



Protesters holding images of Mahsa Amini in a protest in Madrid, Spain on October 1, 2022

New Report Says Iran Treated Protesters As 'Combatants'

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A recent report by an Iranian rights group contends that authorities treated the Woman, Life, Freedom protests of 2022-2023 as an "armed conflict," categorizing the demonstrators as combatants.

Consequently, they deployed military units specialized in combating armed groups, alongside security forces armed with military-grade weapons, authorized to use lethal force, torture, and terrorize civilians to suppress the uprising, stated Omid Shams, a lawyer



Shams also noted that authorities deployed tanks and armored vehicles in several provinces. His organization identified at least twenty military units from the Revolutionary

Guards (IRGC), the IRGC's Basij militia force, and the police, along with 526 individuals directly involved in severe crimes against protesters.

The report highlights recurring suppression tactics, including the deliberate and indiscriminate firing on protesters, bystanders, and those documenting the attacks, reminiscent of previous protests such as those in 2019.



A scene of the Women, Life, Freedom protests in Tehran (September 2022)

The protests erupted when Iran's 'hijab police' arrested Mahsa Amini, a 22-year-old woman in the street for improper attire and hours later she was transferred to hospital with severe head injuries and died three days later. Months of protests that followed represented the most serious challenge to the Islamic Republic since its inception in 1979. Iranian authorities had used brutal force against protesters in the past also, the worst being in November 2019, when they killed at least 1,500 people in the streets.

Justice for Iran, a London-based non-governmental organization (NGO), focuses on human rights abuses in Iran. It maintains a database of political prisoners in Iran (The Atlas of Iranian Prisons) and organized the Iran Atrocities tribunal in London to mark the first anniversary of the November 2019 protests.

The organization's new 250-page report, titled "Waging War on Civilians: Exposing Iran's Repressive Units and Crimes Against Humanity," offers a comprehensive overview of the command structure responsible for the protester massacre, the forces involved, and the weaponry used.

During the Woman, Life, Freedom protests, which began in mid-September following Amini's death, security forces reportedly targeted passing cars, public transport, residential and commercial buildings, medical centers, and hospitals, instilling fear among citizens.

Many protesters were systematically targeted in the face, resulting in numerous cases of blindness. Iran Human Rights (IHR) reported in September 2023 that women comprised 9 percent of slain protesters and 28% of those who suffered eye injuries.

Justice for Iran employed various methodologies, including open-source intelligence, expert interviews, and an in-depth analysis of visual evidence from its archive database of 35,000 videos, to assess the government's actions during the 2022-23 protests and identify serious human rights violations.

Based on its findings, the report argues that authorities treated the protests as an armed conflict, labeling protesters as combatants and deploying military units and security forces authorized to use lethal force, torture, and terrorize civilians.

In April 2022, Iran's Supreme Leader, Ali Khamenei, called for a robust response to criticism and attacks against the Islamic Republic, advocating for the use of "hybrid warfare" to counter various forms of aggression.

Justice for Iran has shared its findings with relevant international rights organizations, including the United Nations Fact Finding Mission on Iran, established in December 2022 after the brutal crackdown on protesters. The mission is set to release a preliminary report on March 8 and a comprehensive report on March 18.

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