

# AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL PRESS RELEASE

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## **Iran: Security forces used rape and other sexual violence to crush “Woman Life Freedom” uprising with impunity**

Security forces in Iran used rape and other forms of sexual violence, amounting to torture and other ill-treatment, to intimidate and punish peaceful protesters during the 2022 “Woman Life Freedom” uprising, Amnesty International said in a new report published today.

The 120-page report, *“They violently raped me”: Sexual violence weaponized to crush Iran’s “Woman Life Freedom” uprising*, documents in detail the harrowing ordeals of 45 survivors, including 26 men, 12 women and seven children, who were subjected to rape, gang rape and/or other forms of sexual violence by intelligence and security forces following their arbitrary arrest for challenging decades of oppression and entrenched gender-based discrimination. To date, the Iranian authorities have not charged or prosecuted any officials for the instances of rape and other sexual violence documented in the report.

“Our research exposes how intelligence and security agents in Iran used rape and other sexual violence to torture, punish and inflict lasting physical and psychological damage on protesters, including children as young as 12. The harrowing testimonies we collected point to a wider pattern in the use of sexual violence as a key weapon in the Iranian authorities’ armory of repression of the protests and suppression of dissent to cling to power at all costs,” Amnesty International’s Secretary-General Agnès Callamard said.

“Iran’s prosecutors and judges were not only complicit by ignoring or covering up survivors’ complaints of rape, but also used torture-tainted ‘confessions’ to bring spurious charges against survivors and sentence them to imprisonment or death. Victims have been left with no recourse and no redress; only institutionalized impunity, silencing and multiple physical and psychological scars running deep and far.”

The report reveals that perpetrators of rape and other forms of sexual violence included agents from the Revolutionary Guards, the paramilitary Basij force, and the Ministry of Intelligence, as well as different branches of the police force including the Public Security Police (*police amniat-e omoumi*), the Investigation Unit of Iran's police (*agahi*), and the Special Forces of the police (*yegan-e vijeh*). Survivors included women and girls who had defiantly removed their headscarves, as well as men and boys who took to the streets to express their outrage at decades of gender-based discrimination and oppression.

The prevalence of sexual violence during the “Woman Life Freedom” uprising is difficult to estimate, as stigma and fears of reprisals usually lead to under-reporting. Nevertheless, the organization’s detailed documentation of 45 cases in more than half of Iran’s provinces, along with accounts from survivors and other former detainees about additional instances of rape and other sexual violence against scores of detained protesters, indicates that the documented violations are part of a wider pattern.

Amnesty International shared its findings with the Iranian authorities on 24 November but has thus far received no response.

#### **“Isn’t this what you seek from liberation?”**

Sixteen of the 45 survivors whose cases were documented in the report were raped, including six women, seven men, a 14-year-old girl, and two boys aged 16 and 17. Six of them - four women and two men - were gang raped by multiple male agents.

State agents raped women and girls vaginally, anally and orally, while men and boys were raped anally. Survivors were raped with wooden and metal batons, glass bottles, hosepipes, and/or agents’ sexual organs and fingers. Rape took place in detention facilities and police vans, as well as schools or residential buildings unlawfully repurposed as detention places.

Farzad, who was gang raped in a van belonging to the Special Forces of the police told Amnesty International: “*Plainclothes agents made us face the walls of the vehicle and gave electric shocks to our legs... They tortured me through beatings ... resulting in my nose and teeth being broken. They*

*pulled down my trousers and raped me...I was really being ripped apart...I was throwing up a lot and bleeding from my rectum."*

Maryam, who was gang raped in a Revolutionary Guards detention centre, recounted that her rapists told her: *"You are all addicted to penis, so we showed you a good time. Isn't this what you seek from liberation?"*

Amnesty International further documented the cases of 29 survivors who were subjected to forms of sexual violence other than rape. These routinely involved state agents grabbing, groping, beating, punching, and kicking survivors' breasts, genitals and buttocks; enforcing nudity, sometimes in front of video cameras; administering electric shocks, inserting needles or applying ice to men's testicles; forcibly cutting women's hair and/or dragging them violently by their hair; and threats to rape survivors and/or their relatives.

Rape and other sexual violence were frequently accompanied by other forms of torture and ill-treatment, including beatings, floggings, electric shocks, administration of unidentified pills or injections, denial of food and water, and cruel and inhuman detention conditions. Security forces also routinely denied survivors medical care, including for rape-related injuries.

### **No domestic path to justice**

The overwhelming majority of survivors told Amnesty International that they did not file complaints after release, fearing further harm and believing the judiciary to be a tool of repression rather than redress.

Six survivors revealed their torture marks or complained about abuse when brought in front of prosecution officials for questioning while still in detention, but were ignored.

Three survivors raised formal complaints, but were forced to withdraw or stopped pursuing them after repeated threats by security forces or months of inaction by the prosecution. One of them was told by a high-ranking official that he mistook a body search for sexual violence.

Amnesty International also examined a leaked official document, dated 13 October 2022, and published by a media outlet outside Iran in February

2023, which reveals that the authorities covered up complaints of rape made by two young women against two Revolutionary Guards agents during the protests. The Deputy Prosecutor of Tehran advised in the document to classify the case as “completely secret” and suggested to gradually “close [the case] over time.”

### **Reeling from trauma yet yearning for justice**

The women, men and child survivors told Amnesty International they continued to deal with the physical and psychological traumas of rape and other forms of sexual violence.

The mother of a schoolboy who was raped told Amnesty International that her son attempted suicide twice while in custody.

A protester, Sahar, recounted the traumatic impact of sexual violence at the hands of security forces who removed her clothes, apart from her underwear, and touched her breasts and genitals while mocking and threatening her with rape:

*“I used to be a fighter in life. Even when the Islamic Republic tried to break me down, I carried on. However, recently, I think about suicide a lot...I am like a person who waits all day for night-time so I can sleep.”*

Zahra a woman who was raped by an agent of the Special Forces police described the long-lasting psychological toll:

*“I don’t think I will ever be the same person again. You will not find anything that will bring me back to myself, to return my soul to me... I hope that my testimony will result in justice and not just for me”.*

“Without political will and fundamental constitutional and legal reforms, structural barriers will continue to plague Iran’s justice system, which has time and again exposed its shameful inability and unwillingness to effectively investigate crimes under international law,” said Agnès Callamard.

“With no prospects for justice domestically, the international community has a duty to stand with the survivors and pursue justice. They should support the extension of the mandate of the UN Fact-Finding mission on

Iran to ensure an independent mechanism continues to collect, preserve and analyse evidence of crimes under international law and other gross human rights violation. We urge states to initiate criminal investigations in their own countries against suspected perpetrators under the principle of universal jurisdiction, with a view to issuing international arrest warrants.”