

# 2019 IMPACT REPORT



## About Us

Established in July 2010, Justice for Iran (JFI) is a London-based human rights NGO that seeks freedom from impunity.

JFI aims to ensure that perpetrators of serious human rights violations in Iran, including Iranian officials, are held accountable. These violations may include crimes against humanity, torture, enforced disappearances, war crimes and genocide.

JFI pursues the right to justice for the most marginalised groups of society, such as women, ethnic and religious minorities, LGBTI's and political dissidents. We also focus on the right to truth for individual victims, and wider society.

JFI conducts fact-finding operations, initiates judicial and semi-judicial actions, and carries out campaign and advocacy at national, regional and international levels.

JFI is a member of the International Federation of Human Rights (FIDH) and the Regional Network for Historical Dialogue and Dealing with the Past (RNHDP).

## Board of Directors

- Hamid Sabi: human rights lawyer
- Dr Nena Tromp: lecturer in East European Studies at the University of Amsterdam (UvA).
- Drewery Dyke: former Amnesty International Researcher on Iran
- Shadi Amin: researcher, LGBTIQI Activist, and JFI Co-Founder

## Co-Directors

- Shadi Sadr: human rights lawyer and JFI Co-Founder
- Dr Mohammad Nayyeri: human rights Lawyer, PhD from King's College

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- Professor Yakın Ertürk: former UN Special Rapporteur on Violence against Women
- Professor Payam Akhavan, McGill University
- Marietje Schaake: International Policy Director at the Cyber Policy Center, Stanford University, former member of European Parliament

### Highlights of the Year

- Justice for Iran moved towards a regional approach
- Corporations were held accountable for their business activities impacting the human rights of Iranians
- Perpetrators exposed by Justice for Iran were sanctioned

## JFI's work

In 2019, JFI continued its fact-finding efforts on grave human rights abuses, such as enforced disappearances, televised forced confessions, widespread and systematic confiscation of properties of minorities, as well as identifying and documenting perpetrators of such abuses. Through raising awareness, international advocacy and using various accountability mechanisms, it advanced its mandate for promoting the rights to truth and justice of the victims, their families, and the wider society.

### The November 2019 Protests

2019 marked one of the most turbulent and bloody periods in Iranian contemporary history with the brutal crackdown on protestors. On November 15<sup>th</sup> 2019, following a sudden spike in fuel prices, nationwide protests broke out across Iran. While the protests were largely peaceful, in certain cities some banks, government buildings and petrol stations were allegedly set on fire by the protestors. On the evening of the 16<sup>th</sup>, the Islamic Republic of Iran (IRI) implemented a near-total shutdown of the internet, lasting five days, to prevent exposure of the brutal crackdown on the protestors. This crackdown took the form of shootings, violence and mass arrests.

To adequately respond to such a large-scale violation of human rights JFI initiated a visual investigation to geolocate, verify and analyse over 1,200 publicly available videos from the protests, in close collaboration with eyewitnesses, local activists and families of victims.

The 'Mapping the November Bloodshed' project has documented the use of unlawful lethal force in 39 cities across 15 provinces, over just five days, resulting in hundreds of deaths and thousands of injuries.

### Human Rights Databases

In addition to utilising new research methods, JFI has been developing more interactive way of presenting its investigations. The organisation's researchers worked on two unprecedented and unparalleled databases throughout 2019, both of which will be launched in late 2020.

The first database documents the widespread systematic confiscation of properties owned by religious minorities, political dissidents, and those who are perceived to be a part of the previous regime (the Shah). The database includes the details of 60,000 properties, confiscated over the last four decades. The two main perpetrators, Setad<sup>1</sup> and Bonyad<sup>2</sup>, are the largest Islamic government economic foundations. JFI's researchers examined tens of thousands of newspapers and documented public auctions over the past two decades that confirmed this. For instance, the entirety of several villages where Baha'i communities

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<sup>1</sup> Execution of Imam Khomeini's Order

<sup>2</sup> Bonyad e-Mostazafan Foundation

used to live have been confiscated and auctioned by Setad; in most cases, the original owners were forcibly displaced.

The second database, Faces of Crime, put the profiles of hundreds of perpetrators in an institutional chart of political power, consisting of more than 200 state institutions. It shows the distribution of power and hierarchy, from the Supreme Leader at the very top, to other entities and position-holders. The database also provides a timeline of human rights violations, linking the events to specific perpetrators and institutions involved.

During the ongoing development of this database, the organisation published a book in Persian, The Faces of Crime, which contains the portraits and profiles of 100 IRI officials suspected of grave human rights violations. The news about the book and its unique characteristics attracted the attention of the media on an unprecedented scale. All mainstream Iranian satellite TV channels, as well as popular websites, introduced the book and interviewed JFI staff. Although the book is in Persian, it also captured the attention of English-language websites.<sup>3</sup>

JFI also published 30 new profiles and 10 videos online, naming and shaming perpetrators. After determining that Wikipedia is a strategic platform to educate the public, we added information about the involvement of IRI officials in human rights abuses on 54 existing pages on Wikipedia.

JFI also continued collecting information on the roles certain state institutions, particularly the Islamic Republic or Iran's Broadcasting (IRIB), in human rights violations. Such violations include torture and ill-treatment against political prisoners in order to extract forced confessions on camera and broadcasting them. The result of JFI's joint research with FIDH on this topic was due to be released early 2020.

### Community Engagement

In 2019, JFI continued its strategy to engage the communities of the victims and local activists, to conduct participatory fact-finding and documentation projects. We published public calls asking victims of forced confessions, enforced disappearances, and eyewitnesses to killing of protesters and other civilians during the November demonstrations to come forward and share their information. This not only contributed to documenting grave human rights abuses, but also mobilised local activists and the relatives of victims, to strengthen the movement for justice and accountability. This has expanded JFI's network within Iran.

JFI also collaborated with local volunteers and pursued the demands of local activists, urging the international community to utilise the human rights mechanisms, and sanction those responsible for human rights violations<sup>4</sup>.

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<sup>3</sup> For instance, see:

<https://en.radiofarda.com/a/new-research-names-many-current-iranian-officials-as-rights-violators/29856750.html>  
<https://www.iranfocus.com/en/human-rights/33429-human-rights-groups-names-100-abusers-in-iran-with-400-more-to-follow>

<sup>4</sup> It is noteworthy that some of JFI's activities in Iran cannot be disclosed due to security reasons.

## A Voice Against Impunity

JFI has represented families of those who forcibly disappeared, including four Kurdish activists who were declared executed by the authorities in 2010, but their bodies never delivered to their families. In addition, JFI has represented eleven families of the victims of the 1988 massacre of political prisoners, before the UN Working Group on Involuntarily and Enforced Disappearances. The organisation provided legal services to 76 individuals, including the families of those who were detained or killed in the November nation-wide protests, labour activists and several other individuals who sought justice. We wrote complaints and assisted individuals in utilising both domestic and international mechanisms for justice.

## International Reach

To elevate the voices of those suffering from the prevailed culture of impunity, JFI used different international and regional platforms, including: the [Washington Bar Association's webinar](#); [FIDH Congress panel of experts on the impact of surveillance and information control technologies](#); [post screening panel discussion of the film 'Born in Evin' at IDFA film festival in Amsterdam](#); and the [launch event of the book, 'Any Hopes for Truth?: A Comparative Analysis of Enforced Disappearances and the Missing in Middle East, North Africa and Caucasus'](#). Furthermore, it co-organised the [2019 Geoffrey Nice Mater Class](#) on 'Mapping, Documenting and Prosecuting Mass Atrocities' alongside the Geoffrey Nice Foundation and the Korean NGO, Transitional Justice Working Group (TJWG).

JFI also took the advantage of [Iran's third cycle of the UPR](#), that took place on the 8<sup>th</sup> of November, to raise international awareness of the absolute impunity the perpetrators of human rights abuses enjoyed ("[Iran: Maximum Impunity](#)"). This submission focused on some examples of serious human rights violations which have occurred over the past four years as showcases to demonstrate that the IRI has no intention of fulfilling its duty to investigate these abuses and punish the perpetrators, fostering a culture of impunity. The abuses include extrajudicial killings of protesters and unlawful deaths in custody in relation to the events of late December 2017-early 2018. They also include the continued denial of the rights to truth and justice of families of forcibly disappeared persons and concealment of the fates and whereabouts of forcibly disappeared persons by deliberate attempts, such as destruction of mass graves from the 1988 massacre of political prisoners.

The organisation was among a small group of NGOs selected to present its submission and recommendations to dozens of UN member states in the [UPR Pre-session](#). In addition, JFI's delegation met nine other state representatives and briefed them on the situation in joint advocacy with FIDH. JFI's UPR advocacy also received positive coverage from media.

However, only one country, Australia, took a principled stance and recommended that Iran "investigate all allegations of torture against the protesters of December 2017 protests, and to hold the perpetrators accountable."

Reacting to such a disappointing outcome, JFI emphasised the connection between the indifference shown by the UN state members, and the new wave of atrocities that occurred in November in a [statement](#):

*“The Islamic Republic would not have been able to carry out these forms of violent oppression on such a scale if the international community had held Iran accountable for its extensive killing, arrests and torture of protesters in the 2017-18 unrests”*

JFI has also worked with other human rights mechanisms, such as the UN Special Rapporteur on the Situation of Human Rights, and the Office of High Commissioner for Human Rights, to advance its aims. The joint UN actions included the [urgent call for a special session of the UN HRC on Iran protests](#), [urging the UN to continue its human rights mission in Iran](#), and [urging all permanent missions to the United Nations in New York to adopt the annual resolution on the situation of human rights in the Islamic Republic of Iran](#).

The EU regime of human rights sanctions is another accountability mechanism that JFI continues to engage with.. Following the deadly crackdowns on the November protests, JFI made a [submission](#) to the EU Council urging the EU to take immediate action, and impose restrictive measures against the two main institutions directly responsible for the deadly suppression of the November protests: Iran’s police forces, and the Ministry of Information and Communication Technology.

### **Human Rights and Business**

Following the suppression of protests in November 2019, JFI carried out in-depth research on the use of CCTV cameras, by the IRI police and security forces, to identify protesters. It then explored the role and culpability of businesses, including those in the EU, supplying relevant technology and equipment to Iran. JFI will then, in a joint effort with the most reputable organisations in the field of business and human rights, launch semi-legal action against these businesses.

This is just one example of JFI’s efforts to hold international corporations and businesses accountable for their involvement in human rights violations targeted towards the Iranian population.

Inspired by JFI’s participation in the panel discussion at the FIDH conference, a coalition of MEPs at the European Parliament question how adequate EU policies on export licenses and dual use products were in preventing abuses by foreign companies. Following JFI’s contribution to this work, it is likely that the EU policies will be modified to make it more difficult for companies to provide goods and services that can be abused.

Furthermore, recognizing the urgency for research into the impact of activities of Iranian businesses in Syria, JFI will address role of enterprises in the continuation of international crimes, particularly forced displacement in Syria. It will do this through a joint research project with the Syrian expert group, Sakan Housing Communities. The research will contribute to the UN Working Group Business and Human Rights ongoing debate on the conflict and post-conflict environment, from the perspective of social corporate

responsibility. Showcasing Iranian companies involved in the reconstruction process in Syria, the research will also educate the public about the core concepts of social corporate responsibility. It will also demand that they be more vigilant about such activities, even if it's happening in other countries; fulfilling their responsibilities as informed citizens by questioning the government's and companies' involvement in Syria.

## Meaningful Impact

### Relief of the Victims' Families

After nearly ten years of uncertainty, and painful yet unsuccessful efforts to find the burial sites of four Kurdish forcibly disappeared activists, their families expressed their feelings of satisfaction and relief as an international body held the Iranian government accountable.

Following the submission of information by JFI on behalf of the families, the UN Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances (WGEID) recognised all four cases. This meant that the authorities had to recognise the victims' families' right to know the truth about their fates, the whereabouts of their remains, and the right to justice according to international law.

On the 9<sup>th</sup> of June 2010, authorities contacted the families of Shirin Alam Holi, Ali Heydarian, Farzad Kamangar and Farhad Vakili, and informed them that their children had been executed. Their bodies were never returned, and after many years, the locations of their burial sites remain undisclosed.

### Perpetrators exposed by JFI were sanctioned

JFI made a formal submission to the US authorities for sanctioning perpetrators, including Ebrahim Raisi, the current head of Judiciary and a member of the 'Death Commission' responsible for the 1988 massacres of political prisoners. This submission was made following the issuance of the June Executive Order by the US President, to impose sanctions on Iran's Supreme Leader Seyyed Ali Khamenei, all the individuals appointed by him, all the entities owned or controlled by them, and any individual or legal entity which is related to them in any way. Ebrahim Raisi was designated on November 4<sup>th</sup>.

Mohammad Javad Azari Jahromi, the Minister of Information and Communications Technology, was sanctioned on November 22<sup>nd</sup>; after JFI made a formal submission to State Department, following the suppression of peaceful protests of December 2017 – January 2018.

Their full profiles can be found in 'The Faces of Crime' and JFI's website.

## Google bans Press TV and HispanTV from its platforms

In April 2019, Google disabled 39 YouTube channels with connections to the IRI, including Press TV and HispanTV. Though Google has not announced any reason for this action, Press TV has claimed that their channel's YouTube and Gmail accounts were disabled for "violating Google's policies."

Over the past few years, Press TV has broadcast numerous forced confessions from political prisoners, ethnic minorities, labour activists, and journalists. These forced confessions, obtained by pressure from intelligence forces, have been used as evidence in courts to sentence Iranians to longer prison terms or even execution.

JFI has previously published multiple research reports on Press TV's illegal activities, including "Cut! Take Press TV Off the Air," which is based on interviews with former political prisoners and their families, and evidence gathered from programs broadcast by Press TV. JFI has called on international satellite companies to stop these channel's broadcasting and, has submitted reports to the Council of the European Union. We called for sanctions on Press TV, its Director Mohammad Sarafraz, and its Senior Editor Hamid Reza Emadi. Sarafraz and Emadi received sanctions from the Council in March 2013.

## Wikimedia Foundation initiated an investigation on the state's interference with the Persian Wikipedia

In September 2019, Persian Wikipedia found itself under pressure after questions were raised about its independence and neutrality. This was triggered by the publication of an investigative Op-Ed, written by JFI, working on adding the information about the record of human rights abuses to the pages of the Iranian officials, on Wikipedia's alarming relationship with Iranian authorities and intelligence institutions. This was brought to light following a Persian Wikipedia meeting, held at Vezarat-e-Ershad (the Ministry of Culture) in Tehran. The article made a noticeable impact in both Persian and English-speaking media (4 articles in English, 9 in Persian). Following the publication of the Op-Ed, and in response to the public's attention, the Wikimedia foundation began an unofficial investigation. On October 9th, JFI published a public letter calling on Wikipedia and Wikimedia foundation to open the investigation to public contribution, and take concrete steps to prevent Iranian state propaganda and disinformation taking place on their platform. This letter resulted in further widespread discussions on Persian social media. Significantly, many mainstream media outlets covered it in both Persian and English.

On the 15<sup>th</sup> of October 2019, Persian Wikipedia published a statement, claiming that Wikimedia had concluded its investigation, finding no evidence of state interference with its content. Before the announcement, Wikipedia's founder responded to Twitter posts by JFI's staff, regarding his silence on the situation. In a different Twitter exchange, Ziaei Parvar (the head of the Vezarat-e-Ershad at the time of their meeting with Persian Wikipedia) also felt obliged to engage. He responded by denying the statements he had made at the meeting with Persian Wikipedia.

As a follow-up step, JFI developed an open-sourced Wikipedia campaign, inviting Wikipedia users (and the general public) to monitor and document organised Iranian state-backed misinformation, and other activities that are taking place on the platform. The campaign was not launched due to the November 2019 Protests. However, an important outcome of the public discussions initiated by JFI's interventions, was an unprecedented heightened public awareness. Among other public engagement, a voluntary account on [Twitter has started monitoring](#) and publicising state intervention (changes/additions and other activities) on Persian Wikipedia.

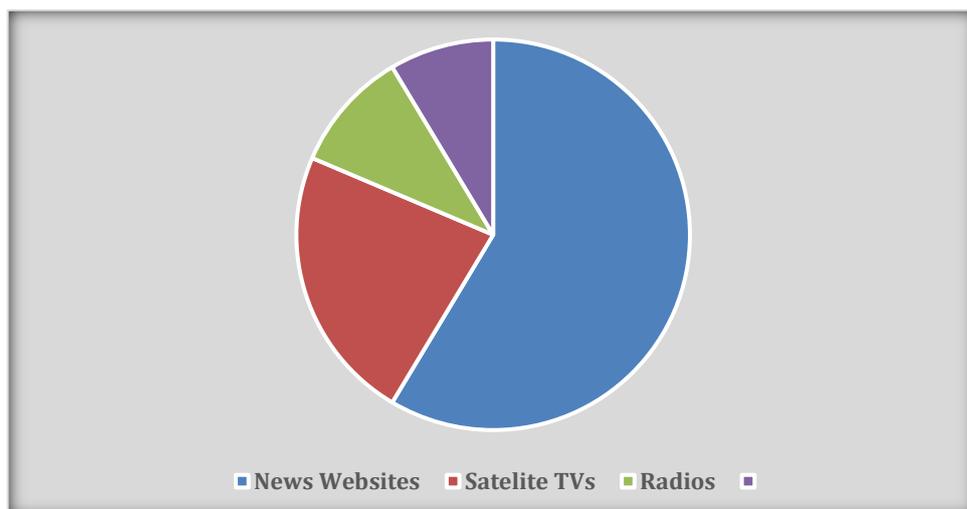
Ever since, JFI has been closely monitoring the platform. During the next quarter we will explore further avenues and advocacy, in order to hold Wikimedia accountable for its failure to address this issue adequately, and for being complicit in the violation of rights to freedom of information and expression of the users of Persian Wikipedia.

### International and Persian media coverage

JFI's publications and reports reached millions of people in Iran through mainstream satellite TV channels, including:

- 13 times on BBC Persian with 13 million viewers;
- 10 times on Manoto with 25 million viewers;
- 3 times on Iran International; and
- 2 times on VoA with over 13 million viewers.

JFI was also covered by other Persian media outlets and news websites 46 times.



*JFI's coverage by the type of Persian media outlets*

In addition to the Persian media outlets, JFI's work was covered in English by [Alarabiya](#), [Lobelog](#), [IranWire](#), [AIJAC](#), [Radio Farda](#) and [The Tower](#).

**Justice for Iran reached over 4.5 million people through its social media**

In mid-2019, JFI launched its English Twitter and Instagram accounts to reach a non-Persian audience. Written and audio-visual material produced and published by the organisation reached more than 4.5 people.

Platform	Reach/Visits
Facebook	824,099
Instagram	745,079
Telegram	447,170
Twitter	1,813,900
Balatarin	284,113
Website	300,608
YouTube	156,523
<b>Total</b>	<b>4,571,492</b>

