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Below is a letter from a participant in the new campaign to free Iran's political prisoners Burn the Cage, Free the Birds, which was launched by their call "[Let Us Unite and Fight Together against Waves of Suppression in Iran.](#)"

A New and Dangerous Wave of Repression

In the last 42 years, the regime of the Islamic Republic of Iran (IRI) has ruled by waging campaigns of terror and suppression against any sort of opposition. But we are facing a new wave of continuous two-pronged mass arrests. This intensified in October 2020—right before the anniversary of November 2019 rebellion. This violent repression is still going on with new people arrested every day, even as we enter the height of COVID deaths and the deadly flooding of major Southern cities of Iran.

The new campaign of suppression by the IRI is two pronged. One prong is to search and arrest known and unknown political activists with the aim of "finding" and breaking up presumed or real organized revolutionary forces. To this end, they are making sweeping arrests of all sections of people known for their oppositional views and activities against this regime. Also, they make mass arrests of people who have taken part in protests against atrocities of this regime.

During the November 2019 uprising, hundreds of people were killed during street protests and in the marshland of Mahshahr (a major Iranian port city that exports gas and refinery products). Between six to eight thousand people were arrested. These numbers have been published by many human rights organizations, including Amnesty International.

According to names collected and verified by the @burn_the_cage campaign, the past two months have seen more than 140 people arrested or detained by the brutal Evin prison authorities to serve their sentences. Many of the arrested have not been identified by the human rights groups and lawyers because the norm is to make arbitrary arrests. People are taken off the street and from their homes without even informing their families. Many are taken to unofficial dungeons by the police of the Sepah Pasdaran (the "Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps," IRGC).

The lawyers of the arrested (i.e., those appointed by the relatives and not those designated by the regime) are desperately overwhelmed. The arrests are of all strata of people: workers, students, women, teachers, lawyers, literary intelligentsia of the left and liberals. The Kurdish and Arab peoples (oppressed minorities in Iran) are accused of wanting to “disintegrate Iran,” as are people of the Bahá’í and Dervish faiths. Those arrested include even established journalists such as the 72-year-old chief editor of *Iran-e-Farda* journal, Mr. Keyvan Samimi, who was sent to Evin prison to serve a three-year sentence on December 7, 2020, for protest coverage (or “spreading propaganda against the system”). His brother Sassan was executed in 1975 under the CIA installed dictator, Shah of Iran, for involvement with the People’s Mujahedin.¹ Mr. Samimi’s other brother (Kamran) was executed by the IRI in 1982 for being a member of Iranian Students Association and the Union of Iran Communists).²

Dr. Mohammad Maleki was the first chancellor of Tehran University after the overthrow of the Shah’s regime in 1979. He was a long-time fighter for freedom of political prisoners in Iran, and spent years in the IRI’s torture chambers and prisons. He died on December 2, 2020 in part from a back operation that worsened from ruthless tortures. Among those recently given a sentence of both execution and 13 years in prison is Hamed Ghara Oghlani. He is charged with *moharebeh* (enmity or hostility against God) and insulting Iran’s leader Ayatollah Khamenei on social media.

Also arrested recently was a daring young woman, who rode a bicycle in the ultra-religious city of Najafabad, for not wearing a hijab, therefore showing contempt for the forced Islamic scarf. Just last week the so-called revolutionary Islamic court of Mashhad sentenced five people of the Bahá’í faith to five years in prison for organizing resistance against their discrimination in an underground academy, as Bahá’ís are not allowed to attend university in Iran.

Iranian wrestler Navid Afkari, who had taken part in the 2018 protests, was arrested and executed this past September after a “confession” extracted through torture. His brothers (Vahid and Habib) now face 27 and 54 years of imprisonment from the same case. And there is the repeated arrest of Arab youth in the oil-rich and ethnically diverse state of Khuzestan. For example 15-year-old Amir Kaabi was recently arrested in city of Shush, and many men were taken to unknown prisons from the city of Mahshahr.³

In mid-October 2020, the IRI arrested scores of people in one sweep. One of them was German-Iranian dual citizen Nahid Taghavi, whose case has been taken up by Amnesty International (see photo of the Amnesty International poster). Her relatives in Germany have been very active in popularising her case as well as the case of other political prisoners. This has put much pressure on the German state and the European Union to not act as accomplices to the crimes of the IRI against the people of Iran.

The Massive Uprisings in 2017 and 2019

Shake Iranian Society

Two mass uprisings in November 2019⁴ and December 2017 have been extremely important developments. They oxygenated all of Iranian society and were taken by the fascist theocratic rulers as potentially a threat to their whole system. The regime is dead serious about not allowing such an actual threat to their rule. They want to make sure the upsurge is not infused with the outlook and program of the need for the most radical revolutionary societal change.

The core of these rebellions was mainly the impoverished youth. According to official newspapers in Iran, one-third of the population around mega-cities like Tehran and Mashhad live in shanties. As of 2017, 19 million Iranians lived in very poor shanty towns infested with drug addiction. After the December 2017 rebellion, there was a good polarization among politically active students. A good number of them were searching and grasping for revolutionary politics. This was echoed by the now-famous slogan chanted by heroic students at the beginning days of the December 2017 rebellion. At a gathering right at the door steps of Tehran University, mainly women students raised the slogan "Reformers. Hardliners. The game is over for both of you. This is the end of the line!" That is, they were referencing a game played by two factions of the IRI regime to hoodwink the masses to remain hopeful to "slow change from within the system."

After the November 2019 uprising, there was even more of a shift among the students away from just being concerned with small demands around students. They expressed a broad outlook and an urgent need to fight for big societal and radical change as to what the masses of people need. The people are being crushed by many fault lines—of super exploitation, of patriarchy, of national/racial oppression, of police state violence, and of Sharia laws and religious obscurantism governing Iranian society. There are the reactionary

wars in Iraq and Syria that this regime actively participates in and in which untold atrocities against oppressed humanity in those countries are committed, and there is the destruction of environment which is hitting scores of cities with floods and droughts. This regime absolutely does not have anything to offer to the impoverished youth who constituted the heart of these two rebellions. So it increasingly rules by relying on gallows, prisons and torture chambers. Plus, growing portions of the middle class are being thrown down there with the impoverished.

Following the November 2019 uprising came the Student Day on December 7. This is the anniversary of December 7, 1953, when the Shah's regime welcomed U.S. Vice President Richard Nixon to Iran. The students rose up against this imperialist henchman and were gunned down by the police and three students died (Ghandchi, Bozorgnia and Razavi). In 2019 on this anniversary, the students held rallies in defense of the people. Although these rallies were held only in a few universities and with the presence of a small number of students, they raised slogans that targeted both the IRI and imperialism, as well as repudiating the right-wing and pro-imperialist opposition to the IRI. Three categories of slogans were raised by the rallies of December 7, 2019: 1) against the Islamic Republic and in support of the November uprising; 2) against forcing women to wear the Islamic hijab and other anti-women laws, and 3) against police brutality and poverty, and in solidarity with struggles around the world.

The IRI Regime Responds to a Potentially Serious Challenge to Its Rule with Vicious Repression

The IRI regime sees a convergence between repeated mass rebellions and development of a revolutionary organized movement as a death blow to its existence. It is determined to stop this by any means necessary. And for us it is very vital to stop this machinery of cruel persecution of the masses and political, social and literary activists. In this context it is crucial to take up the Call for "Burn the Cage, Free the Birds" to Free All Political Prisoners in Iran NOW! It is imperative for revolutionaries and all social movements in Iran to defeat this and future waves of state repression. This is a vital and a foremost necessity for all social movements, because with the continuation of this repression, none of the just struggles will thrive and develop. So it's a matter of being and growing or not being (i.e., getting crushed). This is the situation in Iran which has made such a Call timely and urgent necessity.

The IRI often accuses political dissidents of the vague charge of acting against national security. This is one of the most reactionary and anti-people regimes in the world. It is a regime which labels all kinds of opposition to its crimes and outrages as "spies of the imperialists" or "conspiracy against national security." Just imagine the rebellions that the IRI deems "conspiracy against national security": a) against cruel and life threatening poverty; b) against unemployment; c) demands of intellectuals and artists for freedom of thought and creation; d) demands of workers for right to strike and assembly; e) protests by women against enslaving conditions, of which the forced hijab is a stark symbol; f) protests against national (or racial) oppression; and g) any attempts by environmentalists to save the planet Earth. These can all be deemed "conspiracy against national security," harshly punishable by law. This is a fascist ruling class that has wielded a lethal mix of theocracy, anti-imperialist demagoguery, legal and functional discrimination against oppressed nationalities and women, securitization of society under the guise of safe guarding "Islamic Revolution" from "foreign" harm.

It is true that today this regime is facing threats from the U.S. and other Western imperialist powers, which the regime tries to offset by hanging onto the Chinese and Russian imperialists. But in this contention, both sides have punished the masses of people to make them choose one side over the other when in fact none of these two rotten sides have one iota of interest of the people in mind.

The "securitization" of any political opposition also flows from the theocratic nature of this regime. Since it considers itself a representative of God on Earth, this regime considers any opposition to its "Islamic Revolution" and its holy Leader as a "war against God," which according to Sharia law is punishable by death. All of these are written into its fascist laws. It is a regime that imposes anti-scientific superstition and religious ignorance on the people, but buys the most technologically advanced tools of espionage and repression from China, Russia, Germany, France and other traders of torture and repression instruments and military hardware and knowhow.

To conclude: the regime has to respond violently to struggles of the masses and the revolutionaries because it wants to survive. That is what is meant by "national security." Widespread repression and killing of the masses, on the one hand, and political activists, on the other, should not be tolerated. And under no circumstances should we let the atmosphere of fear and despair to settle in. Yes! It is true that repression is widespread. It is vital for advancing the revolution to confront the attacks of the ruling powers who want to

destroy the movement for revolution and its leadership. The cruel and illegitimate nature of the IRI's class rule and theocracy must be exposed, their repression reversed, and their police state defeated!

For further information, contact Donya Zed: zeddonya1@gmail.com, member of the "Burn the Cage, Free the Birds" campaign.

1. The Mujahideen name are actually many different groups of Muslim armed combatants or jihadists that exist in different countries (e.g., Iran, Iraq, and mainly Afghanistan). In Iran, they started out as a radical religious/nationalist organization under the Shah's monarchy when many of their members were imprisoned and executed by that regime. During the 1979 uprising and afterwards, many of their leaders were freed, and their popularity surged to become one of the biggest organizations in Iran. Their political and ideological views shifted from supporting IRI to one of opposition to it. Through a period of time, they had to go underground against the IRI and eventually waged their opposition from inside Iraq. They have further degenerated and digressed as a political force to the point of working with and relying on U.S. imperialism. In 2016, U.S. imperialists Rudolph Giuliani and John Bolton were invited and spoke at a Mujahadeen Khalq conference in Europe. For the overall global context of the jihadist trend, see Bob Avakian's [*Away With All Gods! Unchaining the Mind and Radically Changing the World*](#), pp. 59-114 ("Christianity, Judaism and Islam—Rooted in the Past, Standing in the Way of the Future").

2. During the 1960s and '70s, students from Iran went all over the world to study and get an education, but the world situation ushered in a different path for them. They became impacted by the upsurge of national liberation struggles against colonial rule in the oppressed countries around the world, the impact of revolutionary socialism in Mao's China, and the radical opposition to the Vietnam war worldwide. All this worked to turn significant numbers of Iranian students against the regime of the Shah of Iran, and against any forms of oppression and exploitation all over the world, under the umbrella organization of Iranian Student Association (ISA). Many of these students became more radicalized and took up communism with variety of understandings of what that meant at that time—some allied with revolutionary socialist China while others allied with the non-revolutionary Soviet Union (which became socialist in name, imperialist in reality, after socialism was overthrown and

capitalism was restored in the mid-1950s). One of those trends developed into the Union of Iranian Communists (UIC), which took up Maoism. Most of the UIC supporters went back to Iran before and after the revolution of 1979, and many of their members were imprisoned and executed by IRI, including those who participated in an uprising in the city of Amol in 1981. The UIC went through a significant process of ideological and political and reorganization and developed into the Communist Party of Iran (Marxist-Leninist-Maoist) (cpimlm.org), which is an organizations that has taken up and upholds the new communism brought forward by Bob Avakian, Chairman of the Revolutionary Communist Party, USA.

3. Mashahr is the city that played an outstanding part in the November 2019 uprising when people effectively blocked the entrance to three major oil and gas (i.e., petrochemical) industrial towns and the special petrochemical economic zone for three days. The protests stopped the production lines and the transportation of the production of these industries and its derivatives. After three days, the governor of Khuzestan ordered the IRGC guards to carry out a ground and air attack, killing people by using tanks, artillery, helicopters, and gunships. Seventeen protesters were killed, including two children ages four and eight. Many people took refuge in the surrounding marshlands but were mowed down there. The IRGC guards immediately took over the hospitals and started arresting the wounded. In these areas, Arab people live and carry the double burden of super-exploitation and oppression as a minority/oppressed nationality. They are always accused by the IRI of trying to make trouble and help "the enemy."

4. See coverage at revcom.us: "[Massive Protests Rock Iran: Islamic Republic Shoots Down More Than 100, Injures or Arrests Thousands More. U.S. Sheds Crocodile Tears While Intensifying Collective Suffering, Risking War.](#)"