BACKGROUND PAPER ON REFUGEES AND ASYLUM SEEKERS FROM IRAN

UNHCR
CENTRE FOR DOCUMENTATION ON REFUGEES
GENEVA, OCTOBER 1995

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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

1. **Asylum Seekers in Europe**
   
   1.1 Introduction \[3\]
   1.2 Overall Trends in Asylum Applications \[3\]
   1.3 Trends in Convention Status Recognition \[4\]
   1.4 Trends in Non-Convention Recognitions \[4\]
   1.5 Iranian Refugees and Asylum Seekers \[4\]
   1.6 Trends in Iranian Convention Status Recognitions \[5\]
   1.7 Trends in Iranians Allowed to Remain for Humanitarian Reasons \[5\]

2. **Iranians in Neighboring Countries** \[6\]

3. **Internal Situation in Iran** \[6\]
   
   3.1 Recent Developments \[6\]
   3.2 Iranian Security Forces \[8\]
   3.3 Political Parties \[10\]

4. **Human Rights Concerns** \[13\]
   
   4.1 International and National Legal Framework \[13\]
   4.2 General Respect for Human Rights \[14\]
   4.3 The Situation of Ethnic Minorities \[18\]
   4.4 The Situation of Religious Minorities \[21\]
   4.5 The Situation of Women \[25\]

Bibliography \[27\]
1. REFUGEES AND ASYLUM SEEKERS IN EUROPE

1.1 Introduction

This section provides a statistical overview of refugees and asylum-seekers in Western Europe in general and of refugees and asylum-seekers from Iran in particular. It is based on official government statistics provided to UNHCR over the period 1990-1994.

The following observations should be taken into consideration when comparing individual asylum statistics from different countries. Firstly, due to the absence of common standards for the compilation of such statistics, the scope for any detailed comparison is limited. For instance, data may refer to individuals or principal applicants ("cases"), to those who submit a request for asylum or to those who are admitted into the asylum procedure. Secondly, persons fleeing from former Yugoslavia and benefitting from temporary protection may be included or excluded. Thirdly, even within countries, comparisons may be hampered due to changing counting practices over the years.

In this section, refugee recognition rates have been calculated by dividing the number of Convention status recognitions ("Recognitions") by the total number of Convention status recognitions and negative decisions ("Rejected"). Humanitarian and other non-Convention status "recognitions", as far as they are reported in the asylum statistics, have been grouped together under one heading ("Allowed").

The general trend indicates an overall decline of new asylum requests in Western Europe, with the exception of a few countries. The number of 1951 Convention status recognitions in 1994 (47,400) declined slightly compared to 1993 (48,800), and the number of persons allowed to remain for humanitarian reasons decreased slightly from 59,500 to 58,200. Most significantly, the number of rejected cases fell by 26 per cent, from 510,000 in 1993 to 375,000 in 1994.

Although the number of Iranian asylum-seekers increased considerably (from 7,100 in 1993 to 11,970 in 1994), the 1994 level is still well below the level reached in 1990/1991 (18,000 and 15,000 respectively). On average, Convention status recognition rates for Iranian asylum-seekers during 1990-1994 have been around 40 per cent, or four times greater than for all asylum seekers.

1.2 Overall Trends in Asylum Applications

In 1994, some 329,000 persons applied for asylum in Europe, 40 per cent fewer than in 1993 (553,000) (see Table 1). Germany received almost 40 per cent of all the asylum seekers in Europe in 1994 (127,200) which, however, constituted a marked decrease compared to 1993 when nearly 60 per cent (323,000) of all asylum applications were lodged in Germany.

The Netherlands and the United Kingdom accounted each for some 15 per cent of all asylum-seekers in Europe during 1994. From 1993 to 1994, both countries more than doubled their share in European asylum applications.

1 Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Italy, Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland and the United Kingdom.
Countries where 5 to 10 per cent of all applications in Europe were lodged during 1994 include France (8%), Sweden (6%), Switzerland (5%), and Belgium (4%). Countries with 2 per cent or less of all applications include Austria, Denmark, Finland, Italy, Norway, Greece and Portugal.

From 1993 to 1994, the following changes in the number of asylum seekers by country were recorded in Europe: Austria (+7%), Belgium (-43%), Denmark (-54%), Finland (-58%), France (-6%), Germany (-61%), Greece (+60%), Italy (-7%), Netherlands (+49%), Norway (-74%), Portugal (-65%), Spain (-2%), Sweden (-50%), Switzerland (-33%), and the United Kingdom (+51%).

1.3 Trends in Convention Status Recognition

Some 47,400 persons were granted Convention refugee status in Europe during 1994, slightly less than in 1993 (48,800). In 1994, Germany granted refugee status to approximately 25,600 persons, 56 per cent more than in 1993, and to more than half of all persons granted Convention status recognition in Europe.

The Netherlands and France each granted Convention refugee status to more than 6,000 persons (14 per cent) of the European total. Countries which accorded between 1,000 and 3,000 Conventions recognitions include Switzerland (3,000), the United Kingdom (1,400) and Belgium (1,500). The following countries granted Convention refugee status to less than 1,000 persons during 1994: Sweden (790), Austria (680), Spain (630), Denmark (540), Italy (300), Greece (90), Finland (20), Norway (20) and Portugal (10).

During 1990-1994, Belgium, France and the Netherlands had Convention recognition rates which were at least twice as high compared to the overall rate in Europe (10 per cent). In Germany the Convention recognition rate doubled from 5 to 10 per cent during 1993-1994 (see table 2).

1.4 Trends in Non-Convention Recognitions

During 1994, some 58,000 persons were allowed to remain for humanitarian reasons, 20 per cent more than the number of persons granted Convention status recognition (see Table 1). Sweden accounted for 64 per cent (36,560) of all "humanitarian recognitions" during 1994 (including 17,950 asylum seekers who were allowed to stay under a special "amnesty" in April 1994).

Between 1990 and 1994, the number of Convention refugee recognitions increased by 63 per cent, while the number of non-Convention recognitions increased by 350 per cent.

1.5 Iranian Refugees and Asylum Seekers

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Note that the figures in Table 1 and 2 refer to persons, while in table 3 and 4 they refer to Principal Applicants only.
From 1993 to 1994, the number of Iranian asylum-seekers applying for asylum in Europe increased by about 68 per cent to 12,000. During the period 1990-1993, the number of Iranian asylum-seekers had fallen steadily, from 18,000 to 7,000. Most of the 1994 increase took place in the Netherlands, where the number of Iranian asylum seekers rose by some 3,400 persons. In fact, the Netherlands has become a major country of destination for Iranian asylum-seekers in Europe: accounting for 10 per cent of all claims in 1990/1991, it received 51 per cent of all Iranian asylum-seekers during 1994.

Iranian asylum-seekers are highly concentrated in Germany and the Netherlands, with 80 per cent of Iranian asylum claims lodged in these two countries during 1994 (Table 3).

1.6 Trends in Iranian Convention Status Recognitions

During 1990-1994, Iranians have been granted refugee status relatively often: Convention status was granted in 40 per cent of all decisions, compared to 10 per cent for all nationalities combined (see Tables 2 and 4).

During 1990-1994, almost 19,000 Iranians were granted 1951 Convention refugee status in Europe, two-thirds of whom were accepted by Germany and 12 per cent by the Netherlands. In fact, Germany granted asylum to Iranians in almost 50 per cent of the cases (see Table 4), compared to the country's overall recognition rate of 7 per cent (Table 2). In France, recognition rates for Iranian asylum-seekers have been even higher (60 per cent), although the absolute number of Iranians seeking asylum in France was very limited (2 per cent of all applications during 1990-1994).

There does not seem to be a strong correlation between high recognition rates and increased attraction of asylum-seekers in the case of Iranians in the Netherlands. Although the Netherlands received 51 per cent of all Iranian asylum applications during 1994, recognitions rates for Iranians in the Netherlands have been relatively low (23 per cent during 1990-1994, compared to 39 per cent for all receiving countries).

1.7 Trends in Iranians Allowed to Remain for Humanitarian Reasons

As opposed to the general picture in Europe, the majority of the Iranian asylum-seekers who were not rejected were granted Convention status: during 1990-1994, 10,000 were allowed to remain for humanitarian reasons, compared to almost 19,900 Convention recognitions. Slightly over 50 per cent of all humanitarian recognitions of Iranian asylum-seekers took place in Sweden.

2. Iranians in Neighboring Countries

In its annual survey on refugee populations worldwide, the U.S. Committee for Refugees stated that since the 1979 Islamic revolution there are hundreds of thousands of Iranians in political exile outside the country, most of whom have no refugee status. (World Refugee Survey, 1995,
114). These reportedly include "leftists, monarchists, ethnic minorities, including Kurds and Baluchis, and religious minorities, especially Baha'is" (Ibid.).

**Iraq**

In government-controlled Iraq, there were an estimated 40,000 Iranian refugees in 1994 (World Refugee Survey, 1995, 114). Of these, approximately 22,500 are said to be Iranian Kurds who reside in the Al-Tash camp west of Baghdad and whose movements are restricted; another 17,000 Iranian refugees of Arab background (Ahwazis) are said to be in the region to the south of Baghdad and are reportedly integrated into the local community; and about 60 Iranians of Persian origin are said to live around Baghdad (Ibid.). In Northern Iraq there are approximately 4,000 Iranian Kurdish refugees (Ibid.). In September 1995, following six days of talks, Iran and Iraq reportedly signed a memorandum of understanding about “prisoners of war, the missing, and refugees from their 1980-1988 war”, said to be the issues posing the greatest obstacle to normalization of relations between the two countries (Middle East Times, 24-30 September 1995; Reuters, 15 September 1995).

**Pakistan**

According to the U.S. Committee for Refugees, in September 1994 Pakistani authorities allegedly forced back into Iran 23 members of the Baha'i community who sought entry into Pakistan, where 200 Iranian Baha'is reportedly resided in 1994 (Ibid.).

**Turkey**

The Government of Turkey is said to estimate that there were about two million Iranians residing in the country in 1994, whereas other estimates, such as that of the Intergovernmental Consultation on Asylum, Refugees and Migration Policies in Europe and North America, arrive at a figure of 50,000 (World Refugee Survey, 1995, 165). Of these, only a fraction are said to have approached either UNHCR or the Turkish authorities for recognition as refugees (Ibid.). Many of them reportedly "carry valid passports, which allow them to enter Turkey as tourists and stay for three months at a time. They often renew their permission to stay as tourists by crossing back and forth to Bulgaria or Cyprus . . . [and] . . . Turkey fines, but generally does not expel, those who overstay their tourist period“ (Ibid.).

### 3. Internal Situation in Iran

#### 3.1 Historical Background

Iran is formerly known as Persia. It was ruled by a series of dynasties from

#### 3.1 Recent Developments

After the overthrow of the Pahlavi Shah dynasty in 1979, the newly established Islamic Republic of Iran has been under the overall authority of the country's spiritual leader (Keesing's Record of World Events, 1995, R133). The Islamic government was built along the Shi'ite interpretation of the tenets of the Koran and the Sunnah, emphasizing the rejection of Western materialism and political ideas (Haynes, 1994, 72).
The highest title, that of wali-ye faqir (supreme religious leader in the absence of the last, and missing, Imam), was held by Ayatollah Ruholla Khomeini until his death in 1989 (Ibid., Economist Intelligence Unit, Country Profile 1995, 4). His successor, Hojatolislam Ali Khameini, received the politically expedient though less exalted title of rahbar (Ibid.). Mr. Khameini is also Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces. The President, Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani, is theoretically the country's senior politician. He was elected to office in 1989 and re-elected in 1993 (Keesing's Record of World Events, 1995, R133). The President, as well as the 270-member legislature, the Majlis ash Shoura (Consultative Council), are elected by universal suffrage every four years. While the Majlis approves the appointment, or may request the resignation, of all members of the Council of Ministers, all legislation passed by the Majlis is reviewed by a Council of Constitutional Guardians to ensure conformity with the principles of religious law and the Constitution (Ibid.). Amid protests by Islamic opposition members, new legislation passed in 1995 reportedly gives the Council of Constitutional Guardians the additional power to screen candidates for parliamentary elections (Reuters, 2 August 1995). The Council of Constitutional Guardians is said to have rejected many candidates in the last elections on “vague moral and religious grounds and did not even feel it was obliged to explain its rulings to those concerned” (Ibid.). On the other hand, the Council of Constitutional Guardians has reportedly also “rejected a segment in the new election law that requires candidates to be university or Islamic theology school graduates, saying it was in violation of equal opportunity and equal legal protection clauses in Iran’s constitution” (Ibid.).

There is also an all-cleric Assembly of Experts, elected by universal suffrage, which decides on issues such as the succession to the position of wali-ye faqir (Ibid.).

The elections of the fourth Islamic Majlis in 1992 highlighted the tension between supporters of President Rafsanjani's Association of Combatant Clerics of Tehran (Jameh-ye Ruhaniyat-e Mobarez-e Tehran - "Ruhaniyat"), advocating a revision of the domestic and foreign policies of the Khomeini years, and supporters of the Association of Combatant Clergy of Tehran (Majma-ye Ruhaniyoun-e Mobarez-e Tehran - "Ruhaniyoun"), who favored the continuation of the policies of the Khomeini era (Sarabi, 1994). With its victory, the Ruhaniyat gained control of the legislature as well as the executive, and the transitional period that had begun with the death of Ayatollah Khomeini was brought to an end (Ibid.).

Expectations of economic reform fostered by the Ruhaniyat victory have not materialized, however, as "the new Majlis was no more willing to rally behind [President] Rafsanjani's reform programs than was the previous one" (Banuazizi, 1994). Those of his programmes requiring parliamentary approval were "repeatedly torpedoed by a new, powerful group of so-called 'hardliners'", with his detractors on major issues receiving support from Ayatollah Khameini (Ibid.).

With the recent resignation of Mas'ud Roghani Zanjani from the Budget and Planning Organization (BPO) over disagreements on policies adopted by the Market Regulation Board (MRB), which is said to be "controlled by Marxist-oriented economists", President Rafsanjani reportedly lost the last bastion of his economic reforms (Middle East International, 25 August 1995). This is seen to represent a reversal of government economic policies, a return to a statist-style economy, and a "resounding victory for Khameini over Rafsanjani" (Ibid.).
The rate of inflation is running at between 50 to 100 per cent, with salaries remaining constant (International Herald Tribune, 31 May 1995). Many Iranians, including government officials, are said to be holding two jobs, when they can find them, and price increases for basic goods and services have reportedly fueled public unrest (Ibid.; The Economist, 25 June 1994). A combination of price increases and housing shortages has led to an increase in urban uprisings, and since 1990 there have reportedly been "major upheavals in Tehran, Shiraz, Arak, Mashhad, Ghazvin and Tabriz . . . [with] . . . frequent minor clashes in many other urban centers" (Bayat, 1994). In an April 1995 confrontation between police and anti-government protestors sparked by increased bus fares and inadequate water supplies, police helicopters reportedly fired tear gas at demonstrators, resulting in one death and several wounded (The Guardian, 5 April 1995).

The Iranian Government, said to be concerned about the increasing number of protests around the country, reportedly staged military maneuvers in August 1995 in 17 cities aimed at “testing the preparedness of the Baseej volunteer militias and other government forces for containing and then crushing any armed uprising” (MidEast Mirror, 10 August 1995).

Following government orders in July 1994 to quell a riot in the northern city of Qazvin, senior officers in the army, air force and the usually loyal Islamic Revolutionary Guard reportedly “put the mullahs on notice that they would no longer order their troops into battle to quell civil disorder”, and, in a communiqué sent to Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, stated that “the role of the country’s armed forces is to defend its borders and to repel foreign enemies from its soil, not to control the internal situation or to strengthen one political faction above another” (The Economist, 27 August 1994). They are said to have then recommended the use of Baseej volunteers for this purpose (Ibid.).

In a move believed to indicate a shift in the trust of the ruling clerics from the Revolutionary Guards to the Baseej volunteer force, on 17 April 1995 Ayatollah Ali Khamenei reportedly promoted a civilian, veterinary surgeon Hassan Firuzabadi, to the rank of full general, “placing him above both Brigadier-General Mohsen Rezai, commander-in-chief of the Pasdaran [Revolutionary Guards] and Brigadier General Ali Shahbazi of the regular armed forces” (Middle East International, 28 April 1995). A subsequent communiqué issued by the National Movement of the Iranian Armed Forces allegedly regretted the placing of a “simple civilian above the nation’s most prestigious and respected professional soldiers”, warning of its potentially negative impact on the overall morale of the armed forces (Ibid.).

3.2 Iranian Security Forces

Article 143 of the Constitution entrusts the armed forces with the task of protecting the independence, territorial integrity and system of government of the Islamic Republic, and Article 144 further stipulates that it shall be an Islamic army, organized along the tenets of Islam and that it shall recruit competent persons faithful in the objectives if the Islamic Revolution in seeing them realized (Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran, 1979).

The Armed Forces
The Iranian Armed Forces, considered the tenth largest in the world, are said to number approximately 513,000 persons in active service, divided into separate groups "with different loyalties and structures" (Economist Intelligence Unit, 1995, 10). The Army, “divided into four armored and seven infantry divisions in addition to a Special Forces division and an airborne brigade”, consists of approximately 95,000 regulars and some 250,000 conscripts serving a two-year term (Ibid.). The Air Force and the Navy reportedly consist of 18,000 men each, the latter including 2,000 marines (Ibid.).

Ashura Brigades
This force, consisting of 17,000 Islamic militiamen and women, was reportedly created in 1993 after anti-government riots erupted in various Iranian cities (Agence France Presse, 17 July 1995). The Ashura Brigades are reportedly composed of elements of the Revolutionary Guards (Pasdaran) and the Baseej volunteer militia (Middle East International, 23 June 1995). Four-day maneuvers held in June 1995 in the East Azerbaijan province were said to be aimed at “maintaining combat readiness to handle possible emergency situations, such as aerial bombardments” and to test the “capacity and capabilities of the Revolutionary Guards, the Baseej and the Hezbollah forces in ‘conducting their responsibilities within the national boundaries” (Agence France Presse, 17 July 1995; Middle East International, 23 June 1995).

Hezbollahi (The Partisans of God)
A group of radical Islamic militants, they consider themselves as followers of the path of Ayatollah Khomeini (Human Rights Watch/Middle East, August 1993, 6) and are seen as the preservers of the revolution (Libération, 26-27 August 1995). They are said to gather at the invitation of the state-affiliated media and generally act without meaningful police restraint or fear of persecution (Human Rights Watch/Middle East, August 1993, 6). In the view of a conservative Islamic leader, Ayatollah Ahmed Janati, they have the right to break laws, substitute for the police or the justice system in their struggle against “Western corruption”, and “neither the police, the judicial system, nor any other authority have the right to stand in their way” (Ibid.).

Baseej Mustadhafeen (Mobilization of the Dispossessed)
A 300,000-strong paramilitary force created to defend the Iranian Government against armed opponents. It has established a reputation as the only reliable force at the service of the government in an emergency because of the refusal of the police, gendarmerie and the Revolutionary Guard units to use force against the protesting civilian populations (Mideast Mirror, 10 August 1995). Its members are reportedly recruited from farms, factories, schools and government offices (Reuters, 7 June 1995). The Baseej allegedly also monitor the activities of citizens, and “harass or arrest women whose clothing does not cover the hair and all of the body except hands and face, or those who wear makeup” (U.S. Department of State, Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 1994, March 1995). According to Reuters, during the year ending in June 1995, they “notified 907,246 people verbally and issued 370,079 written notices against ‘social corruption’ and arrested 86,190 people . . . [and also] . . . broke up 542 ‘corrupt gangs’, arresting their 2,618 members, and seized 86,597 indecent videocassettes and photographs” (7 June 1995).

Pasdaran-e Inqilab (Revolutionary Guards)
According to Article 150 of the Constitution, the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (Pasdaran), which was “organized in the early days of the victory of this revolution, shall continue to perform its role in safeguarding the revolution and the outcomes ensuing therefrom. The scope of functions and responsibilities of the said corps in relation to the scope of functions and responsibilities of the armed forces with the stress laid upon fraternal collaboration and coordination between the two of them, shall be determined by law” (Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran, 1979). This force, said to consist of young recruits dedicated to the Ayatollah Khomeini and the Islamic Revolution, was allegedly created to counter the influence of the armed forces (Economist Intelligence Unit, Country Profile 1995-96, 1995, 11). In 1993 its ground and naval forces allegedly numbered 100,000 and 20,000, respectively, with an ability to “muster up to 120,000 men in 28 divisions and independent brigades” (Ibid.). The Pasdaran additionally have operated as the “principal arm of domestic security” although they now have to apply for a search warrant before they can raid a private home (Ibid.; The Economist, 29 July 1994). However, in August 1994, some Pasdaran units, rushed to quell riots in the city of Ghazvin, 150 km. west of Tehran, reportedly refused orders from the Interior Minister to intervene in the clashes, which allegedly left more than 30 people dead, 400 wounded and over 1,000 arrested (Middle East International, 9 September 1994). A Pasdaran commander was among four senior army officers who are said to have sent a letter to the country’s political leadership, warning the clerical rulers against “using the armed forces to crush civilian unrest and internal conflicts” (Ibid.).

3.3 Political Parties

Article 26 of the Constitution provides for political parties and professional associations which do not contravene Islamic principles (Keesing’s Record of World Events, 1995, R133). Two parties were formed after the 1979 Islamic Revolution -- the Islamic Republican Party (IRP), which disbanded in 1987, and the Liberation Movement of Iran, which was allowed to nominate candidates for legislative elections in 1984 (Ibid.). In 1988 a Political Parties Activities Law was reportedly approved by the Iranian authorities, requesting political parties to “re-register in the Interior Ministry to obtain permission for their activities” (Xinhua News Agency, 27 April 1995). In 1994, Interior Minister Ali Mohammad Besharati is said to have indicated that his Ministry had received 400 applications for the establishment of political parties and trade unions, and that 76 licenses had been issued for the creation of guilds, unions and political parties (Ibid.). The following list of the most well-known political parties only is compiled from information available in the public domain.

The Islamic Republican Party
Founded in February 1979, its members included President Rafsanjani and the Ayatollah Khameini (Economist Intelligence Unit, 1995, 7). The party disbanded in 1987 because of strains between its main factions, the “radicals” calling for increased state control of the economy and support for Islamic movements abroad, and the “pragmatists”, who favoured a market economy and a more moderate foreign policy (Ibid.).

The Freedom Movement of Iran / The Liberation Movement of Iran - Nezat-e Azadi
The party was founded long before the Islamic Revolution, in 1961 (Xinhua News Agency, 27 April 1995; Political Parties of Africa and the Middle East, 1993, 122). It reportedly follows
a moderate nationalist and Islamist line (Agence France Presse, 4 April 1995). Led since its founding by the first prime minister after the 1979 Revolution, Dr. Mehdi Bazargan, until his death in 1995, the party apparently has been tolerated despite its criticism of the government, though several of its leaders have frequently been arrested (Economist Intelligence Unit, 1995, 7). In April 1995, the party’s new secretary-general, Ibrahim Yazdi, is reported to have protested to the Interior Ministry for refusing to legalize its activities (Xinhua News Agency, 27 April 1995). The party also complained of police harassment of its members (Agence France Presse, 4 April 1995).

The National Council for Resistance (NCR)
This group was founded in Paris in 1981 by the first president of the Islamic Republic, Mr. Bani Sadr (Documentation Réfugiés, mars 1994). Initially it was a broad coalition including the Mujahedeen, the Kurdish Democratic Party of Iran (KDPI), the National Democratic Front, the Hoviyat Group and several small leftist groups (Abrahamiam, 1989, 243). In 1984, a number of groups allegedly left the NCR, including the liberals under Bani Sadr and the KDPI (Ibid., 246-47). The Mujahedeen reportedly considered the NCR as the backbone of the political alternative to the regime in Tehran (Al-Majallah, 13-19 January 1993), while others saw it as a Mujahedeen front organization (Hooglund, 30 March 1993). At present, the NCR, headed by a woman, Maryam Rajavi, claims to include “all political groups, parties and personalities [including academics and religious leaders] active against the regime . . . [who] . . . believe in the separation of church and state and in a republic based on pluralism” (The Middle East, September 1994).

Mujahedeen-e Khalq or Sazman-e Mojahedin-e Khalq-e Iran (People’s Mujahedeen Organization of Iran - PMOI)
The group was founded in 1965 and is currently led by Massoud Rajavi (also a leader of the National Resistance Council). Its ideology, based on Islam, emphasizes the need for social change, reportedly incorporating many Marxist ideas (Sarraf, 1990, 181; Hooglund, 1986, 19). The party was instrumental in overthowing Shah Reza Pahlavi, but in 1981 withdrew its support from the Islamic regime in favor of President Bani Sadr. After the latter’s dismissal in June 1981, the government began a “rigorous campaign” against all political opposition, and the PMOI leadership was forced into exile in France, until 1986, when the French government closed down its headquarters in Paris, whereupon Rajavi and his followers moved to Iraq (Revolutionary and Dissident Movements, 1988, 165). In Iraq, Rajavi reportedly turned the group into a military force, the National Liberation Army, believed to number between 10,000 and 15,000 recruits (Middle East Times, 16-22 July 1995). The group is said to have claimed responsibility for several attacks in Iran, including those carried out in May 1993 against eight oil pipelines in the southwestern city of Abadan and in October 1993 against [Ayatollah] Khomeini’s shrine outside Tehran (Ibid.). Women are said to play a prominent role in the organization: a leadership council of 24 women was formed in 1993, women account for half of the NLA’s troops, and Maryam Rajavi, the wife of Massoud Rajavi, is reported to be the deputy commander-in-chief as well as secretary general of the Mujahedeen (Ibid.; Agence France Presse, 10 July 1995). In July 1995 Iranian troops reportedly launched a rocket attack against the group’s bases inside Iraq which, according to the PMOI leader, was “the 34th military or terrorist attack staged by the Iranian regime against the Mujahedeen . . . since the start of 1993” (Agence France Presse, 9 July 1995)
Communist opposition movements
The Iranian communist opposition groups still in existence reportedly have offices in Europe and North America and are seen as having little significance as an alternative or a threat to the Islamic regime (Hooglund, 30 March 1993). The most prominent among these groups are said to be:

Fedayin-e-Khalq (Warriors of the People, or People's Fighters)
The group was active in the overthrow of the Shah's regime, and its spokesman is Mr. Farrakh Negahdar. It is described as an urban Marxist guerrilla force that initially supported the Islamic revolution but subsequently broke with the government over the party's demands for democratic institutions (The Middle East and North Africa 1995, 455; Revolutionary and Dissident Movements, 1991, 148).

Peykar - Sazmane Peykar dar Rahe Azadieh Tabaqe Kargar (Organization Struggling for the Freedom of the Working Class)
Founded in 1975 as the Peykar Organization, it is described as an offshoot of the Mujahedeen. Originally Marxist-Leninist, it merged with Maoist elements in 1978, at which time it acquired its current name. By 1982 it was confined to conducting guerrilla attacks in the north of the Iran (Abrahamiam, 1989, 145; The Middle East and North Africa 1995, 455).

Tudeh Party
The group was founded in 1941 and is led by Ali Khavari, its Secretary-General. Said to have held a "pro-Moscow line" it initially supported the Islamic revolution, but subsequently distanced itself from the regime as the latter became more committed to Islamic fundamentalism. The party opposed the Iran-Iraq war. In 1983, the party was officially proscribed when the government declared that "any activity in favour of it will be regarded as illegal and counter-revolutionary" (Revolutionary and Dissident Movements, 1991, 150).

The Kurdish Opposition

The Kurdish Democratic Party of Iran (KDPI)
Founded after World War II, as a splinter of an Association for the Resurrection of Kurdistan, the party was practically liquidated when a Kurdish rebellion was crushed in 1966-67. It was reconstituted after 1973, when Dr. Abd ar-Rahman Qasemlu was elected the party’s Secretary-General. At present, the party is led by its Secretary-General, Moustapha Hedjri. The KDPI is the largest and best organized of the Kurdish opposition groups, and seeks autonomy for the Kurds in Iran. It operates from its bases in Iraq against the Islamic regime (Le Monde, 18 March 1993). In the early 1980s a measure of autonomy in the Kurdish areas of western Iran was achieved following clashes between KDPI guerrillas and Revolutionary Guards, resulting in the latter’s withdrawal from Mahabad, Sanandaj and Kamyaran, until a renewed government offensive which allegedly left 1,000 Kurds and 500 government troops dead (Revolutionary and Dissident Movements, 1991, 153). In the 1990s armed clashes have continued between KDPI and government forces, including bombing attacks against Iranian Kurds, both in western Iran and inside Iraqi territory (Libération, 10 May 1993; The Independent, 10 November 1994). Two KDPI leaders, Abdul Rahman Qasemlu and his successor, Sadik Sharafkindi,
were assassinated, in Vienna in 1989 and in Berlin in 1992, respectively, while attempting to hold negotiations with the Iranian authorities over Kurdish autonomy (Associated Press, 19 September 1992).

**Komala (or Komaleh)**

Founded in 1969, and led by Ibrahim Alizadeh. The group favours autonomy for the Kurds in Iran. It cooperated briefly with the Kurdish Democratic Party of Iran (Revolutionary and Dissident Movements, 1991, 151). Also known as the Revolutionary Organization of the Toilers of Kurdistan, it is said to be primarily active in the Sanandaj region (Agence France Presse, 7 November 1992). The group has reportedly waged guerrilla warfare against government forces since 1979 with the aim of achieving Kurdish autonomy (Revolutionary and Dissident Movements, 1991, 148).

**The Monarchist Opposition**

**Babak Khorramdin Organization**

Described as a monarchist and strongly anti-clerical group, it has allegedly claimed responsibility for a February 1993 attempt to assassinate President Rafsanjani and for the "execution" of five Revolutionary Guards several days later (Hooglund, 30 March 1993; The Independent, 13 February 1993; Middle East International, 19 February 1993).

**Kaviyani Banner of Iran**

Currently led by Manoucher Gandji, it calls for the restoration of the Pahlavi Shah dynasty and for the establishment of parliamentary democracy in Iran. Its main operations reportedly consist of broadcasts from its radio station, Voice of Kaviyani Banner of Iran, with studios at its Paris headquarters and transmission from Cairo (Political Parties of Africa and the Middle East, 1993, 125; British Broadcasting Corporation, 30 September 1991).

**Movement of National Resistance**

Founded by Shahpur Bakhtiar, it is described as pro-monarchist, the group was allegedly involved in a failed June 1980 attempt against the Islamic regime (Abidi, 1989, 117). Subsequently, it reportedly called for peaceful demonstrations to demand free elections (UN Commission on Human Rights, 13 February 1991). Mr. Bakhtiar, described as a "fierce opponent of Ayatollah Khomeini", was murdered in his home in Paris on 6 August 1991 (Keesing's Record of World Events, 1991, 38409).

4. **HUMAN RIGHTS CONCERNS**

4.1 **International and National Legal Framework**

Iran became a State Party to the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees (CSR51) and its 1967 Protocol (CSRP67) on 28 July 1976; it ratified the 1966 International Convention on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR66) on 24 June 1974; the 1976 International Covenant on

Iran is not a State Party to the 1954 Convention Relating to the Status of Stateless Persons (CSSP54); the Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness; the Convention on the Political Rights of Women; the 1974 Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women; the Convention Against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, or the Geneva Conventions (Ibid.).

Iran's judicial system is based on Islamic law. Article 4 of the 1979 Constitution states that

All civil, penal, financial, economic, administrative, cultural, military, political, and other laws and regulations must be based on Islamic criteria. This principle applies absolutely and generally to all articles of the Constitution as well as to all other laws and regulations, and the fuqahā’ of the Guardian Council [Council of Constitutional Guardians] are judges in this matter (Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran, 24 October 1979, as amended to 28 July 1989).

As reported by the U.S.-based Lawyers Committee for Human Rights, Shi’ite tradition holds that the sources of Islamic law are “the Qur’an and the Sunna, with reference as necessary to secondary or dependent sources, Ijma and Aql” (1993, 8). The Qur’an is regarded as “the holy book of Muslims . . . the words of God revealed to Mohammed” whose short revelations are open to interpretation, while Sunna means “a manner of acting, a rule of conduct, a mode of life”; when there are contradictions between the two, the Qur’an prevails. Ijma is referred to as “the consensus of the community expressed through its competent religious representatives . . . which might change with circumstances”. When resolution of a problem is not achieved through either of the three above, then there is a recourse to Aql, a process whereby “jurists must derive an appropriate rule by logical inferences and analogy” (Ibid.).

According to the Special Representative of the UN Secretary General reporting on Iran to the Commission on Human Rights, “there has been no known reform of Iranian criminal law designed to bring it into line with international standards, nor do efficient measures appear to have been taken to guarantee due process of law” (UN Commission on Human Rights, 16 January 1995, 20).

4.2 General Respect for Human Rights

Freedom of expression

Iran is a signatory to the International Covenant of Civil and Political Rights, in which Article 19 provides for the right of everyone to “hold opinions without interference” (UNHCR RefInt Database). Article 23 of the Constitution states that “Inquisition into people’s opinions shall be
forbidden and no one shall be offended or brought to account merely for having a certain opinion”, but Article 24 stipulates that

The Press and Publications shall be free in their writings unless such writings are detrimental to the foundations of Islam or the rights of the people. The law shall decide on the application of this article (Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran, 1979).

According to Human Rights Watch/Middle East, it is difficult to define the limits of freedom of expression in Iran as “it is not possible to trace censorship to any single source within the government structure . . . there often exists no regulation relevant to the ‘offense’ at hand, and in a given case the Anti-Narcotics Section of the Islamic Revolutionary Prosecutor, the Ministry of Intelligence, a state-affiliated newspaper or a semi-autonomous foundation has as much de facto power to monitor expression as the government’s designated official for this function, the Minister of Culture and Islamic Guidance” (Guardians of Thought, August 1993, 5). Moreover, the government reportedly makes use of various non-state agents to enforce its censorship policies, such as “unchecked vigilante attacks against the press and publishing houses”, or even against officials attempting to defend freedom of expression, reportedly resulting in an atmosphere where state or self-censorship is inevitable: “the hands of the government need descend on relatively few to silence many others” (Ibid.). It further adds that the scope of this censorship extends beyond the country's borders, as in the case of the fatwa issued in 1989 by Ayatollah Khomeini against Salman Rushdie for his book, Satanic Verses, which has already led to the death of the book’s Japanese translator and an attempt on the life of its Italian translator (Ibid.).

The U.S. Department of State points out that Iranian newspapers are “generally associated with various factions in the government . . . [and that] . . . they reflect different views and criticize the government but are prohibited from criticizing the concept of the Islamic Republic or promoting the rights of ethnic minorities” (Country Reports 1994, 1995). It adds that “the Government may harass or shut down independent publishing houses that are overly critical of public policy” (Ibid.). In its annual report covering events in 1993, Human Rights Watch reported the arrest of Abbas Abdi, editor-in-chief of the daily newspaper Salam, which had allegedly become “increasingly critical of government policy”, and the summoning before the Special Clerical Court of its publisher, the prominent cleric Musavi-Kho’iniha, as well as Mehdi Nassiri, editor-in-chief of the daily Keyhan, both on charges of slander (World Report 1994, 288). Slander is said to be the most common criminal charge when government policy is criticized (Country Reports 1994, 1995).

In June 1995 the offices of the radical weekly Peyam-e-Daneshjou, reported to have acquired a large following because of its criticism of leading government figures, were allegedly ransacked by unknown armed persons (La Lettre de reporters sans frontières, juillet-aout 1995). On 31 July 1995, the Ministry of Culture reportedly ordered the closing of Peyam-e-Daneshjou (Student’s Message) for publishing articles “incompatible with the country’s press law” (Middle East Times, 6-12 August 1995). This incident, the second since the closure in February 1995 of the daily Jahan-e-Islam, was seen as “another setback for Iranian radical newspapers, which are among the few to publish independent information” (Ibid.). In August 1995 the premises of a publishing house and book shop, Morghe-e Amin, were allegedly damaged by a fire bomb
(Reuters, 25 August 1995), an attack said to have been supported by a senior ayatollah because
the house had published a book deemed immoral (Ibid.). The attack, which was reportedly
condemned by 43 publishing companies, was also said to have sparked debate between Islamic
Laughs on Mondays” had been banned by the Culture Ministry and removed from book shops
after hostile reviews in hardline newspapers, which accused its author, Mohammad Reza
Koshbin Khoshnazar, of promoting “decadent Western values” (Reuters, 25 August 1995;
Agence France Presse, 14 September 1995). In October 1995, hundreds of Hezbollah militants
reportedly prevented a lecture by a prominent Islamic reformist philosopher, Abdolkarim Sorush,
an advocate of “a democratic Islam where the clergy does not have a monopoly of power”
(Reuters, 12 October 1995).

Amnesty International reported the arrest in March 1994 of the poet Ali Akbar Sa’idi-Sirjani
after writing open letters to the government objecting to censorship (Report 1995, 164). Mr.
Sirjani was allegedly held in incommunicado detention until 27 November 1994, when he was
reported by the Islamic Republic News Agency (IRNA) to have died of a heart attack in an
unnamed Tehran hospital (Ibid.). The Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General on
Iran referred to a 25 October 1994 open letter sent to the authorities by 134 Iranian writers,
academics, translators, artists and journalists calling for respect for freedom of expression and
opinion and an end to censorship and protesting “against the frustrating obstacles and humiliating
attitudes that have to be faced by those who do not respect the Government’s dictates and against
censorship and inadmissible prohibitions” (UN Commission on Human Rights, 16 January
1995).

The Special Representative also indicated that on 20 September 1994, “the Majlis enacted a law
which prohibits the importation, manufacture, marketing and use of dish antennas for satellite
Television” (Ibid.). In addition to assigning the Ministry of the Interior and the volunteer Baseej
militias the task of dismantling and removing antennas, the law “stipulates fines and confiscation
of goods for persons importing, manufacturing and distributing such devices” with the penalty
for a repeated offense being three to six years’ imprisonment (Ibid.). In a September 1995 raid
on three workshops in the suburbs of Tehran, police reportedly seized 226 satellite dishes and
arrested 30 people (Agence France Presse, 14 September 1995; Reuters, 14 September 1995).
The ban is said to have followed a campaign by Islamic hardliners to stop the advance of
“depraved” Western culture into Iran via the “diabolic” dishes” (Agence France Presse, 14
September 1995), and thus “safeguard the cultural boundaries of the country” (Index on
Censorship 1, 1995, 241-2).

Arbitrary arrest and detention

Article 32 of the Constitution, states that “no person shall be arrested unless otherwise ordered by
law . . . [and, if arrested] . . . the accused shall be notified in writing of the reasons for accusation
and within twenty four hours the preliminary case shall be referred to a competent court . . . “
(Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran, 1979). The U.S. Department of State notes
that “there is reportedly no legal time limit on incommunicado detention, nor any judicial means
to determine the legality of detention . . . [and that] . . . the security forces often do not inform
family members of a prisoner’s welfare and whereabouts” (Country Reports on Human Rights
Practices for 1994, 1995). Amnesty International cites the cases of Abbas Amir Entezam, a former Government official, who claimed to have been imprisoned for 15 months before being told he was charged with espionage; Ali Bloori, arrested in 1982 in his final year of high school and charged with membership in the Kurdistan Democratic Party of Iran, whose family did not learn of his whereabouts until 1994; of Houshang Amjadi Bigvand and his cousin, Jamshid Amiri Bigvand, arrested in 1988 by members of the Revolutionary Guards and confined to over one year in incommunicado detention, with periods of solitary confinement and torture, and with their families not being informed of their whereabouts until mid-1989, and of Morteza Afshari-Rad, arrested in 1989 for membership in the opposition political organization Derafsh-e-Kaviani (Flag of Freedom Organization) and sentenced to ten years’ imprisonment by an Islamic Revolutionary Court (Amnesty International, May 1995). The UN Secretary-General's Special Representative on Iran indicated that in December 1994 the Chief of the Prisons Department, Mr. Asadollah Lajervardi, stated that there were 100,481 inmates in Iranian prisons, over half of them belonging to opposition political groups, about 4,000 women and 3,776 persons of Afghan nationality (UN Commission on Human Rights, 16 January 1995).

Torture

In its annual report for 1994, Amnesty International stated that there continue to be reports of torture or ill-treatment of prisoners in order to “extract confessions or statements to be used as evidence at trials” and that former political prisoners claimed to have been beaten and held blindfolded for long periods of incommunicado detention (Report 1995, 164). It added that “flogging and amputation remained in force . . . [with] . . . flogging . . . frequently imposed for a wide range of offenses, often in conjunction with prison sentences” (Ibid.). Women were said to be frequent victims of flogging, especially for violating the dress code (Ibid.). The UN Secretary-General's Special Representative on Iran reported that in November 1994 two people had four fingers of the right hand amputated in public because, according to the newspaper Kayhan, they had “committed robbery and were recidivists” (UN Commission on Human Rights, 16 January 1995). Upon being convicted of theft, two other men reportedly had four fingers of their right hand amputated in Qom’s Central Prison, in the presence of other prisoners (Amnesty International, Report 1995, 165). The U.S. Department of State adds that “female prisoners have reportedly been raped or otherwise tortured while in detention . . . [and that] . . . in the past prison guards have intimidated the family members of detainees and have sometimes tortured detainees in their presence” (Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 1994, 1995). The UN Secretary-General's Special Representative on Iran points out that the body of the Jewish leader, Mr. Feizollah Mekhoubad, who had been executed in February 1994 “bore signs of torture, including a disfigured face, bruises probably caused by blows, broken teeth and contusions on various parts of the body” (UN Commission on Human Rights, 16 January 1995).

Death penalty

According to Amnesty International, since the start of the Islamic Revolution thousands of government opponents have been executed, and the death penalty is widely used for offenses such as espionage, for activities deemed to be "against the Islamic Republic of Iran" which often
means membership in an opposition political group, for drug trafficking, adultery and murder (May 1995). The UN Secretary-General's Special Representative on Iran adds that, although reporting of executions in the press has been severely curtailed, he has received information concerning 63 executions carried out in 1994, a figure similar to that of 1993 (UN Commission on Human Rights, 16 January 1995). The U.S. Department of State further notes that exiles and human rights monitors have indicated that many of those executed for so-called criminal offenses were actually political dissidents (Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 1994, 1995). Press reports in 1995 indicate that the death penalty has been extended to, and carried out for crimes such as bank fraud, antiques trafficking, kidnapping and rape, and that the government is considering the imposition of the death penalty against profiteers or hard-currency dealers (Agence France Presse, 21 May 1995; Middle East Times, 27 August-2 September 1995; Reuters, 22 August 1995, 21 May 1995 and 14 May 1995; Xinhua News Agency, 18 June 1995).

Extralegal execution

According to the UN Secretary-General's Special Representative on Iran, the Majlis enacted a law in September 1994 authorizing members of the security forces and the Baseej militias to fire at demonstrators in order to "restore law and order during illegal armed rallies, at times of unrest and during illegal armed disorders and revolts" (UN Commission on Human Rights, 16 January 1995). The law also allowed shooting at vehicles suspected of carrying fugitives, stolen goods, contraband or narcotics, with members of the security forces and the Baseej allegedly exempted from any civil or criminal court indictment for doing so (Ibid.). According to some observers, the war against drugs also "has led to thousands of summary executions" since September 1990 (The Lawyers Committee for Human Rights, 1992, 159). In May 1995, Amnesty International reported that in the last 18 months four prominent leaders of religious groups, three Christians and one Sunni Muslim and all known to be critical of government policies, were found dead under suspicious circumstances (Official secrecy hides continuing repression, May 1995). The organization also indicates that extrajudicial executions may have been carried out against political opponents outside the country: it cites as examples the cases of Kurdish members of the KDPI in Turkey, Iraq, Sweden, who were either murdered or attacked by people suspected to be connected with the Iranian authorities (Ibid.). Other government opponents in exile are also believed to have been killed by Iranians linked to the Iranian authorities in Romania, Switzerland, France, Germany and Austria (UN Commission on Human Rights, 16 January 1995).

4.3 The Situation of Ethnic Minorities

Article 15 of the Constitution of Iran declares Persian as the official language of Iran, but adds that "the use of local and ethnic languages in the press and for the mass media and the teaching of their literature shall be allowed, besides the Persian language". Article 19 stipulates that "[t]he people of Iran belonging to whatever ethnic or tribal group shall enjoy equal rights and the complexion, race, language and the like shall not be considered as a privilege" (Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran).

The Arabs
The Arabs of Khuzistan, whose numbers in Iran are estimated at 750,000 to one million, are said to have intermixed with many ethnic Persians, Azerbaijanis and non-Arab tribal peoples who moved into Khuzistan, Iran’s largest oil-producing province, since the discovery of oil there in 1908 (Keddie, 1995, 140). There is therefore, allegedly "no large Arab-majority region that could be put together as an autonomous region having a significant Arab urban center", and expectations by some Arabs of greater autonomy after the 1979 Revolution turned to disappointment as the new government, while allowing for locally elected councils, did not include in its laws or Constitution provisions for the setting up of ethnic regions, nor did it allow much use of the local language in education and official bodies (Ibid.). Many Arabs are said to live in “exceptionally depressed conditions . . . [and although] . . . many . . . work in the oil industry, agribusiness, and elsewhere, most hold lower-paying jobs than non-Arabs” (Ibid.). Protests and incidents of sabotage of oil pipelines have allegedly been attributed to Arabs (Ibid.).

The Bakhtiaris
The Bakhtiaris, who are said to number about 600,000, are concentrated in the Bakhtiari mountains west of the city of Esfahan. They reportedly played an important political role in the 1905-1911 revolution, and in 1921-1924 "initiated the establishment of the federation of southern peoples" which was subsequently defeated and forced to submit to the central government (The Encyclopedia of the Peoples of the World, 1993, 73). Although they did not become actively involved in the 1979 Islamic Revolution, the latter's introduction of strict Islamic revolutionary cadres on every tribal level is said to have caused "a drastic destabilization of the traditional ethnic structure" (Ibid.). The Bakhtiaris have traditionally taken Islam rather lightly, have had little direct contact with the mullahs, and are reportedly not prone to veil their women (Keddie, 1995, 146). Thus, "to the extent that [they] feel forced to follow the government's interpretation of Islam, they feel restricted" (Ibid.).

The Baluchis
The Baluchis are a people who inhabit the provinces of Baluchistan and Sistan in Southeast Iran as well as adjoining provinces in Pakistan and Afghanistan (Encyclopedia of the Peoples of the World, 1993, 76), in a region known for its great aridity and also described as one of the most remote and rugged parts of the world (Keddie, 1995, 140; Minority Rights Group, Report No. 48, 1981, 3). While the great majority of Baluchis are Sunni Muslims of the Hanafi school, since the sixteenth century a few are Shi'ites, especially in the Sistan area (Ibid; Keddie, 1995, 140). Baluchi nationalist revolts and movements allegedly existed in Mohammed Reza Shah's time, but since the start of the Islamic Revolution, when the government of Ayatollah Khomeini appointed a non-Baluchi Shi'iite Muslim as governor of Baluchistan-Sistan (Minority Rights Group, March 1981, 13), Baluchis have complained of being "ruled by the Shi'ite Sistan minority and began revolts that continue to this day" (Keddie, 140). However, Amnesty International has indicated that Baluchi resistance is organized along tribal lines, and not all Baluchi tribes oppose the regime in Tehran (Amnesty International, 11 May 1995). Groups such as the Baluch National Movement and the United Baluch Organization are seeking a greater degree of autonomy for the province (Ibid.). In December 1979 Baluchi resentment reportedly flared up and three days of clashes with the revolutionary guards allegedly left 11 people dead and scores wounded (Minority Rights Group, 1981, 13). Since then, international human rights monitoring organizations have reported sporadic combats in this region, which official
reports are said to attribute to "the fight against drugs" (Documentation Réfugiés, 15-28 mars 1994). In 1993, as part of its efforts to stem the activities of “paramilitary groups in Sistan-Baluchistan”, the Iranian authorities reportedly reached an agreement with Pakistan on tightening up their common border in Baluchistan, thereby hampering the traffic in drugs across the border which was believed to be the Baluchi militants’ main source of income (Middle East International, 24 June 1994). According to Amnesty International, members of the Baluchis were among representatives of ethnic minorities held as political prisoners following unfair trials in 1994 (Amnesty International Report 1995, 1995)

The Kurds
The Kurds in Iran are believed to number approximately five million (Documentation Réfugiés, mars 1994). Their situation in Iran is said to be far from stable (Hushyar, 1992, 104-5), with the area in Northwestern Iran which they inhabit being under Iranian government control, in which living conditions are described as primitive, at best (Amnesty International, 7 July 1993). Since April 1993, Iranian government forces have reportedly launched aerial attacks against Iranian Kurds, even those operating inside Iraqi territory (Libération, 10 mai 1993), while Iraqi forces made armed incursions into the “protected zone” inside Iraq above the 36th parallel (Libération, 14 mai 1993). According to Moustapha Hedjri, Secretary-General of the Kurdistan Democratic Party of Iran (KDPI), the Iranian government’s intention was to sow discord among the Kurdish populations in both countries, provoking conflict among them and thus preventing the creation of a politically autonomous Kurdistan (Ibid.). According to a spokesman of the Iranian Foreign Ministry, the incursions were part of Iran’s “resolute” reaction to armed forays by “groups of counter-revolutionaries [who have] made life unsafe for Iranians living near the Iran-Iraq border, especially in the north” (Reuters, 8 August 1993). New attacks by Iranian fighter planes were reported in November 1994, when they allegedly attacked the Iranian Kurdish encampment of Koi Sajaq, lying just north of the 36th parallel, or inside the air exclusion zone established by the Gulf War allies to protect the Kurds of Iraq (The Independent, 10 November 1994). Attempts made outside the country by the KDPI to negotiate a settlement on Kurdish autonomy with the Government of Iran resulted in the assassination of the KDPI’s previous leadership. On 18 September 1992, the Iranian Kurdish leader, Sadik Sharafkandi and three others were assassinated in a restaurant in Berlin, where Mr. Sharafkandi had gone to hold secret autonomy talks with Iranian government representatives (Associated Press, 19 September 1992). A previous attempt in 1989 also ended with the assassination of then-KDPI leader Abdul Rahman Qassemlou in Vienna (Associated Press, 19 September 1992). According to Amnesty International, the Government of Iran continued in 1994 to face armed opposition by the KDPI, and supporters of Kurdish organizations such as the KDPI and Komala were “serving long prison terms following unfair trials” (Annual Report 1995, 1995, 163). In October 1995 the KDPI claimed that one of its supporters had been hanged in a prison in Orumiyeh in Northwestern Iran, allegedly bringing to ten the number of Kurds the Iranian government had killed in the past few weeks (Reuters, 3 October 1995). The party reportedly claimed that in late September 1995 “six of its supporters were executed by a firing squad in Orumiyeh . . . [and that] . . . earlier three of its supporters died as a result of torture in Iranian prisons” (Ibid.).

The Qashqais
A nomadic people located in the centre and southeast of Iran, near Shiraz, they allegedly number about 400,000 (Documentation Réfugiés, mars 1994). Traditionally rebellious against central authority and especially so during the Shah Reza Pahlavi's regime from 1960 to 1970, they have allegedly benefitted economically from the Islamic Revolution and a few have been invested with political and administrative responsibilities at the local level (Ibid.). However, the Islamic regime has allegedly deprived them of traditional cultural activities and, since 1991, excessive taxes have allegedly been levied on them (Ibid.). Moreover, their nomadic lifestyle appears to be questioned by some leaders of the regime (Ibid.). Another observer notes that there are internal struggles between young Qashqais, some of whom are allegedly affiliated with the “leftist-minority Fedayan”, and their traditional leaders, the Khans, and their affiliates (Keddie, 1995, 145). The divisions reportedly reflect the class stratification within the tribe, ranging from the rich to the destitute (Ibid.).

The Turkomans
Information about the Turkomans in Iran is scarce. One of the smallest Sunni border tribes, they were known to raid and enslave Shi’ites in the nineteenth century, and their nomadic lifestyle apparently gave them a considerable amount of political autonomy (Keddie, 1995, 139). The land they live on is reportedly good for agriculture, and during Shah Mohammed Reza's regime some Turkomans grew rich from the cultivation of cotton (Ibid.). The 1979 Revolution appears to have elicited concerns about economic issues and discrimination by an increasingly Shi’ite state, and since then, “several armed revolts . . . often related to peasant attempts to take land, have been put down . . . [with many remaining] discontented with what they see as an uncompromising Shi’ite government” (Ibid.).

4.4 The Situation of Religious Minorities

Articles 12, 13 and 14 of the Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran set forth the official religion of the country, the recognized religious minorities, and the treatment to be accorded to non-Muslims: Article 12 establishes Islam and the Twelver Ja’fari school as the official religion of Iran, and accords full respect for other Islamic schools, including the Hanafi, Shafi’i, Maliki, Hanbali, and Zaydi. Article 13 recognizes the Zoroastrian, Jewish, and Christian religious minorities which, within the limits of the law, are free to perform their religious rites and ceremonies, and to act according to their own canon in matters of personal affairs and religious education. Article 14 calls for the respect of the human rights of non-Muslims as long as they refrain from engaging in conspiracy or activities against Islam and the Islamic Republic of Iran (Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran, 1979).

Moreover, Article 64 provides for the representation in the Islamic Consultative Assembly (Majlis) of members of religious minorities as follows:

“Zoroastrians and Jews will have one representative each, Assyrians and Chaldean Christians collectively will have one representative, . . . [and] . . . [In] case of increase of population of each minority after every ten years, they shall have one additional representative for each additional hundred and fifty thousand (150,000) inhabitants (The Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran).
However, apostasy, or conversion from Islam to another religion, is not acceptable in Islamic law. As allegedly explained by the late Ayatollah Khomeini, there are two types of apostates: innate apostates and national apostates. An innate-apostate (one whose parents were Muslims and who embraced Islam but later left Islam), if a man, is to be executed and, if a woman, is to be imprisoned for life, but will be released if she repents. A national apostate (a person converting from another faith to Islam, and then reconverting back to the other faith), is to be encouraged to repent and, upon refusal to repent, is to be executed (A Clarification of Questions, 1984, 428-9).

An Iranian newspaper article on the subject attributed the following writing to Imam Sadegh, as retold by Ayatollah Mohammad Gilani, Islamic judge of the Central Islamic Revolutionary Court:

[a]s for any Muslim whatsoever, who rejects the religion of Islam and denies the prophetic message of the Prophet of Islam, the spilling of his blood is permissible for anyone who hears of it and from the day of his apostasy his wife is forbidden to him and must be separated from him and it is forbidden for her to sleep with him and his property should be divided among his heirs and his wife should perform the uddeh of death (observe the period after a divorce or death from a husband) and it is for the Imam to slay him and give him no opportunity of repentance (International Iran Times, 31 December 1982).

The most prominent cases of apostasy appear to occur from Islam to Christianity and a number of cases have been reported where especially proselytizing apostates, i.e. converts who have begun preaching Christianity are likely to face execution, as was the case with Evangelical church leader Mehdi Dibaj, Bishop Haik Hovsepian Mehr, and the Reverend Tatavous Mikaelian, all said to have been killed between 1993 and 1994 (International Herald Tribune, 2 August 1994; Middle East International, 22 July 1994; Amnesty International, May 1995). Apostates who practice their new religion openly reportedly suffer from various degrees of harassment, ranging from confiscation or refusal to grant a passport, surveillance, threatening mail, detention and verbal or physical abuse (Iranian Christians International, September 1995).

Baha’is
The Baha’is, who are said to number between 150,000 and 300,000, are not among the protected religious minorities in Iran. They are believed to descend from a group that broke off from Islam in the 1840s, and the location of their international headquarters in Israel, despite their officially neutral position in the Arab-Israeli conflict, allegedly renders them suspect before the authorities (Keddie, 1995, 150). Baha’is are said to have no rights as Iranian citizens, with some individuals claiming to have been counselled to renounce their faith in order to “restore their rights as citizens and terminate the disabilities under which they live” (Minority Rights Group, 1992, 1). While anti-Baha’i sentiment has been traditionally strong in Iran, it allegedly increased since 1979, resulting in nearly 200 executions of its leaders by 1985, the confiscation of their property, looting and arson (World Directory of Minorities, 1990, 181). The property of Baha’is residing in Ilkhchi and Saryan is said to have been confiscated, there is reportedly great pressure by the authorities on the private sector to dismiss Baha’i employees in the city of Mashad, and property confiscated in 1979, such as cemeteries, historic sites, administrative centres, has not yet been returned (UN Commission of Human Rights, 16 January 1995, 22). Moreover, in contravention of Articles 28 and 43 of the Constitution conferring on all Iranian
citizens the right of economic pursuits and employment to earn a decent living, many Baha’is have reportedly been denied retirement pensions and work permits, unemployment benefits, business and commercial licenses (Minority Rights Group, 1992, 2). Some Baha’is dismissed from jobs in the public sector were required to return the salaries and pensions received while they were working, and Baha’i farmers reportedly continue to be denied access to farm cooperatives, which deprives them of their only access to credits, seeds, fertilizers and pesticides (UN Commission of Human Rights, 16 January 1995, 22). In May 1995 two Baha’is, Bihnam Mithaqi and Kayvan Kahlajabadi, arrested in 1989 and held without charge or trial until 1993 when an Islamic Revolutionary Court in Tehran sentenced them to death, were reportedly still being held in detention at an unknown location (Amnesty International, May 1995). The UN Secretary-General’s Special Representative on Iran adds that Mr. Bakhshu’llah Mithaqi, imprisoned since 1985, has been notified of the extension of his sentence for another ten years (UN Commission on Human Rights, 16 January 1995, 22). The Government is said to regard the Baha’i community as a “misguided sect”, and “prohibits Baha’is from teaching their faith and maintaining links with co-religionists abroad” (Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 1994, 1995). However, there are indications that since the mid-1980s “the level of persecution of the Baha’i community has fallen somewhat . . . the numbers detained have dropped . . . [although] . . . economic pressure continues . . . ” (World Directory of Minorities, 1990, 182).

Christians
Christians are one of the religious minorities protected under Article 13 of the Constitution, and Article 64 provides for the representation of the Assyrian and Chaldean Christians in the Majlis (Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran). However, in its annual report covering events in 1994, Human Rights Watch stated that “the government mounted a fierce campaign against the small Christian minority. Churches have been shut down, scores of young Christians -- many of them converts from Islam -- have been imprisoned and tortured, especially in the cities of Gorgan and Kermanshah” (World Report 1995). The U.S. Department of State reported that “Christian . . . minorities suffer varying degrees of officially sanctioned discrimination, particularly in the areas of employment, education and public accommodations . . . [and that] . . . Muslims who convert to Christianity also suffer from discrimination” (Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 1994, 1995). According to Middle East Concern, discriminatory practices against Christians include incidents such as (1) the demotion by the military’s Religious Control Unit of some Christian conscripts on the grounds that “no Muslim should salute a Christian . . . [and] . . . no Christian should be in a position where he may have access to confidential information”, or (2) sermons by Islamic clerics, such as the Ayatollah Ahmed Jannati’s 2 December 1994 broadcast over Tehran radio describing Christianity as “truly lacking in divine and religious spirituality . . . and an arid and useless movement . . . a lifeless corpse” (Middle East Concern, 1995). Converts to Christianity are especially likely to suffer harassment and/or execution. There have been a number of reports of threats and torture of known converts and the execution for apostasy of several pastors has been widely reported in the international press. In August 1994, the International Herald Tribune, reporting on the increased harassment of Christians in Iran, stated that the Armenian Christians have suffered less pressure because they conduct their services in Armenian and also avoid contact with “some dozen evangelical denominations that preach in Persian” (2 August 1994). The same source added that “the Assemblies of God church, which has 8,000 members in Iran and is
headquartered in Springfield, Missouri is the most active in the evangelical movement and is the main target of the crackdown” (Ibid.). According to the UN Secretary-General's Special Representative on Iran, Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs, Mr. Jarad Zarif, explained that “[we consider [some of the evangelical Christian churches] to be political organizations. If someone wants to start a political organization they must go through the process to obtain permission, as is the case for Muslims” (UN Commission on Human Rights, 16 January 1995, 11). In May 1995, Amnesty International reported that “over the past 18 months four prominent leaders of religious minority groups -- three Christians and a Sunni Muslim -- were found dead in suspicious circumstances” (Amnesty International, May 1995). The U.S. Department of State added that the Government of Iran “failed to provide adequate protection for [the] three Evangelical Christian leaders who were murdered in 1994” whom it had accused of seeking converts among Muslims (Country Reports 1994, 1995). Various sources reported the victims to be Assemblies of God leader Mehdi Dibaj, who, after nine years’ imprisonment, was sentenced to death for apostasy; the head of the Evangelical Council of Pastors in Iran, Bishop Haik Hovsepian Mehr, also a convert from Islam who had “campaigned relentlessly for Mr. Dibaj’s release from prison”, and a prominent Presbyterian minister, the Reverend Tatavous Mikaelian, who succeeded Bishop Hovsepian as head of the Evangelical Council (International Herald Tribune, 2 August 1994; Middle East International, 22 July 1994; Amnesty International, May 1995). These incidents are said to have “plunged Iran’s 300,000-strong Christian community into great fear” and an Armenian source has reportedly indicated that “for the first time since the Islamic revolution the Christian community is seriously worried and many are considering emigration” (Middle East International, 22 July 1994). According to Iranian Christians International, the organization continues to receive reports that converts to Christianity in Iran are victims of harassment or threats, even when they have left the country (September 1995).

Jews
The Jews are one of the recognized religious minorities of Iran (Keddie, 1991, 149). While a few leading Jews were reportedly executed after the 1979 revolution, public sentiment towards them appears to be closely linked to their perceived links to Israel (Ibid.). For example, on 25 February 1994, 77-year-old Feyzollah Mechubad, who had been imprisoned since 1992, was executed on charges of espionage for the USA and Israel (Amnesty International, May 1995, 7). The charges were allegedly based on telephone conversations he held with relatives in both countries (Ibid.). Thousands of Jews were able to leave Iran during and after the revolution, while those who do not have the means to leave are said to be apprehensive (Ibid.). There are an estimated 30,000 to 40,000 Jews remaining in Iran, and they reportedly have one representative in the Majlis (parliament) as stipulated in the Constitution (The Jerusalem Report, 9 March 1995). The representative, Kuros Keivani, has allegedly indicated that there are no Orthodox Jews in Iran, and that restrictions on travel by Iranian Jews to Israel depend “on the political winds blowing in Iran at each particular moment” (Ibid.). Zionism, however, is said to be considered “a crime punishable by death” (Minority Rights Group, November 1987, 7).

Sabeans (Mandeans)
Also known as Mandeans and “Christians of Saint John the Baptist”, the Iranian Sabeans are included among the recognized religious minorities (Keddie, 150). They are found mainly in Khuzistan, near the Iraqi border, reportedly work in agriculture and precious metals (the latter
shunned by Muslims for religious reasons), and are said to be “neither numerous nor politically important” (Ibid.). However, according to C. Chaqueri of the Encyclopedia Iranica, “members of the Mandean faith, also known as Sabeans, are ill-treated and discriminated against by the Iranian authorities, given that they fall into the category of ‘undesirables’” (telephone interview, 23 January 1995).

**Sunní Muslims**

Iran’s Sunnî Muslims are found mainly among “all Turkomans and Baluchis, most Kurds, and some Arabs” (Keddie, 1995, 147), comprising about five percent of the total population of the country (Documentation Réfugiés, 15/28 mars 1994). In August 1992, following demonstrations in the city of Shiraz, one of the Sunni leaders in the province of Fars was reportedly arrested on charges of espionage for the United States and Iraq, as well as for adultery, and subsequently executed (Ibid.). More recently, tensions between Sunnî and Shi’îte Muslims have been exacerbated by the destruction of a Sunnî mosque in Mashad which was said to have been “deliberately staged to fuel sectarian passions throughout Khorasan and Baluchistan” (Mideast Mirror, 11 February 1994).

**Zoroastrians**

Iran’s Zoroastrians, including South Asian Zoroastrians (Parsis), are said to be a small community of several thousand, concentrated in the southern cities of Yazd and Kerman (Keddie, 149-50). While there are no known reports of “special persecution” against this group (Ibid.), in his January 1993 report on the situation of human rights in Iran, the UN Secretary-General’s Special Representative on Iran referred to the situation of Zoroastrians as follows:

> [S]ome Iranian newspapers have blamed the Zoroastrian community in Iran for the reported phenomenon of conversion of some Iranian Muslims outside Iran and have associated them with political dissidents. It was further said that Zoroastrians in Iran were afraid that any information about their problems and alleged restrictions would produce more hardship and that the authorities would consider that they were creating adverse publicity” (E/CN.4/1993/41, 28 January 1993).

**Contemporary Religions** notes that “[t]raditionally, Zoroastrians do not accept converts and favor marriage between blood relations . . . [and] . . . they do not proselytize” (1992, 385).

### 4.5 The Situation of Women

While Iranian women were heavily involved in the 1979 revolution, which many saw as an opportunity to rid themselves of imposed, alien western ideas about womanhood and to restore their identity, the new Islamic regime turned from the model of the Muslim woman as a heroic militant on the national stage in favour of the obedient wife and mother (Tohidi, 1991, 256-57; Nashat, 1983, 211). While Article 20 of the Constitution states that “[a]ll persons, whether men or women, shall be equal under the protection of the law and shall enjoy all human, political, economic, social and cultural rights with due observance of the Islamic precepts”, Article 21 stipulates that “the government shall guarantee the women’s rights in every respect . . . and shall proceed to . . . create a favourable atmosphere for upgrading the personality of women and
restoration of their material and spiritual rights” (Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran, 1979). One observer notes,

The clerical elite in Iran -- both hard-line and pragmatist -- have targeted women as an important social force. The hard-line clergy have advocated essentially repressive measures in the name of Islamic purity, while the more pragmatic clergy have supported moderately reformist laws, programs, and new institutions. The overall ascendancy of radical forces during the early phases of the 1979 revolution had a particularly deleterious impact on the lives of women. The pragmatic tendencies first identified in 1985, however, have grown considerably since the death of Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini in 1989, creating a climate more receptive to reform on issues affecting women. Many extremist policies of earlier years have been overturned, while others coexist with more moderate ones, fueling contradictions in word and deed in the Islamic republic (Ramazani, 1993).

Gains in the field of education include increases in literacy rates for urban and rural women, in the number of female university students and in the number of fields of study available to women (United Nations Children’s Fund, February 1993; British Broadcasting Corporation, 13 March 1995; Ramazani, 1993; IRNA, 28 November 1993). However, 15 million out of 28 million women, or 57 percent, remain illiterate (Ramazani, 1993). There are also different restrictions applicable to single and married women: single women are not entitled to receive foreign study scholarships (L’Actualité, 15 May 1993), and married women, while permitted to attend night school (Najmabadi, 3 November 1993), are not allowed to attend public secondary schools (Tohidi, 1991, 253).

In employment, a woman’s right to work was affirmed by Ayatollah Yazdi, but noting, however, that "in the absence of a private nuptial contract specifying a wife's right to work outside the house or continue her studies, her husband had the right to deny these prerogatives (Middle East Watch, Report 1994, 289). Nevertheless, the choice of occupation allegedly depends on her husband, who also determines how she will be employed (L’Actualité, 15 May 1993, 43; Rhoodie, 1989, 381). He may prevent his wife from working if he deems that her choice of employment is contrary to the family’s interests, although he must prove this to the Special Civil Tribunal (Afkhami and Friedl, 1993, 5).

One of the most publicized effects of the Islamic revolution on women has been the imposition of the Hijab: in March 1979 Ayatollah Khomeini first advised women to wear a veil (Afshar 1989, 44; Chafiq 1991, 126), since an unveiled woman represented the negative influence of western values on indigenous culture (Moghadam 1993, 88). In 1980 the dress code became mandatory, and is required to be worn in all public places regardless of a woman's religion or citizenship (Moghadam, 1993, 175; Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 1993, 1994, 1178). Women's hair must be fully covered and their faces free of make-up (Rhoodie, 1989, 379). Contraventions of the dress code are punishable by either a verbal reprimand, a fine, or 74 strokes of the lash, or a prison term of one month to one year (League of Iranian Women, June 1993, 25; Rhoodie, 1989, 379; UN Commission on Human Rights, 28 January 1993). According to the U.K. Parliamentary Human Rights Group, the imposition of the Hijab has cost nearly 100,000 women their jobs because of their opposition to the new law, with about 40,000 teachers being dismissed on the grounds of being "unproductive" (August 1995).
After a temporary lull, the enforcement of the Hijab reportedly increased in 1993, when an estimated 800 to up to 5,000 women were arrested and taken in for questioning, and in some cases, flogged (Afkhami, 3 November 1993; Hoodfar, 4 November 1993). Arrests were reportedly carried out by the morality police, the Revolutionary Guards and the Baseej (L'Actualité, 15 May 1993; The Economist, 22 August 1992; The Gazette, 9 February 1993). 

Amnesty International has reported that in 1994 scores of women were reported to have been sentenced to flogging for violating the dress code (Report 1995, 165). Other sources cite the example of a 53-year-old woman whose headscarf slipped while she stacked groceries in her car, whereupon she was arrested and taken to prison, where she and more than 100 other women between 15 and 62 years of age were sentenced to receive 80 lashes (The Ottawa Citizen, 8 December 1994).
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