

2023 JANUARY - MARCH

HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS REPORT

ON THE AZERBAIJANI TURKS IN IRAN

Contact information: etekyazi@gmail.com

<https://www.etekyazi.com/>

About this Initiative Group

The coverage of human rights violations in Iran depicts a significant gap in reporting human rights violations against minorities. To fill 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 and outside of Iran, composed of sixteen human rights activists and organizations, to cover the human rights violations by the Iranian government in the Azerbaijan region of Iran.

Initiative Group Members:

Behzad Jeddi, Ph.D. student in Economics, Iowa State University

Lale Javanshir, Ph.D. in Turkish and Ottoman Studies, University of Toronto

Ramin Jabbarli, Ph.D. student in Sociology, University of Washington

Turkan Bozkurt, M.A. in Near and Middle Eastern Studies, the University of Toronto

Contents

I	Part One	
1	Introduction	1
1.1	Summary	1
1.2	Introduction	2
1.3	About This Report	3
2	Arrested and Released Individuals	4
2.1	Arrested and Released Individuals	4
3	Sentenced and acquitted Individuals	12
3.1	Sentenced and acquitted Individuals	12
II	Part Two	
4	Mass Poisoning of Schoolgirls	16
4.1	Chemical Attacks on Schools and Poisoning of Students	16



Part One

1	Introduction	1
1.1	Summary	
1.2	Introduction	
1.3	About This Report	
2	Arrested and Released Individuals	4
2.1	Arrested and Released Individuals	
3	Sentenced and acquitted Individuals	12
3.1	Sentenced and acquitted Individuals	



Introduction

1.1 Summary

This report covers human rights violations against Azerbaijani Turks in Iran during the first quarter of 2023 (January, February, and March).

This report focuses on human rights violations, specifically in the Azerbaijani region of Iran. There is inadequate access to human rights organizations in Azerbaijani-populated cities. The Iranian government continues to deliberately ignore and deny the existence of any human rights violations within the country despite the existence of overwhelming evidence.

In the first quarter of this year, despite the amnesty that the Iranian Supreme Leader Khamenei issued, more people have been sentenced and arrested throughout the country. School students, particularly girls, have been targeted through chemical poisoning. The government has taken no action to end these attacks or even begin an investigation into the perpetrators of these crimes.

The first part of this report focuses on 20 arrested individuals. Fifteen of these individuals were released, while five remain arrested. 5 out of 20 of them are women. This report will focus on the cases of sentenced and acquitted individuals. The report's last section will emphasize the poisoned students in the Azerbaijani-populated area.

1.2 Introduction

The Iranian government seeks to create an atmosphere of fear in its society and demonstrate its power in controlling the protests. The government has been suppressing nationwide demonstrations through inhumane tactics enforced by the security forces. The Islamic Republic of Iran has utilized heavy weaponry, capital punishment, and arbitrary arrests to quell protests, resulting in the deaths of at least 520 people, including 74 children throughout the country and 11 women and children in the Azerbaijani region.

Furthermore, chemical attacks on schoolgirls have been emerging. There are increasing reports of female students being poisoned during these crackdowns. Human rights defenders have documented student poisoning in schools nationwide, even though the reasons for these attacks remain unclear due to a lack of proper inspection. Regardless, these incidents have created a pervasive sense of fear within Iranian society and are a clear indication of negligence by the local officials and the central government especially considering that schools should be safe spaces for these children.

Demonstrations in Iran have decreased in the first quarter of 2023. Following the execution of several protestors sentenced to capital punishment, Iran's Supreme Leader ordered an amnesty for prisoners. However, this move was made after over 500 people were killed during the demonstrations and did not stop the execution of some arrested protestors even after the amnesty order. This suggests that the government's intention was not to promote peace or reconciliation within the society but to exert control over the population through threats and pardons.

1.3 About This Report

The recent nationwide demonstrations in Iran have revealed that most victims are in minority-populated regions such as Balochistan, Azerbaijan, and Kurdistan. This creates a cruciality to pay more attention to these regions specifically. In response, Azerbaijani human rights defenders based in the U.S. and Canada have utilized their networks with the Azerbaijani human rights defenders inside and outside of Iran to prepare this report on the human rights violations in Azerbaijani populated provinces, including West Azerbaijan, East Azerbaijan, Ardabil, Tehran, Zanjan, and Qazvin.

This report is based on information compiled from various sources, including the network of Azerbaijani human rights activists inside Iran, eyewitnesses, testimonies from the victims' relatives, footages, and local news resources and journalists.



Arrested and Released Individuals

2.1 Arrested and Released Individuals

Some of the people arrested during the protests have been released as a result of the order of "Amnesty and Reduction of Public Punishment" by the supreme leader of the Islamic Republic of Iran. However, this has not halted the arrest of activists in the Azerbaijani provinces of Iran.

On February 7th, Hossein Kooshi, an Azerbaijani labor activist was released from the Tabriz Central Prison by completing his sentence. This labor rights activist living in Tabriz was arrested in his home on October 24th, 2022 and transferred to the central prison of Tabriz without prior notification.

Later, Kooshi was tried in absentia by the second branch of the Tabriz Revolutionary Court and sentenced to two years of prison for "insulting the supreme leader." He was also sentenced to one year in prison for the charge of "propaganda activities against the regime." With the application of Article 134 of the Islamic Penal Code, it was decided that only the severest punishment applicable to the charge, i.e. six months of imprisonment and 18 months of suspension, should be applied to him.



**Hossein
Kooshi**

East Azerbaijan - Tabriz



**Akbar
Abolzadeh**

East Azerbaijan - Ahar



**Sajjad
Imannejad**

Tehran - Tehran



**Ramin
Sultanmohammadi**

Zanjan - Zanjan



**Tohid
Amiramini**

Tehran - Tehran



**Alireza
Farshi**

Tehran - Tehran



Leyli Pourbaba

East Azerbaijan - Tabriz



**Shaghayegh
Alizadeh**

West Azerbaijan - Urmia



**Hossein
Mohammadian**

East Azerbaijan - Tabriz



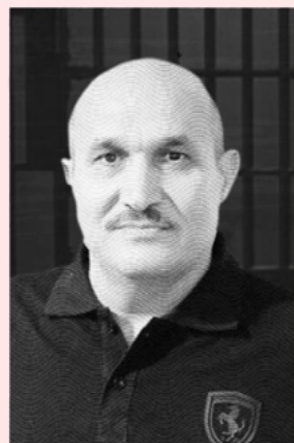
**Arash
Ahmadi Akbari**

East Azerbaijan - Tabriz



Ruzbeh Piri

East Azerbaijan - Tabriz



**Abbas
Lesani**

Ardabil - Ardabil



**Ebrahim
Ahmadpour**

East Azerbaijan - Tabriz



**Pejman
Moin**

Ardabil - Ardabil



**Tahereh
Bajravani**

Tehran - shahr Ghods



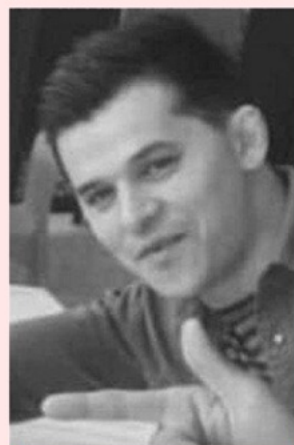
Zeinab Hamrang

Tehran - Tehran



**Parviz
Siyabi**

Ardabil - Ardabil



**Hossein
Bayat**

Zanjan - Zanjan

On February 8th, 2023 Akbar Abolzadeh who is from East Azerbaijan's city of Ahar, completed his sentence and was finally released from the central prison of Tabriz. Akbar Abolzadeh was arrested on September 9th, 2015 during the widespread protests that erupted in the Azerbaijani-populated cities in response to the discriminatory "Fitileh" program that aired on radio and televisions of the Islamic Republic of Iran. This children's program depicted Azerbaijani Turks in an inhumane manner and referred to them as an uncivilized culture. The first branch of the Ahar Revolutionary Court convicted Akbar Abolzadeh for "gathering and conspiring to commit a crime against the country's security through propaganda activity against the Islamic Republic of Iran" and sentenced him to 10 months in prison. He had been released on bail pending the outcome of the proceedings. However, on June 7th, 2022 Akbar Abolzadeh was rearrested in Ahar City and incarcerated to serve the rest of his sentence. On February 8th, 2023 Maryam Abhari and Ramin Sultanmohammadi were released from Safarabad prison in Zanjan. They were arrested during the last protests.

Ramin Sultanmohammadi, an Azerbaijani mountaineer and tourist guide living in Zanjan was sentenced to one year in prison and 74 lashes by the criminal court's 107th branch of the criminal court headed by Judge Mohammad Mehdi Mohammadi for "disturbing public order". They both were released as a result of the new pardon of "Amnesty and Reduction of Punishment". On February 8th, 2023 Tohid Amirami was released from the Evin prison in Tehran after serving his sentence. Amirami, serving his 5-year sentence has been released due to the "Amnesty and Reduction of Public Punishment" order.

On February 20th, 2019 Amirami was arrested in Tehran's Revolution Square for distributing congratulatory leaflets celebrating International Mother Language Day. Tohid Amirami was imprisoned in the Evin prison. Amirami was sentenced to 7 years and six months in prison by Branch 36 of the Tehran Revolutionary Court headed by Judge Ahmad Zargar for "gathering and colluding to disrupt national security" and "propaganda activity against the regime". Throughout the legal process, this sentence was reduced to 5 years of imprisonment according to a new law on the reduction of prison sentences.

On September 10, Alireza Farshi Dizaj Yekanli, an Azerbaijani human rights activist was released from the Evin Prison after serving three years and three months of his four-year

sentence. He was released as a result of the "Amnesty and Reduction of Public Punishment" order.

Alireza Farshi was sentenced to two years of imprisonment and two years in exile by the 54th branch of Tehran Court of Appeal for participating in the "World Mother Language Day" ceremony in the Baharestan city, Tehran. He was arrested on July 21, 2019 and was taken to the Evin prison. Additionally, Alireza was sentenced to three years and six months of imprisonment in another case by Branch 36 of the Court of Appeal of Tehran Province on the charge of "gathering and collusion against national security", as well as the charge of "propaganda against the regime".

On February 9, 2023 Leyli Pourbaba was released from the Tabriz central prison as a result of the new amnesty order. Leyli Pourbaba was sentenced to 3 years in prison and 44 lashes. Pourbaba was arrested on November 2nd, 2023 after being summoned to the FATA (cyber police) of East Azerbaijan. No information about the charge's title, the issuing court branch, or accusations have been published thus far.

On February 9th, 2023 Shaghayegh Alizadeh, a Tabriz University of Arts student living in Urmia, was released from custody. The security forces arrested Shaghayegh on January 6, 2023. There was no detailed information about the reasons behind the arrest, the charge, or the place of transfer of this Azerbaijani student.

On February 10th, 2023 Hossein Mohammadian and Arash Ahmadi Akbari, two of the individuals detained during the recent protests, were released from the Tabriz Central Prison. Hossein Mohammadian was arrested on December 11, 2022. Arash Ahmadi Akbari was arrested on September 22nd, 2022. There is no further information about the accusations brought forward or the charges laid against them.

On February 10, 2023 Ruzbeh Piri was released from prison. He is from Tabriz and was serving his sentence of 3 years and eight months. He was released as a result of the "Amnesty and Reduction of Public Punishment" order.

Ruzbeh Piri was sentenced to 1 year in prison by Branch 3 of Tabriz Revolutionary Court

headed by Judge Fateh Nejad for the charge of propagating against the regime and received five years in prison for the charge of being a member of "anti-regime" groups. This sentence was recently reduced to 3 years and eight months of imprisonment by the Court of Appeal of East Azerbaijan province. With the application of Article 134 of the Islamic Penal Code, three years of imprisonment applies to him. On Thursday July 26, 2022 Piri presented himself to Tabriz Central Prison to serve his sentence.

Abbas Lesani was transferred to Yazd City on February 21, 2023 after serving four years and two months of imprisonment in wing 7 of Ardabil prison to serve his 2-year exile in Yazd City. However, Lesani returned to Ardabil by disobeying the sentence of exile to Yazd City. Abbas Lesani is from Ardabil city. He was arrested on January 15th, 2019. Lesani was sentenced to 10 years in prison and two years of exile to Yazd for the charge of "forming a group to disrupt the security of the country" and for the charge of "acting against national security" and "inciting and encouraging the Turks in West Azerbaijan province through speeches and interviews" with the media against the regime.

On March 2nd, 2023 Ebrahim Ahmadpour, a master's student in political science at Tabriz University was released from the Tabriz Central Prison. Ahmadpour was arrested on February 23, 2023 after being summoned to the Intelligence and Security Police of the East Azerbaijan Police Force. On February 27, he was transferred to the Tabriz Central Prison after concluding the interrogation process. There is no further information about his latest situation and possible charges.

On March 5th, 2023 Mohammad Yousefisadat was released from the Evin prison. Yousefisadat was arrested on February 20, 2023 at the police department and he was taken to the Evin prison detention center accompanied by security officers. He was interrogated for six days in solitary confinement in the Wing 240 of this prison and then transferred to Wing 209. After the interrogations concluded, he was released.

Pejman Moin who lives in Ardabil was released on bail of 50 million tomans until the end of the proceedings. Moin was arrested by the security forces on Saturday March 4, 2023 during the protest rally of the families of poisoned students in Ardabil. On March 9, 2023,

the security forces arrested this Azerbaijani artist and actor and took him to an unknown place. Moin is from Urmia, west Azerbaijan. There is no detailed information about the reasons for his arrest, the details of the case, and the alleged charges against Pejman Moin.

On March 18, 2023 Tahereh Bajravani was released from the Evin Prison. Tahereh's husband Ali Futuhi, was murdered during the protests of November 2019. She was sentenced to 18 months in prison by the first branch of the Shahrar Revolutionary Court. Bajravani was charged with "insulting the supreme leader". No documents and proofs have been presented in the court to prove the alleged charges against her. She was arrested on December 21, 2022 by the security forces at her workplace in Shahr Qods (Hasan Khan Castle) in the Tehran province.

Zeinab Hamrang Seyedbaglou, an activist of the Azerbaijani trade union of teachers was arrested by the security forces on March 12, 2023 in Tehran. Hamrang who suffers from several illnesses such as high blood pressure, kidney problems, and pterygium was released from the Evin prison after the recent "Amnesty and Reduction of Punishment" order. She is from Ardabil-Parsabad. The Tehran Revolutionary Court had sentenced her to five years in prison on the charge of "gathering and conspiring to disrupt the security of the country" and one year of imprisonment on the charge of "propaganda against the regime." Hamrang was arrested on September 5, 2020 while traveling to Khoy City in the West Azerbaijan province and was transferred to the women's ward of Evin prison to serve her sentence.

Parviz Siyabi, a 74 years old senior living in Ardabil, has been granted a leave from the central prison of this city. The leave period of this Azerbaijani civil rights activist has been announced for the duration of two months. This grant was based on the latest assessment requested on the health of Siyabi by the five-member forensic medical board who confirmed that he suffers from medical conditions. This Azerbaijani activist was arrested on November 9, 2022 and transferred to Ward 16 of Ardabil Central Prison to serve his 6-year sentence.

The Court of Appeal of Ardabil province overturned the verdict issued by the first court. The court has sentenced Parviz Siyabi to six years on the charge of "membership to illegal

groups” and “propaganda against the system.” With the application of Article 134 of the Islamic Penal Code, five years of this sentence can be enforced. Hossein Bayat was arrested on February 25, 2023, by the security forces at his father’s house and taken to prison. There is no further information about his latest condition and possible accusations or charges against him.

Sajjad Imannejad, an Azerbaijani protester, is a 34-year-old architecture expert living in Tehran. He was arrested on October 8, 2022, during the nationwide protests in Tehran and was transferred to the Evin Detention Center. Imannejad was initially charged with gathering and collusion and disturbing the public order. Recently, during his trial in the 28th branch of the Tehran Revolutionary Court, he was charged with the crime of Moharebeh (waging war against God).



Sentenced and acquitted Individuals

3.1 Sentenced and acquitted Individuals

Sahand Noor Mohammadzadeh, one of the detainees of the recent protests, was sentenced to 6 years of imprisonment and ten years of exile by Branch 26 of the Tehran Revolutionary Court headed by Judge Iman Afshari.

Mohammadzadeh was arrested on October 4, 2022, during the nationwide protests on the "Ashrafi Esfahani" highway in Tehran. Judge Ali Mazloun, a judge of the 29th branch of the Revolutionary Court, issued a "death sentence" for Sahand Nour Mohammadzadeh on the charge of "attempting to close the street, preventing the movement of vehicles."

On March 30th, 2023, Elnaz Rekabi, an Azerbaijani athlete and mountain climbing champion, planned a trip to Spain to train and prepare for the Olympics. However, the Imam Khomeini airport officials prevented her from leaving the country and confiscated her passport. Previously, Rekabi's appearance in the South Korean rock climbing competition without a mandatory hijab made news during the height of the protests. When she returned to Iran, she was under security pressure.



**Sahand
Noormohammadzadeh**

Tehran - Tehran



**Siavash
Soleimanpour**

Ardabil - Ardabil



Elnaz Rekabi

Zanjan - Zanjan



**Asghar
Mohammadi**

East Azerbaijan - Tabriz

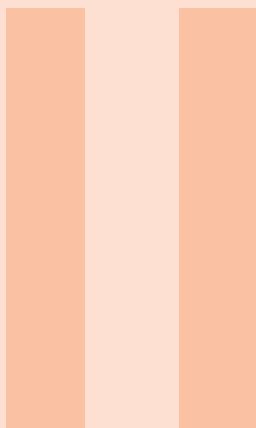


**Farhad
Pakrouh**

Ardabil - Ardabil

Siavash Soleimanipour was acquitted of his charges by the appeal court of West Azerbaijan province. He was sentenced to 6 years and ten months of imprisonment by the 3rd branch of the General and Revolutionary Court of Urmia city, presided over by Judge Najafzadeh, for the charges of propaganda against the system, insulting the leadership, and action against national security.

Security forces arrested Soleimanipour at his home on October 1, 2022. After interrogations, he was transferred from the Ministry of Intelligence detention center to Urmia Central Prison. On November 14, 2022, he was released from the Urmia Central Prison with a bail of one billion tomans until the end of the proceedings. On March 17, 2023, Asghar Mohammadi, an Azerbaijani lawyer and a member of the Human Rights Commission of the East Azerbaijan Bar Association was sentenced to 20 lashes by Branch 101 of the Warzaghan Criminal Court. This occurred following the complaints of companies active in copper mining in the Songun mine. Mohammadi was accused of defamation, insult, and on the charge of spreading falsehoods. On March 6, 2023, Farhad Pakrouh was sentenced to a fine of ten million tomans by the second branch of the Court of Appeal of East Azerbaijan. He is from Tabriz and has been arrested several times for his civic activities and demand for civil rights. Pakrouh was also sentenced to 4 months in prison and two years of mandatory curfew on a separate charge. His mobile phone was confiscated for "propaganda activity against the regime through the publication of images and content against the regime in cyberspace."



Part Two

4	Mass Poisoning of Schoolgirls	16
4.1	Chemical Attacks on Schools and Poisoning of Students	



Mass Poisoning of Schoolgirls

4.1 Chemical Attacks on Schools and Poisoning of Students

The government has started poisoning schools to spread societal fear. These attacks have primarily been against all girls' schools. The poisoning of students started in Qom on Wednesday, November 30, 2022, and 18 female students of Noor Academy were poisoned that day. Following this attack, reports were broadcasted from other cities in Iran, including Borujerd and Tehran. On March 1, 2023 chemical attacks started in the Azerbaijani region of Iran. There were reports of chemical attacks from 9 schools in Ardabil City. This number later increased to 11 schools. These schools are Sama, Din and Danesh, Tayyaba, Efaf, Khalban Zakir, Baharan, Meraj Shahid, Namjo, Chamran, and Dadman. Following this poisoning attack of female students in schools of Ardabil, Aisan Ashtari's health deteriorated to the extent that it required intensive care. This student of Khalban Zakir school was hospitalized in the ICU of Imam Ardabil Hospital. The relatives of this Azerbaijani student announced that the drop in her level of consciousness to 4 has worried the Ashtari family. According to informed sources, the number of poisoned schools continues to increase. This far, more than 400 students have visited the hospitals in Ardabil in relation to school poisonings. For instance, 235 students were transferred to the Emam Khomeyni hospital's emer-

gency rooms for treatment. 48 students in Rahe Zainab girls' school in the Aslanduz City of Ardabil province were poisoned on Thursday, March 2nd of, 2023. Ali Mehboubipour, Director General of Security and Law Enforcement of Ardabil Governorate, has informed that at Rahe Zainab all girls school in Aslanduz, the students and staff of this school began smelling an unpleasant odor and felt weak physically, followed by a burning sensation in their throat. There are reports of the transfer of students from Tabriz, Hamedan, Zanjan, and Garami schools to the hospitals. The schools that were chemically attacked include two schools of Noor Al-Zahra and Narges Khatun in Urmia, two schools in Hamedan City, Wali Asr Zanjan School, two schools named Al-Zahra High School and Fatemeh Elementary School in Garmsi city and at least three schools in Tabriz city, Hazrat Masoumeh High School and two schools. There were poisonings in Basmanj and Baghmesh neighborhoods on March 4, 2023. The students of Noorul Zahra and Narges Khatoon schools in Urmia were transferred to Taleghani and Motahari hospitals.

Recommendations

According to human rights activists both inside and outside of Iran, the Iranian government has engaged in severe mistreatment of its citizens. In particular, security and police forces have targeted students, specifically young girls as a form of deterrence. Recently, in several Azerbaijani-populated cities, the all girl schools have been deliberately poisoned resulting in hospitalization of many students. Yet, no governing body has taken any action to address or investigate these incidents.

Regrettably, international human rights organizations have not paid adequate attention to this issue in general and especially missing the regions with minority populations. The Iranian government ruthlessly suppresses peaceful demonstrations in these regions. Therefore, it is imperative that when investigating these issues, a special attention should be paid to protecting the rights of ethnic minorities.

