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Contact Us

Iran Human Rights Documentation Center

129 Church Street,
Suite 304

New Haven, CT 06510

Ph: (203)772-2218

Fax: (203)772-1782

info@IranHRDC.org

Closure of Human Rights Center in Tehran

On December 20, 2008, the Islamic Republic's Security and Law Enforcement Forces sealed the office of the Defenders of Human Rights Center in Tehran. At the time of the seizure, members of the Center had gathered to commemorate the 60th anniversary of the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights by the United Nations. The Security and Law Enforcement Officers, some of whom were plain-clothed, failed to produce any form of warrants or charge sheets.

The Defenders of Human Rights Center in Tehran, Iran was acquired by one of its founders, Nobel laureate Shirin Ebadi, with funds she had received as part of her Nobel Peace Prize in 2003. Members and employees associated with the office include many prominent human rights activists and lawyers, including Abdulfatah Soltani, Mohammad Ali Dadkhah, Mohammad Sharif and Yunsof Mola'i. These lawyers and activists predominantly defend prisoners charged with political and press related offences. The Center defends political prisoners and prisoners of conscience, protects the family members of such prisoners, and issues opinions regarding violations of human rights in Iran.

Since the closure, Iranian officials have announced that the Center was shut down by order of the Judiciary because it failed to obtain an official work license. In 2006, the Office of the Article 10 Commission for the Activities of Parties and Societies in Iran issued a statement announcing that the activities of the Center were illegal. In its statement, the Commission foreshadowed the regime's impending actions against the Center by noting that "any form of activity by the center was illegal and the violators will be pursued by law."

Relevant News

- On December 27, 2008, the Guardian Council rejected the Freedom of information Act that was passed by the 7th Majlis during the second term of Mohammad Khatami's presidency. The Act imposed upon public agencies the responsibility of providing a detailed account of their yearly activities to the public. If passed, the Act would have also applied to the activities of offices directly under the supervision of the Supreme Leader, a fact that inevitably led the Guardian Council to declare it a violation of Shari'a law.
- Ibrahim Madadi, Deputy Head of the Syndicate of Workers of Tehran and Suburbs Bus Company (SWTSBC), was arrested on December 27, 2008 by plainclothes men in the presence of the Law Enforcement Forces. He was then transferred to an unspecified location. The SWTSBC was not able to gain any information about his charges or whereabouts.
- Behnood Shojaee, an Iranian man convicted of a murder he allegedly committed at the age of 17, "escaped" execution once again at the request of the Attorney General of Tehran, Said Mortazavi. Under Iranian Law, family members of the deceased have the right to pardon the killer from execution. In this case the pardon was recorded on video tape, which prompted the court to delay the execution date pending further investigation. The case has elicited domestic and international outrage because of Shojaee's age at the time of the incident, and overwhelming evidence indicating that he acted in self-defense.

IHRDC Releases Two New Reports

On November 10, 2008, the **IHRDC** released a report entitled *Condemned by Law: Assassination of Political Dissidents Abroad*, which examines the Islamic Republic's unlawful targeting and extrajudicial killing of political dissidents on foreign soil. The report complements two earlier publications, *Murder at Mykonos: Anatomy of a Political Assassination* (2007) and *No Safe Haven: Iran's Global Assassination Campaign* (2008).

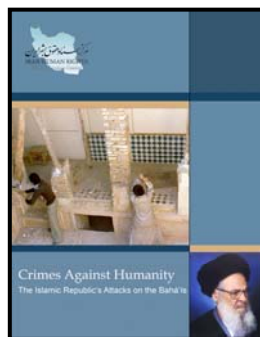
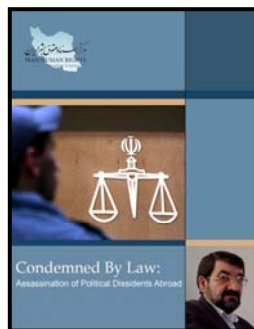
The regime's orchestrated and systematic targeting and extrajudicial killing of its political opponents abroad does not merely violate the criminal laws of the jurisdictions in which the assassinations took place – it also implicates an array of international legal norms and obligations protecting the most fundamental of human rights: the right to life. The Islamic Republic's campaign of assassinations can be traced to nearly twenty countries around the world, from neighboring Pakistan and Iraq to the United States. It is essentially an extension of the regime's consolidation of power inside the country's borders.

The Islamic Republic, and any individuals involved in the ordering, instigating, planning, aiding and abetting or commission of these killings must be held to account for their actions by all member states of the international community.

On December 1, 2008, the **IHRDC** released a report entitled *Crimes Against Humanity: The Islamic Republic's Attacks on the Bahá'ís*. This report complements two earlier publications, *A Faith Denied: The Persecution of the Bahá'ís of Iran* (2006) and *Community Under Siege: The Ordeal of the Bahá'ís of Shiraz* (2007). The regime's campaign of persecution has led to attacks on Bahá'ís throughout the country, including the targeting, unlawful arrest, prolonged detention, torture and extrajudicial killing of many adherents of the Faith. The report argues that these attacks constitute crimes against humanity because they are directed against a civilian population, are widespread and systematic in their nature and implementation, and involve acts contrary to the principles of common humanity under the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, customary law and international criminal law.

In conjunction with the factual reports, this legal report puts forth a powerful indictment of Tehran's deliberate and coordinated campaign to suffocate and ultimately destroy the Bahá'í community by removing all traces of its religion from public life, purging the Faith's members from political and governmental posts and preventing Bahá'í participation in the country's economic, social and cultural sectors. **IHRDC** condemns the actions of the Islamic Republic and any individuals involved in the ordering, instigating, planning, aiding and abetting or commission of acts of persecution directed against one of the country's most vulnerable religious minorities.

It is the hope of the **IHRDC** that, at the very least, these two reports and their companions inform, educate and inspire victims, human rights advocates, government authorities and members of the public to remain steadfast in their pursuit to bring those responsible for these violations to justice.



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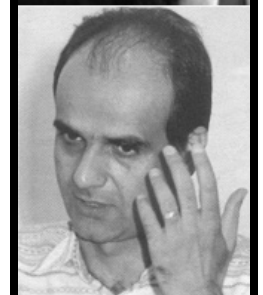
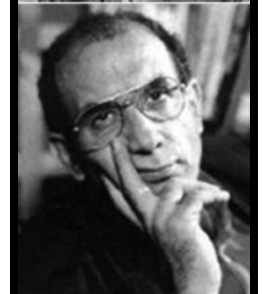
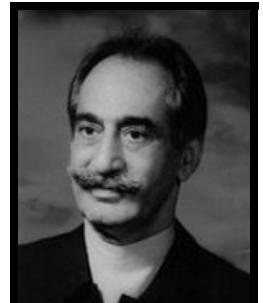
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Remembrance: The Chain Murders

This year marks the tenth anniversary of Iran's infamous "Chain Murders." During the late 90's, individuals who expressed views critical of the Islamic Republic of Iran and its policies were targeted and assassinated by the regime in a campaign of state-sponsored terror generally referred to as the "Chain Murders." During this period, dozens of dissident Iranian intellectuals, journalists and political activists, and even in some instances their family members, were murdered or disappeared. The state-sponsored campaign of terror culminated in late November of 1998, with the murders of Dariush Foruhar, his wife Parvaneh, Mohammad Mokhtari and Mohammad Ja'far Pouyandeh.

In anticipation of activities marking this dark chapter of Iran's modern history, security forces of the Islamic Republic forbid any public gatherings commemorating the death of the victims. Parastou Foruhar, daughter of Dariush and Parvaneh Foruhar, speculated in a recent interview with a Persian daily that the regime feared memorial ceremonies would ultimately become a public forum allowing Iranians to openly protest against the injustices of the regime. According to many family members of the victims and large segments of the Iranian public, the government's response to the Chain Murders has been woefully inadequate. Parastou Foruhar has continuously spoken out on behalf of her parents and other victims of the Chain Murders. Believing that justice has been denied in Iran, the family members have turned to the international community and filed a formal complaint with the United Nations Commission on Human Rights.

Following the assassinations of Dariush Foruhar, Parvaneh Foruhar, Mohammad Mokhtari and Mohammad Ja'far Pouyandeh, the Iranian public became increasingly critical of the government's involvement in the murders. At the funeral services for the Foruhars', thousands of Iranians called for an end to the regime's campaign against dissidents, shouting "death to tyranny" and "freedom of thought forever." The demonstrations caused then president Khatami to authorize an investigation into the Chain Murders in 1999. Khatami's government subsequently reported that rogue elements within the Ministry of Intelligence, led by a man named Saeed Emami, carried out the murders without official authorization. Saeed Emami allegedly committed suicide while in custody.



From top: Dariush and Parvaneh Foruhar, Mohammad Mokhtari and Mohammad Ja'far Pouyandeh

60th Anniversary of Declaration of Human Rights

December 10, 2008 marked the 60th anniversary of the ratification of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, adopted by the General Assembly of the then newly established United Nations. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights, along with the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, comprise the International Bill of Rights. Together, these documents provide the most comprehensive set of international treaties protecting fundamental human rights such as the freedom of speech and the inalienable right to life.

The Declaration and its companion documents have been ratified by most members of the international community of nations, including the Islamic Republic of Iran. Despite this, the Iranian regime has and continues to ignore its responsibilities and obligations under international law by violating many of the rights guaranteed by the International Bill of Rights. The **IHRDC** calls on the government of Iran to immediately and unconditionally cease all state-sponsored activities leading to the violation of fundamental human rights and to ensure that all of its citizens enjoy the protections afforded them by the Declaration.

Draft Resolution of United Nations against the IRI

In November of this year, the Permanent Mission of Canada to the United Nations sponsored a resolution in the United Nations General Assembly concerning the human rights situation in the Islamic Republic of Iran. The resolution "expresses its deep concern at serious human rights violations in the Islamic Republic of Iran relating to: torture and cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment; the continuing high incidence of executions carried out in the absence of internationally recognized safeguards, including public executions and executions of juveniles; arrests, violent repression and sentencing of women exercising their right to peaceful assembly, a campaign of intimidation against women's human rights defenders, and continuing discrimination against women and girls in law and in practice; increasing discrimination and other human rights violations against persons belonging to religious, ethnic, linguistic or other minorities, recognized or otherwise, and, in particular, attacks on Baha'is and their faith in state-sponsored media ... and ongoing, systemic and serious restrictions of freedom of opinion and expression ... and increasing harassment, intimidation and persecution of political opponents and human rights defenders from all sectors of Iranian society ... in particular with regards to the 2008 Majlis electoral process."

The draft resolution passed by a margin of just over twenty votes. In an attempt to derail the passage of the final resolution, the Permanent Mission of the Islamic Republic of Iran to the United Nations called for a "motion of no action" that would prevent the General Assembly from considering the resolution. The action was narrowly defeated by one vote and in mid-December, the fifty-fifth UN resolution concerning human rights violation in the Islamic Republic of Iran was passed.

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