

Execution of children in Iran

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Please accept my warmest greetings. I also wish to extend my gratitude to the organisers of this seminar, in remembrance of those political prisoners who faced execution in the gruesome prisons of the Islamic Republic, and other freedom lovers who sacrificed their lives for freedom and human equality. We particularly remember the horrific mass genocide of the political prisoners in 1981 and 1988.

Today, I am going to talk about a particular group of prisoners among those who perished in the early years of the rule of the Islamic Republic; a considerable number of whom were under the age of 18. Recently, the Human Rights organisations have turned their attention to the execution of prisoners below the age of consent. Amnesty International has recently published a comprehensive dossier about the execution of children in Iran. (Copies of this dossier in English and Farsi are available. I shall refrain from repeating the statistics already published in the dossier, but will only briefly refer to them where necessary).

This document has published the names of those who were executed and those awaiting execution. However, there is no mention of thousands between the ages of 14 and 18 who were executed in those years.

The Islamic security forces' assaults on most political organisations' offices, institutions and media started shortly after the declaration of the establishment of the Islamic Republic. In some cases, aggression against left wing organisations and detention of their members started in the early months of 1980.

The revolution had induced an open political climate. The strong will for democracy and its by products such as self determination, workers' assemblies and councils, independent teachers' and women's associations, writers' associations, independent publications such as "Ayandegan", discerning street shows, and other activities which were not possible, or would have been subject to tight control and censorship before the revolution, were flourishing. Within such a political atmosphere, the political youth organisations and young sympathisers of left wing organisations and other political opposition groups were in the process of formation.

In the meantime, the persecutions and the torment of activists by the security forces and the regime's thugs had already started.

Attacks on demonstrations and invasions of bookstalls and bookshops around Tehran University were rapidly on the increase. Following the regime's massacre of "Gharna" and "Ghalatan" villages in Kurdistan, harassment of women over the compulsory Islamic dress code was exacerbated.

With the start of the Iran-Iraq war, and the justification of the closure of the universities in the name of "Cultural Revolution" and the dismissal and in some cases, the apprehension of progressive lecturers and teachers, along with the closure of the "Writers' Association" and "Ayandegan" newspaper, a historical process was in the making which marked the rule of terror and oppression shortly after the revolution.

The detrimental and chronic effects of this process are still continuing in the form of suppressing and vanquishing those who are seeking and striving for freedom.

Yes. Many children alongside older comrades were executed in Islamic Republic's prisons.

One of the most important aims of this seminar is to recall these historical events by commemorating those who perished to pave the way for freedom.

We remember those children who were sentenced to death by execution. Not because they were carrying guns or drugs, or they stole anything or killed anyone, or engaged in any relationship which is marked as taboo by Islamic standards, but because of their aspirations and allegiance. For being politically motivated. For writing the slogan “Bread, Housing and Freedom” on walls. For reading books and distributing leaflets which had no derogatory contents but an invitation to May Day demonstrations. Such were the state of the affairs. They were sentenced to death without a trial or even the right to have a legal representative.

The Iranian regime is an absolutely ideological type of government. Many children are subject to compulsory military service by the “Revolutionary Guards Corps” and “The Oppressed Mobilisation Militia” (Baseej). Adolescent recruits are abused by these military forces for war propaganda purposes and used as front-line “Sacrificial Units” to pave the way for the rest of the forces.

These children are motivated by wearing the key to “Heaven” around their necks!

The Iranian Regime also has been vanquishing children for having political freedom aspirations. The young members or sympathisers of various opposition political organisations have been vanquished in the most brutal manner.

Perhaps for those of you who live in this country, these words prove inconceivable. Where all the political parties whether parliamentary or otherwise, who also have their youth sections, are free to march on May Day! Nevertheless, for my generation; when I was 21, the execution of children was a horrifying historical wake up call to witness the perishing of the seedling before it had the chance to blossom. The seedling of freedom!

May be using the word “Children” for these brave and determined humans with hearts filled with love for freedom and allegiance to a bright future, enduring the most excruciating torture pains but remaining loyal to their friends and comrades, and still bravely facing the death squad is an absolute understatement. The horrifying truth of the matter however, is that the thought of slaying these young buds and the mass genocide which took place by the cowardly rulers of the Islamic Republic, brings shivers down anybody’s spine.

I call these brave hearts “Children”, because the first paragraph of children’s rights convention defines the word as “Those under the age of 18”. Well, by this definition, childhood and its inviolable sanctity was desecrated many years ago in Iran.

Since a little has been told and known with regard to the savage torture and execution of children in Iran because of their political involvement, I must remind everyone that a substantial number of the political prisoners belonging to the opposition organisations such as “The Peoples’ Mujahedeen” who were executed in June 1981 were children.

Here, I need to describe children’s rights situation in Iran before I make reference to the Iranian government’s obligations in respect of agreed international conventions.

Iran and children’s rights

Iran is the only country in the world where its legislations function directly against children.

Article 1210 of the constitution: The civil law sets the age of consent for girls to be 9 years of age!

Section 84, paragraph 179 of labour legislation defines the minimum age of prohibition of labour to be 15! The amendment article to this section, briefly, overrules the minimum age limits, should the parents or guardians of the children either give their consent or be the proprietors of where their

children are employed! By parents' or Guardians' consent, children could also be contracted out and would be exempted from the minimum age restrictions.

Articles 623 to 625 relating to religious practices, authorises child chastisement up to causing death. Even where punishment by the father leads to the death of his child, the penalty for causing death by chastisement is 10 days in prison plus the payment of compensation!

These laws including the prohibition of death by execution for under 18s are practised in Iran despite Iranian government's international obligations to agreed conventions on children's rights. It is not surprising to expect any disregard for the international conventions by the Islamic Republic, as conforming to such protocols in the first place is a contradiction in terms by a government whose legislative laws on children are based on cruelty.

In the Islamic Republic, the state has a free hand to suppress and terrorise, execute by stoning to death, and carry out hanging in public, Article 1210 of its constitution legalises paedophilia! By lowering the age of consent, the abuse of children is legalised. The signing of any international convention by the Islamic Republic is meaningless and it is only done in order to mislead the international community about its own internal affairs.

According to Islamic law, should a female die as a virgin, she will be considered a martyr and will be destined for heaven. Hundreds of 14-17 year old girls supporting the "The Peoples' Mujahedeen" were forced to temporarily marry members of the "Revolutionary Guards Corps" before their execution. Some were forced to marry their own torturer and executioner. This was done to deny them going to heaven!

How could anyone expect respect for international conventions from such a brutal and medieval regime?

..... It was Friday. The rain was lashing down. I couldn't contain my tears while whimpering the "Friday" tune; ... the black clouds are raining blood...

I was 21 at the time. I could see the published names of the executed freedom fighters who were 5 or 6 years younger than me. The regime published the names to cause fear and anxiety amongst the public.

I remember it very well, when I read about Mojgan in "Peykar"; the publication of the political organisation she supported. They had published her biography and the sad story of her life living unhappily with her step mother who constantly forced her to brush and shine the floors and carry out all kinds of strenuous jobs around the home. The finishing line of her biography was death by execution at the age of 16.

I couldn't stop sobbing. The blossoms of our land not only didn't find a bright future, they were perishing everywhere.

What's the matter, asked my mother? These people are so young, I whimpered.

Yes. One couldn't expect anything else from this government.

Defending childhood rights

Evidently, discussing, commemorating and recording the disastrous execution of children is part of defending the rights of those children who have been sentenced to death by execution for any wrong doing but should not be in its entirety. We must strive for the prohibition of capital punishment. Children's rights are violated "legally" from all angles; by their own families and by states.

Children of unemployed families are exploited to the full as cheap labour and abused by being utilised in drug trafficking and the porn industry. It's obvious that such children get dragged into crime. But the way to deal with such misbehaviour is not their physical elimination. They have only inherited their fate from the state and society itself. The state should adopt a serious programme of action towards the future of children by prohibiting child labour and facilitating their free compulsory education, and by taking measured steps for the proper training of its future assets.

The Islamic law of "Retribution" is hailed by the Islamic Republic as "Family Culture" while at the same time and on the face of it they appear to conform to international conventions for protection of children. This is part of the same hypocritical and backward culture under which the Islamic Republic governs its own people as a whole. For example with regards to the execution of children under 18, the Islamic Republic has repeatedly claimed that it has carried out the will of the victim's family in implementing the law and upholding the "Islamic culture" and "Justice"!

Whose justice or culture? When did the culture of people or upholding the justice prior to the establishment of the Islamic Republic implement the "Retribution Law"?

The "Retribution Law" and "Stoning" amongst other reactionary Islamic laws are the collection of many medieval laws which have been imposed on the people of Iran by the rulers of the Islamic Republic.

This is how all international conventions are observed and implemented by Iran's rulers. Along with its other laws and legislations, the Islamic Republic has created a living hell for children which could have only been heard of in medieval times. The international community and the civilised world must stand up to these barbaric and inhumane laws. Silence must be broken against child abuse and child persecution in Iran.

What would happen if the Guillotine came back to the streets of Paris? Would the world just stand and watch?

Remember the crimes against humanity in Rwanda. Remember the mass genocide of the Jews and other humans by the fascists in Europe. I wonder why the world remained silent when these crimes were taking place.

Some say that the news didn't travel quickly enough during those days. What about now? What else must be done now when the world receives the news almost at the same time around the globe?

The scenes of stoning and executions appear on everyone's desktop within seconds of happening. The problem is no longer delay in hearing the news. The problem is lack of solidarity and the absence of worldwide organisations that could purposefully organise serious actions against these crimes.

The world has got much too used to watching scenes of crimes against humanity on their desktops while drinking coffee and remaining silent!

There is no doubt that organisations such as Amnesty International have been making lots of efforts to stop many executions and uphold the rights of political prisoners in Iran and many other countries. Many individuals have made tireless efforts to save the lives of people such as Nazanin in Iran. Being thankful for the efforts of some international organisations or individuals is not my point. The best show of gratitude is expressed when capital punishment is abolished as a whole. We can only be grateful when the world no longer tolerates stoning and crimes against humanity are met by the international community's collective outrage.

Death by execution is legalised murder and state terror. We must collectively strive to ban capital punishment at international level.

Upholding human rights and social security for all human beings must be our aim alongside these commemoration events.

One of the aims of this seminar is to address these issues. It's time to make a collective effort to start a campaign against mass genocide and cease capital punishment. I urge you all, who carry love for humans in your hearts to join this campaign.

Once again, I would like to thank the "Political Prisoners' Foundation" for organising this seminar and for their concern for children's welfare. I wish to offer part of my share in this historically important task.

May freedom and equality prevail around the world.