



Ambassador Bob Rae

Permanent Representative of Canada to the United Nations

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Dear Ambassador Rae,

I am the founder and executive director of World Without Genocide, an organization in Special Consultative Status to ECOSOC and in formal association with the UN Department of Global Communication.

I contact you as the lead sponsor of the UN General Assembly Third Committee resolution on the human rights situation in Iran. I request that you address current human rights abuses in Iran and make explicit reference to the **1988 Massacre** of political prisoners. There has been no justice or reckoning for the perpetrators of that mass atrocity, and, indeed, it is the cornerstone of a call for ongoing persecution and execution of political prisoners today.

In 1988, on orders by Supreme Leader Ayatollah Khomeini, Iranian authorities extrajudicially executed as many as 30,000 prisoners in at least 32 cities in the country (*Washington Post*, July 24, 2025).

This year, several developments make a comparison between the **1988 Massacre** and the situation today highly relevant and chilling.

An editorial on 7 July 2025 by *Fars News*, an Iranian state-sourced publication, explicitly calls for a repeat of the **1988 Massacre**. The editorial describes the 1988 executions and enforced disappearances of thousands of political prisoners as a "**successful historical experience**" and advocates for similar violence against current detainees and opposition figures. The title of the article itself encourages and incites violence: "**Why the 1988 Executions Should Be Repeated.**"

The UN Special Rapporteur's 2024 report on Iran's past atrocity crimes concluded that the enforced disappearances of 1988 constitute "ongoing crimes against humanity." We know the heartache and tragedy that occur when loved ones have been disappeared and their remains are undiscovered for decades. The desperate searches and exhumations that are ongoing in Guatemala, Srebrenica,

throughout post-Holocaust Europe, and elsewhere are visible evidence of the horrors of the attacks. Mass atrocities are crimes that are never over; they echo in trauma that is passed on to succeeding generations.

There has been impunity for the **1988 Massacre**, and those who try to seek justice today face swift and harsh repression. Iranian authorities therefore continue to violate human rights with no fear of accountability to the global rule of law.

The Iranian government's recent actions include continued unlawful executions of protesters and prisoners of conscience.

- In 2024, at least 975 people were executed, including 31 women and one juvenile.
- In the first four months of 2025, at least 478 executions were recorded, a 75% increase over the numbers in the same period in 2024. Most of those who were executed were political prisoners.

“Iran’s authorities have executed at least three people a day on average during the first five months of 2025, with more dissidents and marginalized communities falling victim to the government’s vicious repression of dissent and brutal anti-drug policy,” said Federico Borello, interim executive director of Human Rights Watch. “The killing spree shows no signs of slowing down and the scale of the crisis underscores an urgent need for the international community to press the Iranian government to immediately halt all executions and establish a death penalty moratorium” (*Human Rights Watch*, May 27, 2025).

While UN experts are warning Iran not to resort to another crackdown resembling the 1988 atrocities, political prisoners assert that the crackdown has started. On 12 July 2025, three opposition activists—Farshad Etemadi-Far, Masoud Jamei, and Alireza Mardasi—were sentenced to death by the Ahvaz Revolutionary Court after two years of torture.

There are currently dozens of political prisoners on Iran’s death row. The surge in executions, especially of political prisoners and dissidents, is linked to the Iranian government’s intensified crackdown on dissent in the wake of the massive 2022 protests. In fact, Human Rights Watch titled a report “Iran: Execution Spree Continues Unabated” (May 27, 2025).

Former U.S. ambassador at large for war crimes issues and international prosecutor Stephen J. Rapp wrote about the impending crisis in the *Washington Post*, “If the present trajectory continues, Iran’s execution tally for 2025 could exceed any in modern memory — except, perhaps, for the horror of 1988... In 1988, Iranian activists attempted to raise alarms throughout the international community as the groundwork was being laid for mass executions. Most Western officials chose to ignore the calls to action. The danger emerging with the latest executions and politically motivated arrests is not just that Iran will perpetrate another massacre, but that the world will repeat its failure in allowing it to happen” (July 24, 2025).

The Government of Canada is a global leader in human rights. It is the country that led the world in affirming the doctrine of the **Responsibility to Protect**. **It is time to protect the journalists, political activists, dissidents, minorities, and others at risk in Iran and to decry Iran's use of political executions and the death penalty.**

I urge the Third Committee resolution to address the current situation in Iran within the context of the **1988 Massacre**. Perpetrators of that atrocity have never been prosecuted; witnesses and victim-survivors have never had the opportunity to provide historical testimony in a legitimate court of law; and thousands of crimes of enforced disappearances remain unsolved. Today's persecutions and executions are a continuation of previous violence and must be understood and addressed not as a new and separate wave of violence, but as a continuation of the **1988 Massacre**.

As Ambassador Rapp wrote, "Impunity breeds impunity." There must be sanctions on the perpetrators; a UN fact-finding mission; excommunication of Iran from the global human rights community; an eventual international tribunal; and guaranteed safe harbor for those able to flee the regime's brutality.

Thank you for affirming and upholding the human rights of the people in Iran.

Sincerely,



Ellen J. Kennedy, Ph.D., Executive Director
World Without Genocide