

What happened to us in the summer of 1988?

Ahmad Mossavi, former political prisoner and survivor of the mass executions of the early 80s and 1988 massacre. He has written his own memories in the book entitled "Good Night Comrades".

Twenty years have passed since the mass execution of Iranian political prisoners during the summer of 1988. The magnitude of this barbaric atrocity was such that Amnesty International rightly referred to it as a "Crime against Humanity".

The mass executions of summer of 1988 were so widespread and savage that our society and the relatives of the victims still haven't come to terms with the ruthless murder of their captive children who had fallen victim to the melancholic minds of the heads of the Islamic Republic in such a brutal manner.

Mothers, wives, children and fathers of the victims of summer of 1988 are still agonised by these horrific monstrosities; mothers, who still don't want to believe that such crimes took place inside the Islamic Republic's jails.

After twenty years, the mothers still haven't quite recovered from the inflicted trauma and still daydream the return of their beloved. How painful and heartbreaking this is.

It is even more agonising for us, the survivors of the summer 1988 genocide, to reflect the sorrow and the futile awaiting of these mothers.

The Islamic Republic has committed countless crimes during its thirty years of existence; crimes which have been and are deeply rooted in the nature of their religion and the reactionary minds of its leaders. The mass genocide of thousands of political prisoners in the summer of 1988 which took place during less than two months is a reminder of the unforgettable era of barbarity and the driving forces of the medieval ages; times well remembered in the historical registers of all civilised societies and conscious humans.

Naturally, our intention and that of all freedom loving and socialist humans would be to keep the memories of these barbaric crimes of the Islamic Republic Regime alive.

Twenty years have passed since the holocaust of the summer of 1988. However, the true magnitude of this genocide still preys upon everybody's minds. A better measure of the extent of the crimes is revealed by knowing that the victims of these crimes were all political prisoners who were supposed to be serving their sentences.

Here, I must stress the fact that although all crimes committed by the Islamic Republic are carried out as a direct consequence of Khomeini's reactionary and melancholic school of thought, but the mass murder of thousands of political prisoners during the summer of 1988 were carried out following Khomeini's personal written decree. Carrying out crimes in such magnitude, would have not been easy if not impossible, had they not been initiated by Khomeini's direct orders. Only Khomeini's direct orders would have had enough clout to consolidate and unify all executive factions within the regime in order to massacre the political prisoners. Even after twenty years, justifying the mass executions of the summer of 1988 defines the regime's unanimity. As we have been witnessing, up to now all the ruling factions within the regime, be it fundamentalist or "reformists", have remained faithful to it.

The essence of ending any life is criminal. But taking a human life for his/ her political beliefs is a disaster. What signifies the act of murder, irrespective of its magnitude is the timeline during which it is carried out. To put it into context, the significance of crucifying one human being today, would be considered more disastrous than thousands of humans who were crucified during the time of slavery or in the medieval period. Should one look at the mass genocide of the summer of 1988 from such an historical view point, then one will realise the horrific scales of the Islamic Republic's crimes.

What were the preliminary grounds for the mass executions of the summer of 1988?

The preliminary grounds for the execution of thousands of political prisoners during the summer of 1988 have to be seen in the oppressive nature of the Islamic Republic.

The summer of 1988 was the resurgence of the executions of the freedom fighters in 1981. The regime's leaders, prison authorities and interrogators had already vowed to execute all political prisoners, should a critical situation arise. The regime was faced with a critical situation in summer 1988. The unavailing war between the two regimes of Saddam and Khomeini had ended. The people had high demands now that the war was over. The material conditions were in favour of the masses and the political forces in order to push for their rightful demands. The grounds for political activities were possibly better than at any other time. The war however, had made provision for suppression and now that it was over, the regime was no longer able to easily impose its oppressive policies upon society as it used to during the war. Most importantly, the acceptance of UN resolution 598 and the end of the war, from Khomeini's and other leaders of the Islamic Republic's point of view, was a psychological defeat seen through the eyes of the people.

By accepting resolution 598 on 18 July 1988, the regime's authorities were faced with confusion, humiliation and disappointment. Their humiliation and disappointment was clearly spreading within its prisons. The prison authorities were experiencing one of the worst psychological states. The peak of the humiliation was displayed two days later. On the evening of 20 July, Khomeini appeared on Iranian television. He informed the Iranians and the people of the world of Iran's acceptance of UNSC resolution 598 and the end of the war. Khomeini's face was spectacular during his speech. For ten years he had forced his political opponents to express their false discontentment on television screens and now he was under the same spotlight. There were no signs of his usual arrogance. His pride was shattered.

The acceptance of the resolution is synonymous to taking the "goblet of poison", he said ashamedly. But it would have been unheard of to expect the mighty leader of the Islamic Republic to take the "goblet of poison" without vendetta. The poison taken by Khomeini had to be flushed out somewhere else.

The Peoples' Mujahedeen's offensive in the western provinces backed by Saddam's air force on 25 July gave Khomeini the perfect pretext he needed. It was the right time to rebuild his broken self esteem. The weakest links to achieve this were the prisoners. They were already trapped in Khomeini's claws. They had no means of escaping nor did they have any means of defending themselves. These were prisoners who were serving their sentences and some had even reached the end of their terms.

This is how the disaster struck. By taking the “goblet of poison” Khomeini had become psychotic and embarked on the mass genocide of political prisoners. The magnitude of his crime horrified and silenced the nation for years to come. By vanquishing thousands of political prisoners, Khomeini had hoped to rid himself and his regime of all the political opposition forces and the most intelligent and dynamic individuals.

How did the mass executions of the summer of 1988 happen?

The mass execution of the summer of 1988 struck like lightning. It came down on Iran’s prisons like lightning and took thousands of political prisoners’ lives. The mass killings happened so fast on such an unimaginable scale that even after twenty years, it still brings shivers down the spine when remembered. Evin and Gohardasht prisons, where most political prisoners were held, became prisoners’ slaughter chambers. The mass executions followed a brief interrogation session in a two minute court hearing. The clock had turned back. The death squads in their medieval cloaks had once again appeared in prisons. Every few minute, a prisoner was being sentenced to death by execution by the decree of the medieval interrogation courts. And this is how the bells of death began their chime!

Every day hundreds of prisoners were sent to their deaths. They were vanquished by Khomeini’s hand picked squads. The genocide of political prisoners continued until 16 September 1988 in this way and in less than two months thousands of political prisoners met their deaths by execution.

The killings were taking place as fast and furious in other provinces outside Tehran as in Evin and Gohardasht prisons. In the Northern provinces where I was held, the bells of death started to sound from the morning of 30 July 1988. On that day the governor of the prison entered the section with his appointed guards. One by one the prisoners were threatened with death. The same evening the massacre began. The first group of victims were selected. They called 17 prisoners and marched them to meet their deaths by hanging. Half an hour later, the second group of 16 were sent to the slaughter chamber.

The massacre continued the next day. On July 31, the prisoners were taken out of the section in pairs and hanged. This is how the days passed. There was no sign of the killings stopping. In less than ten days 95 of my inmate comrades and friends became the victims of Khomeini and his mob’s insanity. Out of 120 prisoners in our section, only 25 survived. The section had been cleared. The nightmare of death was dominating the prison’s atmosphere and in our dreams we kept hoping to see our inmate friends and comrades in another prison.

We could not believe such crime. We could not comprehend it in any way. The scale of the disaster was of such magnitude that exceeded the powers of our imagination.

As time went by, the dreams of seeing our friends and comrades once again, turned into disappointment. In the agonising silence of the prison, we had to come to terms with the death of thousands of our comrades.