‘THEY SHOT OUR CHILDREN’

KILLINGS OF MINORS IN IRAN’S 2019 NOVEMBER PROTESTS

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL

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Cover photo: *Collage of photographs of some of the children killed by Iran's security forces during the protests of November 2019 © Amnesty International*

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1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

> **“I went through such difficulties to raise my child. I had high hopes and dreams for him. It was his birthday just two months ago. I just have one wish: I do not want the injustice that took away my child to go unpunished. And not just my child, but all the children whose blood has been spilled. I want the whole world to hear: I have lost my beloved, my everything.”**
>
> Relative of a child killed by Iran’s security forces during the protests of November 2019,

Amnesty International has uncovered evidence that at least 23 children were killed by Iranian security forces in the nationwide protests that took place between 15 and 19 November 2019. The children killed include 22 boys, aged between 12 and 17, and a girl reportedly aged between eight and 12.

These deaths occurred during the repression of protests that erupted across Iran on 15 November 2019 following a sudden government announcement about a fuel price hike. According to credible reports compiled by Amnesty International, at least 304 people were killed, and thousands injured between 15 and 19 November.

At least 22 of the children were shot dead by Iranian security forces unlawfully firing live ammunition at unarmed protesters and bystanders, according to the findings. In one child’s case, there are conflicting reports on the cause of death, with one referring to fatal head injuries sustained by beatings by security forces and another referring to the firing of metal pellets at the victim’s face from a close distance.

In 10 cases, Amnesty International learned from the description of injuries on the death or burial certificates it reviewed or information it received from credible sources that the deaths occurred as a result of gunshots to the head or torso – indicating that the security forces were shooting to kill. In two of the cases, burial certificates set out in detail the devastating impact on the children’s bodies. One cited injuries including bleeding, a crushed brain and a shattered skull. The other indicated that the cause of the death was extensive internal bleeding and a pierced heart and lung.

Twelve of the 23 deaths recorded by Amnesty International took place on 16 November, a further eight on 17 November and three on 18 November. The protests had started on 15 November. The 23 children are recorded as having been killed in 13 cities in six provinces across the country (Esfahan, Fars, Kermanshah, Khuzestan, Kurdistan and Tehran), reflecting the widespread nature of the bloody crackdown.

Amnesty International has identified videos broadcast by state TV which specifically suggest that two of the victims were killed by non-state actors. More generally, the Iranian authorities have made statements or produced programmes on state TV which attribute responsibility for the majority of the killings in the November protests to armed “rioters” working for “enemies” of the Islamic Republic of Iran. However,

extensive video footage analysed by Amnesty International's Digital Verification Corps and numerous eyewitness accounts obtained by the organization provide clear evidence that those using firearms against unarmed protesters and bystanders belonged to Iran's security forces.

On 25 February, Amnesty International wrote to Iran's Minister of Interior Abdolreza Rahmani Fazli to provide him with the list of the names of the 23 children recorded as killed, along with their ages and places of death, and to seek the authorities' comments on the circumstances of their death. As of 3 March, the organization had received no response.

Consistent with a long-standing pattern of systematic impunity, the Iranian authorities have failed to conduct independent and impartial investigations into the killings of protesters and bystanders, including these children, in the November protests and ensure that those suspected of ordering and carrying them out are prosecuted in fair trials. In fact, the authorities have sought to enforce impunity and silence by orchestrating a ruthless campaign of harassment to intimidate families and prevent them from speaking out.

Given the gravity of the violations perpetrated and the systematic impunity prevailing in Iran, Amnesty International has called on member states of the UN Human Rights Council to urgently mandate an inquiry into the unlawful use of lethal force by Iranian security forces against unarmed protesters and bystanders, including children, between 15 and 19 November 2019.

2. METHODOLOGY AND BACKGROUND

2.1 METHODOLOGY

In the context of its ongoing investigation into the repression of protests in November 2019, Amnesty International has researched cases of individuals who were killed and reported to have been under the age of 18 at that time.

It obtained information from credible sources indicating that 23 individuals were under the age of 18 at the time of their death. In 10 cases, Amnesty International spoke directly to sources impacted by the deaths, including relatives, neighbours, friends, acquaintances and eyewitnesses. In the remaining cases, the information was received from human rights activists and journalists based in or outside Iran. In order to ascertain the credibility and reliability of the information received from human rights activists and journalists, Amnesty International interviewed them about their sources of information, which typically included relatives, neighbours, friends, acquaintances and eyewitnesses. The organization then cross-checked the information. Amnesty International is continuing its efforts to locate and speak to primary sources on these cases and/or obtain documentary evidence.

In four cases, Amnesty International was able to obtain evidence such as death and burial certificates and pictures of gravestones confirming the dates of birth and death of the individual concerned. In two cases, it was able to obtain funeral posters indicating that the deceased was an adolescent. Death and burial certificates in Iran record the deceased's dates of birth and death. The dates of birth and death recorded on the gravestone of the deceased generally reflect the information recorded in their death and burial certificates. Families are not authorized to bury their loved ones and install gravestones until a burial certificate has been issued by the Legal Medicine Organization of Iran, a state forensic institute working under the supervision of the judiciary.

As part of its ongoing investigation into the unlawful use of lethal force during the protests, Amnesty International analysed extensive video footage, verified by its Digital Verification Corps, which showed Iranian security forces using firearms against unarmed protesters and bystanders.

It also reviewed official statements published by state-affiliated media outlets in Iran and searched for and analysed videos that were broadcast by the Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting (IRIB) corporation in relation to the protests of November 2019. These videos included two interviews from December 2019 which the IRIB conducted with the families of two named children: Sasan Eydivandi and Amirreza Abdollahi.

On 25 February, Amnesty International wrote to Iran's Minister of Interior Abdolreza Rahmani Fazli to provide him with the list of the names of the 23 children recorded as killed, along with their ages and places of death, and to seek the authorities' comments on the circumstances of their death. As of 3 March, the organization had received no response.

2.2 BACKGROUND

On 15 November 2019, following a sudden announcement by the government about a significant overnight rise in the price of fuel, tens of thousands of people across Iran took to the streets in protest. In response, Iranian security forces used unlawful and excessive lethal force against unarmed protesters and bystanders to crush the protests.[1] According to credible reports compiled by Amnesty International, at least 304 people were killed, and thousands injured between 15 and 19 November. During this time, the authorities implemented a near-total internet shutdown to stop people inside Iran from being able to share information about these crimes with the rest of the world. During and following the protests, the Iranian authorities also arbitrarily detained thousands of detainees and subjected some to enforced disappearance, torture and other ill-treatment.[2]

[1] Amnesty International, *Iran: More than 100 protesters believed to be killed as top officials give green light to crush protests*, 19 November 2019, www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2019/11/iran-more-than-100-protesters-believed-to-be-killed-as-top-officials-give-green-light-to-crush-protests/

[2] Amnesty International, *Iran: Thousands arbitrarily detained and at risk of torture in chilling post-protest crackdown*, 16 December 2019, www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2019/12/iran-thousands-arbitrarily-detained-and-at-risk-of-torture-in-chilling-post-protest-crackdown/

3. CHILDREN KILLED

> **"They [the authorities] shot our children and now they are telling us, 'They are gone and you have to be silent.' How and why could a child of this age fall victim to this [brutality]? There is no law and justice in this country. There is nobody to answer to us for our children's death."**
>
> Relative of a child killed by Iran's security forces during the protests of November 2019

3.1 OVERVIEW

Amnesty International has uncovered evidence that at least 23 children were killed by Iranian security forces in the nationwide protests in November last year. The children killed include 22 boys, aged between 12 and 17, and a girl reportedly aged between eight and 12.

At least 22 of the children were shot dead by Iranian security forces unlawfully firing live ammunition at unarmed protesters and bystanders, according to the findings. In one child's case, there are conflicting reports on the cause of death, with one referring to fatal head injuries sustained by beatings by security forces and another referring to the firing of metal pellets at the victim's face from a close distance.

In 10 cases, Amnesty International learned from the description of injuries on the death or burial certificates it reviewed or information it received from credible sources that the deaths occurred as a result of gunshots to the head or torso – indicating that the security forces were shooting to kill.

In two of the cases, burial certificates set out in detail the devastating impact on the children's bodies. One cited injuries including bleeding, a crushed brain and a shattered skull. The other indicated that the cause of the death was extensive internal bleeding and a pierced heart and lung.

Twelve of the 23 deaths recorded by Amnesty International took place on 16 November, a further eight on 17 November and three on 18 November. The 23 children are recorded as having been killed in 13 cities in six provinces across the country (Esfahan, Fars, Kermanshah, Khuzestan, Kurdistan and Tehran), reflecting the widespread nature of the crackdown.

Amnesty International's information on the 23 children, including their names, pictures and ages, and the places and circumstances of their deaths are summarized in the Appendix.

3.2 AGES OF CHILDREN KILLED

The youngest victims recorded by Amnesty International were **Sayed Ali Mousavi**, aged 12, from Ramhormoz, Khuzestan province; **Ali Ghazlavi**, aged 12, from Khorramshahr, Khorramshahr province;

Amirreza Abdollahi, aged 13, from Shahriar, Tehran province; and a girl, reportedly aged between eight and 12, from Mahshahr, Khuzestan province, whose last name is reported as Chan'ani but whose first name remains unknown.

Amnesty International was able to confirm the age of Sayed Ali Mousavi by obtaining a picture of his gravestone, which noted his dates of birth and death. The age of Amirreza Abdollahi was revealed by the victim's father in an interview that was aired by the IRIB in December 2019. In the remaining two cases, the information was received from a number of local residents in Mahshahr and Khorramshahr. However, the organization has not yet been able to obtain documentary evidence confirming their names and ages.

SAYED ALI MOUSAVI

Gravestone of Sayed Ali Mousavi recording that he was born on 8 January 2007 and that he died on 16 November 2019 © Private

Sayed Ali Mousavi was fatally shot in his chest by Iranian security forces during a protest in the city of Ramhormoz, Khuzestan province, on 16 November 2019, according to an informed source interviewed by Amnesty International. The source said that Sayed Ali Mousavi was shot on his way back from school, which is located near the headquarters of the governor of the county of Ramhormoz, where the protests were taking place. According to the dates of birth and death provided on his gravestone, Sayed Ali Mousavi was only 12 years old.

The information written on the gravestone of Sayed Ali Mousavi indicates that the authorities have declared Sayed Ali Mousavi a "martyr" (*shaheed*). This designation has been granted to some of those killed during the November 2019 protests. It generally means that the authorities have acknowledged that the deceased was killed during the protests, but claimed that he was either shot accidently by security forces or that armed "rioters" working for "enemies" of the Islamic Republic of Iran are responsible for the killing. Amnesty International is not aware which explanation has been offered by the authorities in the case of Sayed Ali Mousavi.

Amnesty International has not to date located any video showing non-state actors firing live ammunition at unarmed people during the November 2019 protests. Eyewitness accounts obtained consistently note that those using firearms against unarmed protesters and bystanders belonged to Iran's security forces, including the special forces of Iran's police, plain-clothes paramilitary Basij agents and the Revolutionary Guards.

AMIRREZA ABDOLLAHI

A screenshot taken by Amnesty International from an interview with Amirreza Abdollahi's father, aired by the IRIB around mid-December 2019

Amirreza Abdollahi was fatally shot on 16 November 2019 during a protest in the county of Shahriar in Tehran province.

In a propaganda video aired by the IRIB in mid-December 2019, Amirreza Abdollahi's father was shown saying that his son was only 13 years old and he had left the house for some shopping when he was caught in the protests and shot dead. His father added that Amirreza Abdollahi had not taken part in the protests. However, he was not shown expanding on the circumstances of his son's death during the interview.

The Iranian authorities have suggested that Amirreza Abdollahi was killed by unidentified armed "rioters" working for "enemies" of the Islamic Republic of Iran. On 12 December 2019, the IRIB showed the secretary general of Iran's Supreme National Security Council, Ali Shamkhani, visiting and talking to the family of Amirreza Abdollahi. During the visit, he said: "No one objects to people raising their criticisms in different ways. However, sadly, some foreign and opportunistic agents, who are against the people of Iran and the independence of the country, took advantage of people's protests."[3]

Ali Shamkhani, the secretary general of Iran's Supreme National Security Council (second from right), visiting the family of Amirreza Abdollahi in December 2019 © IRNA

In a media interview following this visit, Ali Shamkhani said that "more than 85% of the victims of the recent incidents in Tehran province had not attended any protest and were killed in a suspicious manner with firearms and [other] weapons not belonging to state organs." He added that "this proves that Iran's enemies were involved in a killing project".[4]

However, extensive video footage analysed by Amnesty International's Digital Verification Corps and numerous eyewitness accounts obtained by Amnesty International provide clear evidence that, across the country, including in Tehran province, those using firearms against unarmed protesters and bystanders belonged to Iran's security forces, including the special forces of Iran's police, plain-clothes paramilitary Basij agents and the Revolutionary Guards.

[3] The interview is available in Persian at the following link: www.aparat.com/v/R183j
[4] Islamic Republic News Agency, "Shamkhani visited the families of the victims of recent incidents" (in Persian), 12 December 2019, www.irna.ir/news/83591316; Khabar Online, "New details about those killed in November 2019 protests in the counties of Tehran province" (in Persian), 12 December 2019, www.khabaronline.ir/news/1330444

The remaining 19 child deaths during the protests were of children aged between 15 and 17. For three of these cases, those of **Mohammad Dastankhah**, **Alireza Nouri** and **Sasan Eydivandi**, Amnesty International was able to obtain photographs of gravestones confirming their ages.

In two other cases, those of **Hessam Baranirad** and **Amirhossein Davoudvand**, in addition to receiving information from informed sources, Amnesty International obtained funeral posters indicating that they were adolescents.

In the remaining 14 cases, Amnesty International received its information from credible sources indicating the age of the children. The organization is continuing its efforts to access documentary evidence of the ages of these victims.

MOHAMMAD DASTANKHAH

Gravestone of Mohammad Dastankhah recording that he was born on 10 August 2004 and that he died on 16 November 2019 © Private

Mohammad Dastankhah © Private

Mohammad Dastankhah was shot in the heart on 16 November during a protest in the city of Sadra, Fars province. According to the dates of birth and death documented on his death and burial certificates, which are also recorded on his gravestone, he was 15 years old.

According to an informed source interviewed by Amnesty International, Mohammad Dastankhah was shot on his way back from school by security forces stationed on the rooftop of the office of the Basij in Sadra. Eyewitness accounts and video footage verified by Amnesty International's Digital Verification Corps confirm that, on 16 November, security forces shot at unarmed protesters and bystanders with live ammunition from this location.

The injuries cited on the burial certificate of Mohammad Dastankhah include extensive internal bleeding and a pierced heart and lung. The official certificate states, in a phrase consisting of only a few words, that these injuries resulted from gunshot wounds; however, they do not provide any details on the number and type of bullets that killed Mohammad Dastankhah.

ALIREZA NOURI

Gravestone of Alireza Nouri recording that he was born on 16 September 2002 and that he died on 17 November 2019 © Private

Alireza Nouri © Private

Alireza Nouri was shot in the head on 17 November during a protest in the city of Shahriar, Tehran province. According to the dates of birth and death documented on his death and burial certificates, which are also recorded on his gravestone, he was 17 years old.

The injuries cited on his burial certificate include bleeding, a crushed brain and a shattered skull. The official certificate briefly states, in a phrase consisting of only a few words, that the injuries resulted from "a speedy object hitting the head"; however, they do not specify that the object was one or several bullets discharged from a firearm. An informed source told Amnesty International that the severe injuries seen on Alireza Nouri's body were consistent with gunshot wounds and indicated that he had been shot at a close distance.

SASAN EYDIVANDI

Gravestone of Sasan Eydivandi recording that he was born on 9 March 2002 and that he died on 17 November 2019 © Private

Sasan Eydivandi © Private

Sasan Eydivandi was shot in the heart by Iran's security forces on 17 November 2019 during a protest in the area of Yazdanshahr near the city of Najafabad in Esfahan province, according to an informed source

interviewed by Amnesty International. The dates of birth and death recorded on his gravestone confirm that he was 17 years old.

A propaganda video aired by the IRIB in late December 2019 stated that Sasan Eydivandi was a bystander who was killed on his way back from school "in a suspicious manner", suggesting that Iran's security forces were not the ones responsible for shooting him.

However, eyewitness accounts from Esfahan province confirm that those firing live ammunition at unarmed protesters and bystanders on 16 and 17 November 2019 all belonged to Iranian security forces, including Revolutionary Guards and Basij.

According to an informed source interviewed by Amnesty International, Iranian security and intelligence officials forced Sasan Eydivandi's family to bury him late at night in a rushed manner and without an independent autopsy; this indicates that the authorities were seeking to suppress the truth about the causes and circumstances of Sasan Eydivandi's death.

A screenshot taken by Amnesty International from an interview with Sasan Eydivandi's father, aired on Iran's state TV in late December 2019

The propaganda video aired by the IRIB in December 2019 included a brief interview with Sasan Eydivandi's father in which he said that his son had not taken part in the protests and that "he was not the type to get involved in riots".

Amnesty International is concerned that this interview may have been conducted in circumstances of a coercive nature and included without the father's consent in the broader video package, which distorted the causes and circumstances of the killings in the November 2019 protests. The IRIB has a long-standing record of producing and broadcasting, in co-operation with Iran's intelligence and security bodies, coerced statements from victims of human rights violations and their families and including them in propaganda videos that distort the reality of the human rights violations perpetrated by the authorities or seek to justify them.

AMIRHOSSEIN DAVOUDVAND

Funeral poster of Amirhossein Davoudvand referring to him as an "adolescent" (nojavan) *© Private*

Amnesty International received information from two informed sources that, on the same day that Sasan Eydivandi (see above) was killed, his classmate Amirhossein Davoudvand, also aged 17, was fatally shot by Iran's security forces in the area of Yazdanshahr near the city of Najafabad in Esfahan province.

Amnesty International has not been able to obtain any additional information on the circumstances of Amirhossein Davoudvand's death or access documentation providing his exact age.

However, the funeral poster of the victim describes him as being an "adolescent" *(nojavan)* at the time of his death.

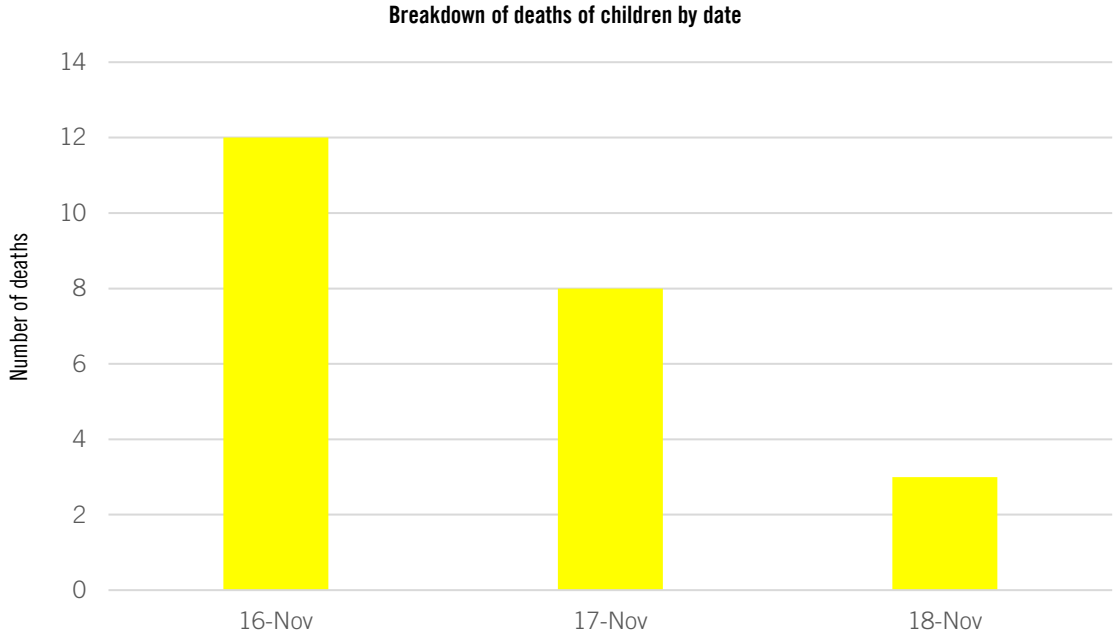
HESSAM BARANIRAD

Funeral poster of Hessam Baranirad referring to him as an "adolescent" (nojavan) *© Private*

Hessam Baranirad was shot in the head on 16 November 2019 during a protest in the city of Kermanshah, Kermanshah province, according to Hengaw Organization for Human Rights, a Kurdish human rights group which Amnesty International understands received its information from an informed source inside Iran. Amnesty International was not able to speak to the source directly due to security concerns. The funeral poster of Hessam Baranirad describes him as being an "adolescent" *(nojavan)* at the time of his death.

3.3 GEOGRAPHIC SPREAD AND TIME FRAME OF KILLINGS

Twelve of the 23 deaths recorded by Amnesty International took place on 16 November, a further eight on 17 November and three on 18 November. The protests had started on 15 November. The fact that the vast majority of the children's deaths took place over just two days – the second and third of the protests – adds to the evidence already documented by Amnesty International that Iranian security forces went on a killing spree to quash dissent at any cost.



The 23 children are recorded as having been killed in 13 cities in six provinces across the country (Esfahan, Fars, Kermanshah, Khuzestan, Kurdistan and Tehran), reflecting the widespread nature of the crackdown.

Below is a breakdown, by city and province, of the deaths of children recorded so far by Amnesty International:

City or county, Province	Number of children killed
Ahvaz, Khuzestan	2
Baharestan, Tehran	2
Esfahan, Esfahan	1
Eslam Shahr, Tehran	1
Kermanshah, Kermanshah	2
Khorramshahr, Khuzestan	3
Mahshahr, Khuzestan	3
Ramhormoz, Khuzestan	1
Robatkarim, Tehran	1
Sadra, Fars	2

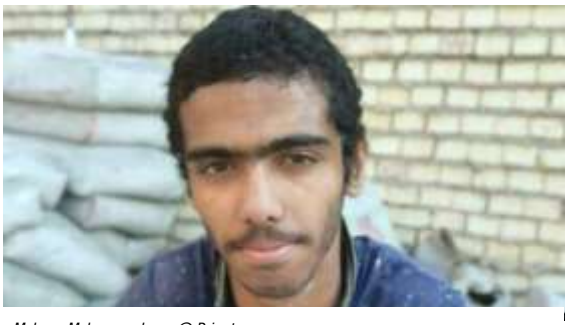
Sanandaj, Kurdistan	1
Shahriar, Tehran	2
Yazdanshahr, Esfahan	2
TOTAL	23

3.4 CAUSES AND CIRCUMSTANCES OF DEATHS

Evidence uncovered by Amnesty International indicates that at least 22 of the 23 children killed were shot dead by Iranian security forces unlawfully firing live ammunition at unarmed protesters and bystanders. In 10 cases, Amnesty International learned from the description of injuries on the death or burial certificates it reviewed or information it received from credible sources that the deaths occurred as a result of gunshots to the head or torso – indicating that the security forces were shooting to kill. In the remaining 12 cases, Amnesty International did not have any information on where in their body the children were shot.

In one child's case, that of **Mohsen Mohammadpour** from Khorramshahr, Khuzestan province, Amnesty International received conflicting reports on the cause of death, with one referring to fatal head injuries sustained by beatings by security forces and another referring to the firing of metal pellets at the victim's face from a close distance.

MOHSEN MOHAMMADPOUR



Mohsen Mohammadpour © Private

Mohsen Mohammadpour's grave site © Private

Mohsen Mohammadpour was killed by Iran's security forces on 18 November 2019 during a protest in the city of Khorramshahr, Khuzestan province, according to an informed local source who had participated in the protests in Khorramshahr and was interviewed by Amnesty International.

The source told Amnesty International that he was not present at the scene of the incident, but that he was at the entrance of the hospital in Khorramshahr to which Mohsen Mohammadpour was taken on 18 November after suffering injuries. He said he learned then through a close friend hospitalized there at the same time that Mohsen Mohammadpour had suffered head injuries as a result of the actions of security forces.

Amnesty International has been provided with a video which shows Mohsen Mohammadpour lying motionless on the ground with his face covered in blood. While Amnesty International's Digital Verification Corps was not able to independently geolocate this video, it has confirmed that the video had not appeared online before 18 November 2019. The image is consistent with reports provided to Amnesty International, including that he sustained trauma to his nose and eyes.

Since November 2019, the Iranian authorities have made statements or produced programmes on state TV which attribute responsibility for the majority of the killings in the November protests to armed "rioters" working for "enemies" of the Islamic Republic of Iran. With respect to the cases of children killed, Amnesty International has identified videos broadcast by the IRIB which specifically suggest that two of the victims, Amirreza Abdollahi and Sasan Eydivandi, were killed by non-state actors (see the case boxes on these children above).

However, extensive video footage analysed by Amnesty International's Digital Verification Corps and numerous eyewitness accounts obtained by the organization provide clear evidence that those using firearms

against unarmed protesters and bystanders belonged to Iran's security forces, including the special forces of Iran's police, plain-clothes paramilitary Basij agents and the Revolutionary Guards. Amnesty International has not to date located any video showing non-state actors firing live ammunition at unarmed people during the November 2019 protests.

In addition to the 23 deaths of children that it has documented, Amnesty International is aware of another about which there are widespread allegations that it resulted from the use of lethal force by Iranian security forces. This is the case of a 14-year-old girl from Tehran named Nikta Esfandani who reportedly died on 16 November 2019. The Iranian authorities have explicitly rejected the allegations, first stating that she was killed by "armed rioters" and then claiming that she died from food poisoning. Amnesty International has not included this case in its list of children killed during the November 2019 protests as it has not been able to identify a credible source with first-hand information about her death. However, in its 25 February 2020 letter to Iran's Minister of Interior Abdolreza Rahmani Fazli, the organization asked that the authorities provide the results of the investigation into the death of Nikta Esfandani, including any autopsy records documenting the cause of death.

NIKTA ESFANDANI

Nikta Esfandani © Private

Reported grave site of Nikta Esfandani © Private

Nikta Esfandani, a 14-year old girl from Tehran, reportedly died on 16 November 2019.

On or around 26 November 2019, a human rights activist and journalist based outside Iran reported that Nikta Esfandani was shot in the head by Iran's security forces in Tehran. The activist added that Nikta Esfandani's family had searched for her body for three days and, after they had found her, were forced to bury her quickly, on 20 November 2019, without an independent autopsy. This report was quickly circulated on the internet and widely shared on Persian-language mainstream and social media. The coverage also triggered a reaction from a number of foreign politicians including an EU parliamentarian.

In a written exchange with Amnesty International in late November 2019, the activist reporting the news said that she had received her information from a close relative of Nikta Esfandani. However, due to security concerns, it was not possible for Amnesty International to access the source. In early December 2019, Amnesty International received a similar report from another individual who said they received their information through a classmate of their child, who was a relative of Nikta Esfandani. Finally, in February 2020, Amnesty International learned through a human rights defender that a relative of another victim buried in the same cemetery as Nikta Esfandani had information indicating that she was killed by Iran's security forces during the protests. However, Amnesty International has not yet succeed in its efforts to locate and speak to this source.

On or around 30 November 2019, state-affiliated media outlets in Iran reported that the IRIB had discovered that "armed rioters" were responsible for firing live ammunition at Nikta Esfandani. The reports were accompanied by a video clip showing an interview with a man who introduced himself as the father of Nikta Esfandani, Mohammad Reza Esfandani. In this interview, Mohammad Reza Esfandani confirmed that his daughter had died at the age of 14. However, he did not clarify the cause of her death; he was only shown objecting to the "politicization" of his daughter's death and saying that she was not involved in the November protests and was too young to hold any political views.

A screenshot of an interview with a man introduced as Nikta Esfandani's father, aired by the IRIB on or around 30 November 2019

Several days later, on 3 December 2019, the spokesperson of Iran's judiciary, Gholamhossein Esmaili, offered a new and completely different explanation about the case of Nikta Esfandani. He denied that Nikta Esfandani's death had resulted from the use of lethal force at all and stated that the Legal Medicine Organization of Iran had confirmed food poisoning as the cause of her death.[5] However, the authorities did not provide any forensic evidence to support this statement.

[5] Khabar Online, "Spokesperson of judiciary: Nikta Esfandani was not killed; the cause of death was food poisoning" (in Persian), 3 December 2019, www.khabaronline.ir/news/1327270

4. STATE COVER-UP AND HARASSMENT

> **“His death is an open wound in our hearts. We really don't know who to call out to for help. If we talk, the security forces will threaten and harass us. We cannot say anything here [in Iran]. The atmosphere here is suffocating but we want our child’s name to stay alive. There are many like him, and they, too, are like our own children. We don't want their names to be forgotten. We want the international community to know what they [the authorities and officials] are doing to us.”**
>
> Relative of a child killed by Iran’s security forces during the protests of November 2019

4.1 COVER-UP AND HARASSMENT

Relatives of the children killed with whom Amnesty International was able to speak described being subjected to harassment and intimidation, including surveillance and interrogations by intelligence and security officials. At least one family received veiled death threats against their surviving children and were warned that “something horrible” would also happen to them if they spoke out.

Such actions correspond with a broader phenomenon by which families of those killed in protests are being intimidated by the state from talking openly about their deaths. Most have reported being forced to sign undertakings that they would not speak to the media and would observe restrictions on how they commemorate their loved ones in order to be able to receive their bodies. In many cases, security and intelligence officials have placed the families under surveillance and attended their funeral and memorial ceremonies in order to ensure that the restrictions are observed.

Restrictions imposed on how families may commemorate their loved ones commonly included the following:

- tightly restricting the number of guests they may invite to funeral and memorial services;
- having their loved ones buried at irregular hours in the darkness of the night or early in the morning;

- prohibiting relatives from making public statements or giving speeches denouncing and disclosing the truth about the killings;
- limiting the number of funeral posters families may publish and prohibiting the inclusion of phrases or words indicating the causes and circumstances of death;
- prohibiting large memorial banners in public spaces; and
- prohibiting relatives from sharing images of victims and funeral posters on social media.

Families of children killed have also reported being forced to bury them quickly in the presence of security and intelligence officials, thereby preventing them from seeking an independent autopsy. Such conduct is part of a wider pattern of actions taken by officials against families of those killed in the November protests and appears aimed at suppressing incriminating evidence.

In general, Amnesty International's research has found that the families of those killed in protests have been consistently excluded from autopsies undertaken by the state forensic institute and denied access to information on the circumstances of their deaths, including the types of weapon and ammunition used.

In some cases, officials washed and prepared the bodies of victims for burial without notifying their families and then handed them the bodies, wrapped in shrouds, just minutes before the scheduled burial, denying families their right to wash and prepare their loves ones for burial in accordance with their own religious and cultural traditions. Amnesty International understands that in these cases, security and intelligence officials generally sought to prevent families from pulling back the shrouds to see the bodies of their loved ones. As a result, some families say they were not able to see the impact of injuries.

In some cases, the authorities have also refused to hand over the belongings of the victims to their relatives, including their phones, raising suspicions that they worried these contained evidence of unlawful actions by the state.

4.2 FAILURE TO CONDUCT INDEPENDENT INVESTIGATIONS

In early December 2019, President Hassan Rouhani announced that he had appointed a committee comprised of a legal deputy to the president and the interior and justice ministers "to investigate the situation of those harmed during recent events and distinguish between [the cases] of those who did not intend to riot and those who created terror and fear."

This committee does not meet the requirements of impartiality and independence provided under international law and standards, particularly considering that the minister of interior heads the National Security Council, which was the body responsible for deciding on and overseeing the security forces' response to the protests. According to the UN Principles on the Effective Prevention and Investigation of Extra-legal, Arbitrary and Summary Executions, members of a commission of inquiry "shall be chosen for their recognized impartiality, competence and independence as individuals. In particular, they shall be independent of any institution, agency or person that may be the subject of the inquiry."[6]

The committee also fails to meet the standards of transparency and effectiveness. The terms of reference guiding the committee's investigation and the procedures to be followed in the investigation are not known. The committee is not open to the scrutiny of the general public and is not bound to ensure the participation and protection of family members during the investigation. As far as Amnesty International is aware, the authorities have not instructed the committee to make public its findings, including their factual and legal basis.

In another example of impunity, the Iranian authorities have also refused to announce the death toll of those killed in the November 2019 protests.

Amnesty International understands that some families have filed a complaint with local police upon the advice of prosecution authorities and been told that, if a suspect is identified, they will be contacted. However, when seeking updates on the status on their complaints, they have simply been told that the complaint is in progress.

[6] Principles on the Effective Prevention and Investigation of Extra-legal, Arbitrary and Summary Executions, Principle 11.

Relatives of the children killed with whom Amnesty International was able to speak all expressed a strong desire to see the perpetrators charged, arrested, tried and sentenced to appropriate penalties. At the same time, they consistently told Amnesty International that they do not see any prospect of accessing truth, justice and reparations in the Iranian justice system as it lacks independence and impartiality and is under the influence of the very security and intelligence bodies that were involved in the deadly crackdown.

5. INTERNATIONAL LAW AND STANDARDS

The right not to be arbitrarily deprived of life is a fundamental and universally recognized right, protected in Article 6 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, to which Iran is a state party, among other provisions. Article 6 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, which has also been ratified by Iran, upholds the inherent right to life of every child and requires state parties "to ensure to the maximum extent possible the survival and development of the child." The UN Human Rights Committee has noted that "the duty to protect the right to life requires States parties to take special measures of protection towards persons in situation of vulnerability" and that this may include children.[7]

Police and security forces have a paramount duty to respect and protect the right to life. To this end, the UN Basic Principles on the Use of Force and Firearms provide that law enforcement officials shall not use firearms against persons except in self-defence or the defence of others against the imminent threat of death or serious injury, and that, in any event, "intentional lethal use of firearms may only be made when strictly unavoidable in order to protect life."[8] Furthermore, international law enforcement standards require that force of any kind may be used only when there are no other means available that are likely to achieve the legitimate objective.[9] If the force is unavoidable it must be no more than is necessary and proportionate to achieve the objective, and law enforcement must use it in a manner designed to minimise damage or injury, must respect and preserve human life and ensure medical aid are provided as soon as possible to those injured or affected.[10]

Deaths due to excessive or otherwise unlawful use of lethal force by law enforcement officials violate the right to life and can constitute extrajudicial executions.

The duty to investigate potentially unlawful deaths is an essential part of upholding the right to life.[11] The duty gives practical effect to the duties to respect and protect the right to life, and it promotes accountability and remedy where the substantive right may have been violated. States have a particular duty to investigate allegations of unlawful killings whenever police have used or appear to have used firearms or other potentially lethal force outside the immediate context of an armed conflict, for example, when live fire has been used against demonstrators.[12] A failure to respect the duty to investigate is a breach of the right to life. Investigations and prosecutions are essential to deter future violations and to promote accountability, justice, the rights to remedy and to the truth, and the rule of law.

According to the UN Minnesota Protocol on the Investigation of Potentially Unlawful Death, "investigations must, at a minimum, take all reasonable steps to: a) identify the victims; b) recover and preserve all material probative of the cause of death, the identity of perpetrators and the circumstances surrounding death; c) identify possible witnesses and obtain their evidence in relation to the death and the circumstances

[7] Human Rights Committee, General Comment 36, UN Doc. CCPR/C/GC/36, para. 23.
[8] Basic Principles on the Use of Force and Firearms by Law Enforcement Officials, adopted by the Eighth UN Congress on the Prevention of Crime and the Treatment of Offenders, Havana, Cuba, 27 August to 7 September 1990, Principle 9.
[9] Basic Principles on the Use of Force and Firearms by Law Enforcement Officials, Principle 4. See also UN Code of Conduct for Law Enforcement Officials, adopted by UN General Assembly resolution 34/169 of 17 December 1979, Article 3.
[10] Basic Principles on the Use of Force and Firearms by Law Enforcement Officials, Principle 5.
[11] Human Rights Committee, General Comment 36, UN Doc. CCPR/C/GC/36, para. 27.
[12] Human Rights Committee, General Comment 36, UN Doc. CCPR/C/GC/36, para. 29.

surrounding the death; d) determine the cause, manner, place and time of death, and all of the surrounding circumstances; and e) determine who was involved in the death and their individual responsibility for the death".[13]

The protocol states that participation of the family members is an important element of an effective investigation: "The state must enable all close relatives to participate effectively in the investigation, though without compromising its integrity. The relatives of the deceased must be sought… and informed of the progress of the investigation, during all its phases, in a timely manner… Family members should be protected from any ill-treatment, intimidation or sanction as a result of their participation in an investigation or their search for information concerning a deceased".[14]

[13] The Minnesota Protocol on the Investigation of Potentially Unlawful Death (2016): The Revised United Nations Manual on the Effective Prevention and Investigation of Extra-legal, Arbitrary and Summary Executions, para. 25.
[14] The Minnesota Protocol on the Investigation of Potentially Unlawful Death, paras 35-6.

6. RECOMMENDATIONS

In line with the findings outlined above, Amnesty International is calling on the Iranian authorities to take the following actions:

- Make public all available information and records regarding the number of those killed during the November 2019 protests; their identities and ages; and the location, cause and circumstances of their deaths.
- Ensure that prompt, thorough, independent and impartial criminal investigations are conducted into the killings of protesters and bystanders, including children, in the November 2019 protests and that those suspected of criminal responsibility are prosecuted in proceedings that conform to international fair trial standards and do not involve seeking or imposing the death penalty.
- Protect the families of victims and others seeking truth, justice and reparations on behalf of the victims against threats, harassment, intimidation, arbitrary arrests and detentions, and other reprisals by state authorities or other actors,

As the Iranian authorities are refusing to open independent, impartial and effective investigations, Amnesty International calls on member states of the UN Human Rights Council to take the following actions:

- Mandate an inquiry into the killings of protesters and bystanders, including children, in the November 2019 protests. The inquiry should report on its findings to the Human Rights Council, and its report should include recommendations on how to ensure Iran upholds its human rights obligations, including in the context of the protests and their aftermath, and on bringing those responsible for serious human rights violations to justice in fair trials.
- Call on Iran to give full and unrestricted access to those conducting this inquiry, as well as to UN officials, including special procedures mandates.

APPENDIX: LIST OF CHILDREN KILLED

The entries in this appendix provide a summary of the information gathered by Amnesty International on 23 children – 22 boys and one girl – who were killed between 16 and 18 November 2019 by Iran's security forces during the nationwide protests that erupted across the country. Each entry specifies the name of the victim and their age, date and place of death. Where available, the reported location of injuries leading to the child's death is also noted.

Due to security concerns, Amnesty International has not revealed the identities and profiles of the individuals with whom it has spoken. However, the organization has clarified that, in 10 cases, it received its information by interviewing sources directly impacted by the deaths, including relatives, neighbours, friends, acquaintances and eyewitnesses, and that in, the other 13 cases, the information was received from human rights activists and journalists based in or outside Iran. The first category of sources is indicated in the relevant entries by the phrase "individuals directly impacted" and the second category by the phrase "human rights activists and journalists". In order to ascertain the credibility and reliability of the information received from human rights activists and journalists, Amnesty International interviewed them about their sources of information, which typically included relatives, neighbours, friends, acquaintances and eyewitnesses. The organization then cross-checked the information.

All photographs have private copyright. In five cases, those of Ali Ali Dabiri, Ali Ghazlavi, Khaled Ghazlavi, Chan'ani and Mohammad Reza Ahmadi, Amnesty International has not yet been able to obtain a picture of the victim.

1. ABOLFAZL SHA'BANI

Age: 16 or 17

Location of death: Baharestan, Tehran province

Date of death: 16 November 2019

Source: Human rights activists and journalists

2. AHMAD KHAJEH ALBUALI

Age: 16 or 17

Location of death: Mahshahr, Khuzestan province

Date of death: 18 November 2019

Source: Individuals directly impacted

3. ALI DABIRI

Age: Under 18

Location of death: Sadra, Fars province

Date of death: 16 November 2019

Source: Human rights activists and journalists

4. ALI GHAZLAVI

Age: 12

Location of death: Khorramshahr, Khuzestan province

Date of death: 17 November 2019

Source: Human rights activists and journalists

5. ALIREZA NOURI

Age: 17

Location of death: Shahriar, Tehran province

Date of death: 17 November 2019

Source: Individuals directly impacted

6. ALIREZA OSTOVAN

Age: 17

Location of death: Robatkarim, Tehran province

Date of death: 16 November 2019

Source: Human rights activists and journalists

7. AMIRHOSSEIN DAVOUD VAND

Age: 16 or 17

Location of death: Yazdanshahr, Esfahan province

Date of death: 17 November 2019

Source: Individuals directly impacted

8. AMIRREZA ABDOLLAHI

Age: 13

Location of death: Shahriar, Tehran province

Date of death: 16 November 2019

Source: Individuals directly impacted

9. ARASH KAHZADI

Age: 16

Location of death: Eslamshahr, Tehran province

Date of death: 18 November 2019

Source: Human rights activists and journalists

10. ARMIN GHADERI

Age: 15

Location of death: Kermanshah, Kermanshah province

Date of death: 16 November 2019

Source: Human rights activists and journalists

11. CHAN'ANI (FIRST NAME UNKNOWN)

Age: 8-12

Location of death: Mahshahr, Khuzestan province

Date of death: 18 November 2019

Source: Human rights activists and journalists

12. HAMZEH ALBEREIHI

Age: 17

Location of death: Ahvaz, Khuzestan province

Date of death: 16 November 2019

Source: Human rights activists and journalists

13. HESSAM BARANIRAD

Age: 17

Location of death: Kermanshah, Kermanshah province

Date of death: 16 November 2019

Source: Human rights activists and journalists

14. KHALED GHAZLAVI

Age: 16

Location of death: Khorramhshahr, Khuzestan province

Date of death: 16 November 2019

Source: Human rights activists and journalists

15. MEHDI VALIPOUR

Age: 16

Location of death: Baharestan, Tehran province

Date of death: 17 November 2019

Source: Individuals directly impacted

16. MOHAMMAD DASTANKHAH

Age: 15

Location of death: Sadra, Fars province

Date of death: 16 November 2019

Source: Individuals directly impacted

17. MOHAMMAD JAVAD ABEDI

Age: 16

Location of death: Esfahan, Esfahan province

Date of death: 17 November 2019

Source: Individuals directly impacted

18. MOHAMMAD PALANI

Age: 17

Location of death: Kerhmanshah, Kerhmanshah province

Date of death: 17 November 2019

Source: Human rights activists and journalists

19. MOHAMMAD REZA AHMADI

Age: 17

Location of death: Sanandaj, Kurdistan province

Date of death: 16 November 2019

Source: Human rights activists and journalists

20. MOHSEN MOHAMMADPOUR

Age: 17

Location of death: Khorramshahr, Khuzestan province

Date of death: 16 November 2019

Source: Individuals directly impacted

21. MOJAHED ALYAMEYEE

Age: 15-17

Location of death: Ahvaz, Khuzestan province

Date of death: 17 November 2019

Source: Human rights activists and journalists

22. SASSAN EYDIVANDI

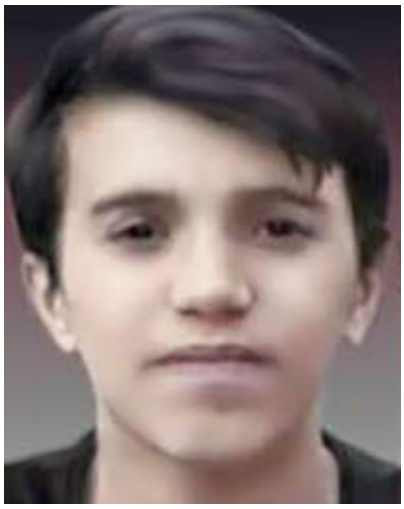
Age: 17

Location of death: Yazdanshahr, Esfahan province

Date of death: 17 November 2019

Source: Individuals directly impacted

23. SAYED ALI MOUSAVI



Age: 12

Location of death: Ramhormoz, Khuzestan province

Date of death: 16 November 2019

Source: Individuals directly impacted

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‘THEY SHOT OUR CHILDREN’

KILLINGS OF MINORS IN IRAN’S NOVEMBER 2019 PROTESTS

Between 15 and 19 November 2019, Iran’s security forces unlawfully resorted to lethal force to crush nationwide protests, killing over 300 protesters and bystanders.

Amnesty International has uncovered evidence that the victims included at least 23 children – 22 boys, aged between 12 and 17, and a girl reportedly aged between eight and 12. The children were killed in 13 cities in six provinces across the country, and the vast majority on 16 and 17 November, reflecting the widespread and swift nature of the crackdown.

Amnesty International gathered evidence from videos and photographs, death and burial certificates, accounts from eyewitnesses and victims’ relatives, friends and acquaintances on the ground and information from human rights activists and journalists.

The authorities have failed to conduct independent and impartial investigations into the killings and ensure those responsible are prosecuted in fair trials. In fact, they have sought to enforce impunity and silence by orchestrating a campaign of harassment and intimidation against the families.

The gravity of the violations perpetrated and the systematic impunity prevailing in Iran requires that the UN Human Rights Council urgently mandates an inquiry into the unlawful use of lethal force by Iranian security forces in the November 2019 protests.

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