

Human Rights Watch

Torture, Former Combatants, Political Prisoners, Terror Suspects, & Terrorists

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Iran's new Minister of Interior is implicated in grave human rights violations over the past two decades, possibly including crimes against humanity in connection with the massacre of thousands of political prisoners, Human Rights Watch said in a briefing paper released today.

Human Rights Watch also said that the new Minister of Information should be investigated for his possible involvement in a dissidents killing.

The briefing paper, [Ministers of Murder: Iran's New Security Cabinet](#), details credible allegations that Minister of Interior Mustafa Pour-Mohammadi and Minister of Information Gholamhussein Mohseni Ezheji were involved in extremely serious and systematic human rights violations over the past two decades.

It's completely unacceptable that men with such records would be serving in Iran's government, said Joe Stork, deputy Middle East director at Human Rights Watch. They should be removed from their posts and investigated for these terrible crimes.

Iran's cabinet is now dominated by former security and intelligence officials, Human Rights Watch said, raising fears that President Ahmadinejad's government will readily resort to violence to suppress dissidents and punish critics.

During Pour-Mohammadi's tenure as top deputy of the Ministry of Information from 1987 to 1999, agents of the ministry systematically engaged in extrajudicial killings of opposition figures, political activists, and intellectuals.

In 1988, the Iranian government executed thousands of political prisoners held inside Iranian jails. The deliberate and systematic manner in which these extrajudicial executions took place may constitute a crime against humanity under international law, Human Rights Watch said. Mustafa Pour-Mohammadi was a member of the three-person committee that ordered prisoners held in Tehran's notorious Evin prison to their summary executions.

From 1990 to 1999, Pour-Mohammadi was director of foreign intelligence operations in the Ministry of Information. During this period, dozens of opposition figures were assassinated abroad. In some of these cases the hand of the Iranian government has been well established, while in others there are credible allegations of government involvement. Pour-Mohammadi is at the center of strong allegations of direct involvement in orchestrating these assassinations.

In 1998, agents of the Ministry of Information killed five prominent activist intellectuals in Tehran. An Iranian source with first-hand knowledge of the investigation told Human Rights Watch that Pour-Mohammadi was implicated by investigators in those killings and even that an arrest warrant was about to be issued for him. But instead it was arranged that he leave his post in the Ministry of Information, this source said.

Gholamhussein Mohseni Ezheji, the new Minister of Information, served as prosecutor general of the Special Court for the Clergy and in this position spearheaded the prosecution of prominent reformist clerics. He has also been a key figure in suppressing press freedoms, resulting in the closure of more than 100 newspapers since 2000. Several journalists and activists have alleged that Mohseni Ezheji ordered the kidnapping and killing of Pirouz Davani, a dissident and political activist, in 1998.

Human Rights Watch called on President Ahmadinejad to relieve Pour-Mohammadi and Mohseni Ezheji of their duties immediately and to establish an independent mechanism to conduct a thorough and impartial investigation into their alleged crimes.

If President Ahmadinejad fails to remove Pour-Mohammadi and Mohseni Ezheji from his cabinet, the Parliament should call for a vote of no-confidence and initiate its own independent investigation, Human Rights Watch said.

Its downright dangerous to have men like this in charge of key ministries, said Stork. The international community must make clear that it holds the government of President Ahmadinejad responsible for the safety of Iranian political activists and dissidents.

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