

# Human Rights Violations in Kurdistan of Iran

Annual Report (2017)

For the Attention of the office of the UN Special Rapporteur on the  
Situation of Human Rights in the Islamic Republic of Iran, UN agencies,  
Media, Government Representatives and the general public



Association for Human Rights in Kurdistan of Iran-Geneva (KMMK-G)  
28 February 2018

KMMK-G expresses immense grief for the sudden passing of Ms. Asma Jahangir, the Special Rapporteur on the Situation of Human Rights in Iran, in February 2018. Ms. Jahangir was an internationally renowned and courageous human rights defender. We will celebrate her life and her vision in our struggle for human rights in Iran, and beyond. Her legacy will continue to inspire and to guide us in this difficult journey. May she rest in peace.

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\* For information regarding the collected data, please contact KMMK-G at [info@kmmk-ge.org](mailto:info@kmmk-ge.org).

## Introduction

This report provides up-to-date data and analysis on the situation of human rights in Kurdistan of Iran from January 1, 2017 until December 31, 2017, prepared for the attention of the UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Iran, UN agencies, media, governments and public attention.

Similar to his first presidential campaign in 2012, Hassan Rouhani again pledged to improve and reconsider its security approach toward Iranian Kurdistan in his presidential campaign in May 2017. Nevertheless, the persecution, execution, imprisonment and indiscriminate and blind killings of *Kulbaran* (border couriers or tradesmen) remain alarmingly high, with the Islamic Republic justifying much of its atrocities under the pretexts of guarding the country's security.<sup>1</sup>

This report specifically addresses executions, political prisoners, indiscriminate killings of *Kulbaran* (Border Couriers), women suicide and landmine incidents affecting Kurdish civilians from January 1, 2017 to December 31, 2017.

Kurdish people in Iranian Kurdistan have yet again endured the highest number of executions in 2017; at least 71 Kurdish prisoners have been executed; 66 *kulbar* (border couriers or tradesmen) were reported killed and 152 injured; and 13 landmine explosion fatalities and 30 landmine injuries were reported in Kurdistan of Iran.

Every year KMMK-G provides the details of data collected in each aforementioned category in Persian attached to its annual human rights violations in Kurdistan report.

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<sup>1</sup> Rouhani Meter: <https://goo.gl/XYJdNe> and IRNA: <https://goo.gl/YLsvPU>

## Background

### State-Sponsored Violence and Discriminations against Kurdish Citizens

Kurdistan, the country of the Kurds, is divided among Iran, Turkey, Iraq and Syria. Iranian Kurdistan covers an area of 111,705 km<sup>2</sup>, comprising four western provinces of Kermanshah, Ilam, Wermê (West Azerbaijan) and Kurdistan, situated in northwest Iran. Their population is estimated between 11–13 million people. Most of the Kurds are Muslims: 66% Sunni, 27% Shi'a and the others are: Yarsan, Yazidis, Qadiriyya, Naqeshbandiyya, Christian and Jew.

Iranian Kurdistan like Iranian Baluchistan, Ahwaz and Turkmenistan suffer a high level of unemployment and discriminatory policies of "the gozinesh", religious monitoring based on one specific sect of Islam. According to the UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, the Iranian 1995 Selection Law based on Religious and Ethical Standards known as the "gozinesh" impairs the equality of opportunity or treatment in employment for persons belonging to ethnic and religious minorities.

Despite the diversity of ethnic constituents of Iran, only the Persian-Shiite group holds ultimate state power, and Article 1 of the Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran declares the Twelver Shi'a School of Islam as the formal religion of the state.

The current government maintains the policies of its predecessors and adheres to a system of governance based on the ideology of one country, one nation, one language and one religion. These elements perpetuate systemic and systematic discrimination against and repression of all ethnic nationalities and religious minorities in the country. Governmental participation by members of ethnic nationalities or religious minorities such as Kurds, Sunni Baloch people, Yarsan or Baha'is is severely restricted, preventing such individuals from assuming the presidency or occupying any significant governmental position.

## Recent Developments

In the final days of 2017 a series of public protests emerged across Iran, including in Kurdistan. In these protests that began on 28 December 2017, ordinary citizens objected to growing inequalities and questioned the legitimacy of the Islamic Republic's rule. In the aftermath of these nationwide protests that led to further crackdown by the Islamic Republic, Iranian Kurdistan has also seen turmoil, intensified repression and arrests.

According to primary data received by our sources from inside the country, 428 Kurdish citizens were arrested, 14 of the detainees were sentenced to imprisonment going from 1 year to 10 years for the crimes of "threat against national security", "*moharebeh*", and "membership of a Kurdish party", all decided upon in hasty and unfair trials. Furthermore, 4 others were called to the court in the days following the protests. Six Kurdish protestors namely Mr. Saru Qaramani from Sanandij, Mr Khaled Qaisary from Kermanshah, Mr. Ghulamraza Mohammadi from Kermanshah, Mr Hussein Qaderi from Sanandij, Mr. Kayanush Zaidi From Sanandij and Mr. Aram Mua'azi from Sanandij were reported killed in prisons after being tortured.

The fate of 414 of the 428 detainees of the protests is unclear, and their whereabouts also remain unknown. KMMK-G, along with its data collection partners, is currently closely monitoring the situation on the ground, and will issue reports in future months to further elaborate on the preliminary numbers stated above.

## Methodology

The Iranian authorities refuse to provide accurate data on executions, landmines, Kulbaran (border couriers) and other issues. In order to get the most credible data, KMMK-G collects and verifies up-to-date information in the following ways: (a) conducting interviews with the family of the victims, (b) conducting interviews with the lawyers of the victims, (c) contacting and receiving information from various institution, on-the-ground local networks, as well as informants within authorities and governmental entities, (d) monitoring the Islamic Republic's official statements, state media and publications, (e) receiving information from informal news agencies, and (f) partnering with the Human Rights Section of Kurdpa News Agency in obtaining on-the-ground information.

## I. Executions

According to the data collected by the Association for Human Rights in Kurdistan of Iran-Geneva (KMMK-G), for the period of January 1 to December 31, 2017, at least 71 Kurdish prisoners were executed. In this regard, despite secrecy surrounding executions, and the government's refusal to publish the names and the ethnicity or whereabouts of the executed prisoners, KMMK-G has been able to identify the names of at least some of those executed.

According to KMMK-G's collected data, at least 71 Kurdish prisoners were executed in 2017.<sup>2</sup> According to the data collected, about 50% of these prisoners were executed for drug-related crimes<sup>3</sup>, about 30% for murder, among other crimes such as *moharebeh* "enmity against God", membership of Kurdish opposition parties and other such allegations. For instance, this year Morteza Rahmani, a Kurdish political prisoner, and Seyed Jamal Mousavi, charged with religious (Sunni) and belief-related allegations, were executed.

The majority of these executions take place after unfair trials and for crimes that do not constitute the "most serious crimes" under international law. In this context, drug-related offenses and the execution of individuals on vaguely worded offenses, such as *moharebeh* or "enmity against God" are examples of insufficient and unfair forms of crime formulation. The Kurdish prisoners face unfair trial and are often convicted in proceedings marked by a pattern of alleged abuses including the use of confessions driven under torture and denial of access to a lawyer.

Proportional to the population of Iran, the number of Kurdish executions is dramatically high. Likely in order to deter any collective resistance, the Islamic Republic executed

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<sup>2</sup> The data collected on-the-ground on Kurdish executions varies. This can be partially due to the fact that some executions are carried out secretly or that some families may have been intimidated not to report. KMMK-G has come across data as high 112 executions in 2017, often with accompanying metadata. However, KMMK-G has decided to state the least verifiable number of executions that its on-the-ground sources have compiled. The metadata used to calculate approximate desegregation of executions reported in 2017 is from a dataset of 112 executions, applied to a minimum of 71 executions.

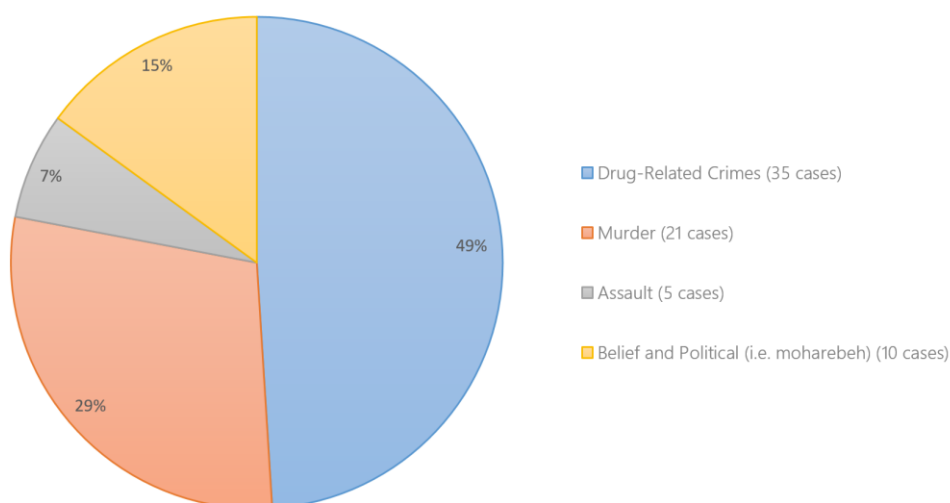
<sup>3</sup> The amendment of the Islamic penal code in the Islamic Republic in late 2017 not to consider death penalty for low-level drug crimes have spurred hopes for fewer drug-related executions in future years. Nevertheless, thus far the rate of drug-related executions of Kurdish prisoners continue to remain alarmingly high. <https://goo.gl/XhUPFh>



more than one fifth of the Kurdish prisoners outside Kurdish region in provinces like Qazween, Hamedan and Rasht.

As the data reveals, drug-related crimes are the highest alleged reason for the execution of Kurdish citizens. The Islamic Republic's parliament passed measures in 2017-2018, raising the threshold for capital punishment when it comes to possession of opium and methamphetamine.<sup>4</sup> While there are hopes that the softening of the law may help to reduce executions, KMMK-G remains sceptical as the execution of Kurdish citizens is often done to intimidate the Kurdish population, and is therefore political and not judicial in nature. Nevertheless, KMMK-G and its on-the-ground data collection partners will closely monitor the rate of executions in 2018, assessing the potential impact of the softened law.

**Execution of Kurdish Prisoners in Iran**  
January 1, 2017 till December 31, 2017



<sup>4</sup> The Guardian, 10 January 2018 <https://goo.gl/BzAB4u>

## II. Political Prisoners

Similar to previous years, the share of Kurdish political imprisonment remains dramatically high in 2017. According to the Report of the Special Rapporteur on the Situation of Human Rights in the Islamic Republic of Iran published on March 17, 2017, Kurdish political prisoners are said to represent almost half of the total number of political prisoners in the country.<sup>5</sup>

According to KMMK-G's collected data, in 2017, 1949 Kurdish citizens have been detained for a variety of reasons, and often in groups, with charges such as environmental rights advocacy, eating while supposed to be fasting during the month of Ramadan, working as border couriers, cheering for the Kurdish referendum in neighbouring Kurdistan of Iraq held in September 2017, planning and participating in nationwide protests, and other such charges.

Without adherence to fundamental principles such as due process and fair trial, 128 of these detainees were charged with alleged "political and security"-related crimes, facing sentenced such as long years of imprisonment, lashes and heavy financial penalty. They are often charged with crimes related to civic activism and membership of Kurdish political parties. Among these prisoners, there are individuals who are workers, teachers, *Koulbars* (border couriers), artists, and human rights activists, etc. For instance, Mr. Saber Shekh Sala, a student and Mr. Diako Rasuli were sentenced to the death penalty on the vague charges of "threats against the national security" and "propaganda against the state" Furthermore, according to KMMK-G's data , at least 17 Kurdish political prisoners have undergone torture and beating, 36 went on hunger strike in objection to the inhumane circumstances of their imprisonment, 18 were deprived from appropriate medical care and another 16 Kurdish political prisoners were denied basic rights such as visitation rights.

Evidently, the Kurdish community remains one of the most repressed groups in the country, with individuals being persecuted, arrested and in many cases sentenced to death, due to their alleged activism.

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<sup>5</sup> Report of the Special Rapporteur on the Situation of Human Rights in the Islamic Republic of Iran (17 March, 2017), Page 18, Clause 79:  
<https://goo.gl/xQvQqh>

### III. Indiscriminate Killings of *Kulbaran* (border couriers or tradesmen)

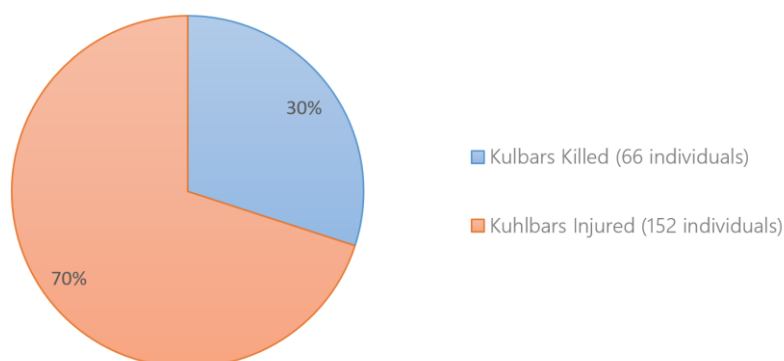
Even though the current Islamic Republic administration pledged to change its security approach toward Iranian Kurdistan, the indiscriminate killing of Kurdish *Kulbaran* (border couriers or tradesmen) has remained high in 2017.<sup>6</sup> The indiscriminate and blind killing of Kurdish *Kulbaran* takes place in blatant violation of Iran's domestic laws and international obligations.

KMMK-G has received reports of indiscriminate and blind killings of 66 border couriers known as *Kulbar* from January 1, 2017 till December 31, 2017. Iranian border security forces also injured 152 *kulbars*.

Border security forces involved in indiscriminate and blind killings do not respect Iranian domestic laws, which authorize the use of lethal force only as a last resort. Moreover, authorities arrested a 246 *Kulbars* in 2017, confiscating their goods. In addition, hundreds of horses belonging to Kurdish *Kulbars* were also shot dead.

Due to high rates of unemployment, and land contamination caused by landmines and explosive remnants of the Iran-Iraq war that hamper seriously the daily life of civilians particularly the farmers, the nomads, the shepherds and traders, the Kurdish youth and farmers from four Kurdish provinces of Kermanshah, Kurdistan, Ilam and Wermê (West Azerbaijan) engage in smuggling commodities, such as tea, tobacco and fuel to earn a living.

**Kurdish *Kulbars* Injured and Killed in Iran  
January 2017 till December 31, 2017**



<sup>6</sup> Donyaye-Eghtesad (The world of Economics Newspaper) : <https://goo.gl/GY7xdy>

#### IV. Landmine Incidents Affecting Kurdish Civilians

Various international bodies and entities such as the Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) on Iran (2010) and the Committee on the Rights of the Child (January 2016) have made observations and recommendations, urging the Islamic Republic to clear its territory of landmines and all the remnants of the Iran-Iraq war (1980-1988). Nevertheless, despite international and domestic efforts, the Islamic Republic refuses to cooperate with international NGOs and entities, and to ratify the Ottawa Mine Ban Treaty.

According to KMMK-G's data, in 2017, 13 Kurdish civilians were killed and 30 were wounded due to landmines expositions and unexploded remnants of the Iran-Iraq war, which ended a long time ago in 1988. Two Kurdish children of 14 and 15 years of age are among the injured this year. Four of the victims are women.

It is also important to note that according to Iranian official statistics, during to eight years-long Iran-Iraq war (1980-1988), more than 20 million landmines have been planted in Iranian Kurdistan and Khuzestan province that hamper seriously the daily life of civilians particularly the farmers, the nomads, the shepherds and traders. Essentially, an area of about 4 million and 200 thousand hectares is contaminated by mines and explosive materials.

The Iranian Kurdistan is the most affected area by landmines and undetonated ammunitions. The reason for this was armed conflict of 1980-1993 between government forces and Kurdish combatants. Reportedly, the Iranian Army planted unknown number of mines around their barracks and compounds in many villages and cities in Kurdistan.

## V. Kurdish Women's Suicide

Kurdish women's increasing rate of suicide and suicide attempts may not seem a direct human rights violation at first sight. However, KMMK-G argues that this increasing rate of suicide among Kurdish women highly correlates with multi-layered discriminations and repressions that victims face. The Islamic Republic's discriminatory laws against women impact all women regardless of their religion, ethnicity, disability or sexual orientation. Nevertheless, gender-based discrimination is further intensified in the case of Kurdish women, given the repressive measures of the Iranian government against Kurds as well as women.

Kurdish women, suffering the discriminatory laws of the Islamic Republic of Iran, such as polygamy and child marriage, are further handicapped by the politically driven underdevelopment of their region, and are denied education and empowerment.

Today the Kurdish-majority provinces of Ilam and Kermashan have some of the highest rates of female self-immolation around the world. Suicide by burning makes up 0.06-1 percent of all suicides in developed countries. In Iran, up to 71 per cent of suicides are conducted via self-immolation, most of which are committed by women in the Kurdish Provinces of Kermanshah and Ilam.<sup>7</sup>

Two of the key problems reported as the cause of female suicides in Kurdistan are family problems and poverty. In the Kurdish region in Iran unemployment or underemployment triggers a sense of vulnerability and can cause individuals to worry about their future. It also creates a sense of loss and loneliness, especially because of reduced social support. Some women whose duties are unpaid and underappreciated - usually household work and taking care of children - experience social and financial dependence, coupled with ongoing gender-based discriminations legitimized by the laws and policies of the Islamic Republic. This all can cause a negative sense of self, and have negative impacts on self-esteem.

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<sup>7</sup> Homa, Ava, 'From Self-Rule to Self-Immolation : Kurdish Women's Past and Present ' in Iran's Human Rights Review, October 2016 : <https://goo.gl/kcKBk1>

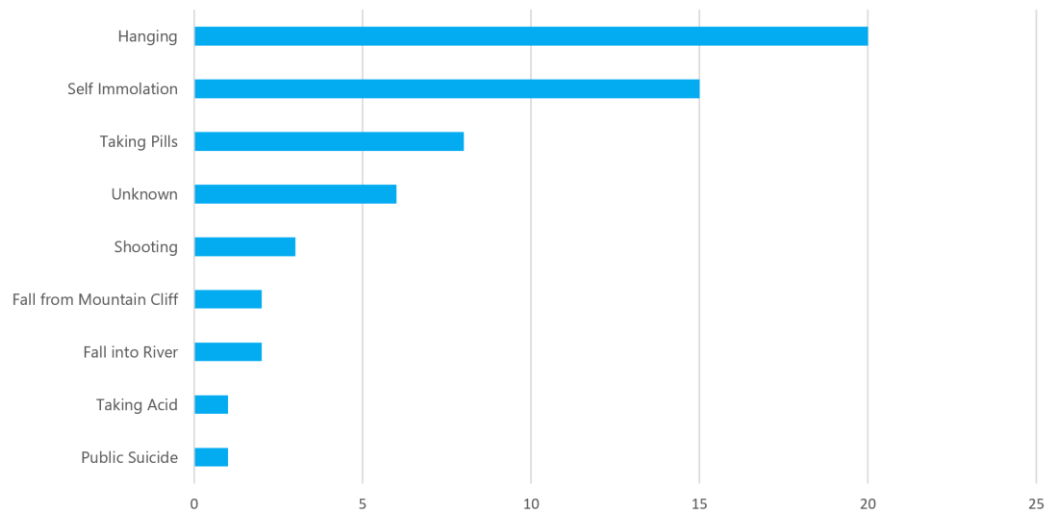
KMMK-G documented 58 cases of suicides among Kurdish women in Iran in 2017. 56 of these women died following the suicide attempt, while only 2 of them survived. The statistics reveals that 15 of the victims were 18 and less than 18 years of age. 25 of these women were married, 29 were single, and the marital status of the rest was unknown. Among the victims there were 4 pupils, a university student, a medical doctor, a civil society activist, and a women rights activist. Among these 58 cases, 20 hanged themselves, 15 self-immolated, 2 jumped from mountain cliffs, 2 jumped into rivers, 3 shot themselves, 8 medicated themselves to death, 1 poisoned herself with acid, 1 killed herself in pubic and 6 other methods were unclear.

Two of the victims were survivors of the November 2017 earthquake in Kermanshah. They allegedly put an end to their life, as post-earthquake life and the government's inability and unwillingness to provide sufficient aid had become unbearable for them. In this context, Shahab Naderi, Pawa's representative to Islamic Republic's Parliament, made a statement to criticize the administration's negligence in sending sufficient aid for the victims, highlighting that 20 civilians committed suicide in the aftermath of the earthquake.

The Iranian government refuses to be transparent about the Kurdish women's struggles. Furthermore, Iranian media outside of the country also often dismisses the issue, making it challenging to conduct research and create suicide prevention programs via mainstream media.

KMMK-G has recently taken the lead in revamped efforts to shed light on this issue at various UN forums such as the Forum on Minority Issues held in November 2016 in Geneva. There is a clear need to carefully depict the contributing factors to this challenge, to more effectively advocate against it on an international level and to seek preventive and awareness-raising grassroots to minimize the alarming rates of women's suicide, by way of self-immolation in particular, in Kurdistan. KMMK-G aims to further works on this issue in 2018.

### Kurdish Women's Suicide in Iran in 2017



## Conclusion

Iran continued to repress peaceful opposition, and to in particular violate the rights of ethnic groups, religious minorities, women and journalists. In the aftermath of nuclear deal, European Union (EU) continued to show an interest in expanding business with Iran in 2017. In such a climate, the West, in particular EU and the UN, as well as international human rights organization ought to push Iran to respect the right of ethnic groups, minorities and its citizens in general.

The Islamic Republic does not seem even remotely willing to stop its ongoing human right violations. Iran's policy of instilling fear and intimidation among members of ethnic nationalities, in particular Kurds, remained actively and aggressively in place in 2017. Meanwhile, the emergence of the Kurds as an inevitable part of a viable solution to a stable Middle East increases Islamic Republic's paranoia of its Kurdish populations at home, despite Kurds' modest request for equality and federalism.

Iranian president, Hassan Rouhani, who calls himself a "moderate" and a "reformist" and highlights human rights, has failed to live up to his promises, including minority rights. Even his most promising gestures, such as allowing university students to officially enroll in Kurdish language studies, are inherently symbolic in nature. Regardless, the power is not in the hands of *elected* governments in Iran, especially when it comes to matters of national security such as Kurdish rights. The Supreme Leader, Ali Khamenei, as well as the Islamic judiciary and the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC), fear even the slightest signs of empowered ethnic communities, Kurds in particular. Yet, the Supreme Leader remains the ultimate decision-maker of the country. In short, despite repeated calls from the United Nations to the Iranian authorities in regards to human rights violations, the Islamic Republic's policy to suppress Kurdish populations remained as forceful as ever in 2017.

Recent nationwide anti-government protests in December 2017 and January 2018 attest to the growing frustration of ordinary Iranian citizens with economic and political hardships in the country. Instead of effectively addressing these grievances, the Islamic Republic responds by detaining peaceful protestors and intensifying existing repressive measures.



## About KMMK-G

The Association for Human Rights in Kurdistan of Iran - Geneva (KMMK-G) was established in 2006 to promote democracy, respect for human rights, and social development in and beyond Iranian Kurdistan. KMMK-G strives to serve as a bridge between the Kurdish and Iranian civil society on the one hand and the United Nations agencies and International institutions on the other. Since its inception, KMMK-G has actively participated in every session of the UN Human Rights Council and other relevant UN human rights mechanisms, including the Forum on Minority Issues. Over the years, the Association has frequently submitted reports on human rights situation in Iran's Kurdistan to various UN treaty bodies and in various UN Committees' meetings. KMMK-G has regular media outreach to Kurdish and Persian media and sponsors cultural events for the Kurdish community in Europe.

As a part of its advocacy efforts, KMMK-G is hosting regularly panels and seminars in Human Rights Council sessions in Geneva and as well as at the Swiss and EU Parliaments to promote the rights of ethnic groups in Iran. In previous years, the group partnered with Geneva Graduate University and Impact Iran to organize workshops on the rights of Iran's ethnic groups and also a panel at Human Rights Council with the participation of the former UN Special Rapporteur for Iran (Dr. Ahmad Shaheed) and Dr. Shirin Ebadi the Peace Nobel Laureate.

KMMK-G prepares annual human rights in Kurdistan of Iran reports, and provides detailed annexes of data collected to the office of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Iran, as well as other relevant entities along with its annual reports. Click here for its [2016 report](#) and for its [2017 bi-annual report](#).

## Organizational Partners

Ensemble Contre la Peine de Mort  
Center for Supporters of Human rights  
International educational Development  
Impact Iran  
International Campaign to Ban Landmines  
Siamak Pourzand Foundation  
World Coalition against Death Penalty



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