Human Rights in Kurdistan of Iran
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Border couriers / Tradesmen / Kolbars

231 Kurdish cross-border porters (Kolbars) were either killed or seriously wounded in Iranian Kurdistan (Rojhelat) in 2018, according to the Hengaw¹ Organization.

Kolbars are local Kurds who to earn their living, on foot, smuggle goods across the Iranian border with Iraqi Kurdistan and Turkish Kurdistan; often carrying the loads, about 220kg, on their back. Reportedly students receive about 150 to 200 thousand Toman² each time for porterage.

Hereby the porters face dangers during their activities including avalanches and Iranian security forces’ ambush and arrest. In addition to the heavy weight they carry, physical problems threaten them. As always the Kolbars are poor porters they are obliged, in order to survive, to carry smuggled goods across the border. They are easy victims of the police and frontier guards and so they have become the symbols of the complete absence of economic development of the Iranian Kurdish regions.

¹ Hengaw is an Independent Human Right Organization reporting on the human rights violations in Kurdistan (IRAN)
² equivalent of 30€ to 40€
After all, due to high rate of unemployment and the land contamination by landmines and explosive remnants of war, the Kurdish youth and farmers from four Kurdish provinces - Kermanshah, Kurdistan, Ilam and West Azerbaijan - engage in above mentioned smuggling commodities such items as tea, tobacco and fuel to earn a living.

Based on the “Annual report Kolber”, from the Center of the Hengaw Organization for Human Rights, in 2018, 71 Kolbar and tradesmen were killed and 160 others were wounded by Iranian regime forces in the mountainous border regions of Kurdistan.

Statistics from 2015 are not available to us

Despite civil protests against the killing of border couriers-tradesmen are heard every day, there is no change in the government’s policy. In the latest statements by the Iranian military officials the border guard commander, Sardar Qasem Rezaie has defended the killing of Kolbars by the border guards while stating that commuters crossing illegally borders will be shot by border guards. So he encourages the indiscriminate killings by Iranian security forces without respecting even the Iranian domestic law, which, authorize the use of lethal force only as a last resort.

News releases

Very recently, worldwide organizations for Human Rights have communicated, among many other, the following news releases regarding to this issue.

3 On Thursday, January 3rd 2019, the 19-years old Kolbar Yaqoub Neek Sirat lost his life as a result of the direct firing, without any prior warning, by Iran’s armed forces, while he did not carry commodity.

4 Mamousta Abdul Baghchi Saeedi, former Prayer Imam of the Tarkhan Abad Mosque of Baneh, during the funeral ceremony of a Kolbar, Hadi Salimi who was shot by border forces, criticised the government’s policies in connection with the killings of Kolbars. Less then two weeks later the cleric has been arrested and transferred to an

3 https://hengaw.net/en/news/a-Kolbar-was-killed-by-direct-firing-of-irans-armed-forces-at-the-urmia-border
unknown location. So far, there is no information available about the status of this detained cleric.

5 A seminar on “the Economy of the Border Regions and Kolbari” supposed to be held at Payam Noor University in Marivan was cancelled due to the involvement of security institutions. Students, who had gathered at the seminar hall, chanted slogans in protest to this cancellation and asked the university authorities to explain.

6 In her annual report 2017/2018 Amnesty International mentions: “Iran’s border guards continued to unlawfully shoot and kill, with full impunity, scores of unarmed Kurdish men known as Kulbars who work as cross-border porters between Iraqi and Iranian Kurdistan. In September, security forces violently suppressed protests in Baneh and Sanandaj over the fatal shootings of Kulbars, and detained more than a dozen people.”

Recommendations

1. PDKI remains deeply troubled by the continuing large number systematic killing of Kurdish cross-border porters, the so-called Kolbars, by Iranian border guards and wants to draw attention to this almost unknown human rights violation against innocent civilians.

2. PDKI calls on the Special Rapporteur along with other UN mandate holders to condemn the indiscriminate killings of Kurdish civilians.

3. PDKI urges the international community in their bilateral human rights dialogues with Iran to underline the Government of Iran has to put an end to extrajudicial killings of Kurdish civilians.

4. PDKI insists European politicians to use their influence in order to urge the Iranian authorities to disclose Mamousta Abdul Baghchi Saeedi’s place of detention and to release him immediately and unconditionally unless he is, after a fair trial, charged with a recognizably criminal offence.

5. PDKI has always insisted on the fact that Iranian regime doesn’t care about the people’s welfare and what the regime is caring about is assisting terrorist groups. Therefore, the country’s wealth and money has become a good source for Iranian affiliated groups in region rather than its own people. PDKI is urging international community to put maximum pressure on regime in order to give priority to citizens not assisting terrorist groups.