

Special Briefing

Five Years Later, Still No Justice for Iran's Massacre of November 2019 Protesters

Families Seeking
Accountability for
Killed Loved Ones
Face Imprisonment



Five Years Later, Still No Justice for Iran's Massacre of November 2019 Protesters

Families Seeking Accountability for Killed Loved Ones Face Imprisonment

Credible Estimates Say State Security Forces Killed More than 1000 Protesters

November 13, 2024 – As the fifth anniversary of the Islamic Republic's bloody suppression of the country's **November 2019 mass protests** approaches, not a single official has yet to be held **accountable** for the lethal state force that killed hundreds if not over a thousand protesters. To this day, the families of those killed who continue to try to seek justice face arrest and imprisonment.

It is this lack of accountability for state atrocities that paved the way for the Islamic Republic's killing of more than **500 women, children**, and men during the "**Woman, Life, Freedom**" protests that erupted across Iran in September 2022, the Center for Human Rights in Iran (CHRI) said today.

"The Islamic Republic has learned it can commit mass murder with little cost, and so it does it again and again," said Hadi Ghaemi, the executive director at CHRI.

"Five years after one of the bloodiest crackdowns in Iran's recent history, families of the victims are still left without answers, without justice, and without acknowledgment of the state's responsibility for these deaths," Ghaemi said.

"The time has come for the international community to stand firm and end this brutal cycle of impunity," he added.

CHRI urges the UN and Member States to:

- Establish a UN-led inquiry into the atrocities committed by the Iranian authorities during the November 2019 protests.
- Identify and pursue Iranian officials suspected of crimes under international law through national courts under the principle of universal jurisdiction.

- Initiate structural investigations into the abuses related to the 2019 protests, so that States are prepared if any perpetrators enter their territory.
- Demand that the Iranian authorities release all family members imprisoned for seeking justice for killed loved ones, cease the harassment and prosecution of justice-seeking families, and allow these families to pursue their cases in Iran’s courts.

On November 15, 2019, mass protests erupted across Iran following a sudden increase in fuel prices. The Iranian government responded with unlawful and **lethal force**, deploying security forces who used live ammunition, heavy machine guns, helicopters, tear gas, and water cannons against protesters. More than **7,000** men, women, and children were arrested, **hundreds**—if not **over a thousand**—were killed, and untold numbers were injured, detained, disappeared, tortured, and sentenced in closed-door trials.

During the protests, the authorities imposed a near-total internet shutdown for nearly a week to conceal the full extent of the atrocities and the scale of killings by security forces.

Soran Mansournia, whose brother was killed during the protests, told CHRI:

“Five years have passed, and we are still unsure about the most important issue—how many people were killed. It requires a collective will, a collective demand, to truly uncover the unseen aspects of November 2019...A truth-finding committee should be formed because, in the case of the November victims [where most of the victims were from the marginalized outer **provinces** where minorities predominate], we are dealing with an impoverished social class that does not have the means to share their suffering—a group that does not have access to media or to the outside world.”

Security forces enacted a shoot-to-kill policy during the protests, with many victims shot in the head, neck, or torso, and the orders reportedly came from the highest levels as the Supreme Leader instructed officials to “do whatever it takes to end it” according to **sources** close to his inner circle.

“All of his organs had been removed. It was a horrifying sight.”

Among the hundreds brutally killed during the protests, the case of 28-year-old **Borhan Mansournia**, a young veterinarian from Marivan, Kurdistan province, illustrates the flagrant violence and lawlessness of the state’s suppression.

Borhan was shot by security forces on November 16, 2019, in Kermanshah. The nearest hospital refused to treat him, forcing his family to drive to another hospital nearly three hours away due to roads blocked by traffic from the protests. During the journey, Borhan bled heavily.

In a recent interview with CHRI, Borhan’s brother, Soran Mansournia, recounted the day, sharing new details about Borhan’s killing:

“At Taleghani Hospital, around 9 p.m., Borhan was taken into surgery, and they brought him out around 3 a.m. We couldn’t believe he had survived. He was then in the general ward and survived for 34 hours, but due to medical negligence, he eventually fell into a coma and passed away around 3 hours later. The main cause of Borhan’s death was internal bleeding, and during those 34 hours, almost no doctors came to monitor him.

“After Borhan fell into a coma, he was transferred to the ICU, which I believe was for political reasons, so that they could record in his medical file that he passed away in the ICU rather than in the general ward.”

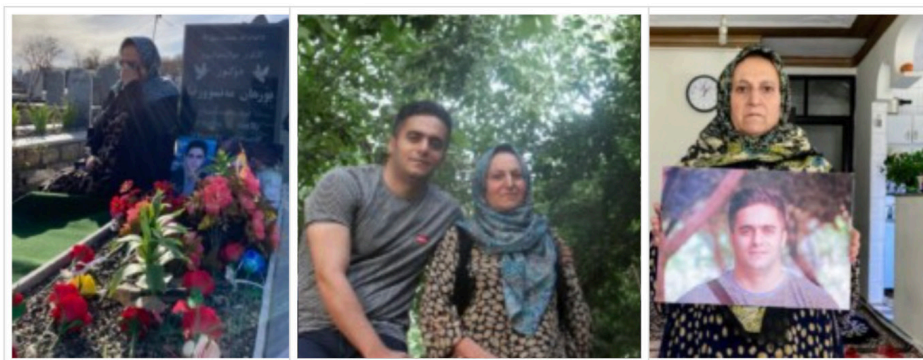
Authorities initially refused to release Borhan’s body, a common practice by the Islamic Republic to prevent burial ceremonies from becoming protests and to conceal the extent of the brutality inflicted on the body.

The hospital kept Borhan’s body for 24 hours, denying his family any visitation. Eventually, they released the body only after the family paid 6 million tomans (about 90 USD). When first taken to the ICU, Borhan’s body appeared in relatively good condition, but the state in which it was ultimately returned to his family left them devastated. His brother said:

“At the hospital, they only allowed us to see Borhan’s face to identify him and made us sign a commitment not to speak publicly about his death.

“When we fully unzipped the body bag to wash Borhan’s body, we were completely shocked. Borhan’s body was a shell, with no internal organs left. All of his organs had been removed—his intestines, kidneys, heart, everything was gone. His brain had been removed, too; his skull had been opened, and even the scalp was loose to the touch, moving when we tried to gently stroke it.

“They had broken his nose, and all the fingers on his hands and feet were broken. His shin was also fractured. It was a horrifying sight. They had tampered with his body so much, with so many incisions, that the bleeding wouldn’t stop at all. We filled his body with cotton, but even then, the shroud kept turning red.



Borhan Mansournia and his parents

“Security forces warned us that if we didn’t bury him that night, they would take his body from us the next day. The shroud we laid Borhan to rest in was completely red. I’ll never forget that scene where it was almost impossible to find any white left on his shroud.”

Lawyer: “All judicial decisions were dictated ...by security officials.”

As the cases of the protesters who were charged began to move through the Islamic Republic’s courts, the capture of the judicial system by the security agencies became clear.

Prominent human rights lawyer Saeid Dehghan, who was defending clients in Iran at the time, shared these remarks regarding the denial of protesters’ right to independent counsel of choice, which fully emerged as state policy only after these protests, and the arbitrary nature of the judicial system, where “connections” with government officials enabled protesters to escape judicial retribution.

“Although Note 48 of Iran’s Code of Criminal Procedure [which specifies that defendants facing national security-related charges can only choose a lawyer from a list of state-approved lawyers], was passed four years before the November 2019 protests, we lawyers did not face any issues [defending] political cases prior to that date. Yet after the protests, despite the surge in the number of detainees and the increased need for legal representation among the protesters, they were deliberately denied access to independent lawyers.

“In the first weeks of the [November 2019] protests, the desks of every prosecutor in the Revolutionary Courts were piled high with new cases against protesters. Security prosecutors claimed that each of them had been assigned over 300 cases, stating they neither had the time nor the capacity to handle them. At the same time, when we, as lawyers, attempted to officially represent some of the detained citizens, they refused our representation, saying: ‘Since your name is not on the list of lawyers approved by the head of the judiciary, you are not allowed to represent the protesters.’

“Eventually, I managed to get involved in six cases. However, I witnessed no signs of judicial proceedings; all decisions were dictated based on the directives of security officials who had authority over the judicial prosecutors.

“In addition, observing the cases I encountered at the Evin Prosecutor’s Office during that period, I saw that three detained citizens were released swiftly and without any complications solely due to their familial connections with certain government officials.”

Ongoing Persecution of Victims’ Families: “The lives of our entire family are at risk!”

Meanwhile, families trying to seek justice for those killed during the November 2019 protests faced ruthless state retribution and are still being subjected to surveillance, arbitrary arrests,

and imprisonment in a relentless effort by the authorities to evade accountability for their actions. In addition, the graves of some of those who were killed have been destroyed to prevent public mourning by the families.

The persecution of the family of 27-year-old **Pouya Bakhtiari** is emblematic of the state's retribution against families who try to seek justice. Pouya was shot and killed by security forces while peacefully protesting on November 16, 2019, in Karaj. Since then, Iranian authorities have subjected Pouya's family to continuous intimidation, surveillance, arrests, and imprisonment in an attempt to silence them.

□ On January 9, 2024, Pouya's father, Manouchehr Bakhtiari, was sentenced to 18 years in prison and 74 lashes on sham national security charges. On February 15, 2024, an additional six-month prison sentence was imposed for "insulting the Supreme Leader." He was first arrested in April 2021 and sentenced to 3.5 years in prison.

□ In June 2024, Pouya Bakhtiari's mother, **Nahid Shirpisheh**, who is currently serving a five-year sentence in Zanzan Prison, was physically assaulted in prison.

□ On August 7, 2024, Pouya's uncle, **Mehrdad Bakhtiari**, was violently arrested after **posting a video** documenting the brutal beating of his brother, who had gone to court to inquire about imprisoned family members.

□ On September 17, 2024, Pouya's uncle, **Arian Shirpisheh**, was arrested by Islamic Republic agents at his home, and his phones and electronic devices were confiscated.



Pouya Bakhtiari's parents at his grave.

"You took my brother's life! My father's life is at risk! My mother's life is at risk! The lives of our entire family are at risk!" Mona Bakhtiari, Pouya's sister, **wrote** on X.

Other recent cases highlight the ongoing repression against families and victims of the November 2019 protests. For example:

□ On October 11, 2024, **Farzad Moazami Goudarzi**, cousin of slain protester Reza Moazami Goudarzi, was sentenced to five years in prison.

□ On September 22, 2024, **two mothers** of slain protesters, Mahboubeh Ramezani and Rahimeh Yousefzadeh, received 18-month prison sentences.

- On August 26, 2024, **Matin Hassani**, who lost an eye during the protests, was summoned to begin a 31-month prison term for seeking justice and supporting victims' families.

Borhan Mansournia's brother, Soran, who is also a member of the **Aban Families for Justice**, told CHRI:

"There are many other families who didn't come forward to the media. I have a photo of a gravestone in Karaj Cemetery where there are multiple young people buried in the same row, all of whom were buried on November 16 and 17, [2019]. Some of these families, when they spoke to each other, found that these individuals were all victims of the November killings, but they decided not to speak out. They said, 'We have other children, and we don't want to create problems for them.'"

Death Sentences Still Being Issued Against November 2019 Protesters

In addition to trying to silence the families of victims, the authorities have continued to advance grossly unlawful prosecutions of protesters from November 2019—including applying the death penalty—reflecting the Islamic Republic's **increased use of executions as a political tool to punish dissent** and intimidate the public.

On September 19, 2024, 28-year-old Iranian boxing champion **Mohammad Javad Vafaei-Sani** was sentenced to death related to anti-government protests in November 2019 for "corruption on Earth," a charge increasingly used against protesters. This comes despite Iran's Supreme Court overturning his initial death sentence, his lawyer Babak Paknia **said** on X.

Protester **Abbas Deris**, a 50-year-old father of three from Iran's ethnic Arab minority, is currently at risk of execution after Iran's Supreme Court rejected his appeal request in January 2024, despite flagrant violations of his fair trial rights.

Deris and his brother were arrested on December 8, 2019, following the **Mahshahr Massacre**, where security forces killed dozens of protesters on November 18. Authorities accused Deris of killing local Special Police commander Reza Sayyadi—a charge he denies. He was sentenced to death for "enmity against God" after a sham trial based on torture-tainted confessions.



Abbas Deris with his children.

In addition, Deris' lawyer, Fereshteh Tabanian, has faced prosecution in two separate cases brought by the security establishment for her persistence in defending her client's innocence.

A person knowledgeable about Deris' case told CHRI: "The Supreme Court has rejected the lawyers' previous request for a retrial. They are looking to submit a new request based on current evidence."

"The UN's [Independent Fact-Finding Mission on Iran](#) found that the Iranian authorities **committed crimes against humanity** during their violent suppression of the "Women, Life Freedom" uprising in 2022. Given the similarly intentional mass killings of unarmed civilians by state security forces in November 2019, there is no doubt that the Islamic Republic committed crimes against humanity in 2019 as well," said Ghaemi.

"We must break this culture of impunity; otherwise, more Bloody Novembers will claim more Iranian lives," said Ghaemi.

For interviews or questions, please contact our Media Department at
media@iranhumanrights.org

About us

Founded in 2008, the **Center for Human Rights in Iran (CHRI)** is an independent, nonprofit 501(c)(3) organization that works to protect and promote human rights in Iran. Headquartered in New York City, the Center researches and documents human rights violations throughout Iran, and provides governments, the U.N., think tanks, global media, and research centers around the world with detailed information, analysis and policy recommendations. The Center's approach is strictly nonpartisan; we operate within the framework of international human rights law.

Five Years Later, Still No Justice for Iran's Massacre of November 2019 Protesters

Families Seeking Accountability for Killed Loved Ones Face Imprisonment

Copyright ©2025 by the Center for Human Rights in Iran

All rights reserved. No part of this report may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means, including mechanical, electric, photocopying, recording, or otherwise, without the prior written permission of the Center for Human Rights in Iran.



Center for Human Rights in Iran
New York

www.iranhumanrights.org