

State Sponsored Child Abuse in Iran

Iran's violations of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child

The child shall have the right to freedom of expression; this right shall include freedom to seek, receive and impart information and ideas of all kinds, regardless of frontiers, either orally, in writing or in print, in the form of art, or through any other media of the child's choice.

United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (article 13)

By Shayan Arya and Nir Boms

- Iran is breaching all the international human rights treaties it signed since it joined the United Nations in 1945, particularly those designed to protect the weakest segment of society, children. This paper details the horrendous child abuse endorsed by the Islamic Republic of Iran that is in direct violation of the treaties it signed and ratified.ⁱ
- Iran ratified its commitment to the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) in 1994, but added an amendment that gives Tehran the “right” to reject all the criteria designed to protect children.ⁱⁱ This gives Iran the green light to trample on children’s rights and violate all the clauses of the CRC while still remaining a signatory.
- Iran holds the ominous world record for child executions, according to both Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch. A report by the CMIPⁱⁱⁱ think tank shows how, in clear violation of the CRC, Iran is teaching whole generations of schoolchildren to sacrifice themselves in “martyrdom” operations against the West. Testimonies leaked out of Iran relay horrific accounts of children tortured and jailed by the Iranian authorities. Children belonging to religious minorities such as the Bahai are discriminated against and hounded by the state.
- With the plight of millions of Iranian children in mind, this paper is intended to raise awareness among the international community to act and put an end to Iran’s shameful state sponsored child abuse. Iran must be persuaded to abide by the

international treaties it signed and grant children the protection and freedoms they deserve in accordance with the CRC^{iv}.

- It is worth noting that Iran is also breaching its commitments to the other rights treaties it ratified including: The International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination and the International Covenant on Economic, Civil and Cultural Rights.
- This document was drafted in conjunction with The Center for Monitoring the Impact of Peace (CMIP), a think tank that analyzes state education curriculums to test their impact on foreign relations, culture and ultimately, peace.

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When Iran ratified its commitment to upholding the CRC on July 13, 1994, it added the following reservation: “The **Government of the Islamic Republic of Iran reserves the right not to apply any provisions or articles of the Convention that are incompatible with Islamic Laws and the international legislation in effect.**”

With this amendment Iran managed to remain party to the CRC while allowing itself in practice to violate everything the CRC stands for, namely the protection of children.

On May 8 2006, Iran’s Permanent Mission to the United Nations released a letter to the UN Secretariat stating that Iran was reconsidering its reservation to the Convention on the Rights of the Child. To date, Iran has not rescinded its reservation and UN and NGO reports show that violations against children in Iran have continued unabated since the pledge was made.

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In the same letter, Iran claimed it had improved its support and cooperation with the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), particularly in regard to human rights education. That being said however, there is no evidence that Iran is heeding UN guidelines on human rights, especially not in the realm of education. In fact, a recent report by the Center for Monitoring the Impact of Peace (CMIP) reveals that Iran is violating numerous articles of the CRC en masse, via its education curriculum that affects the livelihood of millions of Iranian children.

In the most comprehensive report of Iranian textbooks to date, CMIP examined 115 Iranian school books and teachers guides and found that children are being instructed to sacrifice themselves in a holy war against the “enemies of Islam” with a focus on the United States and the West. The report shows how the Iranian leadership is making a cynical use of its education syllabus to spread hatred among young people that will only prolong the hostilities plaguing the Middle East and elsewhere.

There are about 15 million students in Iran being indoctrinated into this culture of hate and the curriculum is laying the foundations for the next generation of suicide bombers.

This education system endangers children's lives and is in direct violation of the CRC, which stipulates in Article 6 that: **“States Parties recognize that every child has the inherent right to life and that, States Parties shall ensure to the maximum extent possible the survival and development of the child.”**

One of the main themes in the textbooks is the glorification of the deaths of the thousands of children who were “drafted” into the Iranian army during its war with Iraq. The children, some as young as 9 and others still in high school, were pulled out of classrooms and sent to the front on suicide missions. These exploited child soldiers are held up as role models for students to emulate throughout the state education system.

School kids are taught they should lay down their lives for the regime; an Iranian textbook for grade 10, shows how child soldiers are presented as role models for children to revere and imitate. **“During the eight years of Holy Defense [the war with Iraq] more than 500,000 school students were sent to the fronts. 36,000 martyrs, thousands of missing-in-action, invalids, and liberated [prisoners-of-war] of this sacrificing section were offered to the Islamic Revolution.”**



Educating kids to seek death and teaching them to become child soldiers is a horrendous exploitation of children. The CRC explicitly protects minors from this kind of abuse in Article 36: **Children should be protected from any activity that takes advantage of them or could harm their welfare and development.**

Article 38 lays down strict laws against sending kids to war: **States Parties shall take all feasible measures to ensure that persons who have not attained the age of fifteen years do not take a direct part in hostilities... States Parties shall refrain from recruiting any person who has not attained the age of fifteen years into their armed forces.**

Iran's education syllabus teaches children to regard faiths other than Islam as inferior. The textbooks condemn irreligious Muslims and teach children that atheists “do not have the right to life.” In fact, atheism is a crime in Iran that can be punished by death. Members of the Bahai faith are discriminated against by the Iranian government and children learn in school that Baha'ism is a “Western plot to undermine Islam.”

Since Iran's constitution can be overruled so easily, there is a huge discrepancy between the laws as they appear on paper and how they are implemented on the ground as reports by the UN, CMIP and human rights organizations show.

This kind of xenophobic education is in violation of Article 14 of the CRC which reads: **States Parties shall respect the right of the child to freedom of thought, conscience and religion.**

Not only does the Iranian education syllabus violate the CRC but it also contradicts the Islamic Republic's Fundamental Law. The same Iranian doubletalk, that allows Tehran to literally get away with murder while participating in human rights treaties, is also deployed to snub its own constitution that unequivocally secures human rights.

The Iranian constitution can be bypassed by two powerful government bodies; the "Guardian Council of the Constitution" which can overrule Fundamental Law if they believe it contradicts their interpretation of Islamic law, and the "Expediency Council" which can veto legislation if they deem it is in the better interest of the state.

Article 14 of the Fundamental Law for example, states: "The Fundamental Law stipulates non-discrimination of the ethnicities and individuals of the people of Iran on the basis of language, race and ethnicity and [stipulates] that each one of them enjoys the [same] rights and freedoms." While article 19 reads: "The people of Iran of every ethnicity and tribe enjoy equal rights. Color, race, language and their likes will not be a reason for privileged treatment."

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Iran defines maturity as the age of 9 for girls and 15 for boys. This means that children are, judged, sentenced and punished as adults. This is in direct violation of children's rights as stipulated by the first article of the CRC which defines a child as **"a human being under the age of eighteen."**

An Amnesty International report from June 2007 titled "Iran the last executioner of children,"^{vi} lists the names of 71 children known to be facing the death penalty in Iran, but emphasizes that "the total number could be much higher as many death penalty cases in Iran are believed to go unreported." Many of the juveniles on death row are members of minority groups including Iranian Arabs, homosexuals and young girls who had been molested and abused. The report cites 24 child executions documented since 1990 and adds that "11 were still under the age of 18 at the time of their execution while the others were either kept on death row until they had reached 18 or were convicted and sentenced after reaching that age."

These horrendous violations of children's rights are outlawed in Article 37 of the CRC: **States Parties shall ensure that... Neither capital punishment nor life imprisonment without possibility of release shall be imposed for offences committed by persons below eighteen years of age.**

Case in point is that of Makwan Mouloudzadeh who is facing the hangman's noose for "crimes of chastity" he allegedly committed seven years ago at the age of 13. Mouloudzadeh was sentenced to death in May 2007 and will be executed soon despite the fact that his accusers repeatedly retracted their claims during the trial. ^{vii}

Executions are typically carried out in public and the most common method is death by hanging, usually from an industrial crane. The children stand on a gallows with their hands tied behind their backs while the executioner fits a noose around their necks. The children are then swung from the crane and left to dangle in front of the crowds for some time after their deaths.

A Human Rights Watch report titled "Iran Leads the World in Executing Children,"^{viii} also released in June 2007, states that: "Torture and ill-treatment are common in Iranian detention centers, making the court's willingness to accept a child's confession in a death penalty case particularly disturbing."

Torturing children is not only abhorrently immoral but it is strictly forbidden by the CRC treaty that Iran is party to. Article 37 declares: **No child shall be subjected to torture or other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment.**

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As this paper shows, Iran is committing serious violations of the Convention on the Rights of the Child while cynically remaining a signatory. It has an intricate system of legislation that enables the government to veto its own constitution that secures children's rights. It is endangering children by encouraging them to seek death and is instilling in them hatred toward different cultures and religions via its education curriculum.

The Center for Monitoring the Impact of Peace deplors Iran's violations of children's rights and urges the international community to take action to end them immediately.

Iran must be pressured to honor the international human rights treaties it has signed^{ix} and be held accountable for the welfare of its child citizens. Iran must end its indoctrination of children into a culture of hate and cult of martyrdom via its education syllabus. Iran must stop exploiting children, who as the most vulnerable members of its society, deserve the protections and freedoms granted them by the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

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About the Authors

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ⁱ Amnesty International report

<http://thereport.amnesty.org/eng/Regions/Middle-East-and-North-Africa/Iran>

Human Rights Watch report <http://hrw.org/englishwr2k7/docs/2007/01/11/iran14703.htm>

ⁱⁱ United Nations document "The Islamic Republic of Iran and the Convention on the Rights of the Child" July 23, 1998 <http://www.hri.ca/fortherecord1999/documentation/tbodies/crc-c-41-add5.htm>

ⁱⁱⁱ Dr Groiss, Arnon and Toobian, Nethanel; "The Attitude to "the Other" and to Peace in Iranian School Books and Teachers Guides," The Center for Monitoring the Impact of Peace, 2007 <http://www.edume.org/>

^{iv} Convention on the Rights of the Child <http://www.ohchr.org/english/law/pdf/crc.pdf>

^v Defense Readiness, Grade 10 (ages 15-16) 2004, p. 11^v

^{vi} Amnesty International report; "Iran the Last Executioner of children" June 27, 2007 <http://web.amnesty.org/library/Index/ENGMDE130592007>

^{vii} Human Rights Watch, "Iran: Revoke death sentence in Juvenile case," November 3, 2007 <http://hrw.org/english/docs/2007/11/03/iran17242.htm>

^{viii} Human Rights Watch report; "Iran Leads the World in Executing Children" June 20, 2007 <http://hrw.org/english/docs/2007/06/20/iran16211.htm>