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Human Rights Violations in Kurdistan of Iran



**Periodic Summary Report for the Attention of the OHCHR Desk of the UN
Special Rapporteur on the Situation of Human Rights in Iran**

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

May 2019



Introduction

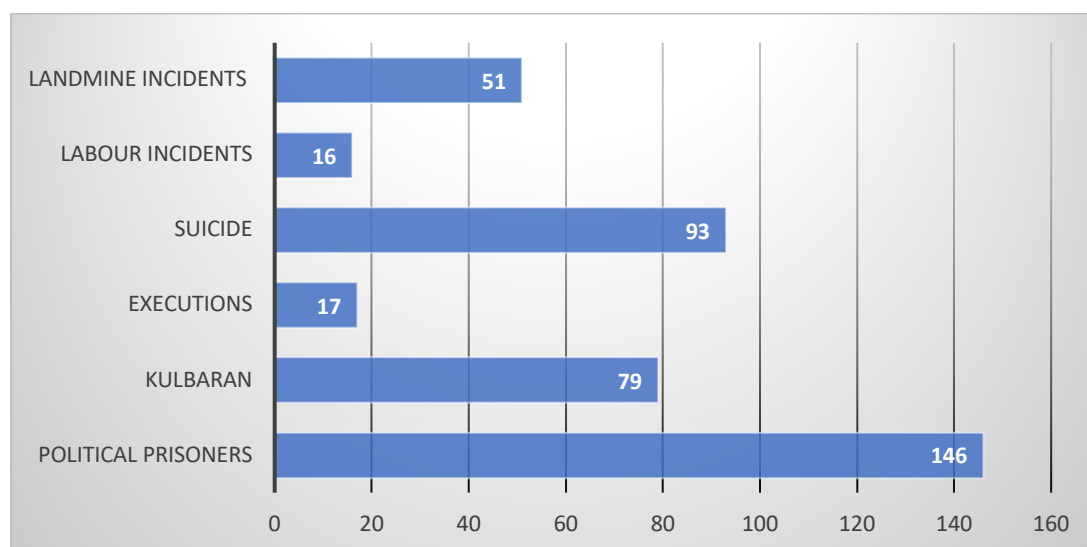
This report provides a summary of the situation of human rights in Kurdistan of Iran in the first four months of 2019 (January 1, 2019 to April 30, 2019) for the attention of the OHCHR Desk of the UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Iran. This report specifically addresses the following topics:

- I. Executions;
- II. Political Prisoners;
- III. *Kolbaran* (Border Couriers);
- IV. Labor activists;
- V. Landmines and
- VI. Suicide.

This report provides a summary of how the Kurdish people in Iranian Kurdistan have yet again endured massive arrests, persecution, imprisonment, repression extra-judicial killings of *Kolbaran* and the highest number of executions in the period January 1, 2019 till April 30, 2019.

During the period at least 17 Kurdish prisoners were executed, 28 *kolbaran* (border couriers) were killed and another 51 injured, 146 Kurdish citizens were arrested, 44 of them were sentenced to imprisonments up to 15 years¹, 3 fatalities and 13 injuries of Kurdish citizens due to landmine explosions, 16 Kurdish citizens died due to unsafe work conditions and there have been 93 cases of suicide among Kurdish citizens.

KMMK-G provides the details of data collected in each aforementioned category in its yearly human rights violations in Kurdistan report, and not in its quarterly updates (such as this document). Nevertheless, KMMK-G can make the detailed data for this document available upon the request of the Special Rapporteur's office, and/or any other relevant entities.



¹ <http://www.kurdpa.net/farsi/idame//76775>



Methodology

The Iranian authorities refuse to provide accurate formal data on executions, landmines, killings of Kolbaran (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 family members of the victims,
- (b) conducting interviews with the lawyers of the victims,
- (c) contacting and receiving information from various on-the-ground institution, 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,
- (f) partnering with the Human Rights Section of Kurdpa News Agency
- (g) and cross checking the executions data with the Abdorrahman Boroumand Center.

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 April 30, 2019, at least 17 Kurdish prisoners have been executed. Despite secrecy surrounding executions, and the government's refusal to publish the names and ethnicity of the executed prisoners, KMMK-G has been able to identify the names of most of those executed.

14 Kurdish prisoners were executed for murder and 3 prisoners were executed for drug-related crimes.

Proportional to the population of Iran, the Kurdish people in Iran amount to 13% of Iran's 80 million's population. However, historically, one third of all executions in Iran are of Kurdish citizens. In 2018, 81 of the 251 prisoners executed in the country were Kurds. This trend continues in the first four months of 2019 in which time Abdorrahman Boroumand Center has reported execution of 55 in Iran². Out of the 55 prisoners executed in Iran, 17 of them were Kurds according to data collected by KMMK-G³. The Islamic Republic executed more than one third (7 of 17) of the Kurdish prisoners outside the Kurdish region, KMMK-G believes that this was likely done in order to deter any collective resistance

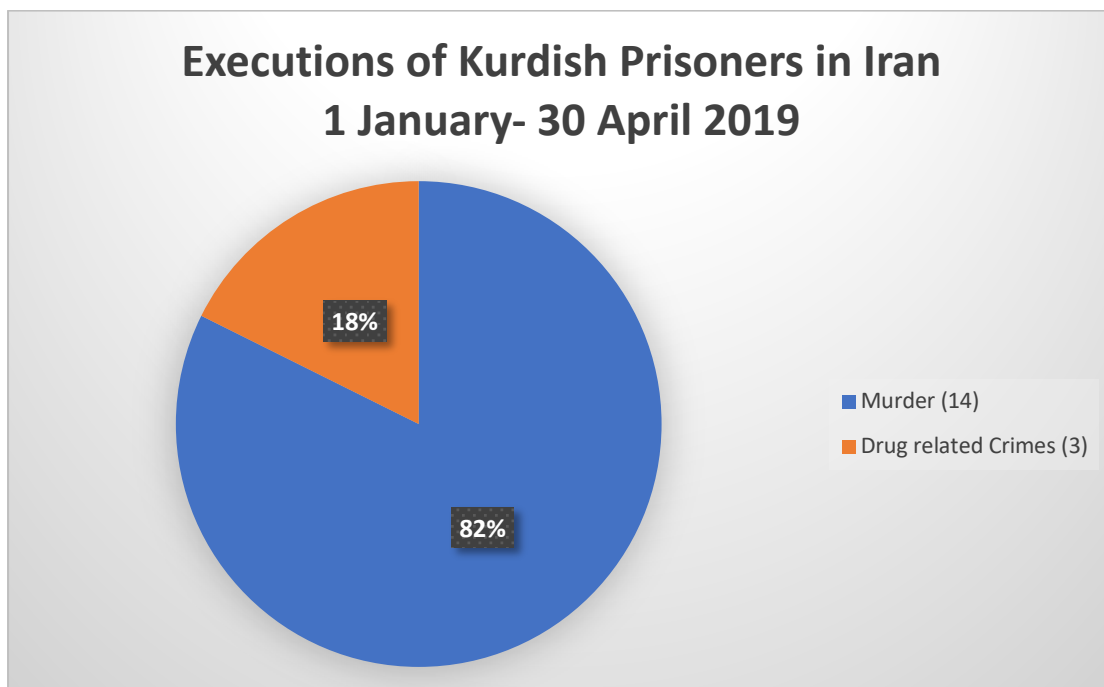
While the majority of countries (141 of 195) abandoned the death penalty, Iran continues to use capital punishment especially against ethnic groups and in particular the Kurds as a means of control of minorities and populations. It's also important to highlight that Iran continue to be one of the world's top executioner countries in the world.

² <https://www.iranrights.org/newsletter>

³ <http://kmmk-ge.org/sd/index.php/executions/>



The majority of the executions in Iran 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. The cases of Mr. Ramin Hossein Panahi, Zaniar Muradi, Lukman Muradi, Ahed Shabab, Nasser Azizi, Kamal Ahmadinejad, all members of Kurdish political parties, executed on September 8th, 2018, illustrate such pattern of unfair trials, as well as forced confessions made under torture⁴.



II. Political Prisoners

Kurdish political prisoners represent almost half of the total number of political prisoners in Iran. Similar to previous years, the share of Kurdish political imprisonment remains dramatically high in first four month of 2019 with 146 Kurdish citizens being arrested during the period. 10 of these prisoners were females, 97 of them were arrested for charges related to membership with Kurdish political parties, 12 were charged in relation to their civil activities, 5 were arrested for organizing the Newroz celebrations, 22 were environmental activists, 3 were arrested for labor activities, 2 were charged for their religious belief and activities and 4 were charged for managing social networks such as Telegram. As for today, 44 of the 146 Kurdish detainees were sentenced to imprisonments up to 15 years⁵.

⁴ <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2018/05/iran-imminent-execution-of-kurdish-man-must-be-halted/>

⁵ Details and list of the detainees are available upon demand to KMMK-G (info@kmmk-ge.org) or on the website : www.kmmk-ge.org



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Among the environmentalists activists arrested in Sanadij, are Jamal ASADI, Irej RAHIMZADEH, Porya AHMEDI, Zakarya NAQESHBANDI, Shaho FARAJI, Bakhtiar KAMANGAR, Amanj GHURBANI, Farhad MOHAMMADI, Hadi KAMANGAR, Hossein KAMANGAR, Rashed MUNTAZARI, Issa FAIZI, Zanyar ZAMIRAN, Farzad HOSEIN, Sirwan GHURBANI, Arman WAFAI, Fardin KARIMI, Afshin SHAIKHULISLAM WATANI, Armin ASIRLUS, Idris MOHAMEDI and Awat KARAM and Mrs Sahar KAZEMI.

In the meantime, two famous Kurdish lawyers Mr. Massoud SHAMSNEZHAD from Wermê (Urmiyeh) and Farhad MOHAMMADI from Sanadij were arrested for exercising their profession.

On January 8th 2019, The Urumiyeh Revolutionary Tribunal sentenced Mr. Massoud SHAMSNEZHAD, to six years and four months imprisonment for the crimes of “propaganda against the system and threat for national security”. These charges were based on the Iranian Penal Code Articles 499 and 500. The Urumiyeh Revolutionary Tribunal, Section 3, pronounced the sentence against Mr SHAMSNAZHAD without the presence of his lawyer Mr. Saleh NIKBAGHT⁶. KMMK-G has reasons to believe that the real reasons behind the arrest was Massoud’s work on defending and gathering information about the suspicious death of Ms. Shayda HATEMI, a Kurdish student in Urumiyeh University.



On January 11th, 2019, Mrs. Sahar KAZEMI, another Kurdish civil rights and environmentalist activist, from Sanandij, was sentenced to 5 years imprisonment by the Section 3 Sanadij of the Revolutionary Court, for the crime of “actions against national security”. Mrs Kazemi’s house was searched by Etela’at Service (intelligence service) without any prior legal notice and she was taken to prison. Her sentence was reduced later to 20 months. Mr. Madeh FATHI the husband of Mrs. Sahar KAZEMI was also arrested a month later. These Kurdish citizens weren’t allowed access to a lawyer or any visit from their family.



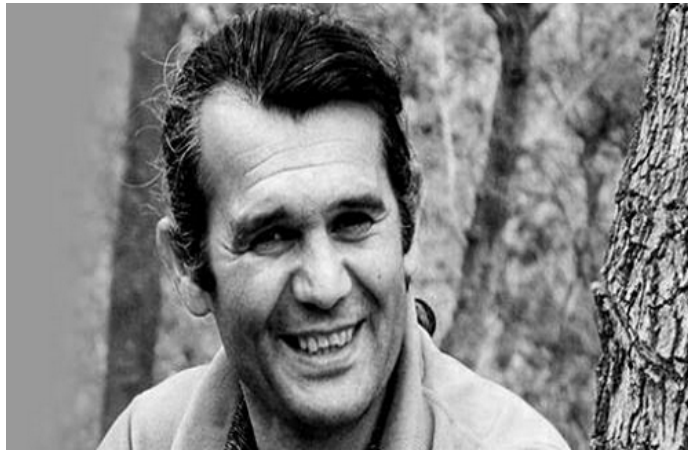
⁶ <http://www.kurdpa.net/farsi/idame/76071>



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It's also important to recall that four other Kurdish environmentalists' activists, Mr. Sharif BAJOUR, Omid KUHNEPUSHI, Rahmat HUKMATNIA and Mohammad PIJUHI, all members of Chia (Mont) Green Association, lost their lives while fighting a fire in Pile and Sipi forests in Mariwan in Iranian Kurdistan, on August 25th, 2018. The fire was provoked by mortar shellings of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC).

Mr. Sharif BAJOUR, born in 1972, a famous Kurdish civil activist and a leading figure of Chia Green Association, had been arrested many times by Etela'at Services for his civil activities. He is also known for a cycling campaign from Mariwan to Tehran with his slogan: "Non-violence is the only way to humanity".⁷

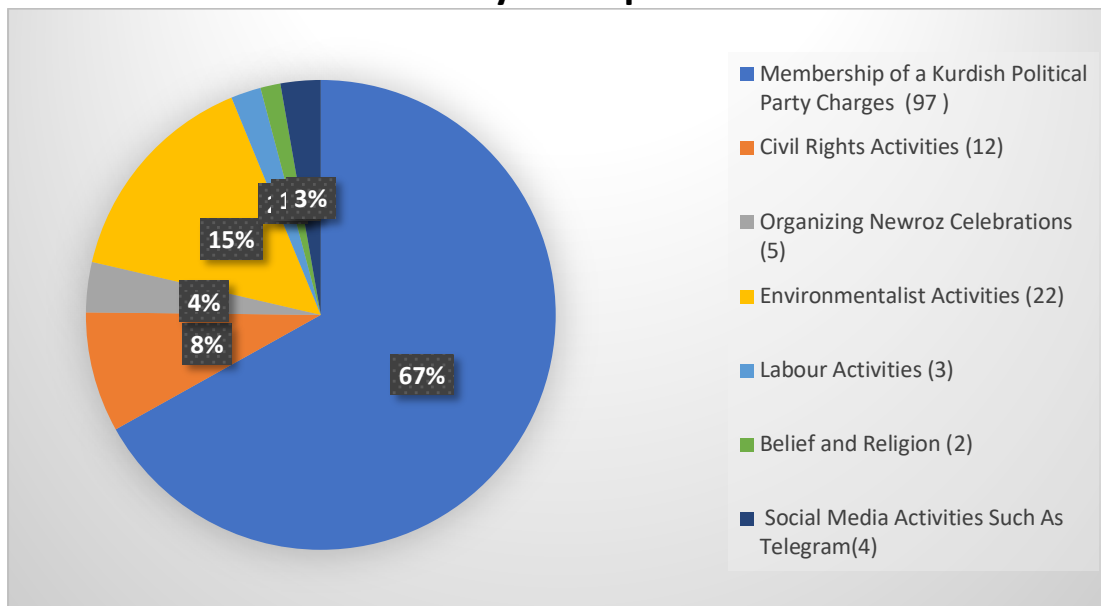


Evidently, the Kurdish community remains one of the most suppressed groups in the country, with individuals being persecuted, arrested and in many cases sentenced to death, due to their alleged activism. According to KMMK-G's collected data, 828 Kurdish citizens were also arrested in 2018, many of whom sentenced to long years of imprisonment and were charged with crimes related to civic activism and membership of Kurdish political parties. (3) Among these prisoners, there are individuals like workers, teachers, Kolbars (border couriers), artists, human rights and environmental activists, journalists, lawyer, students, photographer, cultural activists, and others alike.

⁷ <http://www.kurdpa.net/farsi/idame/74108?fbclid=IwAR363qReyv3bagAkiygv74RYYP1BgPSVzjzW3fCXsHDIwOCUMYfC-EvdE>



Kurdish Political Prisoners in Iran 1 January - 30 April 2019



III. *Kolbaran*

Kolbar (singular and *Kolbaran* plural) is a given name to a category of Kurdish citizens in Iranian Kurdistan who live in the border region between Iranian and Iraqi Kurdistan, in order to make an earning and help their families, they resort to *kolbari* or porting or carrying items. Their number is estimated to 84'000 and for each border crossing, the *Kolbar* gets 10 US Dollars. The *Kolbaran* are the most deprived category of the population; they are also called the *koila* which means literally the slave in Kurdish.

Due to high rates of unemployment, lack of government investment and development projects, and as well as land contamination caused by landmines and explosive remnants of the Iran-Iraq war (1980-1988) 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.

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 resort⁸. Even though the current Islamic Republic administration pledged to change its security approach toward Iranian Kurdistan, the extra-judicial killings of Kurdish *Kolbaran* (border couriers or tradesmen) continued dramatically in the first four months of 2019⁹.

KMMK-G has received reports of indiscriminate and extra-judicial killings of 79 border couriers known as *Kolbar* in the first four months of 2019. 42 of the *Kolbars* were victims of direct shootings of the security forces of the Islamic Republic of Iran. Six of them have fallen

⁸ <http://www.bbc.com/persian/iran-44416603>

⁹ <http://kmmk-ge.org/sd/index.php/kolbaran/>



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from mountains after being persecuted by the Iranian security forces. Fourteen died or lost a limb due to the cold weather conditions and snow fall. Four others were wounded due to landmines explosions.

This brings the total incidents reported regarding shootings and discriminate killings of Kolbaran to 79 victims (28 killed and 51 injured) for the period of January 1st, 2019 to April 30th, 2019. The indiscriminate and blind killing of Kurdish *Kolbaran* takes place in blatant violation of Iran's domestic laws and international obligations.

Its also important to note that according to our data, in 2018, 75 border couriers or "Kolbar" were killed and another 177 individuals working as Kolbar injured at the border due to reasons such as shooting, snow fall, cold and landmine explosions among others. The total incidents in 2018, regarding shootings and discriminate killings of Kolbaran amounts to 252 victims.¹⁰

Afshar SAYADNIAZI

One of the victims Afshar SAYADNIAZI was only 15 years old when he lost his life. Afshar was from a poor family from Mariwan and he engaged in Kolbari hardship work to earn a living and support his family. On 14th of March 2019, after being chased by the Iranian security forces, he fell down from Tata mountain in Uraman Takht, a highly risky mountainous path and died.



Ata DADGUSTAR

Mr. Ata **DADGUSTAR**, 41 years old, a famous Kurdish artist and painter from Mariwan, who is disabled (lives with one hand), resorted to kolbari and carries items from Iraqi Kurdistan to Iranian Kurdistan in order to earn a living and feed his family. The photos of the Kurdish artist Ata Dadgustar provoked outrage among Kurdish intellectuals and media. Hundreds of Kurdish intellectuals made an open statement demanding the people to help him.



¹⁰ <http://kmmk-ge.org/sd/index.php/kolbaran/>

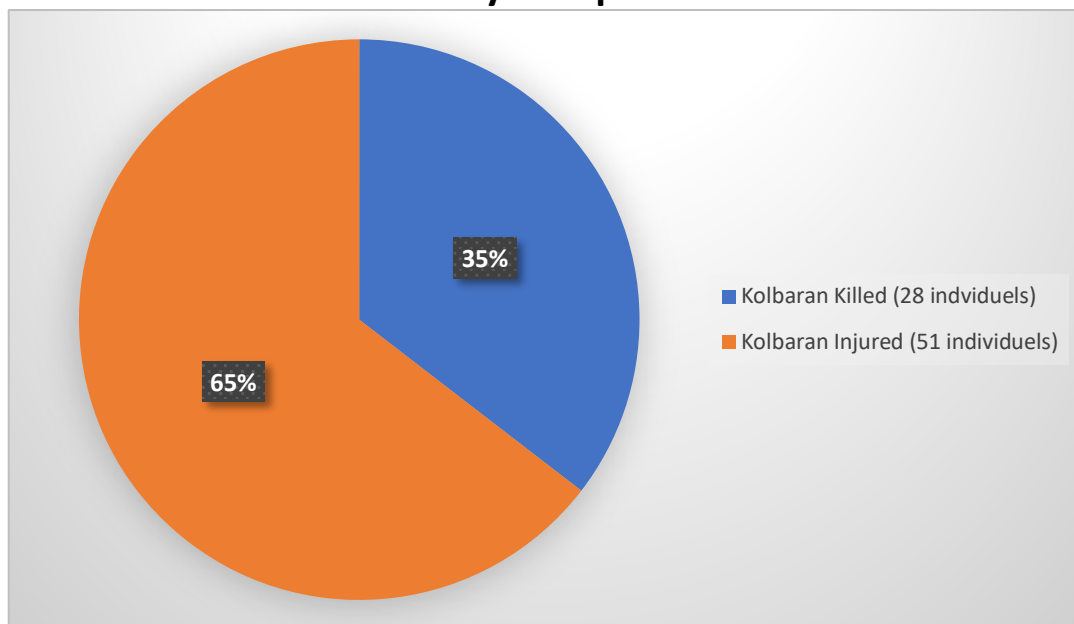


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Moreover, authorities arrested a significant number of *kolbaran* in the first four months of 2019, confiscating their goods. In addition, 1951 horses belonging to Kurdish *Kolbars* were confiscated and 886 of them were also shot dead.



Kurdish Kolbaran killed and injured 1 January-30 April 2019



IV. Labor activists

During the period January 1st- April 30, 2019, the KMMK-G received information that three Kurdish labor activists, Mr. Khaled HOSSEINI, Mr Zaniar Dabaghian and Mr. Bahnam IBRAHIMZADEH were arrested and sentenced to imprisonment for their labor rights activism.

Mr. Bahnam IBRAHIMZADEH, a Kurdish labor rights activist from Ashnaviah, was sentenced to six years imprisonment by Section 26 of Tehran revolutionary Court on March 3rd, 2019, by Judge Iman AFSHARY. Mr. Bahnam IBRAHIMZADEH was condemned to six years

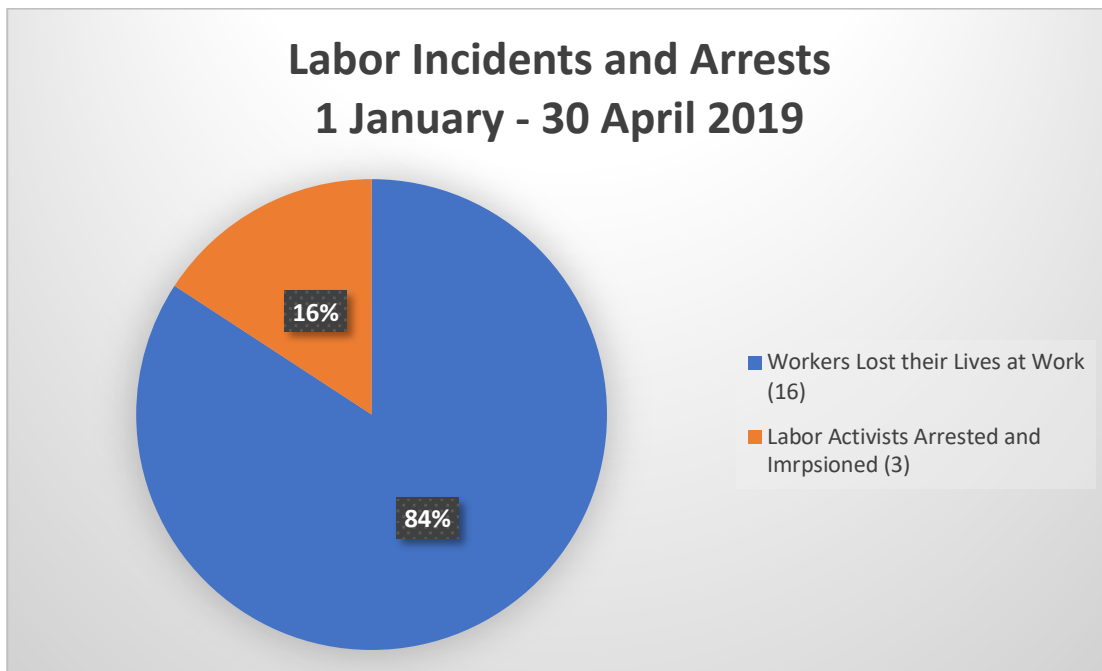


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imprisonment for “Propaganda against the system and membership of Kurdish political parties”. Mr. Bahnam IBRAHIMZADEH is currently in jail in Dizelabad prison in Kermanshah.



Furthermore, the KMMK-G has received reports about 16 cases of labor incidents resulting in death in Iranian Kurdistan for the period January 1st- April 30th, 2019. These Kurdish citizens died due to unsafe work environments and conditions. 7 of the deaths were due to falls from buildings, 2 were due to electrocutions, 1 death was due to fire at work, 2 municipality workers killed in car accident, 1 death was due to detox spraying, 1 case of welding accident and 2 cases in agricultural domains.



V. Landmine Incidents

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



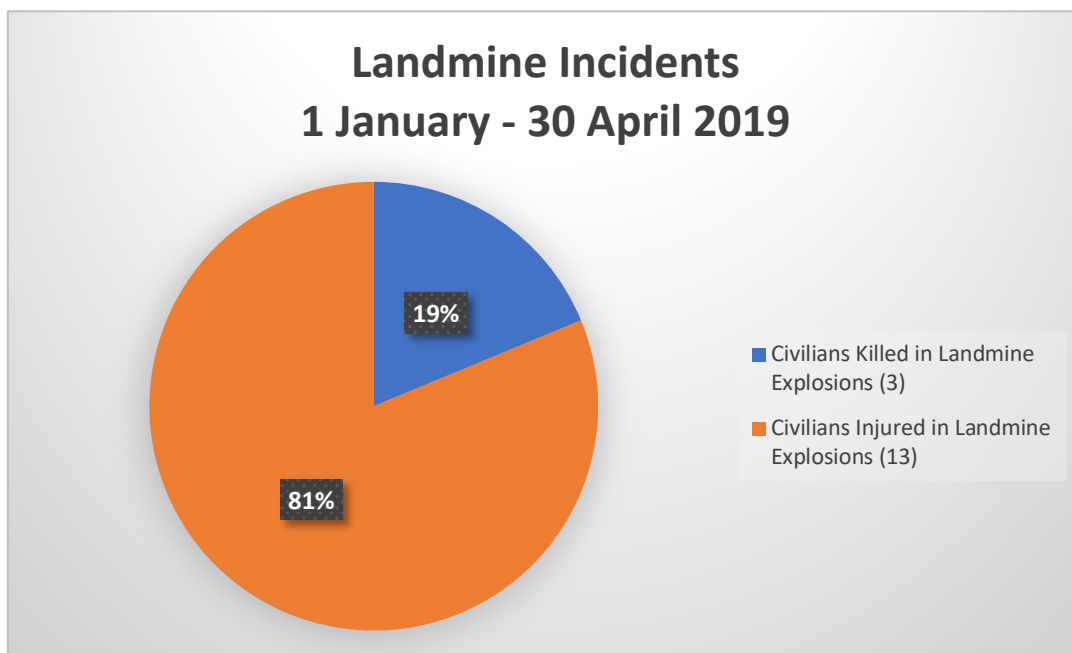
its territory of landmines and all the remnants of the Iran-Iraq war (1980-1988). Nevertheless, despite international and domestic efforts, the Islamic Republic refuses to cooperate with international NGOs and entities, and to ratify the Ottawa Mine Ban Treaty.

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.

According to KMMK-G's data, during the first 4 months of 2019, 3 Kurdish civilians were killed and 13 others were wounded due to landmines expositions and unexploded remnants of the Iran-Iraq war, which back in 1988.

Among this year's victims, Ms. Saeedeh Chanani, a 15 years girl, from Dehlaran town, stepped on a landmine dating from Iran-Iraq eight years long war and lost her life on 2nd of March 2019 in Naser village¹¹.



11. <http://www.kurdpa.net/farsi/idame/76190>



VI. Suicide

Kurdish citizens in particular women's increasing rate of suicide may not seem a direct human rights violation at first sight. However, KMMK-G argues that this increasing rate of suicide among Kurdish citizens highly correlates with multi-layered discriminations and repressions that victims face. The Islamic Republic's discriminatory laws against minorities but especially 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 child marriage, are further handicapped by the politically driven underdevelopment of their region, and are denied education and empowerment.

KMMK-G documented 93 cases of suicides among Kurdish citizens in the first four months of 2019. The statistics reveals that 56 of the victims were women and 37 men. 49 hanged themselves, 13 medicated themselves to death, 14 shot themselves or killed in a suspicious manner, 4 self-immolated, 2 prisoners Mr. Behrooz YANALIZADEH in Khoy and Mr. Hossein FAIZIPOUR were reported hanged in jail in a suspicious manner, 2 jumped from high building, 3 self-poisoning, 5 medical mistake and 4 other methods were unclear.

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.

In the November 2017 earthquake in Kermanshah, we have registered an increase in the number of suicide in Kermanshah. In 2018, we received the report of 198 cases of suicide and 56 of them were from Kermanshah and the surrounding regions.

This number amounts to 29 victims from Kermanshah and the surrounding towns hit by the earthquake during the first four months of 2019. It's important to note that most of the earthquake victims still live in tents and containers and in addition, the Kermanshah province hit by huge floods in the beginning of April this year. The Supreme Guide, Ayatullah Ali Khamenei vetoed a project from the Parliament to release an emergency fund to help the floods' victims.



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 many civilians committed suicide in the aftermath of the earthquake.

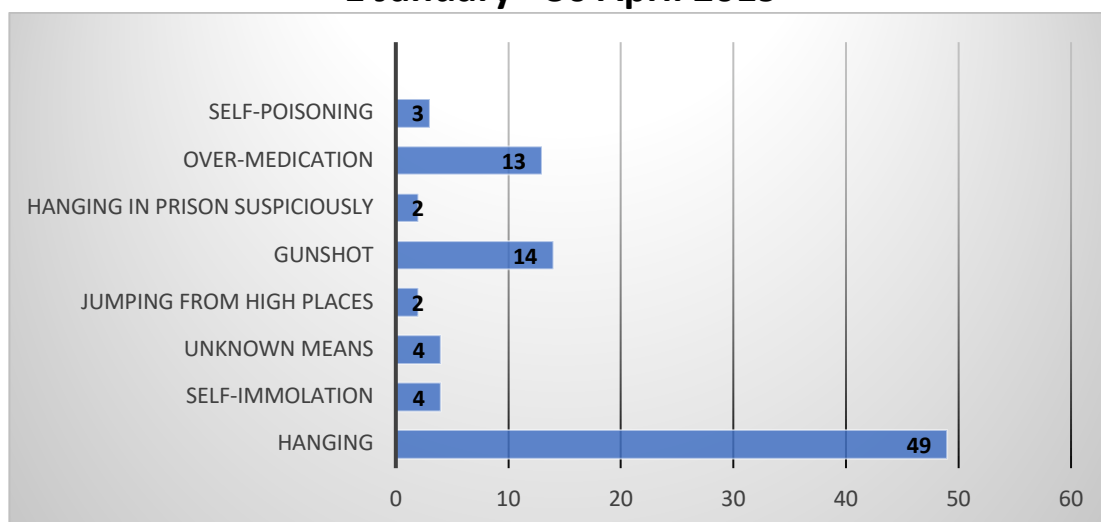
Today the Kurdish-majority provinces of Ilam and Kermashan have some of the highest rates of female self-immolation around the world. Suicide by burning makes up 0.06-1 percent of all suicides in developed countries. In Iran, up to 71 per cent of suicides are conducted via self-immolation, most of which are committed by women in the Kurdish Provinces of Kermanshah and Ilam.¹²

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 2019 and upcoming years.

Suicide

1 January - 30 April 2019



¹² Homa, Ava, 'From Self-Rule to Self-Immolation : Kurdish Women's Past and Present ' in Iran's Human Rights Review, October 2016 :

http://www.ihrr.org/ihrr_article/women-en_from-self-rule-to-self-immolation-kurdish-womens-past-and-present/



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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. Recently, the group partnered with Geneva Graduate University and Impact Iran to organize a workshop on the rights of Iran's ethnic groups and also a panel at Human Rights Council with the participation of the UN Special Rapporteur for Iran and Madam 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 www.kmmk-ge.org.