

# (Video) Iran: Crackdowns, a desperate response to growing unrest

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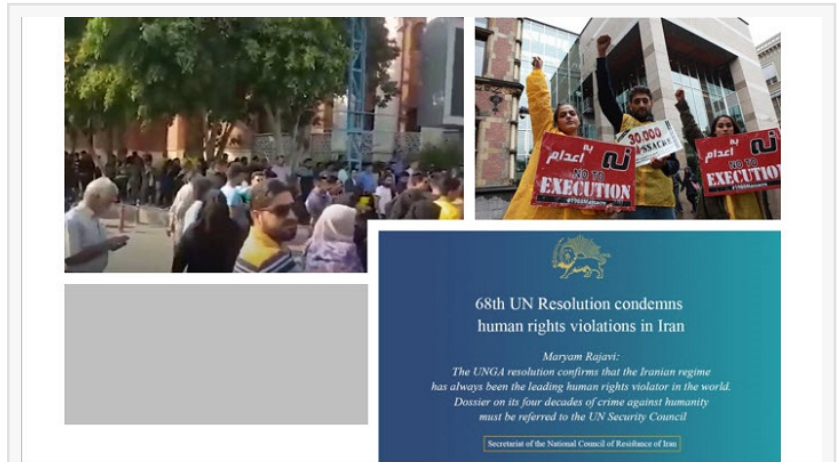
PARIS, FRANCE, January 18, 2022 /EINPresswire.com/ -- On January 5, a statue of the eliminated Quds Force Commander Qassem Soleimani was set on fire, by Resistance Units affiliated with the country’s leading opposition group, [the People’s Mojahedin Organization of Iran \(PMOI/MEK\)](#).

The burning of Soleimani’s statue in Shahr-e Kord came just hours after it had been unveiled, and it was only the latest example of a protest and defiance by a restive society Iran that longs for change. Other images and banners of Soleimani are continuously being set on fire in cities across Iran.

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Recent and ongoing reprisals show that the regime is taking stronger actions to disrupt the MEK network and punish any public dissent. The international community must not allow this to happen.”

NCRI



There have been numerous reports, since the beginning of January, of the Iranian regime’s authorities cracking down on opposition activists and political prisoners. Nevertheless, there have been persistent signs of public unrest.

In November 2019, residents of nearly 200 Iranian cities and towns took part in an uprising by chanting slogans like “death to the dictator” and highlighting the growth in public support for regime change. In response, regime authorities shot and killed some 1,500 people in a matter of days.

For months afterward, the Iranian judiciary carried out a campaign of systematic torture against those detained. At the time, the judiciary was led by Ebrahim Raisi, notoriously known for having played a leading role in the massacre of 30,000 political prisoners during the summer

of 1988. Less than two years after the uprising, Raisi was installed as the new president, in a

move that many observers interpreted as a reward for his decades of service to the regime's repression of dissent.

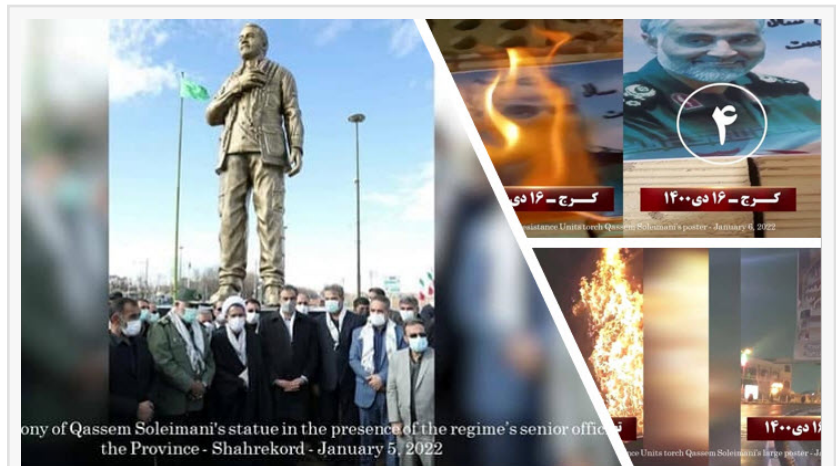
Many of those same observers anticipated that Raisi's ascension to the presidency would accelerate a pattern of crackdowns that started in the wake of an uprising in January 2018 and continued in the wake of the November 2019 uprising, the protests over the Flight 752 disaster, and beyond. January's reports of arbitrary abuse and harassment substantiate those predictions, as does the fact that the Iranian regime already, the leading per capita executioner of Iranian citizens, has sharply stepped up executions in the immediate aftermath of Raisi's appointment.

The Iranian regime finished the year 2021 with an average of at least one execution per day and estimates for the total number of state-sanctioned killings are likely to further increase as information continues trickling into the media from Iranian activist networks.

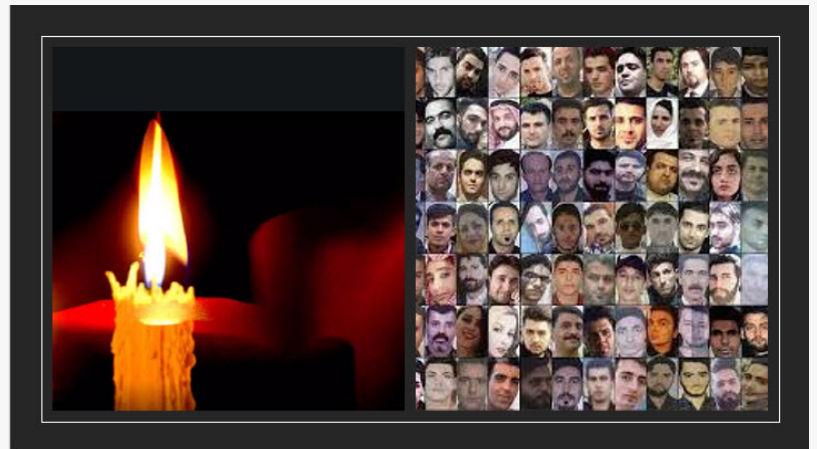
On January 9, an activist by the name of Mohammad Javad Vafaei became the first known political prisoner to receive the death penalty in 2022. The sentence was handed down after he had already spent nearly two years in detention without a conviction, after being accused of supporting the MEK, and "corruption on earth".

A few days before Vafaei's conviction, and just one day after the Soleimani statue was burned, three female activists were sentenced to prison terms of between two and five years charged with "conspiracy to act against national security" through cooperation with the MEK. The youngest of these women is 59 years old and the oldest is 69, and all three previously spent time in prison because of their youth activism for the MEK during the 1980s.

Even short periods of detention in Iran can be life-threatening for people of advanced age or



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poor health, as illustrated by recent reports regarding the plight of another political prisoner, Mehdi Salehi Ghaleh Shahrokhi. The 38-year-old participant in the January 2018 uprising suffered the dual effects of a heart condition and a head wound he incurred at the time of his arrest but was only taken to the prison infirmary last month, following lengthy delays.

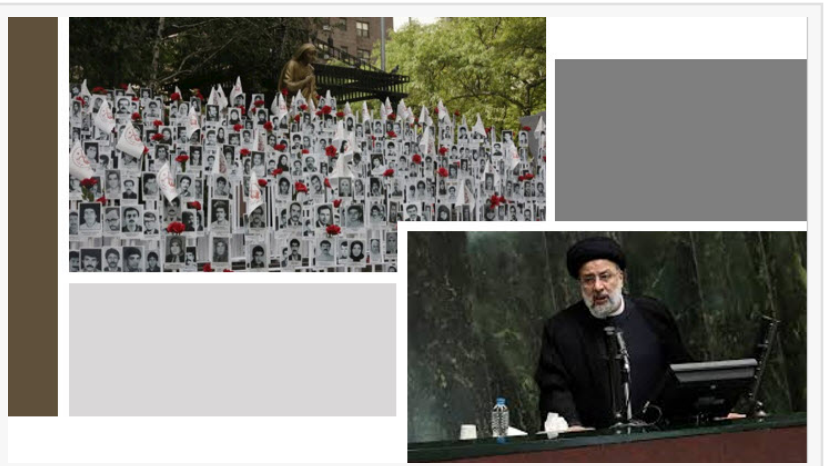
At last report, Shahrokhi was in a medically-induced coma following a stroke caused by the injection of the wrong medication. Nevertheless, he remains under heavy guard, and his family has been barred from visiting him.

Such mistreatment is typical of political prisoners and its effects can even be fatal.

Last March, another political prisoner named Leila Hosseinzadeh was granted release after serving two and a half years of what was initially a six-year sentence, because medical examination determined that the conditions in Evin Prison could put her life at risk. But in the midst of the current crackdown, she was summoned to begin serving a five-year sentence for “assembly and collusion against national security,” based on her organization of a small student gathering in support of yet another political prisoner.

Hosseinzadeh’s return to Evin Prison demonstrates the regime’s capacity for killing political detainees through abuse and the exploitation of health risks. This practice can be expected to accelerate right alongside the rate of formal executions, as authorities led by Ebrahim Raisi continue cracking down on anti-government activism, particularly that which is associated with the MEK.

The MEK was the prime target of the “death commission” of which Raisi was a member, during



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Many observers anticipated that Raisi’s ascension to the presidency would accelerate a pattern of crackdowns that started in the wake of an uprising in January 2018 and, November 2019 uprising, the protests over the Flight 752 disaster, and beyond.

the 1988 massacre. The Organization was widely credited with popularizing anti-government slogans and facilitating the nationwide uprisings in both 2018 and 2019. The MEK's Resistance Units also burned dozens of images of Soleimani in the weeks prior to the unveiling of his statue in Shahr-e Kord.

Recent and ongoing reprisals show that the regime is taking stronger actions to try to disrupt the MEK network and punish any public dissent. The international community must not stand idly by and allow this to happen.



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Instead, the United Nations and its leading member states must exert pressure on the Iranian regime over its past human rights abuses in order to demonstrate that more of the same will not be tolerated, least of all at a time when growing numbers of Iranian citizens are pushing for freedom and democracy in their homeland. The culture of impunity must end.

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