



On the occasion of the
67TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE UN HUMAN RIGHTS DECLARATION

EUROPE should keep its principles when dealing with IRAN



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Abstract

This policy brief highlights the gross human rights violations of the Iranian regime against its own citizens. It draws special attention to the sharp rise of executions, arbitrary detention of rights activists, and the situation of women, minorities and children during President Hassan Rouhani's tenure. Furthermore, in light of the current conflicts raging in the Middle East and North Africa, this brief demonstrates how Iran's destructive and destabilising role in the region, through its unabated backing of terrorism and support for strongmen like Syria's Bashar al-Assad, has been one of the root causes of the humanitarian crisis now on Europe's doorstep. The brief maintains that the strengthening of relations with Iran initiated by the international community subsequent to the nuclear deal of 14 July 2015, must be contingent on the improvement of the human rights situation, including an immediate moratorium on executions, and the immediate cessation of Tehran's meddling in the internal affairs of neighbouring countries through state-sponsored terrorism. Building on Europe's human rights achievements following the Second World War and in the spirit of the Helsinki Final Act of 1975, this policy brief will emphasise that the European Union must not forfeit its values when dealing with Iran.

Foreword

By Paulo Casaca, Executive Director

European Appeasement Policy is destroying the European Order

It is commonly agreed that the high point of a “European Order”¹ was the Helsinki declaration of 1975 agreed by the US, Canada and all European states except Albania. In the Helsinki agreement, the two confronting blocks were able to settle on a comprehensive agenda summarized in ten points that are worth remembering:

- I. Sovereign equality, respect for the rights inherent in sovereignty
- II. Refraining from the threat or use of force
- III. Inviolability of frontiers
- IV. Territorial integrity of States
- V. Peaceful settlement of disputes
- VI. Non-intervention in internal affairs
- VII. Respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, including the freedom of thought, conscience, religion or belief
- VIII. Equal rights and self-determination of peoples
- IX. Co-operation among States
- X. Fulfilment in good faith of obligations under international law

The Helsinki declaration would probably have not been made possible without the “détente” established in 1971 by the two super powers of that time. However, no other political instrument as the Helsinki declaration would become so critical in empowering the citizens of the Eastern bloc contesting Soviet totalitarianism and ultimately so decisive in bringing the perestroika and subsequent transformations. Most importantly, it helped prevent a war.

Even before the end of this Old World confrontation, a new one emerged with the establishment of the Islamic Republic of Iran in 1979 that bluntly and uncompromisingly defied all these ten principles vital for the still evolving “European Order”.

Both the spirit and the letter of the Constitution of the Iranian theocracy are diametrically opposed to the Helsinki agreement: rejection of freedom, democracy, human rights or

¹ Sometimes also named as “New European Order” a designation also used by a fascist movement in the beginning of the fifties which for that reason we do not consider appropriate.

national sovereignty; transformation of Jihad into modern terrorist warfare and the promotion of ideological imperialism, which translates into constant and destabilizing meddling in regional countries' affairs. With these aims, the ruling Iranian clerics set a new global challenge that the West has failed to understand.

Religious fanaticism has been a persistent instrument for the projection of political power in human history, although with the advent of Reformation and Enlightenment its importance has been greatly diminished in the West. Following the Iranian Islamic Revolution, religious fanaticism came back as a fundamental geopolitical reality, but the Western mind-set refused, however, to understand this new historical twist.

After its power grab in 1979, the theocracy in Iran immediately started to impose its inhumane and regressive agenda domestically while at the same time exporting its fundamentalist ideology and governance model to Lebanon, Yemen, Afghanistan and Iraq through its religious co-sectarians. It was also able to command directly or indirectly fanatic groups of other Muslim sects in countries like Saudi Arabia, Algeria or Palestine and even to establish close co-operation with other anti-democratic but secular forces in countries like North Korea or Venezuela. It propped up a web of allies and international actors that openly defied and destabilized the progressive and peaceful international order emerging from the Cold War.

One of the best documented cases was the creation of “Jund Al Islam” on 1 September 2001. The group would later evolve through various fusions and designation changes to what is now known as “Daesh”, “ISIL”, “ISIS” or “the Caliphate”.² The fingerprints of the Iranian regime on this entity are clear and undisputable.

In spite of all the evidence linking the Iranian theocracy with ISIS since the latter's creation, the West seems prepared to believe that Tehran can be considered as an ally in the fight against this particularly barbarian Jihadi group.

Only after the National Council of Resistance of Iran (NCRI) publicly denounced the Iranian nuclear programme³, which Western intelligence completely failed to uncover, did the West finally pay some attention to the regime's aggressive intentions.

During the thirteen long years that followed, a succession of sanctions and negotiations between the international community and Iran took place, concluding in an international agreement on the nuclear program of Iran signed in Vienna on 14 July 2015. The signatories were Iran, the P5+1 (the five permanent members of the United Nations Security Council—

² Brisard, Jean-Charles “Zarkaoui, le nouveau visage d’Al-Qaida” Fayard, 2005.

³ The first public revelation of the programme took place by Alireza Jafarzadeh in 14 August 2002. See <http://www.voanews.com/contentinfographics/iran-nuclear-negotiations/1788545.html> (24-11-2015)

China, France, Russia, the United Kingdom, and the United States—plus Germany), and the European Union.

The Iran deal of 2015, like the Helsinki agreement of 1975, is an informal agreement rather than an international Treaty. It aims to prevent a devastating nuclear conflict, and was reached after marathon negotiations that dragged on for over a decade. The deal is seen by some as a landmark for international politics.

The two agreements diverge in important ways, however. Whereas Helsinki marked the victory of a consistent set of values, the Vienna agreement does not say a single word on behalf of any of these values – implicitly overriding them – restraining the international agreement to a sort of technical nuclear package with a limited time-frame. The package even excludes the Iranian missile development capability –considered to be one of the three key elements of any nuclear weapons programme.

The agreement was reached amid a large-scale Iranian interference in Lebanon, Syria, Iraq and Yemen as well as a severe crackdown on human rights domestically, that included mass executions and persecution of Iranian citizens, which were ostensibly ignored by negotiators from the international community.

One may think that this complete abandonment of the ten principles of the "European Order" as settled in Helsinki was due to other international powers wanting to dissociate themselves from it; but European leaders have shown themselves to be the most fervent enthusiasts for this disastrous misstep.

Regardless of the technical aspects of the Iran nuclear deal – which has so far dominated public discourse on the issue – we should not lose sight of the fact that its main consequence is a full-fledged attack on the universality of human rights principles, and a reversal of significant humanitarian and European achievements of the Helsinki agreement, all in the name of technical nuclear matters coupled with a short-sighted and distorted view of the Jihadist challenge.

The Helsinki European order is certainly in need of a complete overhaul. Europe was not able yet to overcome the consequences of the Soviet collapse, which led to the re-emergence of an aggressive imperial Russia that is now disrupting Ukraine and destabilising the Eastern fringes of the European Union and engaging in a destabilising way in the Greater Middle East. The Washington consensus, broadly contemporaneous to the Helsinki agreement, led to a severe crisis that has not yet found a solid and sustainable alternative. Otherwise, the Rio environmental agenda lost steam and a lot of its chapters are going unheeded in European footsteps.

Along Southern Europe, the so-called Arab Spring – preceded by an Iranian Spring in 2009 – was neither understood nor accompanied. In the absence of a strong European sponsored alternative for freedom and democracy, Islamists derailed the process from Tunisia to Egypt, and worse, in Iraq and Syria aspirations for freedom were smashed by the Iranian theocracy and its puppets.

The theocratic challenge further eroded the European Order to the point where it is difficult to assert whether it even exists. The Iranian nuclear deal has opened a new era of nuclear proliferation among Iran's neighbours. As expected, Egypt, Jordan, Saudi Arabia and the UAE immediately launched nuclear plans, ostensibly peaceful and driven by energy concerns, paradoxically coinciding with a major fall in oil prices.

The deafening silence of Western powers regarding gross violations of human rights, international law and territorial integrity of its neighbours by the theocracy, all sacrificed for the signing of the nuclear deal, reverberated across the whole region. It sent a clear message to all political actors that the West has lost credibility, that human rights and territorial integrity were no longer major issues to be taken into consideration, and that sheer power is the only important criterion.

One of the side effects of this state of affairs was the so-called refugee crisis. When the West failed to react to the large-scale massacre promoted by Iranian theocracy proxies in Syria, including the torture and assassination of all those suspected of opposition tendencies, barrel-bombing of civilian populations, widespread use of chemical weapons against civilians – just to name the most clear and serious violations of human rights – millions of civilians were forced to flee. In turn, Islamic fundamentalists, who have been the single tolerated alternative since the beginning, found these conditions ripe for the execution of their radicalisation agenda.

The fact that this situation would have tremendous consequences for Europe should have not been difficult to imagine for any observer. The surprise and crisis felt by European leaders in the face of the massive influx of refugees seems to confirm their inability to understand the basics of a successful international order as well as the main challenges to it.

The helpless way as Europe deals are conceptualising policies to deal with Iran, the Syrian war and the refugee crisis – as if they were not different aspects of the same reality – shows how appeasement psychosis is preventing the European establishment to formulate any coherent thinking on the political challenges it faces.

European leaders seem obsessed with obtaining commercial advantages regardless of the political consequences in a strategy that will in all likelihood devastate the whole European fabric if not clearly and decisively reversed.

The recent migrant deal between the EU and Turkey is a clear indication that Europe is set on addressing the symptoms rather than the root causes.

Those who assume they will achieve peace by appeasing totalitarian beasts while abandoning their core principles have learned little from history, for they will lose their principles and they will jeopardise peace.

The European Union is in dire need of rethinking and remaking the European Order, which it developed into its present form and helped deeply influence its neighbours' attitudes. Whereas this exercise will have to address several different trade, monetary, investment, environmental and other chapters, the core issues to be taken into consideration are the ten points of the 1975 Helsinki Acts.

Whereas the Helsinki heritage needs to be fine-tuned regarding the compatibility of the Wilsonian double objective of respect for nations and peoples, its core messages on respect for "human rights and fundamental freedoms, including the freedom of thought, conscience, religion and belief" as well as peace, international law, rights of peoples and territorial integrity of states must be confirmed and strengthened.

The European Union should launch a peace and development initiative in the Arab World in order to stop the present massacres by state, semi-state and non-state actors, the criminal use of chemical and other weapons of mass destruction, the pernicious interference of non-Arab state actors and to ensure peaceful solutions respectful of all peoples involved and the existing states with sustainable development perspectives for the whole Arab World.

The European Union should firmly demand from Iranian authorities to respect all above mentioned human-rights, the territorial integrity of its neighbours and the immediate cessation of export of terrorism, and should make the fulfilment of these requests a necessary precondition for any possible improvement in bilateral relations.

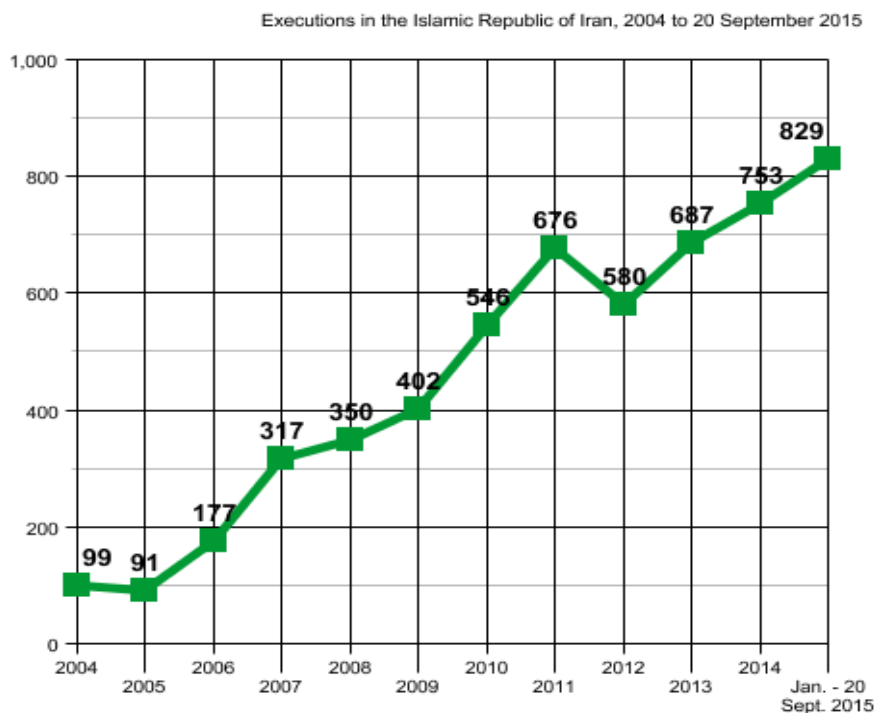
The European Union must develop its refugee, trade and defence policies in a coherent, intelligent and principled manner. To close its eyes to the massacres carried out by the Iranian theocracy or its proxies in Syria so that commercial opportunities can be exploited regardless of the human impact of which the refugee influx is one of the consequences, is a recipe for disaster.

1. Iran's War on Human Rights

1.1 Death Penalty and Mass Executions

Iranian authorities execute more individuals per capita than any other country in the world. According to the latest report by Ahmed Shaheed, the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Iran, executions have been rising at an exponential rate since 2005, peaking in 2014 at 753 executions⁴. Amnesty International issued a report in July 2015, which specified that Iranian authorities executed 694 people between 1 January and 15 July 2015 and characterised this as an “unprecedented spike in executions in the country”⁵.

Said Boumedouha, the deputy director of Amnesty International’s Middle East and North Africa Programme noted, “Iran’s staggering execution toll for the first half of this year paints a sinister picture of the machinery of the state carrying out premeditated, judicially-sanctioned killings on a mass scale”⁶. Furthermore, Boumedouha predicted in July that “If Iran’s authorities maintain this horrifying execution rate we are likely to see more than 1,000 state-sanctioned deaths by the year’s end”⁷, a claim which was recently echoed by the UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Iran⁸.



Source: October 2015 report of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Islamic Republic of Iran and Amnesty International

⁴ <http://shaheedoniran.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/10/SR-Report-Iran-Oct2015.pdf> (29-10-2015)

⁵ <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2015/07/irans-staggering-execution-spree/> (29-10-2015)

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ <http://america.aljazeera.com/articles/2015/10/27/un-executions-in-iran-could-top-1000-in-2015.html> (29-10-2015)

According to Ahmed Shaheed, 69 percent of executions during the first six months of 2015 were reportedly for drug-related offenses. Shaheed argued that the majority of executions violate international laws that ban the use of capital punishment for non-violent offenses and for juveniles⁹.

In October 2015, members of the European Parliament called on the EU to avoid using taxpayers' money to fund the execution of alleged drug offenders overseas. In a resolution passed by 569 to 38, MEPs called on the European Commission and member states *"to reaffirm the categorical principle that European aid and assistance, including to UNODC¹⁰ counter-narcotics programmes, cannot facilitate law enforcement operations which lead to death sentences and executions of those arrested"*¹¹.

According to The Guardian¹², the EU has contributed over €72 million to UNODC projects focused on *"organised crime and drugs trafficking"*, with the money financing equipment and training for counter-narcotics forces in Iran.

In 2005, MEP Paulo Casaca severely criticised the EU policy of financing the Iranian authorities for combating drug trafficking – which actually end up in the hands of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps, responsible for combating border trafficking in Iran – when the very low price and massive quantities of heroin in Tehran cast substantial doubt on Iranian authorities' presumed commitment to a serious fight against drug trafficking.¹³

Aside from the doubtful efficacy of European aid to Iranian authorities for counter-narcotics programmes, Mr. Casaca also laid out three major reasons for not pursuing this policy: (1) Supporting the Iranian drug policy is to support the widespread use of the death penalty, vehemently contradicting European pledges; (2) Due to the lack of transparency and reliability of the Iranian judicial system it is highly likely that drug trafficking is used as a pretext for political or civic persecution; and (3) Given the involvement of the IRGC itself in drug trafficking, it is highly probable that the IRGC's main objective is mainly to get rid of competition to its profitable trade. In fact, several reports accuse the IRGC of being directly involved in drug trafficking.¹⁴

According to Amnesty International, death sentences in Iran are issued by courts that are entirely lacking in independence and impartiality and for vaguely-worded, wide-ranging offences or acts that should not be proscribed, let alone to entice capital punishment¹⁵.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ UN Office on Drugs and Crime.

¹¹ <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?pubRef=-//EP//NONSGML%2BMOTION%2BP8-RC-2015-0998%2B0%2BDOC%2BPDF%2BV0//EN> (29-10-2015)

¹² <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/mar/19/un-fund-iran-anti-drugs-programme-executions-unodc-death-penalty> (23-11-2015)

¹³ Question 2298/05 in [http://www.europarl.europa.eu/bulletins/pdf/01c_bu-a\(2005\)08_en.pdf](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/bulletins/pdf/01c_bu-a(2005)08_en.pdf) (23-11-2015)

¹⁴ See, for instance: <http://acdemocracy.org/the-revolutionary-guards-international-drug-trade/> (23-11-2015)

¹⁵ <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2015/07/irans-staggering-execution-spree/> (29-10-2015)

The case of Mohammad Ali Taheri¹⁶ serves as a recent example. Taheri, the founder of a spiritual movement, was sentenced to death by a Revolutionary Court last August on the charge of “corruption on earth” for merely exercising his right of freedom of religion and expression as enshrined in international law.

1.2 Arbitrary detention

Between 2011 and 2013, the Working Group on Arbitrary Detention (WGAD) issued ten legal opinions concerning journalists, lawyers, a Christian pastor, and a student activist¹⁷. The WGAD established that 12 of the 13 individuals who were the focus of their inquiry, appeared to have been detained for merely exercising their right to freedom of expression, opinion, religion, belief, or association¹⁸. The WGAD called on Iranian authorities to immediately release these individuals, but their call has gone unheeded.

On 3 May 2015, the revolutionary court of Tehran summoned Narges Mohammadi, a prominent Iranian human rights activist on charges of “*activities against national security and anti-government propaganda*” and other “*recent activities*”, which included involvement in peaceful campaigns against the death penalty and violence against women. Over the past five years, Mohammadi has been systematically harassed by judicial officials and agents of Iran’s Ministry of Intelligence and Security due to her activities, and as a result has suffered a psychological breakdown. She was detained on 5 May 2015 for merely peacefully exercising her rights to freedom of expression, association and assembly, and is still awaiting trial, having had it postponed at least three times so far.

On 1 August 2015, Mohammadi suffered partial paralysis and was transferred to hospital where staff concluded that she should be seen and treated by specialists. However, Iranian authorities ignored the medical advice and returned her to prison, effectively denying her urgently needed medical treatment, again a gross violation of her human rights.

As part of her campaigning, Narges Mohammadi met with the then European Union foreign policy chief Catherine Ashton in March 2014 on the occasion of International Women’s Day at the Austrian embassy in Tehran¹⁹. Baroness Ashton underlined that “*The main purpose of the visit was to, as EU high representative, have a chance to talk to Iran about the potential for the relationship that we can have in the future*” and added that “*Not surprisingly, there was a big focus on human rights: I met with women activists on International Women’s Day and talked to them about the situation that women find themselves in and some of the work*

¹⁶ <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/prs/ps/2015/08/245826.htm> (29-10-2015)

¹⁷ <http://shaheedoniran.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/03/HRC-2015.pdf> (31-10-2015)

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/mar/10/eu-catherine-ashton-criticised-meeting-iran-women-activists> (02-11-2015)

that these women are engaged in, from journalists to those involved with Afghan refugees, people working across the spectrum of civil society and the importance of civil society”²⁰.

Not surprisingly, Baroness Ashton’s meeting with people like Narges Mohammadi and Gohar Eshghi, the mother of Iranian blogger Sattar Beheshti, who died in custody while having no access to his family or lawyer, enraged hardliners in Tehran. According to Narges Mohammadi’s account of the meeting, “Ashton wept as she embraced Eshghi”. She added, “Ashton told Eshghi that as a mother herself she can completely understand how it feels to lose a child like that”²¹.



Catherine Ashton (L), the European Union's top foreign policy diplomat, at a meeting with Narges Mohammadi (right), an Iranian human rights activist, and Gohar Eshghi, mother of Sattar Beheshti who died in Iranian custody.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid.



Catherine Ashton (L) embracing Gohar Eshghi (R), mother of Iranian blogger Sattar Beheshti who died in custody.



Javan newspaper, which is affiliated with the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps, published an article criticising Baroness Ashton’s meeting with women activists. In the picture accompanying the article, the image of Gohar Eshghi, the mother of deceased Iranian blogger Sattar Beheshti, has been completely removed.



Narges Mohammadi, chained to a hospital bed and denied proper medical treatment for a deteriorating neurological condition.

Another recent example of arbitrary imprisonment by Iranian authorities is that of young female artist Atena Farghadani who was jailed in Tehran in August 2014 for drawing a satirical cartoon portraying lawmakers as monkeys, cows and other animals. Through her cartoon she protested against a bill that aims to criminalise voluntary sterilisation and restrict access to contraception and family planning services²².

Atena was released four months later and posted a YouTube video in December 2014 in which she protested against female prison guards at Evin prison who had tortured her, verbally abused her and forced her to strip naked for a body search²³. She also wrote an open letter to Iran's Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei stipulating that *"I know...I will be in a court that screams injustice. I will be present before a judge who for years has skewed the balance of justice. What you call an 'insult to representatives of the parliament by means of cartoons' I consider to be an artistic expression of the... parliament which our nation does not deserve"*²⁴.

Atena was subsequently arrested again in January 2015 and sentenced to 12 years and nine months in prison in May 2015 for merely exercising her rights to freedoms of expression, association and assembly. Furthermore, Amnesty International reported in October 2015 that it has seen a note written by Atena Farghadani, which was leaked from prison, in which she says that the judicial authorities took her to a medical centre outside the prison on 12 August 2015 and forced her to submit to virginity and pregnancy tests to investigate charges of *"illegitimate sexual relations"*, short of adultery, after she shook the hands of her male lawyer²⁵.

Amnesty International emphasised that by subjecting Atena to forced virginity and pregnancy tests, Iranian authorities have violated her human rights to physical integrity, dignity, privacy and the right to be free from torture and cruel and inhumane and degrading treatment. Despite the fact that the United Nations World Health Organisation (WHO) has called for a global end to the practice of *"virginity testing"* in all cases and banned health workers from continuing this discriminatory and degrading conduct²⁶, Iranian authorities still apply sexual and gender-based violence in order to intimidate, punish or harass women and girls.

²² <http://www.amnestyusa.org/news/press-releases/imprisoned-cartoonist-subjected-to-forced-virginity-test-in-iran> (02-11-2015)

²³ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ybx0HE7ykt8> (02-11-2015)

²⁴ <http://cartoonistsrights.org/jailed-iranian-artist-aten-farghadani-recipient-of-crnis-2015-courage-in-cartooning-award/> (03-11-2015)

²⁵ <http://www.amnestyusa.org/news/press-releases/imprisoned-cartoonist-subjected-to-forced-virginity-test-in-iran> (03-11-2015)

²⁶ http://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/10665/136101/1/WHO_RHR_14.26_eng.pdf?ua=1 (03-11-2015)



Atena Farghadani and her satirical cartoon portraying Iranian lawmakers as animals. Atena's artwork and bravery won her the 2015 Courage in Editorial Cartooning Award.

1.3 Treatment of prisoners

The Special Rapporteur on human rights in Iran reported in March 2015 that he remains concerned about reports of insufficient or non-existent access to medical services for detainees²⁷. The Special Rapporteur's findings highlighted sixteen detainees in urgent need of specialised medical treatment outside prison but that in only a few instances were prisoners allowed to seek medical care outside prison walls²⁸.

On 13 September 2015, Shahrokh Zamani, an official of the Tehran Paint Workers' Union, died in prison where he was serving an eleven-year sentence since 2011 on charges of "*spreading propaganda*" and "*endangering national security*"²⁹. It has been reported by various sources inside Iran that Shahrokh Zamani was denied visitors and was not allowed to make phone calls whilst in prison. In addition, he was denied access to medication and subjected to physical and psychological abuse amounting to torture. Despite claims by the Iranian authorities that Shahrokh Zamani died of a stroke in prison, fellow prisoners reported black and bruised areas on his body indicating that he did not die of natural causes.

The case of Zeynab Jalalian serves as another example of how prisoners are denied access to medical treatment in Iran's prisons. Jalalian was sentenced to death in January 2009 by the revolutionary court of Kermanshah on charges of "*enmity against God*" for allegedly being a member of the Party For Free Life of Kurdistan (PJAK), an armed Kurdish opposition group. Prior to her sentencing, Jalalian was, according to her own account, held in a Ministry of Intelligence detention facility for eight months where she was subjected to torture³⁰. In November 2011, Jalalian's death sentence was commuted and reduced to life imprisonment. However, Jalalian is now suffering from eye problems, believed to be the result of head beatings during interrogation in prison, and the authorities have repeatedly refused her access to an eye specialist outside the prison³¹. Furthermore, she has been moved around to unknown locations various times and the authorities have denied her family visitation for over a year³².

In June 2014, Amnesty International described the state of prisons in Iran as extremely grim and stressed that overcrowding, inadequate food and sanitation deteriorate the circumstances for those who suffer from medical conditions³³. The human rights group further argued that Iranian authorities' denial of medical care to prisoners can amount to torture under international human rights laws.

²⁷ <http://shaheedoniran.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/03/HRC-2015.pdf> (03-11-2015)

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ <http://www.middleeasteye.net/news/international-trade-union-bodies-criticises-iran-over-suppression-unionists-1601132510> (03-11-2015)

³⁰ http://www.amnesty.org.uk/iran-help-us-save-zeynabs-sight#.Vjjqp_nhDcs (03-11-2015)

³¹ Ibid.

³² Ibid.

³³ Ibid.

1.4 Freedom of expression and censorship

Despite the election of President Hassan Rouhani in 2013, who presents himself as a moderate, Iran was recognised in 2014 as the country with the world's most repressive environment for the press. News outlets that belong to hardliners and which support the regime virtually control the media. A state agency such as the Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting (IRIB), which dominates television and radio broadcasts inside Iran, operates as an instrument of carrying out the repressive policies of the government by airing programmes which aim to slur and demonise opponents of the regime. IRIB has frequently been engaged in collaborating with security and intelligence services and has aired confessions from dissidents, which were obtained under duress. Its news programmes, therefore, carry little value as they are subjected to censorship and serve the interests of the regime.

The Special Rapporteur states in his October 2015 report that at least 46 journalists and social media activists were either in prison or sentenced for their peaceful activities as at April 2015 and that only a small number of these journalists have since been released³⁴. The Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) and cyber-policing units continue assisting government agencies in tracking down and arresting journalists, bloggers, social media and human rights activists. According to Freedom House, the Intelligence Unit of the IRGC has throughout 2014 reportedly tortured a few detainees in order to extract televised confessions from them³⁵.

The Special Rapporteur underlined that the judiciary also reportedly continues to impose heavy prison sentences on individuals that peacefully exercise their right to freedom of expression for offenses such as "*propaganda against the State*", "*insulting*" political or religious figures, and harming "*national security*"³⁶. Children's rights activist Atena Daemi is a recent example of how authorities impose heavy prison sentences on those who peacefully exercise their rights. Daemi was sentenced to 14 years in prison in May 2015 on charges of "*assembly and collusion against national security*", "*propaganda against the State*", "*insulting the Supreme Leader and the sacred*", and "*concealing (criminal) evidence*"³⁷. The evidence which was presented by the authorities against her in court included jokes and a protest song saved on her mobile phone³⁸.

State censorship in Iran extends to Farsi blogs and news websites and even though easing restrictions on media and information was one of President Rouhani's promises, the reality is that online surveillance and extensive censorship continues to be applied on the population by authorities. Despite the fact that President Rouhani and his foreign minister,

³⁴ <http://shaheedoniran.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/10/SR-Report-Iran-Oct2015.pdf> (04-11-2015)

³⁵ <https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-press/2015/iran> (04-11-2015)

³⁶ <http://shaheedoniran.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/10/SR-Report-Iran-Oct2015.pdf> (04-11-2015)

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Ibid.

Mohammad Javad Zarif, have an active presence on Facebook and Twitter, these social media websites, as well as YouTube, have been blocked for the broader Iranian society.

The Special Rapporteur revealed in his latest report that in May 2015 the Ministry of Telecommunications and Information Technology unveiled a national search engine called “Parsijoo” (meaning Persian search) and a new messaging service for mobile phones called “Salam”³⁹. The government aims to replicate international online applications and services which will make it easier for intelligence services to conduct surveillance and monitoring of activities related to user content and communications.

1.5 Minorities

Iran’s society is comprised of various ethnic and religious groups who mainly reside in underdeveloped regions and face discrimination. Ethnic minorities include the Azeris, Kurds, Baluchis and Arabs who have in the past organised many protests calling for more rights. Despite the fact that the authorities officially recognise ethnic minorities, these groups continue to face serious challenges in Iran on a daily basis. The Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights reviewed Iran in 2013 and expressed concern about severe restrictions being imposed on education in the native languages of ethnic minorities⁴⁰. According to the review, Iranian authorities do not allow ethnic groups to have newspapers and publications in their own languages which subsequently prevents them from participating in cultural life.

Moreover, according to a recent report by the Islamic Parliament Research Centre, the lowest literacy rates are in the areas of which the majority of the populations belong to ethnic minority groups, such as Sistan-va-Baluchistan, Kurdistan, West Azerbaijan, and Northern Khorasan provinces, whereas provinces with a predominant Fars population, such as Tehran, Semnan and Yazd, have the highest literacy rates⁴¹. Discrimination, poverty, early marriages among girls and a lack of mandatory primary education, are identified by the report as the reasons for higher illiteracy rates in areas dominated by ethnic minorities⁴².

Ethnic minorities are severely persecuted for their peaceful activism in Iran. In January 2014, President Hassan Rouhani ordered the execution of Iranian-Arab poet and rights activist, Hashem Shaabani, who belonged to Iran’s Ahwazi Arab minority. Shaabani, who was sentenced to death following a grossly unfair trial in 2013 by Branch Two of the Ahwaz Revolutionary Court, was executed along with fourteen others on charges of “*enmity against God*” and threatening “*national security*”. Shaabani’s peaceful activities included raising awareness of Arab culture and literature in Iran and he frequently expressed his

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ http://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=E/C.12/IRN/CO/2 (05-11-2015)

⁴¹ <http://shaheedoniran.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/10/SR-Report-Iran-Oct2015.pdf> (05-11-2015)

⁴² Ibid.

concerns about the treatment of ethnic Arabs in the province of Khuzestan. The authorities detained him in 2011 due to his cultural activities on charges of “*waging war on God*”, and he was severely tortured in prison, which subsequently resulted in a forced confession that was broadcast on national television. Whilst in prison, Shaabani wrote a letter to his family in which he stated that he could not ignore the “*hideous crimes against Ahwazis, perpetrated by the Iranian authorities, particularly arbitrary and unjust executions...I have tried to defend the legitimate right that every people in this world should have, which is the right to live freely with full civil rights. With all these miseries and tragedies, I have never used a weapon to fight these atrocious crimes except the pen*”⁴³.

The conditions of Iran’s religious minorities have not improved either despite President Hassan Rouhani’s promises to improve their treatment before assuming office in 2013. Iranian authorities continue to oppress members of the Baha’i community, Christians and Sunni Muslims. The Special Rapporteur revealed in his October 2015 report that at least 74 members of the Baha’i community were detained as at June 2015 and that authorities allegedly continue to arrest and interrogate Baha’is and to close down their businesses in Iran⁴⁴. Furthermore, the crackdown on Iran’s Christian community continues unabatedly. The government actively pursues Christian ministers and adherents of the faith and detains them under fabricated political charges.

1.6 Women

Iran has been ranked in the 2015 World Economic Forum gender gap index as 141th out of 145 countries and has overall scored 0.580 with 0.00 implying inequality and 1.00 implying equality on the scale⁴⁵. On adult unemployment rates of the labour force, the gender gap index 2015 indicates that 19.8% of the unemployed in Iran are female and 8.6% are male. Moreover, on science, technology and research, the report indicates that 35% of tertiary-level STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics) students are female against 65% male and 32% of tertiary-level STEM graduates are female against 68% male. The percentage of PhD graduates stands at 35% female against 65% male.

The report further specifies the rate of early marriages among women aged 15-19 to be 21%. With regards to rights and norms, Iran scored on parental authority in marriage and after divorce at 1.0, with 1 being the worst score and 7 the best score. On the existence of legislation punishing acts of violence against women in cases of domestic violence, Iran scored 1.0. Similar scores were found for inheritance rights of daughters (1.0), women’s access to credit (0.5) and women’s access to property other than land (0.5)⁴⁶.

⁴³ <http://www.jpost.com/Middle-East/Rouhani-orders-executions-of-Iranian-Arab-poet-rights-activist-340173> (05-11-2015)

⁴⁴ <http://shaheedoniran.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/10/SR-Report-Iran-Oct2015.pdf> (05-11-2015)

⁴⁵ <http://reports.weforum.org/global-gender-gap-report-2015/economies/#economy=IRN> (26-11-2015)

⁴⁶ Ibid.

Various laws and policies restrict Iranian women in their daily lives, from dress codes in public to subjects of study in university and employment opportunities. Despite the fact that at university level women now encompass the majority of students, women in Iran are banned from studying certain subjects such as those involving engineering and technology. Furthermore, the number of subjects that Iranian women are banned from studying appears to be on the rise indicating more restrictions being imposed on women. Women's employment opportunities are restricted under article 1117 of the Civil Code. An Iranian man can ban his wife from work if he considers it to be "*incompatible with the interests of the family or with his or his wife's dignity*"⁴⁷.

Iranian women are not protected by the laws of the Islamic Republic of Iran and the case of Reyhaneh Jabbari serves as a clear example. In October 2014, Reyhaneh, a 26-year-old woman convicted of murder, was hanged by Iranian authorities despite an international campaign to save her life.

In an act of self-defence, Reyhaneh stabbed 47-year-old Morteza Abdolali Sarbandi, a former intelligence officer, who tried to rape her when she was 19-year-old. Reyhaneh was hired by Sarbandi to redesign his office and after she was taken to Sarbandi's office, he had tried to sexually abuse her. Reyhaneh was arrested in 2007 and found guilty of murder by the Tehran criminal court and sentenced to death in 2009 following a deeply flawed investigation and trial.

Following her arrest, she spent two months in solitary confinement and did not have access to a lawyer or her family. Reyhaneh insisted during the trial that she stabbed Sarbandi after he tried to sexually abuse her but that another man who was in the house at the time actually killed him⁴⁸. Amnesty International reported in October 2014 that Reyhaneh was forced by Iranian authorities to replace her original lawyer, Mohammad Ali Jedari Foroughi, with a more inexperienced lawyer, which indicates that judicial authorities aimed to prevent an inquiry into her claims⁴⁹.

Moreover, in October 2014 a series of coordinated acid attacks against women who were deemed to be dressed "immodestly" took place in the city of Isfahan. At least twenty four women have fallen victim to these attacks and to date authorities have not brought the perpetrators to justice.

⁴⁷ <http://rc.majlis.ir/fa/law/show/96904> (06-11-2015)

⁴⁸ <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/middleeast/2014/10/amnesty-iran-set-hang-woman-at-dawn-2014102422855125759.html> (09-11-2015)

⁴⁹ <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2014/10/iran-halt-execution-woman-set-be-hanged-dawn/> (09-11-2015)

1.6 Children

In May 2013, Iran adopted a new Islamic Penal Code which offered some the hope that juvenile offenders on death row would see their death sentences withdrawn, along with a re-examination of their cases. According to article 91 of the new Islamic Penal Code, judges are allowed to impose an alternative punishment instead of the death penalty if they determine that the juvenile offender did not understand the nature and consequences of the crime or if his or her “*mental growth and maturity*” are in doubt⁵⁰.

However, despite the adoption of this new Penal Code, on 13 October 2015, authorities hanged Fatemeh Salbehi, a 23-year-old woman and alleged juvenile offender. Fatemeh Salbehi was sentenced to death in 2010 for allegedly having killed her husband, the 30-year old Hamed Sadeghi, when she was 17.

Fatemeh was a victim of forced marriage at a young age, having been wedded to Sadeghi when she was only 16 years old. Despite the fact that the State Medicine Organisation stipulated at the trial that Fatemeh Salbehi was suffering from severe depression and was suicidal around the time of her husband’s death, the Supreme Court of Iran upheld her death sentence. Salbehi’s execution came just days after the execution of Samad Zahabi, who was hanged for a crime which he allegedly committed when he was 17.

The executions of Fatemeh Salbehi and Samad Zahabi are clear violations of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), which plainly states that capital punishment shall not be imposed for offences committed by persons below eighteen years of age⁵¹, and to which Iran is a state party. Moreover, the trials of Fatemeh Salbehi and Samad Zahabi lacked fair standards. Amnesty International recorded at least 75 executions of juvenile offenders between 2005 and 2015 and believes that 160 juvenile offenders are currently on death row in prisons across Iran⁵².

Fatemeh Salbehi’s lack of consent and young age at the time of her marriage is an example of the rising trend in early forced marriages in Iran. On 18 August 2015, Shahrvand newspaper published a troubling report⁵³ showing that more than 40,000 underage marriages were registered in Iran in 2014 alone. The report further indicates that 419,488 girls under the age of 15 and 484,885 boys under the age of 20 got married between 2004 and 2014⁵⁴.

⁵⁰ <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2015/10/iran-juvenile-offenders-executed/> (11-11-2015)

⁵¹ https://www.icrc.org/customary-ihl/eng/docs/v2_cha_chapter39_rule135_sectiond (11-11-2015)

⁵² <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2015/10/iran-juvenile-offenders-executed/> (11-11-2015)

⁵³ <http://www.khabaronline.ir/detail/447361/society/1533> (16-09-2015)

⁵⁴ Ibid.

2. The Quds Force of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps

Following the Iranian revolution of 1979, which resulted in the collapse of the Pahlavi rule and the establishment of the Islamic Republic of Iran, the late Supreme Leader Ayatollah Khomeini formed the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC), an ideologically-driven armed force tasked with protecting the interests of the regime domestically and internationally. The IRGC is a counterweight to Iran's traditional military. It also controls the Bassij (volunteer) militia which is responsible for repressing domestic dissent.

The current Constitution of Iran considers the formation of a global Islamic state as the state's objective. Article 11 of the General Principles of the constitution orders that *"In accordance with the sacred verse of the Qur'an ('This your community is a single community, and I am your Lord, so worship Me' [21:92]), all Muslims form a single nation, and the government of the Islamic Republic of Iran has the duty of formulating its general policies with a view to cultivating the friendship and unity of all Muslim peoples, and it must constantly strive to bring about the political, economic, and cultural unity of the Islamic world"*⁵⁵.

Moreover, Article 144 of the constitution stipulates that *"The Army of the Islamic Republic of Iran must be an Islamic Army, i.e., committed to Islamic ideology and the people, and must recruit into its service individuals who have faith in the objectives of the Islamic Revolution and are devoted to the cause of realising its goals"*⁵⁶.

The IRGC serves as an instrument to this end and uses the Quds Force, its powerful elite branch, for extraterritorial operations including training and supporting terrorist groups operating regionally and internationally. This includes a first layer of groups that work as external ideological and military extensions of the IRGC, such as the Lebanese Hezbollah, the Iraqi Badr Corps or the Yemeni "Ansar Allah" (Houthis), a second layer of Sunni groups that have different degrees of proximity and the support for which is not necessarily permanent, like Al Qaeda, the Afghan Taliban, Hamas or the Palestinian Islamic Jihad⁵⁷. Parallel to the external activities of the Quds Force, the Iranian regime uses its ministries of foreign affairs and intelligence and security to run its overseas political, ideological and cultural activities in order to effectively export its Islamic "revolution," a cornerstone of its foreign policy objectives.

Under the command of General Qassem Suleimani, the Quds Force's strategy is to increase the Iranian regime's range of regional influence across various dimensions. The most important is towards the Mediterranean using its power bases in Iraq, Syria and Lebanon, towards the Gulf and towards Central Asia through Afghanistan. IRGC operations are worldwide, be it Western Africa, South America or Southeast Asia.

⁵⁵ <http://www.iranonline.com/iran/iran-info/government/constitution-1.html> (12-11-2015)

⁵⁶ <http://www.iranonline.com/iran/iran-info/government/constitution-9-3.html> (12-11-2015)

⁵⁷ <http://www.globalsecurity.org/intell/world/iran/qods.htm> (15-11-2015)

Organisations that are affiliated with the Quds Force receive military training at IRGC facilities, specifically in a special facility located 100 kilometres south of Tehran⁵⁸. In the Syrian conflict, the Quds Force is playing an active role alongside pro-government forces in order to prevent the fall of Iran's ally Bashar al-Assad.

According to Khaled al-Shami, a Syrian army defector, a Syrian army as such no longer exists and those who are currently fighting in Syria are militias, mostly from Iran and Lebanon⁵⁹. According to Shami, Division 9, Assad's largest and most important military force in southern Syria houses the only tank division and has around 4,000 troops organized in four brigades⁶⁰. However, Shami argues that most of the troops within the division are now non-Syrians. *"Without the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) and Lebanese Hezbollah the army could not stand up. Seventy percent of the troops in Division 9 are Iranian troops or Lebanese Hezbollah, the rest are Shabiha⁶¹. Only two to three percent are regular Syrian soldiers"*⁶², Shami has said.

Even though the Iranian regime denies having combat troops in Syria, claiming instead that it only has officers and generals within an advisory capacity to assist the Syrian army and Hezbollah, the increasing number of IRGC casualties indicates that these forces are fulfilling combat roles. According to the semi-official Fars news agency, thirty military personnel from the IRGC were killed in Syria in the span of a few weeks between October and November 2015, including high-ranking figures such as Colonel Mostafa Ezzatollah, General Farshad Hasoonizadeh and General Hossein Hamedani, all of whom were killed in Aleppo⁶³.

Furthermore, Khaled al-Shami's account exposes the combat role of the Quds Force in Syria. According to Shami, during battles, groups of 50 fighters are deployed, including 15 IRGC, 15 Hezbollah, and 20 Syrians, of which the majority are Shabiha⁶⁴. In addition, Shami emphasised that *"The Iranians and Hezbollah are not under the control of the Syrian Army, the exact opposite....Ten high-ranking Iranian officers control the division, they plan the operations. Only Iranian or Hezbollah forces can access operations rooms, no Syrian soldiers are allowed in"*⁶⁵.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ <http://www.middleeasteye.net/columns/shia-jihad-and-death-syria-s-army-1508759016> (18-11-2015)

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Alawite paramilitary force known for its brutality and sectarian nature

⁶² <http://www.middleeasteye.net/columns/shia-jihad-and-death-syria-s-army-1508759016> (18-11-2015)

⁶³ <http://english.aawsat.com/2015/11/article55345559/mutiny-within-irans-revolutionary-guard-after-incurring-heavy-losses-in-syria-source> (15-11-2015)

⁶⁴ <http://www.middleeasteye.net/columns/shia-jihad-and-death-syria-s-army-1508759016>

⁶⁵ Ibid.

3. Lebanese Hezbollah: the Iranian theocracy's most important proxy

In 1982, subsequent to the founding of the IRGC, Khomeini sent his Revolutionary Guard officers to Lebanon in order to help Shiite militias there to establish Hezbollah, both a military outfit and a political party. Imad Mughniyeh, Hezbollah's notorious military commander who was assassinated in February 2008, assisted in the formation of the Special Security Apparatus, a Hezbollah division that works closely with the Quds Force⁶⁶.

Under guidance from Iran and vital financial support and training from the IRGC, Hezbollah helped orchestrate suicide attacks on the American embassy and on French and American barracks in Beirut in October 1983, killing 258 Americans⁶⁷ and 57 French paratroopers⁶⁸. In its founding manifesto, which was issued in 1985, Hezbollah explicitly declares its loyalty to the late Ayatollah Khomeini and his principles of an Islamic state governed by the guardianship of the jurispudent (velayat-e faqih). The opening chapter of the 1985 Hezbollah manifesto states that:

"We are often asked: Who are we, the Hizballah, and what is our identity? We are the sons of the umma (Muslim community) - the party of God (Hizb Allah) the vanguard of which was made victorious by God in Iran. There the vanguard succeeded to lay down the bases of a Muslim state which plays a central role in the world. We obey the orders of one leader, wise and just, that of our tutor and faqih (jurist) who fulfils all the necessary conditions: Ruhollah Musawi Khomeini. God save him!

By virtue of the above, we do not constitute an organized and closed party in Lebanon. Nor are we a tight political cadre. We are an umma linked to the Muslims of the whole world by the solid doctrinal and religious connection of Islam, whose message God wanted to be fulfilled by the Seal of the Prophets, i.e., Muhammad. This is why whatever touches or strikes the Muslims in Afghanistan, Iraq, the Philippines and elsewhere reverberates throughout the whole Muslim umma of which we are an integral part. Our behavior is dictated to us by legal principles laid down by the light of an overall political conception defined by the leading jurist (wilayat al-faqih).

As for our culture, it is based on the Holy Koran, the Sunna and the legal rulings of the faqih who is our source of imitation (marja' al-taqlid). Our culture is crystal clear. It is not complicated and is accessible to all. No one can imagine the importance of our

⁶⁶ <http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2013/09/30/the-shadow-commander> (13-11-2015)

⁶⁷ <http://www.cfr.org/lebanon/hezbollah-k-hizbollah-hizbullah/p9155> (13-11-2015)

⁶⁸ <http://middleeast.about.com/od/thisdayinmideasthistory/ig/September-18-to-September-24-i/Hezbollah-Attacks-US-Embassy-.htm> (13-11-2015)

*military potential as our military apparatus is not separate from our overall social fabric. Each of us is a fighting soldier. And when it becomes necessary to carry out the Holy War, each of us takes up his assignment in the fight in accordance with the injunctions of the Law, and that in the framework of the mission carried out under the tutelage of the Commanding Jurist*⁶⁹.

With the creation of Hezbollah, the “Axis of Resistance”, headed by Iran, was announced, comprised of state and non-state actors in the Middle East, aiming to realise Khomeini’s principles and objectives in the region and to confront the interests of the United States and Israel. The Axis initially only included the regime of Hafez al-Assad in Syria and the Lebanese Hezbollah.

Iran's financial support to Hezbollah is in the range of \$200 million annually. Following the 2006 war between Hezbollah and Israel, Iran rearmed the group by providing it with sophisticated equipment, which were transferred to Hezbollah in Lebanon through Syria⁷⁰. Iran does not want to lose its Syrian foothold as this would have detrimental consequences for Hezbollah, which actively pursues the realisation of Iran’s regional objectives and Khomeini’s ideological principles.

During his speech in May 2013, Hassan Nasrallah, Hezbollah’s Secretary General, acknowledged the group’s involvement in the Syrian conflict in support of Bashar al-Assad⁷¹. Syrian opposition groups have on multiple occasions argued that Hezbollah uses the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS) as a pretext for its interference in the Syrian conflict.

In an interview with the Voice of America, Colonel Riyad al-Asaad, the founder of the Free Syrian Army, said: “*Hezbollah is a terrorist organisation. They cannot be a legitimate force*”⁷². Riyad al-Asaad further argued that Hezbollah and other Iraqi and Iranian Shi’ite militias, which are under the direct command of the IRGC, in southern Aleppo and northern Hama are fighting opponents of the Assad regime⁷³. According to expert estimates, there are currently 6,000 Hezbollah fighters fighting alongside Syrian government troops and the IRGC. The Britain-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights has revealed that 900 Hezbollah fighters have been killed in Syria so far⁷⁴.

⁶⁹ <http://www.cfr.org/terrorist-organizations-and-networks/open-letter-hizballah-program/p30967> (13-11-2015)

⁷⁰ http://www.understandingwar.org/sites/default/files/Hezbollah_Sullivan_FINAL.pdf (13-11-2015)

⁷¹ <http://edition.cnn.com/2013/05/25/world/meast/syria-violence/> (13-11-2015)

⁷² <http://www.voanews.com/content/hezbollah-expands-military-presence-syrian-war/3052160.html> (13-11-2015)

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

4. Iran's covert invasion of Iraq

Iran saw its power and influence grow in neighbouring Iraq in the shadow of the 2003 US-led invasion, which led to the fall of Saddam Hussein and his regime. Ushering in a new era, the regime in Tehran went all out in an unparalleled manner in order to expand its control in all layers of the Iraqi government. Quds Force commander Qassem Suleimani was tasked by the Iranian Supreme Leader, Ali Khamenei, to formulate and implement the Iranian regime's Iraq policy in the post-Saddam era. Suleimani engaged his entire network of IRGC and Quds Force officers and political and intelligence links in order to install a pro-Iranian government in Iraq⁷⁵.

This objective was accomplished once Nouri al-Maliki of the Islamic Dawa Party assumed the post of premiership in 2006 in Iraq. Maliki's two terms at the helm bolstered ties with Iran and enabled favourable conditions for Tehran to effectively strengthen its command on all layers of the government of Iraq and to cultivate powerful Shi'ite militias by funding and arming them. Many experts and human rights groups blame the abusive sectarian policies of Maliki for paving the way for ISIS, as Iraq's Sunni community was considerably marginalised during his tenure. The Iranian-backed Shi'ite militias, which the Quds Force nurtured during Maliki's premiership, proved to be helpful to the former prime minister as he would use the paramilitary organisations with the full backing of Tehran in brutally oppressing Iraq's Sunni minority.

The two main Shi'ite militias being backed by Iran in Iraq are - aside from the institutional Badr Brigades created as a corps within IRGC, as pointed out above - the Kataib Hezbollah (Hezbollah Brigades) and Asaib Ahl al-Haq (League of the Righteous). The Badr Brigades, which is the IRGC's original wing in Iraq, is headed by Hadi al-Ameri. Once the group appeared in the Iraqi political scene it was renamed the Badr Organisation⁷⁶. During the Iran-Iraq war in the 1980s, the Badr Brigades fought against Saddam Hussein's army alongside the IRGC and were involved in other terrorist activities in the Gulf region. Their terrorist threats against US forces during the Iran-Iraq war were widely publicised in the media. Subsequent to the 2003 invasion of Iraq, Hadi al-Ameri became a key element in the Iranian-led terrorist operation in the country.⁷⁷

⁷⁵ <http://www.globalsecurity.org/intell/world/iran/qods.htm> (16-11-2015). Casaca, Paulo, (2008) "The hidden invasion of Iraq", Acadia Publishing details evidence to the fact that the IRGC presence was overwhelming at all the stages of the invasion of Iraq. After the book publication, however, more evidence on the close cooperation between the IRGC and the invading forces for the creation of the death squads was highlighted by several sources, namely the BBC and the Guardian.

⁷⁶ <http://www.reuters.com/article/2014/11/12/us-mideast-crisis-militias-specialreport-idUSKCN0IW0ZA20141112#f0OPkJqIEJWVKBhI.97> (16-11-2015)

⁷⁷ Among various other terrorist activities he is the number one suspect of the murder of Iraqi parliamentarians within the Iraqi building in April the 12th 2007. (Casaca, op.cit.)

He won a seat in parliament and became the Minister of Transportation during Maliki's second term⁷⁸.

Ameri's Badr Brigades gained notoriety for running death squads and a terror campaign against the Sunni Muslim minority in the post-Saddam era, including kidnappings, torture and assassinations. Since the rise of ISIS in June 2014, Ameri has again fully assumed his role in the frontlines and has become a battlefield commander. One former security official emphasised, *"Look at Ameri's uniform and then compare it to any Iraqi uniform...It's completely different...Look for the uniform of the IRGC, it's exactly one of them"*⁷⁹.

Abu Mahdi al-Mohandes is the head of Iran's second proxy, Kataib Hezbollah, in Iraq. Mohandes started his public cooperation with the IRGC in 1983 by orchestrating terrorist attacks against embassies of countries that backed Saddam Hussein in the war against Iran⁸⁰. In 2009, the US Treasury imposed sanctions on Mohandes, who has been described as an adviser to Quds Force commander Qassem Suleimani, for his role in carrying out and facilitating attacks against US and Iraqi forces⁸¹.

In June 2014, Iraq's Grand Ayatollah Sistani issued a fatwa calling on all Shi'ites to arm themselves against ISIS. As a result, the Popular Mobilisation Committee was formed under the leadership of Abu Mahdi al-Muhandes. The Committee, which is in fact a paramilitary organisation, is made up of Iranian-backed Shi'ite militias such as Kataib Hezbollah, Asaib Ahl al-Haq, Saraya al-Salam, Harakat Nujaba, Khorasan Brigades, the Imam Ali Brigades and the Badr Organisation⁸². Kataib Hezbollah is listed by the US as a Foreign Terrorist Organisation and the leaders of Asaib Ahl al-Haq, the Imam Ali Brigades and Harakat Nujaba are listed as Specially Designated Global Terrorists⁸³. With the collapse of the Iraqi army and security services in the face of ISIS advances starting in June 2014, the Iraqi government has increasingly relied on the Popular Mobilisation Committee in the fight against ISIS.

Asaib Ahl al-Haq is the third Iraqi Shi'ite militia backed by Iran and was formed from a splinter group of the Mahdi Army in 2006. Asaib advocates the "velayat-e faqih" political system and overtly follows the traditional Iranian clerics, such as the late Ayatollah Khomeini, Kazim al-Haeri and the current Iranian Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei⁸⁴. In June 2012, Asaib Ahl al-Haq and Kataib Hezbollah conducted deadly

⁷⁸ <http://www.reuters.com/article/2014/11/12/us-mideast-crisis-militias-specialreport-idUSKCN0IWOZA20141112#f0OPkQIeJWVKBhl.97> (16-11-2015)

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² <http://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2015/06/iraqi-shiite-militia-commander-threatens-to-attack-us.php> (16-11-2015)

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ <http://www.trackingterrorism.org/group/asaib-ahl-al-haq-aah> (17-11-2015)

attacks against US bases in Iraq. Asaib gained notoriety under leadership of Qais Khazali for orchestrating kidnappings and assassinating Sunni civilians⁸⁵. Khazali was trained and his militia's operations are financed by Iran's Quds Force⁸⁶. Former Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki has been accused by Sunnis of allowing Shi'ite militias, particularly Asaib, to kidnap and kill Sunni civilians in order to solidify his grip on power. Asaib has often been considered as Maliki's personal militia⁸⁷.

Members of all three militias, Badr Brigades, Kataib Hezbollah and Asaib Ahl al-Haq, have, upon orders from Iran, engaged in combat in Syria following the outbreak of the Syrian conflict in 2011 in order to ensure the Iranian grip over Syria and pursue the strategic objectives of the Iranian regime in the region.

5. Regional humanitarian crisis

5.1 Syria

Iran's determination to keep Syria under its control through the deployment of troops and arms has been the differentiator when considering the Syrian uprising against other Arab Spring events, with dire consequences for the people. The Iranian instigated civil war has resulted in the deaths of nearly 300,000 people⁸⁸ and has led to one of the world's biggest refugee crises since the Second World War. As at 17 November 2015, the total number of Syrian refugees stands at 4.3 million people⁸⁹. 2.1 million Syrians have been registered by the UNHCR in Egypt, Iraq, Jordan and Lebanon, 1.9 million have been registered by the government of Turkey and 27,000 have been registered in North Africa⁹⁰.

Furthermore, a total of 7.6 million Syrians have been internally displaced due to the conflict raging in their country for more than four years⁹¹. While Assad's collapsing ground forces are being replaced by the IRGC, Hezbollah and Iran-backed Shi'ite militias from Iraq, Assad's air force is focused on producing oil drums packed with explosives and shrapnel which are dropped from helicopters that fly over opposition-held territory. Experts and human rights groups have identified the use of these deadly barrel bombs, which kill indiscriminately, by the regime's air force as the main cause of the refugee crisis. The explosives detonate on impact and have the capability of destroying large residential buildings. As the pro-government forces continue using these weapons indiscriminately, Syrians have nicknamed

⁸⁵ <http://www.reuters.com/article/2014/11/12/us-mideast-crisis-militias-specialreport-idUSKCN0IW0ZA20141112#v922BIVFy2JoV0ER.97> (16-11-2015)

⁸⁶ <http://www.trackingterrorism.org/group/asaib-ahl-al-haq-aah> (17-11-2015)

⁸⁷ <http://www.reuters.com/article/2014/11/12/us-mideast-crisis-militias-specialreport-idUSKCN0IW0ZA20141112#v922BIVFy2JoV0ER.97> (16-11-2015)

⁸⁸ http://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/2015/10/31/syrian-civil-war-death-_n_8440378.html (17-11-2015)

⁸⁹ <http://data.unhcr.org/syrianrefugees/regional.php> (18-11-2015)

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ <http://www.unhcr.org/pages/49e486a76.html> (18-11-2015)

them the “barrels of death”. They have killed thousands of civilians over the past four years⁹².

Moreover, Bashar al-Assad's forces have been repeatedly accused of using chemical weapons in the Syrian conflict. In March 2015, Sarmin, a town which is located 50 km southwest of Aleppo, was attacked using chlorine gas reportedly by Syrian government forces. Even though the government vehemently denies conducting chemical attacks against civilians, witness accounts at Sarmin have reported hearing a helicopter, which only the Syrian army possesses, flying overhead prior to a roaring sound, like thunder, which did not result in an explosion but still left casualties⁹³.

As UN humanitarian agencies struggle to meet the basic needs of refugees in the face of an ever-growing refugee crisis, Iran’s support for Bashar al-Assad, Hezbollah and Shi’ite militias continues unabatedly, raising the grim prospect of a deterioration of the current humanitarian crisis.

5.2 Iraq

Iran’s vital backing of Iraq’s former Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki enabled him to hold onto the post of premiership for two terms, an era which can be characterised as a totalitarian rule along sectarian lines. Alienation and persecution, arbitrary detention and summary executions of Iraq’s Sunni minority and indiscriminate bombing of Sunni neighbourhoods were all policies conducted by the government of Iraq on Maliki’s watch, with complete support of the Iranian regime. The result was increasing sectarian tensions to unprecedented levels.

It was in such conditions that a Sunni extremist group called ISIS emerged as the most important actor in June 2014. In August 2015, an Iraqi Parliament report to the public prosecutor called for the trial of former Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki and dozens of other top officials over the fall of Mosul to Islamic State the year before.⁹⁴

As the Iraqi army was heavily politicised by Nouri al-Maliki and ridden by corruption, ISIS succeeded in taking hold of Iraq’s second-largest city, Mosul, dealing a heavy blow to a hollow Iraqi army in which its senior commanders abandoned their posts instead of defending the local population. As a result, nearly a third of Iraq’s territory is now in the hands of ISIS.

⁹² <http://america.aljazeera.com/articles/2015/9/28/at-un-panel-speakers-call-for-end-to-syria-barrel-bombs.html> (18-11-2015)

⁹³ <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-34212324> (18-11-2015)

⁹⁴ <http://english.aawsat.com/2015/08/article55344819/iraq-report-on-fall-of-mosul-to-isis-calls-for-ex-pm-maliki-to-face-trial> (18-11-2015)

Due to the armed conflict in Iraq, 3.6 million people have been internally displaced as at December 2014⁹⁵. In August 2014, ISIS militants attacked and took control of swathes of northern Iraq, home to Iraq's Yazidi minority. Many Yazidis were massacred and more than 400,000 were displaced around Sinjar Mountain and Nineveh Plain in north-western Iraq as a result of ISIS's advances⁹⁶. In addition, ISIS militants managed to capture and enslave more than 5,000 Yazidi children and women⁹⁷. The children were forced to convert to Islam at training camps located in ISIS-held territories and many girls and women were turned into sex slaves.

Meanwhile, Iranian-backed Shi'ite militias continue to operate with impunity outside any legal framework under the leadership of Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi. In October 2014, Amnesty International issued a report titled "*Absolute Impunity Militia Rule in Iraq*"⁹⁸, which exposes human rights abuses, including war crimes, committed with impunity by notably the Badr Brigades, Kataib Hezbollah and Asaib Ahl al-Haq. The report outlines abduction and killing of Sunni civilian men at the hands of these Iran-backed paramilitary organisations in Baghdad and around the country with the blessing of the Iraqi government.

Amnesty underscored that *"The victims were abducted from their homes, workplace or from checkpoints. Many were later found dead, usually handcuffed and shot in the back of the head. Reports by families of the victims and witnesses have been corroborated by Ministry of Health workers, who told Amnesty International that in recent months they have received scores of bodies of unidentified men with gunshot wounds to the head and often with their hands bound together with metal or plastic handcuffs, rope or cloth. Photographs of several bodies shown to Amnesty International by victims' relatives and others viewed at Baghdad's morgue, reveal a consistent pattern of deliberate, execution-style killings. Some of the victims were killed even after their families had paid hefty ransoms. Several families told Amnesty International how they had received the dreaded call from the kidnappers, had searched frantically for the ransom money and had managed to pay it, only to discover that their loved one had still been killed"*⁹⁹.

In December 2014, Reuters news agency reported on how central Iraq's mixed Shi'ite and Sunni regions were being altered as Shi'ite militias entered territories under control of ISIS, forcing the Sunni population to flee out of fear of reprisals from both Iranian-backed Shi'ite paramilitaries and the Sunni extremists. According to the Reuters report, it was up to the Shi'ite militias to determine who could stay in a community and who

⁹⁵ <http://www.unhcr.org/pages/49e486426.html> (18-11-2015)

⁹⁶ <http://www.reuters.com/article/2015/09/24/us-mideast-crisis-icc-yazidis-idUSKCN0RO14G20150924> (18-11-2015)

⁹⁷ http://www.nytimes.com/2014/11/15/world/middleeast/yazidi-girls-seized-by-isis-speak-out-after-escape.html?_r=0 (18-11-2015)

⁹⁸ https://www.amnesty.org.uk/sites/default/files/absolute_impunity_iraq_report.pdf (17-11-2015)

⁹⁹ Ibid.

should leave and they would mark the houses that needed to be destroyed and the ones that could remain.

A commander from Asaib Ahl al-Haq told Reuters that *“Our orders come from the government: whoever is with Islamic State, we will confiscate their land. Those who aren’t Islamic State will be allowed back”*¹⁰⁰. Residents’ accounts¹⁰¹ of these towns indicated that these Shi’ite militias made little distinction between ISIS and civilians when they attacked areas and as a result confiscated and burned down many houses belonging to innocent civilians. The International Rescue Committee told Reuters that more than 130,000 people, mostly Sunnis, fled central Iraq in 2014¹⁰².

The immense radicalisation of Iraq cannot be understood without the creation of ISIS (Jund-al-Islam, soon to be renamed Ansar-Al-Islam in the Iranian-Iraqi Kurdish border in 2001, displaced to Syria after the invasion) and without a terrorist sectarian policy pursued since the invasion, made of death-squads, destruction of the Iraqi state and mass terror and ethnic cleansing.

6. The reversal of US policies

6.1 Iranian dissidents in Iraq

Another underreported humanitarian crisis in Iraq is the case of the Iranian dissidents, members of the People’s Mojahedin Organisation of Iran (PMOI)¹⁰³. In 1986, the PMOI established its base, Camp Ashraf, in Iraq’s Diyala province 60 miles northeast of Baghdad. Following the 2003 US invasion of Iraq, the US-led Multi-National Forces in Iraq (MNF-I) recognised the residents of Camp Ashraf as protected persons under the Fourth Geneva Convention, and promised in writing to protect the camp’s residents after they voluntarily disarmed.

In February 2009, following the government of Iraq’s assurances to respect the rights of the Camp Ashraf residents and to treat them humanely, the US transferred, under the Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA), the responsibility of the camp’s security to the Iraqi authorities¹⁰⁴. This happened despite the fact that at the time many in the US and Europe were against the transfer of the Camp’s security to the government of Iraq.

¹⁰⁰ <http://www.reuters.com/article/2014/12/31/us-mideast-crisis-iraq-idUSKBN0K909K20141231#UdxDjLcpiDQ4R8OR.97> (17-11-2015)

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

¹⁰² Ibid.

¹⁰³ Also known as Mujahedin-e Khalq (MEK)

¹⁰⁴ Ad Melkert, Report and recommendations on the humanitarian crisis in Camp Liberty (Iraq), 2015

However, former Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki and his regime were more concerned about how the PMOI's presence in Iraq affected the relationship with neighbouring Iran instead of safeguarding Iraqi and international law. On 28 July 2009, the Iraqi army attacked for the first time the defenceless residents of Camp Ashraf with Humvees and bulldozers and destroyed walls and fences around the camp and targeted the residents¹⁰⁵. Armed with batons, some with nails, metal rods, cricket bats, chains, sickles, axes, teargas, sound grenades and water cannons, the Iraqi security forces attacked the unarmed residents.

According to the United States Forces – Iraq (USF-I), who witnessed the violence from their Forward Operating Base (FOB), the attack was extremely fierce and lasted for hours, finishing after nightfall¹⁰⁶. The violence against the residents continued the next day, when Iraqi armed forces returned to the camp with the same weaponry. Again, the attack unfolded in front of the USF-I and yet none of them intervened to protect the residents from harm¹⁰⁷. Later a USF-I officer told UNAMI off the record that they did not intervene or try to prevent the Iraqi armed forces from attacking the camp because they had received an order from General Odierno, the General Commander of the USF-I, not to do so¹⁰⁸.

According to Tahar Boumedra, former Chief of the Human Rights Office of United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI), and Adviser to the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Camp Ashraf affairs, other participants in the attack, in addition to the Iraqi armed forces permanently based around Camp Ashraf, included army units from Baghdad, police units from Diyala province and Iraqi army Special Forces from the notorious 56th Brigade under the command of the Prime Minister¹⁰⁹. Furthermore, residents of the camp who provided their accounts of the attack pointed out that some of the attackers spoke fluent Farsi¹¹⁰. This revelation indicates how Iraq's security forces have merged with Iranian-backed Shi'ite militias and perhaps even the IRGC's Quds Force. The attack resulted in the deaths of 12 camp residents and 443 injuries, including 42 seriously wounded¹¹¹. 36 camp residents were abducted and detained by Iraqi authorities and reportedly tortured and beaten¹¹². The 36 abductees were imprisoned for 72 days even though an Iraqi judge had ordered their release three times. In protest, they went on hunger strike from the first day of their arbitrary detention and during their last days in prison they also refused to drink liquids. They were eventually released as they would have otherwise died in custody.

¹⁰⁵ Tahar Boumedra, *The untold story of Camp Ashraf*, 2013

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹¹² <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2015/10/iraq-investigate-deadly-camp-liberty-rocket-attack/> (20-11-2015)

On 8 April 2011, a second deadly attack conducted by Iraq's army against the residents of Camp Ashraf occurred. Despite the fact that prior to the attack UNAMI expressed its concerns to the diplomatic community and the American embassy regarding the safety and security of Camp Ashraf, no measures were taken to protect the camp residents from the violence that was looming. Indeed the American platoon which monitored Camp Ashraf and shared UNAMI's concerns, was ordered to leave the camp and even the entire area on the eve of the second attack¹¹³. The carnage resulted in the deaths of 36 camp residents and more than 300 people were injured¹¹⁴.

In 2011, the pro-Iranian government of Nouri al-Maliki maintained its demand for the relocation of the Camp Ashraf residents to a Temporary Transit Location (TTL) called Camp Liberty, where they would await departure from Iraq to third countries. Despite the fact that there was no feasible plan for relocation inside Iraq to a location where humanitarian standards would be met and the safety of the residents could be guaranteed, UNAMI agreed with the demands of the Iraqi government and signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the authorities in December 2011, without consulting the residents of Camp Ashraf¹¹⁵. In Camp Liberty, the residents do not have the right to freedom of movement, no right to income-generating activities and they are not permitted to build any infrastructure to support the residents' lives¹¹⁶. In fact, 3,000 residents of Camp Ashraf were evicted by the government of Iraq, facilitated by UNAMI, from their camp of 36 km² to a location, with prison-like conditions, of little more than half a km². In 2012, the UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention concluded that the "custody" of the residents of Camp Liberty is "arbitrary" and in violation of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. The working group argued that there is "no grievance mechanism or complaints procedure to address their conditions and (...) to challenge their detention in a court of law"¹¹⁷.

Almost all residents of Camp Ashraf bar 100, were moved to Camp Liberty near Baghdad's international airport. The remaining 100 residents in Ashraf were allowed to stay in order to resolve outstanding property issues. On 1 September 2013, this group was raided by armed men which resulted in the killing of 52 people and the abduction of 7 camp residents, including six women¹¹⁸. To this day, the whereabouts of those abducted remains unknown.

Due to courage of some of the victims, extensive video footage was taken of the attackers, Iraqi Army Special Forces, documenting the massacre. Although the attack lasted for hours and the refugees were able to call for outside help, none of the Iraqi forces surrounding the camp intervened.

¹¹³ Tahar Boumedra, The untold story of Camp Ashraf, 2013

¹¹⁴ <http://www.amnestyusa.org/sites/default/files/uaa24213.pdf> (21-11-2015)

¹¹⁵ Ad Melkert, Report and recommendations on the humanitarian crisis in Camp Liberty (Iraq), 2015

¹¹⁶ Tahar Boumedra, The untold story of Camp Ashraf, 2013

¹¹⁷ Ad Melkert, Report and recommendations on the humanitarian crisis in Camp Liberty (Iraq), 2015

¹¹⁸ <http://www.amnestyusa.org/sites/default/files/uaa24213.pdf> (21-11-2015)

Furthermore, Camp Liberty, which now houses around 2,000 unarmed Iranian exiles, has been subjected to four missile attacks since Camp Ashraf residents moved in, most recently on 29 October 2015, resulting in the deaths of at least 24 people and multiple injuries¹¹⁹. The al-Mukhtar Army, an Iranian-backed Shi'ite militia¹²⁰, claimed responsibility for the most recent missile attack¹²¹. The UN has on multiple occasions called on the government of Iraq to conduct an independent and impartial investigation into the deadly attacks on Camp Ashraf and Camp Liberty in order to bring to justice those who perpetrated the killings. However, Iraqi authorities have failed to investigate previous attacks on both camps and no one has ever been brought to account¹²².

Numerous reports from inside Camp Liberty indicate that agents of Iran's Ministry of Intelligence and Security (MOIS) and the IRGC's terrorist Quds Force are transported to and around the camp in order to obtain intelligence for further terrorist operations against the residents. The MOIS and IRGC agents enter the highly-secure camp perimeter under the guise of relatives of the residents. These agents are brought to Camp Liberty by a committee of the government of Iraq, headed by National Security Adviser Faleh Fayyadh, which is responsible for suppressing Camp Liberty residents on a routine and humiliating basis. This flies in the face of all expected behaviour with respect to the protection of refugees.

6.2 Families of Ashraf-Liberty residents inside Iran

Little attention has been paid by international organisations and human rights groups, including the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Iran, to the repercussions that the family members of those in Camp Ashraf and Liberty face inside Iran. For decades, incidents have been documented in Iran which indicate that mere telephone conversations with family members who are with the PMOI in Iraq, can result in imprisonment on charges of "*enmity against God*".

On 1 June 2014, Iranian authorities executed Gholamreza Khosravi Savadjani¹²³, who was sentenced to death in 2010 in an unfair trial on the charge of "*enmity against God (moharebeh)*" for providing financial support to the PMOI¹²⁴. Following his arrest in 2008, Gholamreza Khosravi spent 40 months in solitary confinement in various prisons across Iran. According to his own account, whilst in custody, he was tortured or otherwise ill-treated as he refused to make a "*confession*"¹²⁵. Under the new Islamic Penal Code, capital punishment for "*enmity against God*" can only be issued when one has actively taken up arms.

¹¹⁹ <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2015/10/iraq-investigate-deadly-camp-liberty-rocket-attack/> (21-11-2015)

¹²⁰ http://www.memri.org/clip_transcript/en/4046.htm (21-11-2015)

¹²¹ <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2015/10/iraq-investigate-deadly-camp-liberty-rocket-attack/> (21-11-2015)

¹²² Ibid.

¹²³ <http://www.haaretz.com/middle-east-news/1.596448> (25-11-2015)

¹²⁴ <https://www.amnesty.org/en/press-releases/2014/05/halt-execution-death-row-man-convicted-enmity-against-god/> (25-11-2015)

¹²⁵ Ibid.

Khosravi's execution is therefore a gross violation of the Iranian regime's own laws. A day before Khosravi's execution, Hassiba Hadj Saharoui, Amnesty International's Deputy Director for the Middle East and North Africa, said in a statement that *"Yet again Iranian authorities are about to execute a man who did not even receive a fair trial in total disregard of both international law and the Iranian law"*¹²⁶. Khosravi's mother reiterated her son's innocence by stipulating that *"My son had no weapons, nor a safe house... They should execute me too. As an 80-year-old mother, how can I stay alive without him"*¹²⁷.

Furthermore, on 28 December 2010, Iranian authorities executed Ali Saremi in Tehran's Evin prison on charges of *"enmity against God"* for his alleged membership in the PMOI¹²⁸. His lawyer did not receive a warning prior to his execution, as is required under Iranian law. Saremi had a son living in Camp Ashraf, who he had visited in Iraq. Upon his return to Iran he was arrested and sentenced to one year imprisonment. In May 2007, the authorities released Ali Saremi only to arrest him again in September 2007 after he spoke at an event which commemorated those killed during the summary executions of thousands of people in Iran's prisons, also known as the 1988 massacre¹²⁹. In May 2010 Saremi told Amnesty International from prison:

*"I was tried in October 2008 before Branch 15 of the Revolutionary Court, on the charge of 'enmity against God' for membership of PMOI. I again denied this and defended myself as they had no evidence against me to prove the charge. I was sentenced to death in December 2009 and appealed through my lawyer. I only learnt about the confirmation of my sentence via the Tehran Prosecutor's press conference [on 15 May]. Even though I have a lawyer, they do not recognise him. They do not communicate legal proceedings to him and do not notify him"*¹³⁰.

His son, Akbar Saremi, has in the past denied the allegations against his father and stated that his father's *"only interest in Mojahedin-e Khalq (MEK) and Camp Ashraf was to visit me, and that's the last time I saw my father"*¹³¹. Ali Saremi had previously spent twenty years in prison for his political activities both during the time of the Shah and the clerical regime.

Moreover, on 24 January 2011, Iranian authorities announced that they had executed Jafar Kazemi and Mohammad Ali Haj Aghaei¹³². Jafar Kazemi, who had been previously imprisoned for membership of the PMOI, was again detained on 18 September 2009 and tortured for months in Tehran's Evin prison¹³³. The Iranian authorities tried to obtain a confession from Kazemi under duress, which he refused to provide. Kazemi was accused of participating in protests subsequent to the disputed presidential election results in June

¹²⁶ Ibid.

¹²⁷ <http://www.foxnews.com/world/2014/06/01/iranian-dissident-faces-imminent-execution-for-enmity-against-god/> (25-11-2015)

¹²⁸ Amnesty International, Urgent Action: 102/10 Index: MDE 13/002/2011, 05 January 2011

¹²⁹ Ibid.

¹³⁰ Ibid.

¹³¹ <http://edition.cnn.com/2011/WORLD/meast/01/02/iran.execution/> (25-11-2015)

¹³² <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-12272067> (25-11-2015)

¹³³ Amnesty International, Urgent Action: 102/10 Index: MDE 13/002/2011, 05 January 2011

2009 and for his alleged contact with the PMOI. Additionally, it is assumed that he was also sentenced on charges of “propaganda against the system”¹³⁴. Jafar Kazemi also has a son, Behrouz Kazemi, who is now residing in Camp Liberty. Jafar visited Behrouz in 2008 in Camp Ashraf. In an interview with the Voice of America Persian in 2010, Behrouz Kazemi stipulated that “The only reason for my father’s death sentence is because he visited me in Camp Ashraf two years ago. This means that the regime cannot tolerate the basic rights of a person to visit family. For this reason, he was arrested, accused of Moharebeh, and they gave him a death sentence. It is ridiculous that the regime doesn’t tolerate family members visiting us in Camp Ashraf”¹³⁵. Mohammad Ali Haj Aghaei, who was arrested, tried and executed alongside Jafar Kazemi, had also visited relatives in Camp Ashraf prior to his arrest¹³⁶.

Other examples of those who have been detained by Iranian authorities, as they happen to be merely family members of the Ashraf-Liberty residents, include Ali Moezi¹³⁷, Mashallah (Hamid) Haeri¹³⁸ and husband and wife, Mahmoud and Fatemeh Ziae¹³⁹.

¹³⁴ Ibid.

¹³⁵ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lxCDfTXdOIO> (26-11-2015)

¹³⁶ Amnesty International, Urgent Action: 102/10 Index: MDE 13/002/2011, 05 January 2011

¹³⁷ http://www.huffingtonpost.com/hejrat-moezi/my-father-is-a-political-prisoner_b_8351976.html (26-11-2015)

¹³⁸ <http://www.amnesty.org.uk/press-releases/iran-arbitrary-arrests-torture-and-executions-continue> (26-11-2015)

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7. Policy recommendations

The human rights situation in Iran has deteriorated under President Hassan Rouhani, evidenced by the rising trend of executions, which by year's end will unquestionably reach at least 1,000. Meanwhile, repressive policies against human rights defenders, netizens, women and ethnic and religious minorities continue unabatedly, with grim prospects for Iranian society. Despite the international agreement on the Iranian nuclear programme, the regime in Tehran remains a major source of instability in the region, and will continue to be so as long as it maintains support for its terrorist surrogates, such as the Lebanese Hezbollah and Shi'ite militias in Iraq. Iran's backing of Bashar al-Assad in Syria has not only exacted an unconscionable human cost, but has also internationalised the Syrian conflict, thereby imperilling global peace and security. Moreover, ISIS' spectacular emergence in Iraq and Syria is the direct result of Iran's sectarian policies in these two countries. It is, therefore, reasonable to conclude that Iran cannot be considered as part of a solution to the current crises; quite the opposite, Iran must be recognised as the instigator of the conflicts raging in the Middle East.

Europe must not allow short term economic interests with Iran to prevail over values such as human rights, the rule of law and democracy, which the Iranian authorities continue to violate systematically. It is therefore imperative that the intensification of diplomatic and economic relations between the European Union and Iran be contingent upon:

- the improvement of the human rights situation in Iran, including an immediate moratorium on executions, and the authorities' respect for the fundamental freedoms of Iranian society;
- an immediate end to Iran's meddling in the internal affairs of its neighbouring countries, notably Iraq, Syria and Yemen, which is destabilising the region;

Furthermore, the European Union must assume its humanitarian responsibility vis-à-vis the Iranian refugees residing in Camp Liberty in Iraq by:

- assuring and guaranteeing their protection, including air protection by the air forces of EU member states that are operating over the skies of Iraq against ISIS;
- accepting them as refugees and immediately relocating them from the danger zone in Baghdad to member states of the EU.

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