



Iran - Researched and compiled by the Refugee Documentation Centre of Ireland on 30 December 2011 and 3 January 2012

Information on the activities of Basij including applicable state support

In September 2011 *Human Rights Watch* states:

“Agents of the Ministry of Intelligence, Revolutionary Guards, police, and Basij paramilitaries have been responsible for numerous cases of torture, particularly of political prisoners” (Human Rights Watch (21 September 2011) *UN: Expose Iran's Appalling Rights Record*).

The *European Parliament* in November 2011 notes that:

“...the Iranian Revolutionary Guard, the secret services and the Basij militia are playing an active role in the severe and brutal repression in Iran.” (European Parliament (17 November 2011) *European Parliament resolution of 17 November 2011 on Iran – recent cases of human rights violations*)

In October 2011 a report by the *United States Congressional Research Service* points out that:

“Iran’s armed forces are divided organizationally. The Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC, known in Persian as the Pasdaran) controls the Basij (Mobilization of the Oppressed) volunteer militia that enforces adherence to Islamic customs and has been the main instrument to repress the postelection protests in Iran.” (United States Congressional Research Service (26 October 2011) *Iran: U.S. Concerns and Policy Responses*, p.25)

In March 2011 *BBC News* notes:

“The Revolutionary Guard also controls the Basij Resistance Force, an Islamic volunteer militia of about 90,000 men and woman with an additional capacity to mobilise nearly 1m. The Basij, or Mobilisation of the Oppressed, are often called out onto the streets at times of crisis to use force to dispel dissent. There are branches in every town.” (BBC News (2 March 2011) *Who's who in Iran*)

Research carried out by the *United Kingdom Home Office* in June 2011 states:

“Jane’s Sentinel Security Assessment, updated 1 February 2011, stated that “Known as the Mobilisation of the Oppressed”, the Basij volunteer force is a paramilitary militia organised throughout Iran under the tutelage of the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC). Basij personnel are the eyes and ears of the Islamic regime and are considered extremely loyal...” (United Kingdom Home Office (28 June 2011) *Iran, Country of Origin Information (COI) Report*, p.43)

This report also notes:

“Jane’s Sentinel Security Assessment, updated 1 February 2011 noted:

'The Basij has taken a very active role in Iran's domestic security affairs. It maintains a formal presence in all government offices, universities, schools, trade associations, hospitals and factories. Formed on the orders of the Ayatollah Khomeini in November 1979 after the US Embassy siege, the Basij militia is designed to defend the Islamic republic against internal enemies and foreign intervention.

—Now apparently based at more than 70,000 locations nationwide, members of the Basij are organised into five main elements: the Pupil Basij, the Student Basij, the University Basij, the Public Service Basij and the Tribal Basij. The diverse range of these units demonstrates the various roles of the militia, and the fact that the aim of the Basij is not just to forge a paramilitary force, but to reinforce support for the regime through ideological dissemination...

—The preservation of internal security is the primary role of the Basij. Although it also nominally exists to contribute to external defence, as in the case of the Iran/Iraq war when large numbers were deployed, given its size and paramilitary nature the main utility of the Basij members to the government is to act as the eyes and ears of the Islamic republic. In carrying out their ideologically-based duties, Basij members act as 'moral police' in towns and cities by enforcing the hijab, arresting women for violating the dress code, prohibiting male-female fraternisation, monitoring the activities of citizens, seizing 'indecent' material and satellite dish antennae, intelligence gathering and even harassing government critics and intellectuals. Basij volunteers also act as bailiffs for local courts.'" (ibid, p.44)

A paper issued in October 2010 by the *United States Institute of Peace* notes:

"The Basij Resistance Force is a volunteer paramilitary organization operating under the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC). It is an auxiliary force with many duties, especially internal security, law enforcement, special religious or political events and morals policing. The Basij have branches in virtually every city and town in Iran." (United States Institute of Peace (October 2010) *The Basij Resistance Force*)

This document also states:

"Since the 2005 election of President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, Basij interventions in politics have become more frequent. The Basij were pivotal in suppressing the anti-government protests after the disputed presidential election on June 12, 2009. Various branches of the Basij were mobilized to counter anti-government protests at high schools, universities, factories and on the street." (ibid, p.2)

It is also noted in this document that:

"The Basij organizational structure divides each city in Iran—depending on its size and population—into 'resistance areas.' Each resistance area is then divided into resistance zones, each zone into resistance bases, and each base into several groups." (ibid, p.2)

This paper also points out that:

"Estimates of the total number of Basij vary widely. In 2002, the Iranian press reported that the Basij had between 5 million to 7 million members, although IRGC commander Gen. Yahya Rahim Safavi claimed the unit had 10 million members. By 2009, IRGC Human Resource chief Masoud Mousavi claimed to have 11.2 million Basij members—just over one-half the number originally called for by Khomeini. But a 2005 study by the Center for Strategic and International Studies, a Washington

think-tank, put the number of full-time, uniformed and active members at 90,000, with another 300,000 reservists and some 1 million that could be mobilized when necessary." (ibid, p.3)

It is also noted in this report that:

"The Basij statute distinguishes between three types of members:

- Regular members, who are mobilized in wartime and engage in developmental activities in peacetime. Regular members are volunteers and are unpaid, unless they engage in war-time duty.
- Active Members, who have had extensive ideological and political indoctrination, and who also receive payment for peacetime work.
- Special Members, who are paid dual members of the Basij and the IRGC and serve as the IRGC ground forces." (ibid, p.4)

This document also notes:

"The Basij's performance since the June 2009 election has been mixed. It managed to suppress street protests in the provinces with the help of the local police forces, but maintaining order in major urban centers, especially Tehran, was more difficult." (ibid, p.5)

In June 2010 the *Iran Human Rights Documentation Centre* states in a report that:

"The Basij is a militia of private citizens purportedly established to provide domestic security under the command of the Revolutionary Guards. Members are often deployed to counter student demonstrations, enforce Islamic dress codes, and maintain the separation of the sexes." (Iran Human Rights Documentation Centre (June 2010) *A Year Later: Suppression Continues in Iran*, p.24)

A report published in February 2010 by the *Iran Human Rights Documentation Centre* notes:

"Basij members receive little or no law enforcement training." (Iran Human Rights Documentation Centre (February 2010) *Violent Aftermath: The 2009 Election and Suppression of Dissent in Iran*, p.9)

This report also notes:

"Under Iranian law, the Basij have broad discretion as to when they may take action. Militia members may engage in law enforcement whenever a crime is observed and they feel the police are not responding fast enough or properly, or when the police ask for their help." (ibid, p.9)

In December 2011 *Reuters* states:

"Iran's elite Revolutionary Guards and Basij militia have distanced themselves from Ahmadinejad and remain fiercely loyal to Khamenei." (Reuters (1 December 2011) *Analysis: British embassy storming bares rift in Iran elite*)

Ahmadinejad is the President of Iran; Khamenei is the clerical supreme leader of the country.

An introductory paragraph in the *United States Department of State* report covering events of 2010, issued in April 2011 notes that:

“Vigilante groups with ties to the government, such as Basij militia, also committed acts of violence.” (United States Department of State (8 April 2011) *2010 Human Rights Report: Iran*)

This report also points out:

“Several agencies share responsibility for law enforcement and maintaining order, including the MOIS, the Law Enforcement Forces under the Interior Ministry, and the IRGC. The Basij and informal groups known as the Ansar-e Hizballah (Helpers of the Party of God) were aligned with extreme conservative members of the leadership and acted as vigilantes. In October 2009 the government announced the merger of the Basij into the IRGC ground forces. While some Basij units received formal training, many units were disorganized and undisciplined. During government-led crackdowns on demonstrations, the Basij were primarily responsible for the violence against the protesters.” (ibid, Section 1d ‘Arbitrary Arrest or Detention/ Role of the Police and Security Apparatus)

In January 2012 *Web Newswire* states:

“Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon said he was ‘deeply troubled’ by reports of excessive force, arbitrary arrests and possible torture in the suppression of protests over the disputed Iranian presidential elections, in a report to the General Assembly on the country’s human rights situation that was released today. Mr. Ban urged the Government and the opposition to peacefully resolve their differences through dialogue and legal means, while describing the public debate during the election campaign, the high level of participation of the electorate in the 12 June polls and the peaceful post-election demonstrations as positive signs of the vitality of civil and political life.’ The handling by authorities of the protests that followed has raised concerns about respect for freedom of expression, assembly and association, the use of force in policing demonstrations and the treatment of and due process afforded to detainees,’ Mr. Ban wrote in the report. Mr. Ban said that following the announcement of President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad’s victory, tens of thousands of supporters of the other candidates took to the streets over several days to protest the result, with national television reporting the death of seven people after violence erupted.’ There is no accurate measure of the number of casualties during the protests, but numerous media reports have cited at least 20 people killed and many more injured during the demonstrations,’ stressed Mr. Ban. He noted that the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Navi Pillay led a chorus of UN rights experts voicing concern over the use of excessive police force, arbitrary arrests and killings, in particular reported acts of violence by members of the Basij militia. As the protests grew, authorities restricted the media by blocking websites, banning them from unauthorized demonstrations and implementing new restrictions requiring journalists to obtain permission before leaving the office to cover any story.” (Web Newswire (1 January 2012) *Iran: Ban troubled by reports of violent extinction of election protests in latest report*).

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This response was prepared after researching publicly accessible information currently available to the Refugee Documentation Centre within time constraints. This response is not and does not purport to be conclusive as to the merit of any particular claim to refugee status or asylum. Please read in full all documents referred to.

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