

Iran: A Human Rights Report on the Azerbaijani Turks in Iran

September- October 2022

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About this Initiative Group

The coverage of the ongoing protests in Iran depicts a significant gap in reporting of human rights violations in the Azerbaijani region of Iran. To fill in this gap, we, as a group of Azerbaijanis from Iran, currently in academia in the US and Canada, have formed an ad hoc initiative group to facilitate the preparation of a human rights report on Azerbaijanis facing injustice in Iran. This report is prepared in collaboration with the Azerbaijani human rights networks inside Iran, composed of 16 human rights activists, to cover the human rights violations by the Iranian government in the Azerbaijani region of Iran.

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Iran Protests 2022: Human Rights Report on the Azerbaijani Turks in Iran

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Summary

This report has been prepared by the Azerbaijani human rights defenders regarding the latest status of the human rights violations of the Azerbaijani Turks in Iran by examining the 2022 Iran protests. The Azerbaijanis [ethnically Turks] are Iran's largest ethnic minority, primarily residing in West Azerbaijan, East Azerbaijan, and Ardabil, which is bordered by Turkey and the Republic of Azerbaijan, alongside Zanjan, Qazvin, Hamadan, Alborz, and Tehran provinces.¹ The Iranian government has never released official demographic statistics for the country's ethnic and linguistic groupings. However, during his official visit to Turkey in January of 2011, former Iranian Foreign Minister Ali Akbar Salehi declared that forty percent of Iranians

speak Turkish.

“We speak almost the same language. Forty percent of Iranians speak Turkish. This is a big link between Turkey and Iran”.²

The Azerbaijani Turks, alongside their ethnic relatives the Turkmens and the Qashgais, often claim a population share of close to 40%. After the rise of the Pahlavi dynasty to power in Iran in 1925, the government pursued forced assimilation policies. This led to a decline of Azerbaijani influence in the country's government and politics significantly. The Islamic regime, just as the previous monarchy in Iran, has downplayed and willfully ignored the differences between Persians and Azerbaijanis. The Islamic regime did not hesitate to crack down on the Azerbaijani Turk protestors throughout its history, using heavy

1. <https://www.fdd.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/fdd-monograph-iran-is-more-than-persia.pdf>

2. Ibid.

weapons to crush uprisings such as the protests in Tabriz in 1981 that led to the murder of hundreds of Azerbaijanis.³ Taking into consideration the systemic discrimination and racism that Azerbaijani Turks face, this report focuses on the arrested and murdered Azerbaijani Turk protestors since the beginning of the uprisings on September 16th, 2022 to maintain a balance in the discourse of reporting on recent human rights abuses by the government of Iran, as well as ensuring that the rights of Azerbaijani Turks, as a systematically discriminated group, are not left invisible.

The first part of this report presents a brief overview of the latest protests and provides a list of Azerbaijani Turk activists arrested and killed during these demonstrations.

The second part of this report mainly concentrates on the authors of the report and sources that have been used as reference in preparation.

The third part of this report explains the methodology used, the data collection process, and the formation of the framework.

Similar to other regions of Iran, people in the Azerbaijani-populated provinces began holding demonstrations demanding freedom alongside their other ethnic and religious rights. Authorities started to crack down upon Azerbaijani protests immediately. The next section of the report classifies the human rights violations in the Azerbaijan

region. According to Sina Yousefi, the vice-chairman of the Human Rights Commission of the Azerbaijani Lawyers Association, the number of detainees only in Tabriz were more than 1700 protestors in the first two weeks of the protests alone. This number is difficult to estimate for the whole Azerbaijani region. However, we were able to confirm the identity of only 110 of the arrestees and 13 protestors who were killed during these demonstrations or as a result of physical abuse and torture by the various security forces in Iran.

Published information from the victims' families, eyewitnesses, Azerbaijani human rights defenders inside Iran, and international human rights organizations confirms that the Iranian police and intelligence agents, together with the IRGC and Basij forces, have been using live ammunition and directly shooting at the protestors and civil bystanders. Still, the Iranian government has been denying the murders of these protestors. The next part of the report shows how the authorities treat the victims' families to prevent investigating the cases of injured and dead protestors.

3. <https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/iranian-azeris-giant-minority>

Introduction

“Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience, and religion,” states

Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Although Iran remains a signatory to this declaration, this notorious repressive machinery has been brutally working to crack down on

the West Azerbaijan, East Azerbaijan, Ardabil, Zanzan, Arak, Qazvin, and Tehran protests. Amnesty International confirmed after obtaining leaked official documents that revealed the plans of authorities to systematically crush the protests at any cost. The crackdown has left at least 13 identified victims shot to death and hundreds injured in Azerbaijan. Sina Yousefi, the vice-chairman of the Human Rights Commission of the Azerbaijani Lawyers Association, announced that in the first two weeks of the protests alone, more than 1700 people had been arrested just in Tabriz. This number would be significantly higher if it included all of the Azerbaijani cities. It is challenging to collect data regarding the true estimate of the people arrested since the government shuts down the internet and threatens the victims’ families from

coming forward.

Protests were sparked by the death of Mahsa Amini on September 16, 2022, after she was arrested by the morality police. Indeed, this 22 years old girl was arrested by Tehran’s “morality police” on September 14. She was transferred to a hospital that same day in coma and died on September 16. The police claimed that Mahsa Amini had a heart attack, but in an interview, Amini’s uncle called her heart disease a fabrication and said Mahsa was completely healthy.

The publication of this news followed large-scale reactions. In addition to many social media users, well-known cultural, artistic, and sports figures also expressed their anger about what happened. After the death of Mahsa Amini, demonstrations started against the forced hijab laws in Azerbaijan. Medical students of Tabriz University protested against systematic gender inequality and the violence perpetrated by morality police against women. Tabriz University of Medical Sciences students protested against this violence by holding placards stating “Violence Against Women is Political” and “Take Your Hands off my

Body,” written in Azerbaijani Turkish, their native tongue.

A few days later, the demonstrations began to evolve into a new level with radical demands. The termination of the Islamic republic was included amongst the demands of protestors. Political slogans such as “Freedom, Justice, and National Government” were chanted by demonstrators on September 20, 2022. This is a popular slogan amongst the Azerbaijani protestors in Urmia, Ardabil, Zanjan, and other cities.

Since the beginning of the protests, Iranian authorities have mobilized the riot police, Revolutionary Guards, the Basij paramilitary force, the Law Enforcement Command of the Islamic Republic of Iran, and plainclothes security agents to stifle demonstrations in Azerbaijan. A leaked document provides new details about the harsh methods the Iranian officials used to crack down on peaceful protestors. Iran’s highest military body instructed the commanders of armed forces in all provinces to “severely confront” protestors. Following this order, there was a significant spike in the number of injured, arrested, and dead protestors.

About this Report

Generally, the human rights organizations rarely talk about the remote areas of

Iran, especially the regions where the national and cultural rights of ethnic minorities are continuously violated. U.S. and Canada based Azerbaijani human rights defenders, utilized their networks with the Azerbaijani human rights defenders inside of Iran, and prepared this report on the human rights status in the West Azerbaijan, East Azerbaijan, Ardabil, Zanjan, and Qazvin provinces. Unfortunately, international human rights reporters mostly do not have adequate access to information from these regions’ even though analysis of the latest news has shown that the government stifles non-Persian ethnicities harsher than Persians. In Azerbaijan, Baluchistan, and Kurdistan, protestors have been brutally murdered by the Iranian government. Based on the collected evidence from eyewitnesses, victims’ families, published information, and the protestors, the security and IRGC forces have been deliberately using firearms to stifle protests. For instance, the “Baloch Activists Campaign⁴”, based in the United Kingdom, has published the names of 96 people shot dead in Zahedan and announced that more than 300 people were injured due to gunshot wounds during a demonstration on September 30, 2022.

So far, Iran’s authorities have rejected an independent investigation regarding this issue. Also, Iran’s authorities have been denying any crackdowns on protests. Demonstrations in Azerbaijan continue as this report is being published and information about the dead, injured, and arrested protestors is being collected

4. <https://tinyurl.com/mr2tk5k3>

through this network. This report has collected most of the information about victims from the Azerbaijani Human rights defenders outside and inside Iran, eyewitnesses, victims' relatives, videos, and local news resources and journalists.

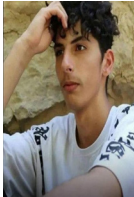


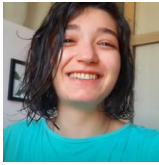




Classification of the Collected Information on Human Rights Violations

Received footage from the protests and published reports from Iran indicate that protestors in East Azerbaijan, Zanzan, Qazvin, Ardabil, Tehran, and West Azerbaijan are opposing the mandatory hijab, supporting women's rights, and standing up for ethnic rights and freedoms. The protestors chanted many slogans against the Islamic Republic's leadership, including its supreme

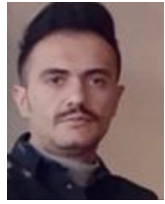

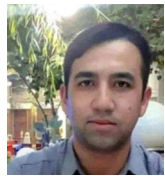


leader. During these demonstrations, the government began to suppress these protestors with live ammunition. Numerous protestors have been arrested, maimed, and killed by the security forces. The majority of fatalities occurred due to being killed by live ammunition.

Azerbaijani casualties cannot be readily identified in Tehran and other megacities with a sizable Azerbaijani population due to a lack of information about the victims. Nonetheless, some of them have been identified based on funeral recordings, family members' statements, human rights defenders' investigations, and social media profiles of victims. In the meantime, in certain instances, security authorities pressure victims' relatives to bury the dead outside of the capital city, Tehran, such as their home towns. In these examples, the victims' origin can be determined. Up till today, we were able to authenticate the identities of thirteen protestors killed in Iran's Azerbaijan region. The subsequent tables detail the victims of the protests.

A) Protestors shot dead

Victim's name	Birth year	occupation	city	Gender	Photo
Mehrdad Ghorbani	2004	Student	Zanjan	Male	
Mehdi Mousavi	2006	Student	Zanjan	Male	
Hadis Najafi	1999	Worker- Receptionist	Karaj	Female	
Sarina Esmailzadeh	2006	Student	Karaj	Female	
Nima Shafighdoost	2006	Student	Urmia	Male	
Asra Panahi	2006	Student	Ardabil	Female	
Javad Heydari	1982	Engineer	Qazvin	male	
Esmail Heydari	2004	Worker	Meshgins- hahr- Ar- dabil	Male	

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Sina Malayeri	1984	Student	Arak	Male	
Parisa Bahmani	1970	Doctor	Zanjan	Female	
Reza Esmailzadeh	unknown	Student	West Azerbaijan- Chaldoran	Male	
Nasim Sedghi	2000	unknown	West Azerbaijan	female	
Mohsen Mousavi	1992	shopkeeper	Tehran	male	

A day after the Tabriz demonstrations, Zanzan joined these protests on September 21, 2022. The gatherings of protestors in Zanzan started around 18:00 on Wednesday and gradually spread to other main districts of the city. With the increase in the number of those protesting, the police and security forces assaulted the citizens with batons, threw tear gas, and fired directly at the protestors with shotguns. Several citizens were injured due to the impact of metal bullets and batons. Police and security forces used many tools and various methods to end the protests. During the protests **Mehrdad Ghorbani** and **Mehdi Mousavi** were shot dead by the regime's forces on Wednesday, September 21, 2022. The local reports confirmed that Mehdi Mousavi, a minor, was killed as a result of five bullets, and numerous baton blows to his head and body. Also, Mehdi Mousavi was only 16 years old when he was killed.

According to local reports the authorities did not transfer Mehdi Mousavi's corpse to his family due to the pressure from intelligence agencies. The officers only allowed the family to attend his burial. Mehdi Mousavi's body was taken directly from the hospital to Behesht Zahra Cemetery in Zanzan and was buried without the presence of relatives and other citizens of Zanzan and only in the presence of a few members of his family. The security agencies threatened Mehdi Mousavi's family that if they revealed that he was killed by the police officers of the Islamic Republic, they would also arrest and "eliminate" the other family

members. At the same time, several people from Zanzan reported that three to five people were killed in the protests in this city. However, it is very challenging and we could not confirm the identities of the others killed.

According to the published information, 23-year-old **Hadis Najafi** suffered many injuries as a result of six bullets in her abdomen, neck, heart, and hand by the security forces in Karaj on September 21, 2022, and died after being transferred to Qaim Hospital in Karaj.

Videos and photos have shown that victims were hit and shot in their heads. Hadis Najafi was killed by fired war bullets. Her mother and sister said that when the security forces gave Hadis's corpse, they saw a bullet wound on her face. We could not confirm if she had prior activities regarding women rights, however, she posted videos on her Instagram and TikTok account dancing to the latest viral trend, including Turkish pop music and Azerbaijani songs which show that she was against the mandatory hijab. On her very last instagram story, she tells "I am going to the protests with excitement. A few years later I want to look back and feel happy that I attended the protests and everything has changed". Unfortunately, hijabs are mandatory in public for all women in Iran, regardless of religion or nationality. Hadis, 23, was part of the new generation in Azerbaijan. She was aware of women's and national rights, such as Azerbaijani culture. She loved sharing fashion on her Instagram, styling her hair with and without her

hijab with Turkish captions and bio. In her Instagram Bio, she wrote, “Fill my place now if there is another me” in Turkish. She was a TikToker shot dead while protesting for women’s rights and has become a symbol of Azerbaijani resistance.

One of the identified victims, **Sarina Esmailzadeh**, a 16-year-old female from Mehrshahr, Karaj was killed by the repressive forces of the Islamic Republic of Iran during these nationwide protests On September 21, 2022. According to local news and reports, this teenager’s mother could not bear her daughter’s death and committed suicide.

On September 22, **Javad Heydari** was shot near the Mellat Qazvin Park and died after a few hours due to the severity of his injuries and lack of medical attention. Heydar Javadi is currently the only victim of the protests in Qazvin who has been identified. He was hit by ammunition from a close range and died after a few hours due to heavy bleeding. According to the information given to the family by the intelligence forces, he was shot near the hip and the bullet passed through his body. This means that the bullet hit him from a very close distance from the back and it exited from the other side of his body.

The intelligence forces told Javad Heydari’s family that Javad should be buried right away; otherwise, they (the security forces) would bury him wherever they wanted. The intelligence forces even sent a message through an intermediary

that they should announce that Javad died due to an accident. Still, his family members ignored the threats and said: “one of us had gone. There is no fear of losing the others too”. The presence, support and company of many people helped reduce the pressure. There was a grand funeral with a large number of people supporting this family.

Esmail Heydari, 18 years old, from Qurt Tepe village in Meshginshahr city of Ardabil province, was killed on September 23. He lived alone in Motelgo in Nishtarud, Mazandaran, and worked in a bakery to send money to his parents in the village.

On October 8, **Mohsen Mousavi**, an Azerbaijani citizen originally from the city of Tarim-Zanjan, was killed by the security forces of the Islamic Republic of Iran. Mohsen Mousavi, 30, was killed in Tehran’s bazaar on Saturday, October 8, due to severe blows from a baton to the head. The security officials prevented him from being buried in Tehran and said he should be buried in a distant city. Mousavi’s family took Mohsen’s body to his hometown of Tarem, and he was buried there.

According to information from a local source in Azerbaijan, on October 16, Nima Shafighdoost was killed by a security force in Urmia. **Nima Shafighdoost** was arrested with a brutal beating. Although Nima was bleeding in the police department, security forces did not immediately transfer him to the hospital, and they let him die. The nearest

hospital is two minutes away from the police department where Nima died. The government has announced that Nima died due to a dog bite.

Another victim was **Asra Panahi** who died on October 14 after being beaten by the security forces in the Ardabil Province. Some other students of Shahid high school in Ardabil were also arrested for refusing to attend the government mandated march. Asra Panahi, a 15-year-old student, was killed by an internal bleeding that she suffered as a result of brutal beating.

On October 22, **Sina-Malayeri**, a 38-year-old young man from Arak, was killed by the security forces during the protests.

A bullet shot by the intelligence forces killed **Dr. Parisa Bahmani**. Parisa Bahmani was a general surgeon. She was shot to death on October 26 in a gathering of doctors in front of the Tehran Medical System building and was brutally attacked by Iranian security forces.

Reza Esmailzadeh, a senior student in Sharif University of Technology, was killed by a direct shot to his face. His body was handed over to his family in Chaldoran. He was shot during the Sharif university protests when the police interfered. He was buried on October 25, in West Azerbaijan- Chaldoran cemetery.

On October 31, **Nasim Sedghi**, a 22-year-old girl, was killed by security forces during the protests in Urmia- West

Azerbaijan. Nasim Sedghi died in the demonstrations by direct fire from the security forces. Her family is under pressure from the security agencies to announce the cause of her death as an accident. Her body was buried on November 2 under strict security measures in Shahindej cemetery.

B) Arrested Protestors

In Marand, on Saturday, September 17, the security forces arrested **Erfan Shahbazi** and **Hamed Portaleeb**. No information has been published about their latest condition.

On September 20, Several plainclothes security forces arrested **Mehdi Hamidi Shafigh** after beating him and breaking his car's windows. The security forces also confiscated Mehdi Hamidi's car and took it. A photo published after his arrest shows a gunshot wound on his face. On October 27, he was released from the central prison of Tabriz after posting a bail of 2 billion Rials (6250 Dollars) until the end of the proceedings.

At the same time, reports tell of massive arrests in Tabriz. Several arrested people on September 20 have been transferred to this city's Intelligence and Security Police Detention Center. **Farid Hosseiniazar**, **Atila Sadeghifar**, **Ramin Behzad**, and **Ahmadreza Afshar**, graphic students of Tabriz University of Islamic Arts were arrested.

Ramin Behzad is a soldier in Tabriz. He

was arrested for refusing to participate in the government's crackdowns against protestors. He got temporarily released under bail on October 15 from the central prison of Tabriz.

On September 20, the security forces raided the home of **Amir Mohsen Banai Kazem** and arrested him without an arrest warrant, and then transferred him to Tabriz Central Prison. This Azerbaijani activist was released from prison on Tuesday, October 25, with a bail of 40 billion Rials. (125 thousand Dollars)

Atila Arfai was arrested on September 21 in Tabriz. After his arrest, the agents transferred him, a 16-year-old boy, to Basminj's prison. Atilla suffers from asthma. Arfai faced severe assault and as a result, his nose was broken, and various parts of his face and body were injured and bruised.

Also, Atila Arfai's case has been sent to the 15th branch of the Tabriz General and Revolutionary Prosecutor's Office (Tabatabai Complex). The case investigator has issued him bail of 4 billion Rials. (12500 dollars) "Security office of the Tabriz IRGC prevents the temporary release of Atila." Based on what the investigator of the case told the family of Atila Arfai, this 16 years old teenager is accused of "organizing and encouraging citizens to riot through social networks", "leading street riots," and "damaging property." Eventually, he was released temporarily under bail. After being released, he said that he was subjected to the most severe tortures

because he was fluent in Azerbaijani Turkish and used this language in his daily conversations and on WhatsApp.

Mohammad Nejad was arrested by the security forces on September 21 and transferred to Fashafoueh prison in Tehran. He is from Maragheh city - West Azerbaijan province. Mohammad Nejad is an aerospace engineering major at Sharif University. He was released under bail and is waiting for his case to proceed.

In Ardabil, **Mohsen Mohsenzadeh** was arrested on Wednesday, September 21, in Jiral Park. Also, Azerbaijani Activists **Asgar Akbarzadeh** and **Saeed Sadeghifar** were arrested on September 22. The security forces detained the activist Asgar Akbarzadeh at around four o'clock in the morning on Thursday. Saeed Sadeghifar, another activist, was arrested by plainclothes officers at his workplace in Ardabil city at three in the morning on Thursday. Also, **Meysam Jolani** was taken into custody in Ardabil. On October 6, 2022, Mohsen Mohsenzadeh, Asgar Akbarzadeh, Meysam Jolani, and Saeed Sadeghifar were transferred from the Ministry of Intelligence detention center to the central prison of Ardabil. The accusations against them, brought by the 7th branch of the Ardabil General, and Revolution Prosecutor's Office are "gathering and collusion against the security of the country and propaganda against the system of the Islamic Republic of Iran". Mohsen Mohsenzadeh was released from Ardabil Central Prison after posting a bail of 4 billion Rials (12500 dollars)

until the end of the proceedings. Asgar Akbarzadeh was released under bail of one billion Rials on November 3rd, 2022.

In addition, **Haleh Ershadi, Ebrahim Pakdel, Reza Ghorbani, Babak Hamrang, Amir Ghazizadeh,** and **Sajjad Majidi** were arrested during protests in Ardabil city by Iran's security institutions on Thursday, September 22. There is no information about the health status of these citizens, and the security institutions refuse to give any information to the families and relatives. Intelligence forces have announced that activists have been transferred to the "military section of Ardabil prison". The military section of Ardabil prison is used for punishing soldiers.

At the same time, **Abbas Lesani**, a political prisoner imprisoned in Ardabil prison, has been denied access to the right to make phone calls outside the prison with the beginning of protests in this city.

Amin Behzad, a young Azerbaijani writer, living in Tabriz, has been arrested by the security forces of the Islamic Republic of Iran. The place of his arrest and the reason for his arrest have not been published

On September 22, the security agents arrested many citizens in response to the gatherings of citizens in Hidej city. A day later, **Mehdi Dadgar** and his sister **Ms. Dadgar** were detained by police officers in their home in Heidaj. They have all been transferred to Abhar's prison. Mehdi Dadgar and Ms. Dadgar were released on

Sunday, October 9, after posting bail.

Additionally, in the city of Abhar, police and security officers arrested many citizens during a protest rally on Wednesday, September 21. The number of detainees still in Abhar's prison is more than 50. During a protest rally held in Abhar, **Saeedeh Moradi, Alireza Razavi,** and **Ali Maghsoudi** were arrested by the security forces. After being arrested, they were transferred to the Zanjan and Safarabad prisons.

On September 22, many people were arrested in a demonstration in Malekan city in the East Azerbaijan province. **Mobina Rahmani, Mehri Golafshan, Romina Rahmani, Amir Hossein Khalilzadeh, Ali Zahmatkesh, Meysam Zahtkash, Asal Nahi** – a 15-year-old student- and Mehdi Karimpour were all arrested by the security and police forces. On September 28, in Malekan, Behnam Monjemi was arrested at his home. Also, plainclothes agents arrested Amir Sadeghian at his workplace.

Asal Nahi has been transferred to the central prison of Tabriz. Asal has been denied access to make phone calls outside the prison to her family.

Ms. Romina Rahmani was arrested and sent to Maragheh prison with her 2-month-old baby. After a few days, the authorities of Iran's judiciary separated the 2-month-old Azerbaijani baby Artia from her mother in Maragheh prison and handed her over to her husband's family. According to the published information,

Ms. Romina Rahmani is currently in solitary confinement in Maragheh prison, and “they don’t even let the mother hear the voice of her baby, and they have banned her from meeting and talking to other people”. Romina and Mobina Rahmani, Mehri Gol Afshan, were also arrested at a family gathering in Malekan.

On September 23, **Erfan Zardehi** was arrested in Tabriz. Unfortunately, no information has been published about the reason for the arrest and the place where he was held. On October 15, Erfan Zardohi’s mother went on strike in front of the Tabriz Prosecutor’s Office to protest her son’s arrest.

Mohammad Siamaknia, a filmmaker **Ahad Afsar**, **Saman Abdollahi**, and **Babak Farahmandi** were arrested in Tabriz on September 24.

Khalil Moradi and **Bahram Jafari** were arrested in Sulduz. There is still uncertainty and concern about the condition of these people. Security forces of the Iranian government raided the residence of Khalil Moradi and Bahram Jafari at noon on Saturday, September 24, 2022, arrested them and transferred them to the Sulduz Intelligence Department.

Sina Esmaili was arrested in Tabriz on September 27, 2022. Unfortunately, no information has been published about his condition.

Mohammad Javad Tarbiat, an Azerbaijani Turkish language teacher, was arrested on September 30 in Tabriz. His

pictures were published on TV in Judge Salavati’s court. This has increased the severity of the concerns. These televised courts are held on the order of the security authorities to charge arrested people severely.

On October 1, the intelligence agents of Zanjan arrested **Safiyeh Gharebaghi**, a journalist and women’s rights activist living in this city, and transferred her to an unknown location. On October 8, Safiyeh Gharebaghi was released on bail until the end of the proceedings. In the preliminary stage of the proceedings, her accusation was called “propaganda against the Islamic Republic of Iran”.

On October 1, 2022, the security forces of the Iranian government stormed the father’s house of **Yousef Kari** in Ardebil. Due to the absence of this Azerbaijani activist at home, they did not succeed in arresting him. He was arrested 4 days later on October 5.

Amir Safari, a soldier, was arrested by security forces on October 1, 2022 while he was serving his military service. Despite his family referring to the responsible authorities, there is no information about the reason for the arrest and where he was held. A week later he was temporarily released under bail.

On October 1, According to eyewitnesses, when Sajjad **Ghane Moghaddam** and **Mohammad Jolani** were traveling from Sareen toward Ardabil in a private car, they were being chased by several vehicles. In the meantime, the sound of

gunshots were heard by witnesses. The security forces opened fire on a moving car, and after bursting the car's tires, security forces surrounded the national activists and arrested them after a severe beating.

According to the information of the relatives, these activists were transferred to the hospital due to the injuries caused by the severe beating during the arrest. They were treated, and after a few hours, the officers took them to an unknown place.

On October 2, 2022, Tabriz University witnessed one of the largest gatherings of students in the past three decades. Thousands of students joined nationwide protests in Iran with the slogans of "Women, Life, Freedom", "Death to the Dictator", "Freedom, Justice, National Government", etc. An hour after the students' gathering, the Internet in Tabriz was first disrupted and then completely cut off. Moreover, the Islamic Republic of Iran blocked all roads leading to the Tabriz University to prevent people from joining the students. Then the security and law enforcement forces attacked the students, assaulted them with batons, and shot them directly with bullets. In this incident, more than 50 students were injured due to direct gunshots, batons, and electric shocks. Some of them are in serious condition. Half of the wounded were female. So far, at least 50 students have been arrested and taken out of the university with the cooperation of university security officers. The security forces inside the university surrounded

more than 3,000 students. More than 500 students were summoned to the security office of Tabriz University. Among them, 300 students are from the Technical Faculty.

An eyewitness present at the protests in Tabriz university on October 2, 2022, told us: "The security forces retaliation was severe. They fired shotguns at students."

We interviewed a protestor at Tabriz University and summarized his words as: The university president came and asked us to leave. He said that if we stayed, there would be bloodshed. We kept chanting "We are not afraid". Two hours later, we noticed that students were attacked in the university block in front of the university gate, where many were present. The students were surrounded by security and police forces. I saw 20 students who were beaten to death. Security forces took them blindfolded to Imam Reza Hospital. The rest of the students were arrested after the whole beating and bloodbath. They had started other arrests and took them around Abresan. Two of the students had broken bones in their arms and legs, but I don't know what happened to them. The University campus doors were closed. They closed the doors to attack all of us without the presence of even one witness. A brave girl was the first to jump the wall. I'll never forget her voice. She said, "neither life nor death is so valuable that one would sell his/her honor for these"

On October 2, 2022, **Ali Koohi** was arrested in Tabriz. His family does not

have any information about his situation, so Ali's family is deeply concerned for him.

At the same time as Tabriz University, Urmia and Zanjan University students gathered on university campus and chanted slogans against the Islamic Republic and supported nationwide protests. There is still no information about the possible detainees in these two universities. However, **Elaheh Bayramian, Masoumeh Maleki, Salar Taherafshar, Ahmed Zafarnamon, Nima Hosni, Mehdi Arsalani, Ashkan Saadatfar, Vahid Eshghi, and Siavash Soleimani** were arrested at these protests in Urmia.

On October 2, Elahe Bayramian was beaten and arrested by the security forces in Urmia-West Azerbaijan Province. She is an artist. Elahe Bayramian has played a role in the short film "Museum" about the consequences of the drying up of Lake Urmia.

On October 3, Salar Taherafshar, an Azerbaijani activist from Urmia, was arrested by the security forces in Kermanshah. According to the published information, this activist is serving his military service in Kermanshah. There is no detailed information about the reason for his arrest, possible charges, and where he was transferred.

On October 3, 2022, **Javad Ahmadi Yekanli**, an Azerbaijani activist living in Khoy, was arrested by the security forces at his father's house. There is no detailed

information about the reasons for his arrest and the transfer place.

The government, without any reason, has continued to arrest Azerbaijani activists. On October 3, 2022, **Yashar Akbarzadeh**, an Azerbaijani activist, was arrested by the security forces in Ardabil city. According to the reports, there is no detailed information about the reasons for the arrest and the place of transfer of this activist.

Arash Effati and **Meysam Beheshti** were arrested by security forces on October 4 in Tehran and Tabriz, respectively. Arash Efti in Tabriz and Meisam Beheshti were taken to an unknown location. During the arrest of Arash Effati, the security forces searched the house and confiscated his personal belongings, including his laptop and mobile phone.

On October 4, **Ali Latifi**, one of the student activists from Arak, was arrested by the security forces of the Iranian government in his home. So far, there is no information about his latest condition. On October 5, Firooz Moini was arrested by the security forces at his workplace in Ardabil. This activist was severely beaten during the arrest. Mr. Moini's left eye has lost its visual ability. His left legs and hands were severely injured. No information has been published about the reasons for his arrest. He was transferred to Ardabil Central Prison's military wing on October 6, 2022.

On October 6, 2022, **Zahra Pandi**, a student activist from Sarab, was arrested

in Tabriz. No news has been published about the whereabouts of this student activist.

Aylar Ahmadi was arrested by the security forces at the gathering, on October 8, in Urmia. No information has been published about her whereabouts and the reason for the arrest.

On October 9, **Saeed Ilkhani** was arrested by the security forces at the Azad University of Melkan. He is a student. There is no information about his whereabouts and reasons for arrest.

On October 9, **Saleh Mollaabbasi** was arrested by the security forces in Ahar- West Azerbaijan. No information about the reason for his arrest has been published. Security forces subjected Saleh Mollaabbasi and his family to severe physical and psychological abuse. Saleh Mollabbasi has started a hunger strike because of the brutal behavior of intelligence forces since October 18.

On October 11, the Court of Appeal of Zanzan province sentenced **Seyyed Ahmad Naghavi** to prison. Seyed Ahmad Naqavi is a Teacher's union activist. Branch 1 of the Zanzan Court of Appeals has sentenced him to 1 year in prison for propaganda activity against the regime.

On October 12, the security forces arrested well-known Azerbaijani lawyer **Mohammadreza Faghihi**. Mr. Faghihi was detained in a rally in front of the Iran Bar Association in Tehran in a protest against the "violation of protestors' rights

and Article 27 of the Constitution". He was released on October 25 from prison after posting a bail and remains free until the end of the proceeding.

On October 15, **Saeed Ahmadi, Mohammad Rezachamcheman, Yousef Yousefi, Mohammad Mehdi Ebrahimi**-16 years old-, **Peyman Monadi, Erfan Zareiyan, Mohammad Jalali, Tohid Manouchehri, Hosein Javadi, Abbas Nasiri, Maryam Afsharnia, Mohammad Amin Shafinejad, Ahmad Rostami, Moin Hadisi, Mobin Mekailvand, Sina Mekaili, Mirabbas Mirhabibi, Arash Ashkani, Pouya Alizadeh, Ali Alavi, Amir Rahimi** were all arrested during a demonstration in Ardabil. No information has been published about their accusations and the reason for the arrest.

On October 15, **Sina Yousefi, Ghasem Bodi, and Amir Mehdipour**, three lawyers, were arrested in Tabriz. Sina Yousefi is the vice-chairman of the Human Rights Commission of the Azerbaijan Lawyers Association. Sina Yousefi, announced the creation of a committee called the Committee for the Defense of Detainees by the Human Rights Commission of the Azerbaijan Lawyers Association. This arrest occurred after the creation of this committee and began providing statistics on the number of detainees in Tabriz. Sina Yousefi has announced on his Twitter account that at least 1700 people were arrested in Tabriz. These lawyers were transferred to Tabriz Central prison. Sina Yousefi and Amir Mehdipour were released on October 27.

Ghasem Bodi started a hunger strike on October 31. This Azerbaijani lawyer is in Tabriz prison on charges of “gathering and colluding against the security of the country” by forming a committee to defend the detainees and “propaganda against the regime”. He had been transferred to solitary confinement when he started the hunger strike.

Mahsa Yazdani, the coach of the official Skating Federation and an Aslam (Talesh) resident, was arrested by the security forces after participating in the demonstrations on October 26. Until today, there is no information about Mahsa Yazdani’s condition.

Negin Kiani, a lawyer and a member of the East Azerbaijan Lawyers Association, has been arrested and transferred to Tabriz Central Prison for accepting to represent the detainees from the protests. Jafar Afsharnia, one of Azerbaijani lawyers, announced the news on his Instagram page, stating that there is still no information about the charge, the investigating branch, or her case process.

Nima Rahimi was arrested on October 26 in Tabriz- East Azerbaijan. No information has been published about his latest condition.

Human rights defenders indicate that **Rasoul Haddadi**, a retired teacher living in Zanjan, suffered brain death due to a gunshot wound to his neck on Wednesday, October 26. At the same time as a rally was held in this city on the occasion of the 40th anniversary of Mahsa Amini’s

murder. He was admitted to the ICU department of Mousavi Zanjan Hospital.

This 66-year-old citizen has been under strict security measures since that date, and his family has not been informed of his condition. Haddadi’s family does not have access to his medical file, and the meeting is conducted with a significant presence of security officers to avoid taking photos.

It is said that the security agents pressured his family to agree to Rasoul Haddadi being taken to Tehran after the death of this retired teacher was announced. If he is buried in Tehran this would prevent the gathering of protestors in Zanjan. After Rasoul Haddadi’s family refused to sign the consent form, the security forces announced that they would receive an order from the prosecutor to transfer Rasoul Haddadi to Tehran. At that time, security forces would not need the family’s consent.

Davoud Kabali was arrested on Wednesday, October 26, 2022, in the gathering of Ostadan Street in Urmia city- West Azerbaijan, and was transferred to the Intelligence Police Department of Urmia.

Fatemeh Alefi and Saeed **Amir Rashidi**, a couple living in Tabriz, were arrested by the security forces in Tabriz on Wednesday, October 26, and taken to the prison of this city.

According to witnesses, the Iranian government’s repressive agents beat the

couple during their detention. So far, no reliable information has been released about their latest condition.

Hanan Moezzen, a bachelor's student in engineering of mining at the Sahand University of Technology, was arrested in the evening of October 27 protests in Shahnaz Street in Tabriz. There is no information about his current situation and the institution that arrested him.

On October 30, 2022, **Milad Parnian** was arrested in Tabriz, East Azerbaijan. There is no information about his whereabouts.

Afshar Moheb, a human rights activist, on October 30, 2022, after referring to the General and Revolutionary Prosecutor's Office of Ardabil city, was informed about the issuance of a summons to the proceedings for the charges in his case. The accusations are "propaganda activity against the Islamic Republic" and "knowingly insulting the Iranian government to create tension".

On October 30, 2022, the security forces stormed **Reza Joodi's** father's house. Joodi is an Azerbaijani civil rights activist living in Garimi city of Ardabil, and due to the absence of Reza Jodi at home, they did not succeed in arresting him. Security forces searched the house without a warrant, seized Reza Jodi's car, and arrested his father, according to Reza Joodi. There is no information about Reza's father.

Neda Bayat was arrested in Zanzan on October 30. She is a teenage girl who

participated in peaceful public protests in Zanzan city and was taken into custody by plainclothes forces. There is no news about her latest status. According to eyewitnesses, plainclothes forces used violence during the arrest of Neda Bayat.

Reports indicate that **Maziar Shakouri**, an Azerbaijani comedian, was arrested by the security agents of the Islamic Republic of Iran after posting an Instagram post on October 31.

On October 31, **Armita Pavir**, a student of Azerbaijan Madani University was arrested in front of the entrance gate of the university. Armita Pavir is a student of biology. There is no information about her latest condition.

The Iranian Government's Approach to the Protests

Despite much published information from the victims' families, eyewitnesses, human rights defenders inside Iran, and International human rights organizations about the killings of people during the ongoing demonstrations, Iran has denied the killing of protestors and has not taken any responsibility. Analysis has shown that in most cases, death was preventable.

The Eighty-three years old supreme leader, Khamenei, has smeared the protestors as "rioters" and "enemies of the people". "I say explicitly that these riots and this insecurity were designed by the U.S. and the occupying, fake Zionist regime [Israel] and those who they pay, and some traitorous Iranians abroad helped them," said Khamenei in his speech on October 3, 2022.

On September 23, 2022, Ahmad Vahidi, Iran's Minister of Interior, made statements about the people killed during the protests. He said, "People from the west and northwest of Iran were active anti-Islamic Republic groups". He has not clarified which anti-Islamic Republic groups are active in Azerbaijan. Azerbaijani Turkic minorities populate

provinces in the northwest and west of Iran. Although there is no evidence that the demonstrators attempted to enter the police station forcefully, security forces fired live ammunition repeatedly and killed several people in Azerbaijan.

The Supreme leader of Iran and Iran's Minister of Interior, called protestors "rioters", "enemies of the people", and "anti-Islamic Republic groups". They did it to crack down upon protestors and refuse any responsibility against victims. On the other hand, the government pressures victims' families to announce that the dead protestors have died in accidents or they died from health conditions such as heart failure. In the case of Asra Panahi, the government threatened Asra's family to announce that their daughter had died because of an underlying disease. In the case of Nima Shafighdoost, the Commander of the police force of Urmia, reported that Nima died because of a dog bite. The government has attempted all actions to not take responsibility.

Systemic Discrimination

Iran's constitution upholds discrimination and apartheid against women and ethnic minorities, notably Ahwazi Arabs, Azerbaijani Turks, Baluchis, Kurds, and Turkmen Turks. Women and minority groups have been denied fundamental human rights. Non-Persians are not permitted to be educated in their native languages. In addition, women are unable to choose their own clothing as they are required to wear the hijab regardless of their religion. The weight of discrimination on women's marriage, divorce, inheritance, and other parts of their lives are widespread and often the very reason why women are oppressed.

Women from minorities, besides gender discrimination, also suffer other forms of inequalities, including ethnic discrimination. It makes their social status inferior to the status of Persian women in the Iranian society. For example, discriminatory economic policies against non-Persian ethnicities leads to educational, economic, and social deprivation amongst minority women.

Conclusion and recommendations

The news of the deaths of some demonstrators and the mass detention of protestors continue to rise despite the Internet outage. Locals are attempting to treat those wounded by the gunshots or beatings of the security forces at home in order to avoid the arrest of these protestors since the authorities control the hospitals. Furthermore, they frequently transport injured people to prison in ambulances, manipulating those in need of help. The wounded were reportedly sent to Al-Qadir Hospital in Tabriz city, but no further information was provided. The prison in Tabriz was packed with protesting students. Due to a shortage of suitable detention facilities, several detainees, including students, were transported to locations outside of the prison.

Following the events of September 16, “Freedom, justice, and national government” slogan has become a common chant on the streets of Azerbaijani cities including in Tabriz, Urmia, and Ardabil, the three main Azerbaijani-Turk population centers in northwestern Iran.

In early November, protestors in the Girdh-Mehr and Shahnaz neighborhoods of Tabriz chanted the aforementioned slogan along with others such as “sovereignty for nations,” “freedom for women,” and “the business of the mullahs: robbery, murder, and treason”. Usage of these slogans were evident based on footage shared on social networks.⁵

The Iranian government has disregarded calls from the UN Secretary-General and the UN General Assembly to examine the ongoing unlawful killings and arrests.

We are deeply concerned that without significant pressure from the international communities and organizations and lack of proper actions, the lives of the protestors, women, and ethnic rights activists’ are at further risk.

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5. <https://www.voanews.com/a/azerbaijani-turks-in-iran-demand-freedom-justice-national-government-/6830812.html>