

Iran's Executions of Kurdish Political Prisoners and External Destabilisation

Iran's Executions of Kurdish Political Prisoners

With a population of 88 million, Iran has the second highest execution rate in the world, exceeded only by China with 1.4 billion people. The rate of Iranian executions in 2023 – a total of [834](#) hangings - exceeds that of the previous eight years. Included in this statistic are eight people executed for participating in the 2022 protests. In January 2024, 74 executions were carried out. Thirty-four (46 percent) were Kurds. Of the seven executed on political or religious charges, [six were Kurds](#). Sixty four percent of those executed were convicted of drug related offences, political prisoners commonly being convicted on fabricated drug offences. And some say, these numbers are an underestimation.

In Iran, political prisoners face a single judge in a network of 70 'revolutionary' courts, which notoriously rely on confessions elicited under torture and do not waste time with any form of defence. Trials can last 15 minutes. All those named in this document were political prisoners who went through this process and were executed by hanging based on a conviction of *moharebeh* or "enmity against God," and "corruption on earth."

Kurdish political prisoners Ghasem Abasteh, Ayoub Karimi, Davoud Abdollahi, Farhad Salimi, Anwar Khezri, Khosrow Besharat, and Kamran Sheikheh were arrested and imprisoned in Saqqez and Mahabad between December 2009 and January 2010. Tehran's Islamic Revolutionary Court sentenced them to death on the charges of "acting against national security" and "corruption on Earth." They had been accused of a 'jihadi' rebellion! Their death sentences were confirmed in 2020 amid allegations of torture and coerced confessions. Ghasem Abasteh was executed in October 2023; In November, Ayoub Karimi was [executed](#); In December, Davoud Abdollahi was executed. On January 2, 2024, Anwar Khezri, Kamaran Sheikha, and Khosrow Besharat initiated a hunger strike inside Ghezel Hesar Prison in Karaj in protest of these executions and their own death penalties. They remain in prison.

In the last days of December 2023, there were four executions of Kurdish political prisoners in West Azerbaijan – Nasim Namazi (a female engineering student at Tehran University, originally from Urmia), and Vafa Hanareh, Aram Omari and Rahman Parhazo. The four had been arrested in May 2022 for allegedly taking instructions from [Mossad](#) to kidnap Iranian security forces to extract intelligence and set fire to cars and apartments of Iranian security [agents](#). The hangings came a day after an Israeli airstrike in a Damascus neighbourhood that killed Sayyed Razi [Mousavi](#), a high-ranking general in the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corp (IRGC), for which Iran promised retaliation.

In January 2024, [11 prisoners](#), including eight Kurds, faced the death penalty. After the Supreme Court rejected their appeals, on 23 January, two Kurdish political prisoners, Farhad Salimi and Mohammed Ghobadlou, were executed for participating in the 2022 anti-government 'Jin, Jiyan, Azadi' (Kurdish for 'women, life, freedom') protests fueled by the death in custody of Jina (Mahsa) Amini, a Kurdish woman arrested for not wearing her hijab properly.

On 29 January 2024, another four Kurdish political prisoners were executed. They had been forcibly disappeared since their arrests in July 2022. Mohsen Mazloun, Mohammad Faramarzi, Vafa Azarbar, and Pejman Fatehi were charged with being operatives of the [Komala Party of Iranian Kurdistan](#) (Komala denies they were members) and of entering Iran from the Kurdistan Region of Iraq to attack a factory in Isfahan that produces equipment for the Ministry of Defence and Armed Forces. Iranian government authorities claim that the operation was planned for the summer of 2022 but was averted by Iranian intelligence. Their forced confessions were publicly broadcast. Their request for a retrial was rejected. Their families were denied visiting rights, and their corpses after the executions. Their corpses were buried in unknown locations so their burials would not incite protests.

Baluch political prisoners have also been targeted with executions after imprisonment on spurious charges, torture and forced confessions. Two are Farshid Hasan Zehi and Mansour Dehmardeh, arrested in October 2022 for participating in the 2022 protests. Zehi was subsequently convicted of killing a soldier, Behzad Barahoui, and injuring First Lieutenant Mehdi [Hashemzahi](#). Executions in January included another three Baluch, seven Azeri and two [Afghans](#).

Imprisoned activist and Nobel Peace Prize laureate Narges Mohammadi announced that sixty odd female political prisoners held in Tehran's notorious Evin Prison are on hunger strike in protest of the executions in December and [January](#). Yet all these hangings are the tip of the iceberg of the so called 'Islamic' Republic's escalating disregard for human life and human rights. For instance, in January 2024, [eight Kurdish cross-border porters known as kolbars](#) were killed and 45 injured. This is not an exceptional tally. One could conclude that the current authorities no longer worry about internal disenchantment or international criticism when making decisions (such as barring Former President Hassan Rouhani from standing as a candidate in the next elections) or carrying out executions, that their priority is to generate fear and distractions to avoid a counter revolution. For reasons of internal oppression and external aggression the head of the snake needs to be challenged. This elite 'head' includes Iran's Guardian Council, current President, Chief Justice, revolutionary court judges, and IRGC commanders, all of whom wield much power and wealth.

We beg the Australian government to discuss these matters with allies and Iranian representatives, one-on-one, in committee meetings, and at international fora, and consider working through international institutions and court systems, as well as enacting sanctions, boycotts, and freezing the overseas assets of these power brokers. They include:

- President Ebrahim Raisi, responsible for thousands of Kurdish executions in the early 1980s;
- Chief Justice of Iran, Gholam-Hossein Mohseni-Eje'i, responsible for revolutionary courts and the high rate of executions; the Minister of Justice, Amin Hossein Rahimi, and the judges that are so generous in awarding the death penalty;
- QUDS Commander in Chief Esmail Qa'ani, responsible for arming and politically and militarily guiding the 'Axis of Resistance' – a network of Iran-linked militias in Iraq and Syria, Lebanese Hezbollah, Gaza's Hamas and Yemen's Houthis;
- The Aerospace Forces CiC, Amir Ali HajiZadeh;

- The CiC of the whole military-industrial enterprise known as the IRGC, Hossein Salami;
- If not Iran's Supreme Leader, Grand Ayatollah Khamenei; and
- Members of the Guardian Council, and also,
- Abdul Al-Mohammadawi and Iran-backed, Iraqi government-paid Kata'ib Hezbollah if proven to be behind the drone attack on 28 January 2024 that killed three US soldiers and injured another forty stationed at the logistics support base Tower 22, part of the Jordanian Defense Network north of al-Tanf, and the Jordan-Syrian border. Approximately 350 US Army and Air Force personnel are deployed to the base in support of Operation Inherent [Resolve](#).

Iran's External Destabilisation

After the Hamas attack on Israel on October 7, Iran-linked militias having conducted 180+ drone and missile attacks on US bases and troops in Iraq and Syria. After the Iran-linked, Iraqi militia Kata'ib Hezbollah killed three US soldiers in Jordan on January 28, US President Joe Biden promised to "hold all those responsible to account at a time and in a manner of our choosing." Implying Iran has some leverage, Kata'ib Hezbollah immediately announced it would stop attacking US troops in Iraq and Syria! The US president's statement was followed by a claim that undisclosed actions had been decided upon. Secretary of State Antony Blinken then announced 'We will respond decisively to any aggression ... Our response could be multi-levelled, come in stages and be sustained [over time](#).' International hawks advocated large scale military attacks targeting Iran, while others conjectured that there could be attacks on the IRGC and Iran-linked militias in Iraq and Syria, the sinking of Iranian naval assets, and a slow burn of small attacks on 'Iranian interests'. On February 3, the US hit 85 targets in seven IRGC bases in Iraq and [Syria](#) killing between 18 and 45 people (sources vary.) Social media posts claim that high value assets had been removed before the attacks.

Some observers question how much control Iran has over Hamas, Hezbollah, the Houthis and the militias in Iraq and Syria which Iran trains, arms, and guides. Some of these commentators suggest that US and UK military retaliations intend to demonstrate Iran's weak spots while avoiding [war](#). Both Iran and the US say they do not want to go to war, but while the current Iranian stakeholders remain in power, high rates of executions and lengthy imprisonments, escalating pressure on the US to leave the region, and the potential for destabilisation and war, will continue. Whatever happens, we sincerely hope Australia is kept in the loop of quality information and the decisions being made.

For Australians, Iran's executions of Kurdish political prisoners, and Iran-linked militias drone and missile attacks on US and Kurdish bases and troops in Iraq and Syria may seem a low priority, but Iran-backed Houthi attacks on international vessels in the Red Sea in the name of supporting Gazans have led to the deployment of an unknown number of Australian Defence Force personnel. This deployment will expand if Iran and its proxies increase their aggression. The Red Sea attacks are also having a detrimental impact on the Australian economy. For example, one ship exporting live sheep to the Middle East was forced to return to Fremantle, and Australian construction companies are experiencing long delays in receiving materials. Increases in the price of fossil fuels impact everyone.

Thus, we ask the Australian government’s advisors and decision makers to think deeply about the appropriate responses to Iran’s internal oppression and external aggression, and take considered action, ideally in coordination with allies, before any further destabilisation of the Middle East, for as sure as the sun rises each morning, a large-scale war would create millions of innocent victims, with Australian and Kurdish forces being called upon to fight.

Yours Sincerely,

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To the international community and human rights organisations:

In Iran, 70 executions have been so far carried out in January 2024, in addition to the daily imprisonment, torture and kidnapping of political, cultural, and environmental activists. The Iranian Islamic regime has resumed its continuous waves of capital punishment, with a disproportionate number of executed political prisoners being Kurds.

This follows more than 800 prisoners being executed in 2023. This 2023 statistic is a staggering increase of 55 percent compared to the previous year. Although murder and execution have come to identity of the regime, the recent human rights violations and executions of political prisoners reflect the current political and social state of the regime and the widespread continuation of dissatisfaction and protests.

Past experiences show that the Islamic Republic of Iran takes revenge on the people and activists of Iran whenever it faces a shameful failure and stalemate at the global or regional levels. After the death of the international terrorist Ghassem Soleimani, its so-called "harsh revenge" was to attack flight PS752 and kill 176 innocent civilians. Since the period of protests fuelled by the Jina movement and the failure of the Islamic Republic's policies in the Middle East, the Iranian judiciary and intelligence services have been taking revenge by killing people and violating human rights, of those involved in the 'Woman Life Freedom' Movement.

The Democratic Party of Iranian Kurdistan strongly condemns the recent wave of mass arrests and repression of political activists and the continuation of executions in Kurdistan and Iran. We call upon the international community, NGOs, and human rights organisations to use their weight and increase their diplomatic pressure on the Islamic Republic of Iran and create obstacles to prevent the regime from repressing and executing Kurds and other nations in Iran. So that human rights no longer are sacrificed for the interests of other countries. Let's increase the cost of human rights violations for the Iranian regime.

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