized and ensured by the Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran, and the enjoyment of our people of this right has always been supported by the Government.”

“For decades, Iran’s government and its diplomatic representatives around the world have orchestrated denial and misinformation campaigns to mislead the international community and rob those affected and society at large of the right to truth. It is high time for Iranian diplomats to reveal the nature and source of instructions they received from capital, and stop contributing to the shroud of secrecy surrounding the 1988 prison massacres, which has only entrenched impunity and compounded the suffering of survivors and relatives,” said Diana Eltahawy.

\*\*\*\*\*

**For more information or to arrange an interview, please  
contact: [press@amnesty.org](mailto:press@amnesty.org) or [ghina.bouchacra@amnesty.org](mailto:ghina.bouchacra@amnesty.org)**