

# USADI Dispatch

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## USADI Commentary

### The 1988 Iran Massacre Must not Be Forgotten

Sixteen years ago today, Iran's fundamentalist regime was carrying out one of the most under-reported political mass killings of our times. In what is now known as "The 1988 Iran massacre," tens of thousands of political prisoners were summarily executed nationwide in a span of three months, beginning in mid-summer 1988. Many international law experts believe that this heinous atrocity qualifies the current Iranian leadership as a perpetrator of crimes against humanity.

In 1981, the Iranian regime embarked on systematic arrest, torture and execution of political dissidents. Tens of thousands of Iranian men and women were imprisoned or executed; members and sympathizers of the People's Mujahedeen (MEK) comprised the vast majority. Inside the prisons, dissidents, particularly women, were subjected to brutal treatment. Still, the executions and tortures were not the only reality of lives there. Resistance against the clerical regime continued even in those torture chambers. Majority of the prisoners had remained defiant.

In the mid-1980s, the United Nations Commission on Human Rights was pressing Iran to open its prisons to international scrutiny. The mullahs had a major problem on their hand: the prisons were filled with tens of thousands of political prisoners whom the regime had no intention of releasing. Allowing free UN access to these prisoners was out of the question. They were the living testament to the clerics' barbarism and inhumanity.

The murderous patriarch Ayatollah Khomeini came up with a solution: Massacre them all. In a *fatwa* in summer of 1988, Khomeini ordered the following:

*"Those who are in prisons throughout the country and remain committed to their support for the [Mujahedeen], are waging war on God and are condemned to execution.... Destroy the enemies of Islam immediately. As regards the cases, use whichever criterion that speeds up the implementation of the [execution] verdict."*

A special body, dubbed by the prisoners as the "Death Commission" carried out the fatwa. During kangaroo hearings, prisoners were asked about their ideological and political allegiances. If there were even a slight hint of sympathy with the opposition, especially toward the Mujahedeen, the prisoner would be sentenced to death.

The state-run daily *Iran News*, referring to the massacre, wrote on April 9, 2000, "Officials were astonished to see that these prisoners were still insisting on fighting the state and supporting the Mujahedeen."

According to testimony of Kamal Afkhami Ardekani, a former senior prison official in the notorious Evin prison, for most of July and August 1988, prisoners, including juveniles, were loaded on three forklift trucks, lifted to six cranes and hanged in groups of five or six at a time in half-hour intervals from 7:30 am to 5:00 pm every day. Within a few months, tens of thousands of political prisoners were executed.

The scale of massacre was so horrifying that Khomeini's designated successor, Grand Ayatollah Hussein Ali Montazeri, complained to his mentor in a July 1988 letter:

*"... As you presumably will insist on your decree, at least order that women not be executed, especially pregnant women. Ultimately, the execution of several thousand people in several days will not have positive repercussions and is not without mistakes."*

By any measure, the massacre of 1988 constitutes a crime against humanity. The current leadership of the clerical regime, including Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, former president Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani, President Mohammad Khatami, current Minister of Intelligence Ali Younessi, and many others were actively involved in this hideous crime.

With these killings, the mullahs sought to extinguish the flames of resistance against their theocracy. They have not succeeded, but their reign of terror continues. At home, the mullahs murder, torture, rape and maim to silence dissent. Abroad, they offer lucrative business deals to their trade partners or threaten them with terrorism, to coerce them into blacklisting opposition groups.

We should not be an unwitting accomplice to Tehran's efforts. To the contrary, we must lift all diplomatic or political restrictions placed on anti-fundamentalist Iranian opposition groups to enable them to carry their fight to the mullahs. Doing so, is in the recognition of the same spirit of resistance for which tens of thousands of Iranians gave their lives in the summer of 1988.

The US Alliance for Democratic Iran (USADI), is an independent, non-profit organization, which aims to advance a US policy on Iran that will benefit America's interests, through supporting Iranian people's aspirations for a democratic, secular, and peaceful government, free of tyranny, fundamentalism, weapons of mass destruction, and terrorism. The USADI is not affiliated with any government agencies, political groups or parties.

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## Iran Focus September 30, 2004

### Young victims of Iran quake being sold to human traffickers

Iran, Bam, Sep. 30 – Nine months after a devastating earthquake that left behind over 50,000 people dead and more than 90,000 homeless, a new specter is haunting the wretched survivors of that natural disaster. Human trafficking has become a booming business, as orphaned girls and the children of impoverished families are being picked up by organized crime gangs.

Girls and single women between the ages of 15 and 25 were the biggest victims of the tremor in Bam. Back in December and January, foreign aid workers complained that the Iranian authorities were discriminating against women and girls, giving men priority in the distribution of aid and medical supplies.

A social worker who has spent the past few months tending to bereaved families said: "At present the number of old men marrying girls under the age of 20 has soared. Many girls are sold in 'a black market'. Many more are forced to marry men 3 or 4 times their age out of poverty. It is the only way that they can sustain their families."

Another aid worker said the government has been acting inadequately to re-designate people. He said that at present the population in central Bam has more than doubled since the earthquake struck, as people in nearby villages have nowhere else to turn to for help.

The relief worker, who wished to remain anonymous out of fear of persecution, said: "Drug addiction has rapidly spread everywhere, especially among young girls and women. The government hasn't taken any action. Something needs to be done about this."

Many social obstacles remain, and life has not come back to normal in the city of Bam. Many who have lost their loved ones, including small children say that there is no one there to help them.

The regime's state-run press quoted Dr. Mostafa Tabrizi, a respected psychiatrist in Bam, as saying: "The trauma left on the young women is increased because of a lack of healthy social environment. The physical pain that they also have to bear also adds to their stress."

The aftermath of the earthquake has provided fertile grounds for human traffickers. Often working in collusion with corrupt local officials or, in the case of larger organized crime gangs, having ties to influential figures in Tehran, the traffickers work with impunity as they spot the girls and women in Bam and the outlying towns and villages and take them away to other cities, to be sold to wealthy old men looking for young concubines, or sent abroad, often to the Arab states of the Persian Gulf.

## Reuters September 24, 2004

### Even EU Now is Losing Patience with Tehran over Nukes

VIENNA -- European countries trying to persuade Iran to abandon its uranium enrichment program are losing patience with Tehran and may soon be ready to support U.S. demands for tougher action, diplomats say.

One western diplomat close to the negotiations between Britain, France and Germany and Iran said it was very likely Iran's nuclear program would be referred to the U.N. Security Council in November.

Iran, defying calls by the U.N. nuclear watchdog, said earlier this week it had begun processing raw uranium to prepare it for enrichment -- a process that can be used to develop nuclear bombs.

"It looks like Iran is going to the Security Council," said the diplomat, who declined to be named. "People now are discussing what will happen when it goes there."

The European trio has been trying for over a year to persuade Iran to abandon its enrichment program, resisting U.S. calls for tougher action to isolate and punish Tehran. "They know what they have to do," one European diplomat said. "They need to implement a full suspension or they know what will happen."

French Foreign Minister Michel Barnier said in New York, where he is attending UN General Assembly session that the Europeans were growing impatient with Tehran.

"If we are not reassured ... then the matter will be brought before the Security Council," he told reporters, adding that the Europeans were still hoping Iran would begin co-operating.

Diplomats and intelligence officials have told Reuters in recent interviews that once Iran has enough uranium feed material for its centrifuges, it will begin enriching it.

Negotiations between the EU trio and Iran will continue in the hope that Tehran will agree to a full freeze, but diplomats close to the talks said this is unlikely. Another diplomat close to the IAEA said that it would be "very Iranian" if Tehran agreed to a suspension right before an IAEA board meeting due to discuss Iran on November 25.