

General allegation

111th session (6-10 February 2017)

Iran (Islamic Republic of)

17. The Working Group received information from credible sources concerning reported obstacles encountered in the implementation of the Declaration on the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance in Islamic Republic of Iran.

18. The source asserts that throughout the 1980s, the Iranian authorities detained, tortured, disappeared and killed thousands of people for their political opinions or religious beliefs. The killings reached the highest levels in August and September 1988 when the authorities implemented a plan to eliminate political prisoners across the country. In just a few weeks, an estimated 5,000 political prisoners were rendered incommunicado, executed in secret and without trial, and dumped in unmarked individual and mass graves. Reportedly, the victims' families were not informed about the fate of their loved ones.

19. From late 1988 onwards, the source reports, the authorities informed the families that their relatives had been executed, although the timing and details differed depending on the city. However, the bodies were never returned for proper burial. Nor did Government provide any concrete information about the circumstances of or reasons for the executions or the place of burial.

20. Three decades later, according to the source, there is still little information about the number and location of the graves. Existing research has identified 74 potential mass grave locations across Iran.

21. These locations, the source reports, are scattered across 21 provinces and 40 cities. Twenty-nine of the suspected mass graves are apparently in the outskirts of cemeteries and areas that were, at the time of the executions in 1988, disused and away from frequently visited areas. However, in many cases, the source alleges, with the passage of years and as the cemeteries have become more populous, the distance between the individual cemetery plots and the mass graves in the outskirts has decreased or in some cases completely disappeared. Other sites of suspected mass graves, according to the source, have been identified in the deserted outskirts of cities and in forests, gardens, recreational centers and prison courtyards.

22. The source submits that it has been able to confirm the locations of 10 mass graves. It is further asserted that Iranian authorities have concealed evidence of four identified mass graves. These graves are in or near Mashhad's Behesht Reza Cemetery in north-eastern Khorasan province, Rasht's Tazeh Abad Cemetery in northern Gilan province, Ahwaz's Behesht Abad Cemetery in southern Khouzestan province, and Khavaran in south-east of capital city, Tehran. It is alleged that techniques deployed to conceal evidence of mass graves include: repeated bulldozing; turning the sites of mass graves into stinking and unsightly garbage dumps; hiding the location of mass graves beneath new, individual burial spots; pouring concrete over mass graves; and forbidding families and members of the public from dignifying the sites of mass graves, including through erecting monuments and gravestones or adorning the sites with flowers, pictures, plaques and loving messages.

23. According to the source, in addition to destroying the physical evidence of mass graves, the Iranian authorities have adopted various practices to erase traces of extra-judicial executions and suppress the truth, including the exact number and identity of the victims and the identity of perpetrators. Allegedly, the authorities have excluded the names of those executed in 1980s from public death and burial records. In Tehran, the source reports, the families of some of the 1988 execution victims have repeatedly requested access to the death and burial records maintained by Behesht Zahra Organization, which is responsible for collecting such data. The organization has

refused to supply any information in writing. In some cases, however, staff has informed the families verbally that their relatives are buried in Khavaran.

24. The authorities, the source maintains, have also misrepresented the cause of death on victims' death certificates. Reportedly, the sources have obtained copies of 18 death certificates. Only three of them mention 'execution' or 'hanging' as the cause of death. In three death certificates entry about the cause of death has been left blank. The remaining 12 death certificates, the source claims, misrepresent the cause of the death of prisoners executed in 1980s. Three of the certificates cite "death" (fo't) as the cause of death; four refer to "death by natural causes" (marg-e tabiee); and three attribute death to illness such as bleeding or stroke. One certificate claims that the executed political prisoner died of "a car accident" and one mentions "natural causes in his house" as the cause of death.

25. A number of families, according to the source, have informed that due to a practice of deliberate misrepresentations, they have never applied for a death certificate. Others, the source alleges, have accepted inaccurate death certificates for practical needs.