

Iran: Leaders gathered at UN must act over Mahsa Amini's death and anti-protest violence



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‘Brutal’ crackdown against protesters sees at least eight killed and hundreds arrested

Most of the injured not seeking hospital treatment for fear of arrest

‘Iran’s security forces will continue to feel emboldened ... if they are not held accountable’ - Diana Eltahawy

Amnesty International has called on world leaders gathered at the UN General Assembly in New York to support international action against Iran amid an ongoing crackdown against largely peaceful protests in the country following the death in custody of 22-year-old Mahsa Amini last week.

The security forces’ violent actions have left at least eight people dead and hundreds injured.

On 13 September, Mahsa Amini, an Iranian Kurdish woman, was arrested in Tehran by Iran’s so-called “morality” police, who routinely subject women and girls to arbitrary arrest and detention, torture and other ill-treatment for not complying with the country’s discriminatory compulsory veiling laws.

According to eyewitnesses, Amini was violently beaten while being forcibly transferred to Vozara detention centre in Tehran. Within hours, she was transferred to Kasra hospital having fallen into a coma. She died three days later. The Iranian authorities announced an investigation while

simultaneously denying any wrongdoing. The promised investigation does not meet the requirements of independence as it is due to be carried out by the Ministry of Interior.

Amnesty has gathered evidence of the security forces' unlawful use of birdshot and other metal pellets, teargas, water cannon and beatings with batons to disperse protesters who have gathered in numerous towns and cities in response to Amini's death. Amnesty has recorded the deaths of six men, one woman and one child during protests on 19 and 20 September in the provinces of Kurdistan (4), Kermanshah (2) and West Azerbaijan (2). Of these, at least four died from injuries sustained from security forces firing metal pellets at close range.

At least two other people have lost sight in one or both eyes. Hundreds more, including children, have sustained painful injuries amounting to torture or other ill-treatment due to the unlawful use of birdshot and other munitions against them.

The authorities have confirmed the death of three people in Kurdistan province on 19 September and two people in Kermanshah province on 20 September, but, consistent with widespread patterns of denial and cover-up, they attributed responsibility for their deaths to "enemies of the [the Islamic Republic]".

"The global outpouring of rage and empathy over Mahsa Amini's death must be followed by concrete steps by the international community to tackle the crisis of systemic impunity that has allowed widespread torture, extrajudicial executions and other unlawful killings by the Iranian authorities to continue unabated both behind prison walls and during protests. "The Iranian authorities' latest brutal crackdown on protests coincides with Ebrahim Raisi's speech at the UN. "He has been given a platform on the world stage, despite credible evidence of his involvement in crimes against humanity, in a stark reminder of the devastating impact of the repeated failure of UN member states to tackle impunity for grave crimes in Iran. "Iran's security forces will continue to feel emboldened to kill or injure protesters and prisoners,

including women arrested for defying abusive compulsory veiling laws, if they are not held accountable. "With all avenues for accountability closed at the domestic level, the UN Human Rights Council has a duty to send a strong message to the Iranian authorities that those responsible for crimes under international law will not go unpunished."

Amnesty has gathered eyewitness accounts and analysed images and videos of the protests, which reveal a harrowing pattern of the Iranian security forces unlawfully and repeatedly firing metal pellets directly at protesters.

Eyewitnesses reported that at least three men (Fereydoun Mahmoudi in Saqqez, Kurdistan province; Farjad Darvishi in Urumieh, West Azerbaijan province; and an unidentified man in Kermanshah, Kermanshah province), and one woman (Minou Majidi in Kermanshah) died from injuries caused by metal pellets during protests on 19 and 20 September. Four other people - Reza Lotfi and Foad Ghadimi in Dehgolan, Kurdistan province; Mohsen Mohammadi in Divandareh, Kurdistan province; and 16-year-old Zakaria Khial in Urumieh - were also killed. Human rights defenders told Amnesty that according to their sources on the ground, they were shot by security forces but did not have any additional information on the types of munitions used.

Consistent eyewitness accounts and video footage leave no doubt that those firing weapons during the protests belonged to Iran's security forces. Extensive video evidence indicates that protesters in Kermanshah, Kurdistan and West Azerbaijan provinces - where protester deaths were recorded (*see note below) - were mostly peaceful. In some places, a number of protesters engaged in stone-throwing and damaged police vehicles - though this in no way justifies the use of metal pellets, which is prohibited under all circumstances.

According to a source interviewed by Amnesty, on 16 September, the first day of protests, the security forces in Saqqez fired birdshot at 18-year-old Nachirvan Maroufi at a distance of about ten metres, resulting in him losing the sight in his right eye. The source said the security forces also fired birdshot at another young man, 22-year-old Parsa Sehat, who

consequently lost the sight in both eyes.

On 19 September, mass protests spread from Saqqez to other cities populated by Iran's oppressed Kurdish minority, including Baneh, Dehgolan, Divandareh, Kamyaran, Mahabad and Sanandaj. Protesters, victims' relatives and journalists on the ground told Amnesty that on that day alone, the security forces injured hundreds of men, women and children by repeatedly firing metal pellets at their heads and chests at close range, indicating intent to cause maximum harm.

An eyewitness to the crackdown in Kamyaran told Amnesty:

Eyewitness accounts of the security forces' extensive use of metal pellets are corroborated by videos and photos reviewed by Amnesty in which the sounds of repeated firing are heard and classic spray patterns of birdshot are seen on injured protesters and bystanders.

Gruesome images and eyewitness testimonies obtained by Amnesty further indicate that in Divandareh, Saqqez and Dehgolan the security forces fired an unidentified munition causing gaping wounds on protesters' legs, chests and abdomens. Those hit include Zana Karimi, a 17-year-old boy who sustained severe leg injuries after being shot in Divandareh which may require his leg to be amputated, and Ehsan Ghafouri who suffered severe kidney injuries after being shot in Dehgolan.

Amnesty has learnt that most injured protesters and bystanders are not seeking hospital treatment for fear of arrest, which puts them at risk of infection and other medical complications.

The security forces have violently arrested several hundred demonstrators - including children - both during the protests of 19 September and in subsequent night-time raids. An eyewitness reported seeing scores of arrested protesters in Kamyaran with fractured heads, noses or arms, and bloodied bodies.

*Note: this press release is focused on the provinces of Kurdistan, Kermanshah and West Azerbaijan, where protesters

were killed. Amnesty is currently investigating the crackdown on protests in other cities across Iran since 19 September, including Hamedan, Rasht, Shiraz, Tabriz and Tehran.

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Press Contacts

1. Press Office

press@amnesty.org

+44 (0) 20 7413 5566

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