



Home Office

# **Country Information and Guidance**

## **Iran: Kurds and Kurdish political groups**

**Version 2.0**

**July 2016**

# Preface

This document provides country of origin information (COI) and guidance to Home Office decision makers on handling particular types of protection and human rights claims. This includes whether claims are likely to justify the granting of asylum, humanitarian protection or discretionary leave and whether – in the event of a claim being refused – it is likely to be certifiable as ‘clearly unfounded’ under s94 of the Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Act 2002.

Decision makers must consider claims on an individual basis, taking into account the case specific facts and all relevant evidence, including: the guidance contained with this document; the available COI; any applicable caselaw; and the Home Office casework guidance in relation to relevant policies.

## Country Information

The COI within this document has been compiled from a wide range of external information sources (usually) published in English. Consideration has been given to the relevance, reliability, accuracy, objectivity, currency, transparency and traceability of the information and wherever possible attempts have been made to corroborate the information used across independent sources, to ensure accuracy. All sources cited have been referenced in footnotes. It has been researched and presented with reference to the [Common EU \[European Union\] Guidelines for Processing Country of Origin Information \(COI\)](#), dated April 2008, and the [European Asylum Support Office’s research guidelines, Country of Origin Information report methodology](#), dated July 2012.

## Feedback

Our goal is to continuously improve the guidance and information we provide. Therefore, if you would like to comment on this document, please email [the Country Policy and Information Team](#).

## Independent Advisory Group on Country Information

The Independent Advisory Group on Country Information (IAGCI) was set up in March 2009 by the Independent Chief Inspector of Borders and Immigration to make recommendations to him about the content of the Home Office’s COI material. The IAGCI welcomes feedback on the Home Office’s COI material. It is not the function of the IAGCI to endorse any Home Office material, procedures or policy. IAGCI may be contacted at:

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Information about the IAGCI’s work and a list of the COI documents which have been reviewed by the IAGCI can be found on the Independent Chief Inspector’s website at <http://icinspector.independent.gov.uk/country-information-reviews/>

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# Guidance

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## 1. Introduction

### 1.1 Basis of Claim

- 1.1.1 Fear of persecution or serious harm by the Iranian authorities because the person is of Kurdish ethnicity and/or because of their perceived or actual affiliation to a Kurdish political group.

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## 2. Consideration of Issues

### 2.1 Credibility

- 2.1.1 For further information and guidance on assessing credibility, see the [Asylum Instruction on Assessing Credibility and Refugee Status](#).
- 2.1.2 Decision makers must also check if there has been a previous application for a UK visa or another form of leave. Asylum applications matched to visas should be investigated prior to the asylum interview (see the [Asylum Instruction on Visa Matches, Asylum Claims from UK Visa Applicants](#)).
- 2.1.3 Decision makers should also consider the need to conduct language analysis testing (see the [Asylum Instruction on Language Analysis](#)).
- 2.1.4 For information on verifying membership of a Kurdish political group, see [Kurdish Democratic Party of Iran](#), [Kurdish Democratic Party-Iran](#), [Komala Parties \(Komala SKHK, Komala KZK and Komala Party of Iranian Kurdistan\)](#) and [Party of Free Life for Kurdistan \(PJAK\)](#) in the country information section.
- 2.1.5 See also country information and guidance on [Iran: Background Information \(including actors of protection and internal relocation\)](#).

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### 2.2 Exclusion

- 2.2.1 The Party of Free Life of Kurdistan (PJAK) has often carried out armed attacks in the north-west of the country, sometimes on civilians (see [Party of Free Life for Kurdistan \[PJAK\]](#)). If it is accepted that the person has been involved with such activities, then decision makers must consider whether one of the Exclusion clauses is applicable.
- 2.2.2 For further information and guidance on the exclusion clauses, discretionary leave and restricted leave, see the [Asylum Instruction on Exclusion: Article 1F of the Refugee Convention](#), the [Asylum Instruction on Discretionary Leave](#) and the [Asylum Instruction on Restricted Leave](#).

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## 2.3 Assessment of risk

- 2.3.1 Kurds in Iran face institutional discrimination which affects their access to basic services such as housing, employment and education (see [Treatment of Kurds by the State and Society](#)).
- 2.3.2 However, in general, the level of discrimination faced by Kurds in Iran is not such that it will reach the level of being persecutory or otherwise inhuman or degrading treatment. This was confirmed in the country guidance case of [SSH and HR \(illegal exit: failed asylum seeker \(CG\) \[2016\] UKUT 308 \(IAC\)](#) (29 June 2016) where the Tribunal held that the evidence does not show that there is a risk to returnees on the basis of Kurdish ethnicity alone unless that person is otherwise of interest to the Iranian authorities (para 34 of determination).
- 2.3.3 The situation is different for those who become or are perceived to be involved in Kurdish political activities. The authorities have no tolerance for any activities connected to Kurdish political groups and those involved are targeted for arbitrary arrest, prolonged detention, and physical abuse. Even those who express peaceful dissent are at risk of being accused of being a member of a banned Kurdish political group. Those involved in Kurdish political activities also face a high risk of prosecution on vague charges such as “enmity against God” and “corruption on earth” (see [Treatment of Kurdish political or human rights activists and perceived activists/family members](#)).
- 2.3.4 Persons with a high political profile as well as human rights activists and those seeking greater recognition of their cultural and linguistic rights are targeted by the authorities because of their political opinion. However, even a person speaking out about Kurdish rights can be seen as a general threat. If the Iranian regime catches a perceived sympathizer carrying out an activity perceived to be against the government, the consequences for him and his family can be result in arbitrary arrest, detention and possible ill-treatment. (see [Treatment of Kurdish political or human rights activists and perceived activists/family members](#)).
- 2.3.5 Family members of persons associated with a Kurdish political group are also harassed and detained. In pre-trial detention in Evin Prison, members of minority ethnicities, including Kurds reportedly were repeatedly subjected to more severe physical punishment or torture than other prisoners, regardless of the type of crime accused. The execution rate is disproportionately high among Kurds in Iran. A large proportion of these executions are based on accusations of drug smuggling, but sometimes political activists are executed under the pretext of being drug smugglers (see [Treatment of Kurdish political or human rights activists and perceived activists/family members](#)).
- 2.3.6 For further information and guidance on assessing risk, see the [Asylum Instruction on Assessing Credibility and Refugee Status](#).
- 2.3.7 See also country information and guidance on [Iran: Background Information \(including actors of protection and internal relocation\)](#) and [Iran: Illegal Exit](#)

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## 2.4 Protection

- 2.4.1 As the person's fear is of ill treatment/persecution at the hands of the state, they will not be able to avail themselves of the protection of the authorities.
- 2.4.2 For further information and guidance on assessing the availability or not of state protection, see the [Asylum Instruction on Assessing Credibility and Refugee Status](#).

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## 2.5 Internal relocation

- 2.5.1 As the person's fear is of ill treatment/persecution at the hands of the state, they will not be able to relocate to escape that risk.
- 2.5.2 For further information on considering internal relocation and the factors to be taken into account, see the [Asylum Instruction on Assessing Credibility and Refugee Status](#).

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## 2.6 Certification

- 2.6.1 Where a claim falls to be refused, it is unlikely to be certifiable as 'clearly unfounded' under section 94 of the Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Act 2002.
- 2.6.2 For further information and guidance on certification, see the [Appeals Instruction on Non-Suspensive Appeals: Certification Under Section 94 of the NIA Act 2002](#).

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# 3. Policy Summary

- 3.1.1 Kurds in Iran face discrimination which affects their access to basic services. However, in general, this level of discrimination will not reach the level of being persecutory.
- 3.1.2 Those involved in Kurdish political groups are however, at risk of arbitrary arrest, prolonged detention and physical abuse from the Iranian authorities. Even those who express peaceful dissent or who speak out about Kurdish rights can be seen as a general threat and face a real risk of persecution.
- 3.1.3 Family members of persons associated with a Kurdish political group are also harassed and detained and may be subject to inhumane treatment.
- 3.1.4 Where a person can demonstrate to a reasonable degree of likelihood that they are known or likely to be made known to the Iranian authorities on the basis of their membership or perceived membership of a Kurdish political group they should be granted asylum.
- 3.1.5 Internal relocation to avoid persecution is unlikely to be an available option.
- 3.1.6 Where a claim falls to be refused, it is unlikely to be certifiable as 'clearly unfounded'.

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# Country Information

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## 4. Background

### 4.1 Demography

- 4.1.1 The CIA world fact book estimates the population to be approximately 81,824,270.<sup>1</sup> Iran is a multi-ethnic country. The largest ethnic community comprises Persians who constitute about 50-55% of the population. The rest of the population is combined of Kurds, Lurs, Azeris, Arabs, Armenians, and a host of other small ethnicities.<sup>2</sup> Estimates vary as to their numbers, but at up to 8 million, Iran's Kurdish population is second in size only to the Kurds in Turkey and probably larger than the Iraqi and Syrian Kurdish populations combined.<sup>3</sup>

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### 4.2 Language

- 4.2.1 The OrvilleJenkins.com website produced [a chart](#) (last edited in January 2013) summarising an extensive survey and evaluation of the Kurdish peoples and the languages they speak.
- 4.2.2 A 2015 Austrian Federal Ministry of the Interior report on 'The Kurds' noted: 'Kurdish is a macro-language consisting of at least five dialect groups: Northern Kurdish (Kurmanji), Central Kurdish (Sorani), Southern Kurdish (Kirmashani/Faili/Kalhuri), Zazaki and Gorani/Hawrami. These groups belong to the northwestern branch of Iranian languages, a branch of the Indo-Iranian family, which is a sub-group of the world's largest family of languages - the Indo-European languages. On both linguistic and sociolinguistic grounds, this categorization sets Kurdish apart from Arabic and Turkish and places it close to Dari, Balouchi, Pashtu and Persian/Farsi. While linguists overwhelmingly accept this as a fact, there is less consensus as to the varieties of Kurdish itself. Whereas a number of Western philologists and theoretical linguists do not consider Zazaki and Gorani/Hawrami as Kurdish, the vast majority of the speakers of these varieties - except for a group of Zazaki intellectuals - consider their speech variety a Kurdish "dialect". While Central, Southern and Gorani/Hawrami groups are spoken in Iran and Iraq, Zazaki is spoken in Turkey only;

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<sup>1</sup> CIA World Factbook, Iran- people and society, regularly updated, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/ir.html> [date accessed 6 April 2016]

<sup>2</sup> Jane's 'Sentinel Security Assessment' Iran- Demography, 17 February 2016, subscription source [date accessed 6 April 2016].

<sup>3</sup> The Guardian, Poetry and silence: Iran's Kurds tread the line between art and activism, 26 February 2016, <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/feb/26/iran-kurdistan-rouhani-tehranbureau> [date accessed 6 April 2016]



Kurmanji is spoken in all major Kurdish areas. Only two dialect groups, Sorani and Kurmanji, have standardized literary varieties.’<sup>4</sup>

- 4.2.3 Further information on Kurdish dialects can be found in the Austria-Federal Ministry of the Interior report ‘[The Kurds: History –Religion – Language – Politics](#)’ published in November 2015 (page 30-51)<sup>5</sup>

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#### 4.3 Legal and constitutional framework

- 4.3.1 Article 19 of the Iranian Constitution states: ‘All people of Iran, whatever the ethnic group or tribe to which they belong, enjoy equal rights; and color, race, language, and the like, do not bestow any privilege’.<sup>6</sup>

- 4.3.2 The 2015 US State Department Human Rights report for Iran published in April 2016 states that:

‘While the constitution grants equal rights to all ethnic minorities and allows minority languages to be used in the media, minorities did not enjoy equal rights, and the government consistently denied their right to use their languages in school. Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) forces allegedly controlled security in two provinces, Sistan-va Baluchistan and Kordestan, due to large ethnic minority Baluch and Kurdish communities, respectively.’<sup>7</sup>

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#### 4.4 History

- 4.4.1 For the history of the Kurdish region please see the Kurdish project website<sup>8</sup> and the Austria- Federal Ministry of the Interior report ‘The Kurds: History – Religion – Language – Politics’ published in November 2015 (page 162-165)<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Austrian Federal Ministry of the Interior – ‘The Kurds’, 2015 [http://www.bfa.gv.at/files/broschueren/KURDS\\_Monographie\\_2015\\_11.pdf](http://www.bfa.gv.at/files/broschueren/KURDS_Monographie_2015_11.pdf) [date accessed 13 July 2016]

<sup>5</sup> Austria: Federal Ministry of the Interior, The Kurds: History –Religion – Language - Politics, November 2015, <http://www.refworld.org/docid/568cf9924.html> [accessed 20 April 2016]

<sup>6</sup> Iran online, Islamic Republic of Iran Constitution, undated <http://www.iranonline.com/iran/iran-info/government/constitution.html> [date accessed 20 April 2016]

<sup>7</sup> United States Department of State, 2015 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices - Iran, section 6, 13 April 2016, <http://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/hrrpt/humanrightsreport/index.htm?year=2015&dliid=252923> [date accessed 20 April 2016]

<sup>8</sup> The Kurdish project, Kurdish region of Iran, undated, <http://thekurdishproject.org/kurdistan-map/iranian-kurdistan/> [date accessed 6 April 2016]

<sup>9</sup> Austria: Federal Ministry of the Interior, The Kurds: History –Religion – Language - Politics, November 2015, <http://www.refworld.org/docid/568cf9924.html> [accessed 13 July 2016]

## 5. Treatment of Kurds by the state and society

### 5.1 Overview

- 5.1.1 Amnesty International<sup>10</sup>, Freedom House<sup>11</sup> and the US State Department<sup>12</sup> all note, in their respective annual human rights reports, that ethnic minorities in Iran continue to report that they face various forms of discrimination. This discrimination ranges from problems with access to employment, housing and land rights, access to political office, the exercise of cultural, civil and political rights, restrictions on the use of language and permission to publish books.

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### 5.2 Kurds

- 5.2.1 Minority Rights Group International's report on the 'State of the World's Minorities and Indigenous Peoples 2012 – Iran' published on 28 June 2012 noted that:

'In terms of land rights, there are high levels of property confiscation and governmental neglect in the Kurdish region of north-west Iran – Iranian Kurdistan, Kermanshah and Ilam provinces. The Kurdish region has abundant water resources. Dams have been built by the government to facilitate water irrigation and for hydroelectric power generation, but Kurds are generally excluded from the benefits of this investment. They experience poor housing and living conditions because of forced resettlement, and the expropriation of rural land for large-scale agricultural plantations and petrochemical plants which pollute the surrounding environment.'<sup>13</sup>

- 5.2.2 The Danish Immigration Service, the Norwegian Landinfo and Danish Refugee Council's fact-finding mission to Tehran, Iran, Ankara, Turkey and London, United Kingdom, 9 November to 20 November 2012 and 8 January to 9 January 2013 consulted a Western embassy who stated that:

'It was considered that generally, no matter what ethnic or religious background, an individual has, if he or she plainly accepts and lives by the Islamic regime, he or she will be left alone. However, there is institutional discrimination in Iran and it would for example be harder for a Kurd to get a job compared to a Persian Iranian. While it was considered that Kurds would be subject to harsher treatment from the authorities than ethnic Persians, one cannot say that there would be differences between how Kurds are treated in different areas of Iran. In the border areas where there could be

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<sup>10</sup> Amnesty International, Amnesty International report 2015/16- Iran, 24 February 2016 <https://www.amnesty.org/en/countries/middle-east-and-north-africa/iran/report-iran/> [date accessed 11 April 2016]

<sup>11</sup> Freedom House, Freedom in the world 2016; Iran, 7 March 2016, <https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/2016/iran> [date accessed 11 April 2016]

<sup>12</sup> United States Department of State, 2015 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices - Iran, section 6,13 April 2016, <http://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/hrrpt/humanrightsreport/index.htm?year=2015&dlid=252923> [date accessed 20 April 2016]

<sup>13</sup> Minority Rights Group International, State of the World's Minorities and Indigenous Peoples 2012 - Iran, 28 June 2012, <http://www.refworld.org/docid/4fedb3fcc.htm> [date accessed 13 April 2016]

some interactions and activities between armed groups, it is however, a different story’.

“If the Kurdish people are organizing cultural activities and a number of people gather, the authorities will fear that it is a cover for political activities for which reason they are also suppressing cultural activities and expression”.<sup>14</sup>

- 5.2.3 The same source further noted that ‘The activities that Kurds conduct that can be perceived as political activities include social welfare and solidarity activities.’<sup>15</sup>
- 5.2.4 The Danish Refugee Council and Danish Immigration service fact finding mission on Iranian Kurds and Conditions for Iranian Kurdish Parties in Iran and KRI, Activities in the Kurdish Area of Iran, Conditions in Border Area and Situation of Returnees from KRI to Iran 30 May to 9 June 2013, dated 30 September 2013 consulted a western diplomat and expert on Iran in Erbil who stated that; “being a Kurd in Iran does not necessarily mean getting into trouble with the authorities as has been the case in Syria. Troubles will start as soon as a person gets involved in political activities”.<sup>16</sup>
- 5.2.5 The same report also noted:  
‘An NGO working with asylum seekers and refugees in Iraq stated that the Iranian intelligence agents are present in KRI, and they have good relations with some of the Iraqi Kurdish political parties in KRI. Formerly, the Iranian intelligence service assassinated Iranians living in KRI but since 2009 this has no longer taken place.’ [...] Sardar Mohammad and Asos Hardi (Awene Newspaper) pointed to the strong presence of the Iranian intelligence in KRI and their ability to monitor Iranian nationals and their activities in the area. The source added that many Iranians residing in KRI have received threats from the Iranian intelligence service or have had their telephones tapped.<sup>17</sup>
- 5.2.6 Amnesty International’s annual report for 2015/16 noted that ‘On 7 May [2015], riot police were reported to have used excessive or unnecessary force to disperse demonstrators in Mahabad, a city in West Azerbaijan province largely populated by members of the Kurdish minority, who were

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<sup>14</sup> Landinfo, Iran – On Conversion to Christianity, Issues concerning Kurds and Post-2009 Election Protestors as well as Legal Issues and Exit Procedures, Joint report from the Danish Immigration Service, the Norwegian LANDINFO and Danish Refugee Council’s fact-finding mission to Tehran, Iran, Ankara, Turkey and London, United Kingdom, 9 November to 20 November 2012 and 8 January to 9 January 2013, February 2013, (3.1 Kurdish political activities, p. 40-42).

<https://www.nyidanmark.dk/NR/rdonlyres/A8C2C897-1CA9-49D1-BA32-EC3E599D646D/0/Iranendeligudgave.pdf> [date accessed 26 April 2016]

<sup>15</sup> Ibid (3.2 Prevalence of written Kurdish political materials p. 44)

<sup>16</sup> Danish Refugee Council Iranian & Danish Immigration Service, Iranian Kurds: On Conditions for Iranian Kurdish Parties in Iran and KRI, Activities in the Kurdish Area of Iran, Conditions in Border Area and Situation of Returnees from KRI to Iran 30 May to 9 June 2013, 30 September 2013, (1.3. Consequences of conducting activities for the Kurdish political parties, p.15)

[http://www.nyidanmark.dk/NR/rdonlyres/D82120CB-3D78-4992-AB57-4916C4722869/0/fact\\_finding\\_iranian\\_kurds\\_2013.pdf](http://www.nyidanmark.dk/NR/rdonlyres/D82120CB-3D78-4992-AB57-4916C4722869/0/fact_finding_iranian_kurds_2013.pdf). [date accessed 26 April 2016]

<sup>17</sup> Ibid (5.2. Presence of Iranian intelligence in KRI, p.56)

protesting after a Kurdish woman fell to her death in unclear circumstances.<sup>18</sup>

5.2.7 In July 2015 Press TV reported that:

'Iran has officially included the Kurdish Language and Literature major in college curriculum in the Kordestan region in west of the country. The Kordestan University will admit 40 students into the major in the next Iranian academic year which starts late September, said the chancellor of the university Fardin Akhlaqian .... He said the official guidebook published by the Iranian Organization for Educational Testing allows students to take up the Kurdish Language and Literature major.'<sup>19</sup>

5.2.8 Rudaw reported on Iranian President Hassan Rouhani visit to the Kurdish province on 26 July 2015. Rudaw reported that Rouhani stated that;

'... the Iranian government views Kurds, Arabs, Baluchis and Persians equally, irrespective of their religious orientations. "Sunni and Shiite are all brothers, we are all equal," he said. "Kurdistan is the eye of Iran."

'...Rouhani additionally made a series of promises to improve Kurdistan province's undeveloped infrastructure. According to Rouhani, 11 dams will be built within the next two years. He also vowed to take necessary measures to build new roads in Kurdistan.'

"This visit could be evaluated as the Iranian regime offering new efforts to improve the conditions of minorities in Iran," Farhad Aminpour, a Kurdish political activist from Sina, told Rudaw. However, Aminpour said he was doubtful the visit would lead to any shift in Iranian regime policies toward ethnic minorities like the Kurds. "Unfortunately the political demands of the Kurds have been abandoned by the government," he said. "The legitimacy of the Iranian government after the nuclear deal is increased, and that frees the Iranian authorities' hands of having to take care of minorities issues."<sup>20</sup>

5.2.9 Shafaq news reported in September 2015 that:

'Iran appointed, its first ambassador of Kurdish nationalism from Sunni doctrine to the two states in a first in its history. According to the news quoted by "IRNA" Iranian official news agency, followed by Shafaq News, Tehran appointed Saleh Adeb, a Sunni Kurd, from Sanandaj city, capital of Kurdistan Iran province, as the Iranian ambassador to Vietnam and Cambodia, to be the first Iranian ambassador belongs to the Sunni doctrine.'<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Amnesty International, Amnesty International report 2015/16- Iran, 24 February 2016 <https://www.amnesty.org/en/countries/middle-east-and-north-africa/iran/report-iran/> [date accessed 11 April 2016]

<sup>19</sup> Press TV, Iran includes Kurkish in college curriculum, 27 July 2015, <http://217.218.67.231/Detail/2015/07/27/422104/Iran-Kurdish-Rouhani-Fardin-Akhlaqian-Sanandaj> [date accessed 25 April 2016]

<sup>20</sup> Rudaw, Iranian president visits Iranian Kurdistan, 26 July 2015, <http://rudaw.net/english/middleeast/iran/26072015> [date accessed 25 April 2016]

<sup>21</sup> Shafaq news, First Kurdish Sunni ambassador to Iran in two states, 3 September 2015, <http://english.shafaq.com/politics/15743-first-kurdish-sunni-ambassador-to-iran-in-two-states.html>

5.2.10 Asharq Al-Awsat reported in January 2016 that:

‘Kurdish opposition sources in Iran have revealed yesterday that the executions carried out by the Iranian regime against the Kurds and other components are increasing annually, indicating that during the past nine months, according to the Iranian calendar, Iran executed more than 750 people, the majority of whom were Kurdish.’<sup>22</sup>

5.2.11 In January 2016 Kurdistan Human Rights Network (KHRN) published a report on the violation of Kolber workers in Iran. The report stated that

‘Kolber is a Kurdish name for workers and tradespersons, who for a small sum of money risk their lives to transport packs of various foreign items on their own back or on the back of horses to transfer them from and to Iranian border territories from border areas of neighbouring Kurdish regions in Iraq and Turkey.’

5.2.12 The report went on to state that:

‘The Kolber workers mostly come from Kurdish border villages and towns, where they are usually left with no job other than Kolber work to make a small income to survive through the harsh reality of the deprived Kurdish border areas. However, the Iranian government describes them as “smugglers”, while Iranian soldiers and border guards deliberately shoots to kill them across the border areas.’<sup>23</sup>

5.2.13 Jane’s ‘Sentinel Security Assessment’ noted that ‘there is growing anger in Iran’s Kurdish community over the number of Kurds executed in Iran amid allegations that torture is widespread.’<sup>24</sup>

5.2.14 The US Congressional Research Service reported that:

‘the Kurdish language is not banned, but schools do not teach it and Kurdish political organizations, activists, and media outlets are routinely scrutinized, harassed, and closed down for supporting greater Kurdish autonomy. Several Kurdish oppositionists have been executed since 2010.’<sup>25</sup>

5.2.15 According to the 2015 US State Department Human Rights report for Iran:

‘The estimated eight million ethnic Kurds in the country frequently campaigned for greater regional autonomy. The government continued to use security law, the media law, and other legislation to arrest and prosecute Kurds for exercising their rights to freedom of expression and association.’

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[date accessed 25 April 2016]

<sup>22</sup> Asharq Al- Awsat, Iranian Kurdish Parties: Tehran Executed Hundreds of Kurds in Past Nine Months, 4 January 2016, <http://english.aawsat.com/2016/01/article55346183/iranian-kurdish-parties-tehran-executed-hundreds-of-kurds-in-the-past-nine-months> [date accessed 26 April 2016]

<sup>23</sup> Kurdistan Human Rights Network (KHRN), 2015 Annual report on violation of human rights of Kolber workers in Iran, January 2016, <http://kurdistanhumanrights.net/en/wp-content/uploads/2016/01/Kolber-final.pdf> [date accessed 26 April 2016]

<sup>24</sup> Jane’s ‘Sentinel Security Assessment’ Iran- Army, 24 March 2016, subscription source [date accessed 20 April 2016].

<sup>25</sup> US Congressional Research Service (CRS): Iran, Gulf Security, and U.S. Policy, 30 March 2016, <https://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/mideast/RL32048.pdf> [date accessed 13 April 2016]

The government reportedly banned Kurdish-language newspapers, journals, and books and punished publishers, journalists, and writers for opposing and criticizing government policies. Authorities suppressed legitimate activities of Kurdish NGOs by denying them registration permits or bringing security charges against persons working with such organizations. The government did not allow Kurds to register most Kurdish names for their children in official registries. Authorities did not prohibit speaking the Kurdish language, but authorities prohibited most schools from teaching it.<sup>26</sup>

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## 6. Kurdish political groups

### 6.1 Overview

6.1.1 Freedom House's report on Freedom in the world 2016 published on 7 March 2016 noted that:

'Only political parties and factions loyal to the establishment and to the state ideology are permitted to operate. Reformist parties and politicians have come under increased state repression, especially since 2009. [...]The parliament grants five seats to recognized non-Muslim minorities: Jews, Armenian Christians, Assyrian and Chaldean Christians, and Zoroastrians. However, ethnic and especially religious minorities are rarely awarded senior government posts, and their political presence remains weak. In September 2015, Iranian media reported that the government had for the first time appointed a Sunni Muslim to serve as an ambassador.'<sup>27</sup>

6.1.2 For further background and general information on the Kurdish political groups see:

- the Danish Refugee Council and Danish Immigration Service report- [Iranian Kurds On Conditions for Iranian Kurdish Parties in Iran and KRI, Activities in the Kurdish Area of Iran, Conditions in Border Area and Situation of Returnees from KRI to Iran 30 May to 9 June 2013](#),
- the Austrian Centre for Country of Origin & Asylum Research and Documentation (ACCORD) COI compilation- [Iran: Political Opposition Groups, Security Forces, Selected Human Rights Issues, Rule of Law, July 2015](#);
- and the Austrian report by the Federal Ministry of the Interior, [The Kurds: History –Religion – Language - Politics, November 2015](#)

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<sup>26</sup> United States Department of State, 2015 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices - Iran, section 6,13 April 2016, <http://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/hrrpt/humanrightsreport/index.htm?year=2015&dliid=252923> [date accessed 20 April 2016]

<sup>27</sup> Freedom House, Freedom in the world 2016, 7 March 2016, <https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/2016/iran> [date accessed 26 April 2016]

## 7. Kurdish Democratic Party of Iran (KDPI, aka PDKI and DPKI)

### 7.1 Background

7.1.1 The KDPI was founded in the city of Mahabad in Iranian Kurdistan on August 16, 1945.<sup>28</sup> The KDPI was the largest and best organized of the Kurdish opposition groups, and sought autonomy for the Kurds in Iran.<sup>29</sup>

7.1.2 According to the self-description on the official Website of the party “the PDKI [KDPI] is a democratic socialist party and [...] a member of the Socialist International (SI). For us, democratic socialism entails the belief that all human beings, whether as individuals or as members of nations, should be free and equal in all spheres of life. The PDKI’s policies on economic, political and social issues are based on these beliefs.”<sup>30</sup>

7.1.3 The Austrian Federal Ministry of the Interior report titled ‘The Kurds: History –Religion – Language – Politics’ published in November 2015 noted that:

‘The highest decision making body of the KDPI party structures is the Central Committee. It is elected at the congress – which is held every four years – and consists of 25 permanent members and 10 substitute members. By now, the KDPI had held 15 congresses. Seven members of the Central Committee are elected to the Political Bureau, including the Secretary General. The chairpersons of the Democratic Women’s Union of Iranian Kurdistan, the Democratic Youth Union of Kurdistan and the Democratic Students Union of Kurdistan are automatically members of the Central Committee.’

‘[...] the KDPI is banned in Iran and thus not able to operate there; its headquarters are located in the KRG area. [...] The disunity and discord within the party remains leading to a loss of influence within the Kurdish population.’<sup>31</sup>

7.1.4 In February 2016 Kurdistan 24 reported that the PDKI announced in February that ‘they will resume armed resistance against Iran. PDKI’s official Twitter account quoted the party’s Secretary General Mustafa Hijri making that announcement. “Last night [Feb. 25], a successful operation was carried out against an Iranian Basij military base in Majid Xan, in the city of Bokeran,” PDKI tweeted.’<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Democratic Party of Iranian Kurdistan- about undated <http://pdki.org/english/about/>. Date Accessed: 2 June 2015.

<sup>29</sup> Global Security, Kurdish Democratic Party of Iran, undated <http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/para/kdpi.htm>. Date Accessed: 22 June 2015.

<sup>30</sup> Democratic Party of Iranian Kurdistan, About, undated <http://pdki.org/english/about/> [date accessed 10 May 2016]

<sup>31</sup> Austria: Federal Ministry of the Interior, The Kurds: History –Religion – Language - Politics, November 2015, <http://www.refworld.org/docid/568cf9924.html> [date accessed 10 May 2016]

<sup>32</sup> Kurdistan 24, Kurdistan PDKI resumes armed resistance in Iran, 29 February 2016, <http://www.kurdistan24.net/en/news/e977cea5-a78e-458e-8dd6-759841d6c895/PDKI-resumes-armed-resistance-in-iran-> [date accessed 10 May 2016]

## 7.2 Recruitment to and membership of KDPI

### 7.2.1 A Danish Refugee Council and Danish Immigration Service fact-finding mission in 2013 citing a number of sources, reported:

‘Regarding recruitment of new members to KDPI, Mohemed Sahebi (KDPI) informed the delegation that the minimum age for becoming a KDPI member is 18, and if a person is under below 18, he or she can become member of Lawan (Youth Organisation of KDPI). According to Mohemed Sahebi, if a person in Iran wishes to become member of KDPI, he may contact the local party cell and ask for it.

‘...Concerning the organization of members of KDPI in Iran, KDPI’s representative in Paris informed the delegation that there are three categories of persons affiliated with KDPI: members, sympathizers and ‘friends’. As regards how members are organized KDPI’s representative in Paris explained that they are organized in cells. Each cell consists of one or more members.’

‘...Apart from members and sympathizers, KDPI’s representative in Paris described a third category of people connected to the party as ‘friends’. KDPI’s friends are characterized as ones who participate in different activities that are encouraged by the party, such as participating in demonstrations, closing their shops during announced strikes, or writing articles about the situation of the Kurds in Iran in newspapers. The KDPI friends are not in all cases of Kurdish ethnicity’.

‘...Regarding recruitment of new members to KDPI, Mohemed Sahebi (KDPI) informed the delegation that the minimum age for becoming a KDPI member is 18, and if a person is under below 18, he or she can become member of Lawan (Youth Organisation of KDPI). According to Mohemed Sahebi, if a person in Iran wishes to become member of KDPI, he may contact the local party cell and ask for it.’

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## 7.3 Membership cards

### 7.3.1 The Danish fact finding mission also reported:

‘...Mohammad Nazif Qadiri (KDPI) stated that KDPI normally does not issue ID cards and certainly not to members in Iran. ID cards will be issued only in special cases by the party’s headquarter in Khoysanjak Camp in KRI, for instance when a member moves from one city to another and the holder of the card may need to be identified as a KDPI member. However, the party demands that the ID card must be returned to the KDPI office in KRI when the holder for instance, travels to Europe. However, this is not always done and the card holders have sometimes kept the card (which is against the KDPI rules).’

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## 7.4 Verification of membership

### 7.4.1 The 2013 Danish Refugee Council and Danish Immigration Service fact-finding mission were also informed:



'...Regarding letters of recommendation, KDPI's representative in Paris informed the delegation that when the representation in Paris is requested to verify whether a person is a party member or sympathizer, it will ask the party's headquarters in Khoysanjak Camp in KRI to investigate the case. Upon receiving the answer from Khoysanjak, the representation in Paris will issue a letter of recommendation. In the letter, in addition to the name of the person in question, it is stated in French whether the recommended person is a KDPI member or a sympathizer. The letter of recommendation, which is signed by KDPI's representative in Paris, will be sent by fax directly to the asylum administration in the country in question; it will never be handed to the recommended person himself.'<sup>33</sup>

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## 8. Kurdish Democratic Party- Iran (KDP-I)

### 8.1 Background

- 8.1.1 The Rubin Centre's Research in International Affairs guide on the main Kurdish political parties in Iran, Iraq, Syria and Turkey dated 19 August 2013 noted that:

'The Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) is a splinter group of the PDKI and is led by Khalid Azizi. In 2006, at the PDKI's 13th convention, the dispute over choosing its next leader led some senior members to leave the party. Under Azizi's leadership, they created the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP). In 2012, "the PDKI and KDP met in Iraqi Kurdistan to discuss a possible reunification," however, for the time being, they function independently. The KDP is based in Iraqi Kurdistan and has no real influence on the masses in Iranian Kurdistan.'<sup>34</sup>

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### 8.2 Recruitment to and membership of KDP-I

- 8.2.1 The Danish Refugee Council and Danish Immigration Service fact-finding mission in 2013 reported:

'...According to Mustafa Moloudi (KDP-Iran), the requirements for people who want to become members of the party are first of all that they adhere to the goals and principles of the party, secondly that they have reached the age of 18, thirdly that they are of Iranian Kurdish origin, fourthly that they are recommended by two party members and finally that they must pay a monthly membership fee paid by all members.'

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<sup>33</sup> Danish Refugee Council and Danish Immigration Service, Iranian Kurds On Conditions for Iranian Kurdish Parties in Iran and KRI, Activities in the Kurdish Area of Iran, Conditions in Border Area and Situation of Returnees from KRI to Iran 30 May to 9 June 2013, 30 September 2013, pgs 26, 27 and 32 [http://www.nyidanmark.dk/NR/rdonlyres/D82120CB-3D78-4992-AB57-4916C4722869/0/fact\\_finding\\_iranian\\_kurds\\_2013.pdf](http://www.nyidanmark.dk/NR/rdonlyres/D82120CB-3D78-4992-AB57-4916C4722869/0/fact_finding_iranian_kurds_2013.pdf). [date accessed 10 May 2016]Ibid (2.1.5 Letters of recommendation issued by KDPI pg 32/33)

<sup>34</sup> Rubin Centre- research in international affairs, The main Kurdish political parties in Iran, Iraq, Syria and Turkey: A research guide, 19 August 2013, <http://www.rubincenter.org/2013/08/the-main-kurdish-political-parties-in-iran-iraq-syria-and-turkey-a-research-guide/> [date accessed 9 May 2016]

'...Mustafa Moloudi (KDP-Iran) further explained that there are two types of membership of KDP-Iran: ordinary members and professional or full time members. A person who wants to become a party member must go through two months of training in the party's training center in KRI. During these two months, aspirants are being taught about the party program and ideology and they also receive practical military training. During the whole period they will go through physical training.'

'...Mustafa Moloudi (KDP-Iran) explained the process of recruitment of new members in Iran by saying that potential recruits are watched by the party members for a while. If a person is assessed to be a qualified and trustworthy candidate, then he will be approached by the party member watching him and asked if he is interested to join the party. If the candidate accepts to join the party and if the party finds it necessary, he will be sent to KRI to receive training. The source emphasized that recruitment of new members in Iran is not an easy task, and the involved party members will face a number of difficulties in this process, particularly due to the difficult security situation in Iran. Regarding the profile of the recruited, the source stated that the party focuses on recruitment of young people, particularly university students and educated men and women. The source stressed that the procedure for being recruited to the party is the same for men and women.'

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### 8.3 Membership cards

#### 8.3.1 The 2013 Danish Refugee Council and Danish Immigration Service fact-finding mission were also informed:

'...Mustafa Moloudi (KDP-Iran) informed the delegation that all party members in KRI are holders of a membership card. The membership card is of the size of a credit card and it has text on both sides. The membership cards issued to the full time professional members is of a pale blue color while the membership card issued to the ordinary members is of a pale yellow color. The party members living outside the party camp have the same pale yellow ID card as the ordinary members. The party's peshmargas are also issued the pale yellow ID card for up to one year and after that they will hold the same cards as the high level professional members. Secret members living in Iran do not hold a membership card for security reasons. Within the party camp, there is a social committee that issues marriage certificates and birth certificates since the local government in KRI does not issue these documents to Iranian Kurds.'

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### 8.4 Verification of membership

#### 8.4.1 The same source also reported:

'...Mustafa Moloudi, (KDP-Iran) informed the delegation that the headquarters of the party in Khoysanjac, KRI issues letters of recommendation to members going abroad to seek asylum. Since all members have their names listed in the headquarters, it is possible to identify each one of them. The party issues letters of recommendation, but

the source emphasized that letters of recommendation are not delivered to asylum seekers and they will only be issued directly to the asylum authorities or the asylum seekers' lawyers in Europe. Every member has a written file within the headquarters which forms the basis of the description of the situation of the asylum seeker in the letter of recommendation. If a party member for instance goes to Denmark to seek asylum, he or she must address the local party committee that will then ask the headquarters to issue a letter of recommendation. The party's sympathizers can also get a letter of recommendation if the KDP-Iran is certain that the person asking for the letter had to flee due to political activism. In such case it will be stated in the letter that he or she is a party sympathizer and not a member.<sup>35</sup>

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## 9. Komala (Komaleh/Komalah) Parties

**Note:** These include Kurdistan Organization of the Communist Party of Iran, Komala (Komala, SKHKI), Komala of Toilers of Kurdistan and the Komala Party of Kurdistan (Komala KZK) and the Komala Party of Iranian Kurdistan

### 9.1 General background

#### 9.1.1 Jane's Sentinel Security assessment on non-state armed groups stated the following on Komala:

'There are two distinct wings of Komaleh: the Komalah Communist Party of Iran (Komalah-CPI); and the Komala Party of Iranian Kurdistan (Komala-PIK).'

'Komaleh was founded as a Marxist-Leninist nationalist organisation in Iranian Kurdistan in 1969. The group regarded itself as the vanguard of the proletariat and the guardian of Kurdish rights, and provided political opposition to the autocratic reign of the Shah.'

'Following the 1979 Islamic revolution, it took up arms against the new Islamic Republic of Iran, but was forced to relocate to Iraqi Kurdistan in 1983 following a concerted counter-terrorism operation. In 1984, it participated in the creation of the Communist Party of Iran (CPI), a move that alienated many Komaleh cadres, and in the late 1980s and early 1990s Komaleh evolved into two distinct organisations.'

'The Komalah Communist Party of Iran (Komalah-CPI), led by Komaleh founder Ebrahim Alizadeh, retained the group's original Marxist-Leninist outlook, and operates as an autonomous Kurdish arm of the CPI; while the breakaway Komala Party of Iranian Kurdistan (Komala-PIK), led by Abdullah Mohtadi, adopted a more moderate socialist ideology, and emerged as the larger faction. Despite their ideological and doctrinal differences, their

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<sup>35</sup> Danish Refugee Council and Danish Immigration Service Iranian Kurds On Conditions for Iranian Kurdish Parties in Iran and KRI, Activities in the Kurdish Area of Iran, Conditions in Border Area and Situation of Returnees from KRI to Iran 30 May to 9 June 2013, 30 September 2013 pg 36 and 38 [http://www.nyidanmark.dk/NR/rdonlyres/D82120CB-3D78-4992-AB57-4916C4722869/0/fact\\_finding\\_iranian\\_kurds\\_2013.pdf](http://www.nyidanmark.dk/NR/rdonlyres/D82120CB-3D78-4992-AB57-4916C4722869/0/fact_finding_iranian_kurds_2013.pdf). [date accessed 4 May 2016]

objectives remain broadly aligned, namely replacing the theocratic central government with a secular, federal, and democratic republic that provides autonomy for Iran's ethnic minorities. However, the two wings do not cooperate, and the last major offensive carried out by Komaleh came in 2005 when Komala-PIK participated in a series of abortive uprisings throughout Iranian Kurdistan.'

[...] Komaleh still retains a military capacity and carries out sporadic cross-border attacks, but currently it poses only a limited and localised threat to Iranian security forces, and poses little or no threat to the Iranian state itself.'<sup>36</sup>

- 9.1.2 The Austrian report of November 2015 noted that; 'In the past Komala formed the strongest organization after the KDPI but today the party, similar to the KDPI, has become a shadow of its former self. It is banned in Iran and its base is located in KRG area.'<sup>37</sup>

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## 9.2 Recruitment to and membership of Komala parties

- 9.2.1 The 2013 Danish Refugee Council and Danish Immigration Service fact-finding mission reported:

### Komala, SKHKI

'Regarding the party's mode of organization in Iran, Ebrahim Alizadeh, General Secretary of the Kurdistan Organization of the Communist Party of Iran, Komala (Komala, SKHKI) explained that Komala members in Iran are either individuals having no connection to other members and reporting directly to Komala SKHKI in KRI, or they are organized in cells where each cell comprises three to five members. In the cells, members divide the work between them and only one member has direct contact to Komala SKHKI in KRI. According to Alizadeh, besides party members, there are party sympathizers who are Kurds active for Komala without being members or without having any direct connection to the party. These people listen to the party's radio programs and watch Komala TV and conduct the activities which Komala encourages Kurds to do through these programmes.'

'Ebrahim Alizadeh (Komala, SKHKI) informed the delegation that Komala SKHKI does not allow its members in Iran to get together in groups of more than two to three persons.'<sup>38</sup>

'...Asked about recruitment of new members in Iran, Ebrahim Alizadeh (Komala, SKHKI) replied that the recruitment process is long. During the

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<sup>36</sup> Jane's Sentinel Security Assessment, Iran; non state armed groups, 6 August 2015, subscription source [date accessed 4 May 2016]

<sup>37</sup> Austria: Federal Ministry of the Interior, The Kurds: History –Religion – Language - Politics, November 2015, <http://www.refworld.org/docid/568cf9924.html> [date accessed 4 May 2016]

<sup>38</sup> Danish Refugee Council and Danish Immigration Service Iranian Kurds: On Conditions for Iranian Kurdish Parties in Iran and KRI, Activities in the Kurdish Area of Iran, Conditions in Border Area and Situation of Returnees from KRI to Iran 30 May to 9 June 2013, 30 September 2013 3.1.1. Party organisation of Komala, SKHKI p.24 [http://www.nyidanmark.dk/NR/ronlyres/D82120CB-3D78-4992-AB57-4916C4722869/0/fact\\_finding\\_iranian\\_kurds\\_2013.pdf](http://www.nyidanmark.dk/NR/ronlyres/D82120CB-3D78-4992-AB57-4916C4722869/0/fact_finding_iranian_kurds_2013.pdf). Date Accessed: 27 May 2015.

process, which may take from one month to two years, the party carries out an investigation about the individual who wishes to become members. Ebrahim Alizadeh (Komala, SKHKI) explained that recruitment either takes place by the party in KRI among those who are in contact with the party, including those coming to the party camp in KRI, or by the party cells inside Iran.'

#### Komala KZK

'... According to Omar Elkhanizade (Komala, KZK), the party has a special procedure for people coming to KRI to become peshmargas. The procedure consists of extensive questioning of the person, for instance, about whom he knows in his city of origin. Besides, investigations are carried out into the individual's background by the party's underground cells in Iran. Even if the person is a family member of a Komala member, investigations are still carried out. Everyone who comes to join the party is under close scrutiny, according to Omar Elkhanizade.'

#### Komala Party of Iranian Kurdistan

'...As regards recruitment of persons who approach the party in KRI in order to obtain membership, Siamak Modarresi, Komala Party of Iranian Kurdistan, said that an individual must complete one/two months of training while the party looks into the new recruit's background. If the investigation is complicated, for instance if the party does not know the individual's family, two party members must recommend the new recruit in order for him to be admitted. Once the person has been admitted to the party, he or she will participate in different tasks managed from the camp, such as broadcasting in the party's TV station, publishing or other administrative tasks. When asked whether the party recruits members outside of Iran, Siamak Modarresi confirmed that this takes place. Asylum seekers with a pending case can also be admitted as a member once the applicant's knowledge of the party has reached an acceptable level.'

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### 9.3 Membership cards

#### Komala SKHKI

- 9.3.1 '...Ebrahim Alizadeh (Komala, SKHKI) informed the delegation that the party issues three types of membership cards. For people living in the camp on a permanent basis, a blue card of a credit card size is issued. On the card is stated father's name, paternal grandfather's name, mother's name, gender, date of birth and place of birth. For people living in the camp on a temporary basis a beige card that is one and a half time bigger than a credit card is being issued. Finally, the party issues a special card for the peshmarga. The source further stated that if a member goes abroad, he or she must leave the membership card behind which they do not always do.

#### Komala Party of Iranian Kurdistan

- 9.3.2 '... Siamak Modarresi, Komala Party of Iranian Kurdistan, informed the delegation that peshmargas and people working in the camp have membership cards. Besides, the party issues membership cards to its members in Iran. However, it was added that members in Iran may not carry

their membership cards due to security reasons. The party has a copy of all membership cards in its archive.

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#### 9.4 Verification of membership

##### 9.4.1 The 2013 Danish Refugee Council and Danish Immigration Service fact-finding mission reported:

###### Komala SKHKI

'...Ebrahim Alizadeh (Komala, SKHKI) stated that Komala issues letters of recommendation which are sent from the party's official e-mail address directly to the asylum authorities. According to the same source, neither a party ID-card nor a letter of recommendation handed over by an asylum applicant is proof of his or her membership of Komala. Only letters of recommendation received directly from the party by the asylum authorities can be considered as valid proof of membership. The party also issues letters of recommendation for its sympathizers. The letters will be made on the basis of an investigation into the sympathizer's past activities. The source emphasized that the letter will only be issued for people who the party considers to be under threat.'

###### Komala KZK

'...Omar Elkhanizade (Komala, KZK) mentioned that Komala, KZK, issues letters of recommendation to both members and sympathizers to support them in the asylum procedure. However, he stressed that these letters are sent directly to the immigration authorities. Omar Elkhanizade (Komala, KZK) stated that an asylum seeker can contact Komala, KZK, and ask for a letter of recommendation. Elkhanizade further stated that Komala is able to investigate and establish if a person is a member or a sympathizer having performed activities for the party. Investigations about sympathizers and their activities will be carried out by the secret cells in Iran. If a person, for instance, has spent a few months in the Komala camp, the party will assess whether he or she will be at risk upon return to Iran. Only if Komala finds that the asylum seeker is threatened, it will issue a letter of recommendation. A letter of recommendation is sent directly to the asylum authorities.'

###### Komala Party of Iranian Kurdistan

'...Siamak Modarresi, Komala Party of Iranian Kurdistan, stated that party members who wish to seek asylum can go to the party representation in the country to which they have fled and ask the local secretary of the party for a letter of recommendation. The secretary will then address the party representation abroad, which is in Canada, who will ask the party camp in KRI to investigate the background of this person. If the asylum seeker is known to the party, the representation in Canada will issue the letter of recommendation and send it to the lawyer or the asylum court in the country in question. In some cases, a letter of recommendation can be issued directly from the camp. In the past, these letters were handed to the party member. This practice was however halted when it turned out that some letters of recommendation were fabricated. Today, the party does not hand over letters of recommendations directly to the asylum seeker. The source emphasized that if an asylum seeker delivers a letter of recommendation to

the asylum authorities in Europe, the letter should be considered as fabricated.<sup>39</sup>

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## 10. Party of Free Life for Kurdistan (PJAK)

### 10.1 Background

#### 10.1.1 The Austrian Federal Ministry of the Interior report titled 'The Kurds: History - Religion - Language -Politics' published in November 2015 noted that:

'The party itself claims that it operates only in the Kurdish region of Iran. PJAK states as well that it operates only against military targets and never targets civilians – contrary to the PKK – and the Iranian Regime has never accused the PJAK of attacking civilians. According to the party most of its members are Kurds from Iran but also Kurds from other neighbouring countries as well as the diaspora. There are reports that also Arabs, Baluchis and even Persians are members. The PJAK calls for a 'peaceful and democratic solution' to the Kurdish question, while Iran regards it as a terrorist organization. PJAK is the last Kurdish group fighting for self-rule in Iran, and it has carried out numerous attacks in the country. In 2011 PJAK and Iran signed a ceasefire, but skirmishes between Iranian Special Forces and the PJAK's military wing still occur. In the view of PJAK the group exercises its right of self-defence while claiming that the Iranian government is the aggressor. Since the ceasefire in September 2011 the number of clashes has increased. The last bomb attacks occurred in the spring of 2015 when the Iranian Army shelled PJAK quarters in Kandil area.

'According to estimations PJAK has about 3.000 fighters. Concerning the structure of the PJAK, its Germany-based leader Haji Ahmadi stated that the party holds a congress every three years and is organized in four governing bodies: the Congress, the President, an Assembly and a Coordinating Board. There are also subcommittees, arranged according to four themes: ideology, politics, social issues and defense. Furthermore it has a Judicial Committee which acts as an internal court. Since its third Congress in 2008 PJAK has adopted an ideology of 'democratic liberation'. This means the goal is to create a 'democratic system in Iran and democratic autonomy for Kurdistan'. The PJAK also seeks to "achieve a radical democracy and to be able to establish a democratic confederation in eastern Kurdistan". The PJAK has an armed wing which is called HRK (Hezen Rojhelati Kurdistan), the military forces of Eastern Kurdistan. PJAK also maintains units of female fighters. Its women's branch is called The Union of the Women of Eastern Kurdistan. Its youth movement is called The Union of the Youth of Eastern Kurdistan. PJAK is a member of the Kurdistan Communities Union (Koma Civaken Kurdistan or KCK) and the Kurdistan National Congress (KNK). The

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<sup>39</sup> Danish Refugee Council and Danish Immigration Service Iranian Kurds: On Conditions for Iranian Kurdish Parties in Iran and KRI, Activities in the Kurdish Area of Iran, Conditions in Border Area and Situation of Returnees from KRI to Iran 30 May to 9 June 2013, 30 September 2013 p43, 46 and 48 [http://www.nyidanmark.dk/NR/ronlyres/D82120CB-3D78-4992-AB57-4916C4722869/0/fact\\_finding\\_iranian\\_kurds\\_2013.pdf](http://www.nyidanmark.dk/NR/ronlyres/D82120CB-3D78-4992-AB57-4916C4722869/0/fact_finding_iranian_kurds_2013.pdf). [date accessed 27 May 2016]

party runs a satellite TV station based in Norway called Newroz. PJAK founded the KODAR (Organization of Free and Democratic Society for East Kurdistan), which called for dialogue with Tehran concerning an autonomous self-administration.'

'The PJAK can today be seen as the most active political party inside Iran, although it is considered a terrorist organization by the Iranian government and therefore banned. After taking up the armed struggle in 2004, both parties signed a ceasefire in 2011 but clashes were still ongoing.'<sup>40</sup>

10.1.2 Jane's Sentinel Security assessment security noted that 'A wave of attacks by the Party for a Free Life in Kurdistan (Partiya Jiyana Azad a Kurdistanê: PJAK) in August and September 2015 marked the resurgence of the group's operational presence in Iran since its defeat in 2011, raising the risk of low-capability attacks on security forces in Kurdistan, Kermanshah, and West Azerbaijan.'<sup>41</sup>

10.1.3 According to an Iranian country report regarding Kurds compiled by Professor Joffé dated 30 September 2012, the PJAK movement is surprising for a Kurdish political movement as it is:

'...highly supportive of women's rights and of women's participation in government. Its ideology appears to be based on democratic liberalism and is wishes to see the current Iranian regime replaced by democratic federal system in order to allow for minority rights. The PJAK apparently traces its roots back to the non-violent student movements in Iran that developed in the wake of the 1999 demonstrations in Teheran'.

10.1.4 The report goes on to note that:

'Observers have suggested that it is ideologically situated between the Kurdish Democratic Party and the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan in Iraqi Kurdistan, although others have suggested that it is linked to the PKK. Its main bases are also in Iraqi Kurdistan where it is said to maintain two camps and, even though it does not seek a military confrontation, the realities of Iranian control over Iranian Kurdistan have meant that it has had to engage in military actions against the Iranian security forces'.<sup>42</sup>

10.1.5 Shamal Bishir, Head of Foreign Affairs, Party of Free Life for Kurdistan (PJAK) informed the 2013 Danish fact finding mission that "PJAK is an illegal organization in Iran. The party's headquarters is located in the Qandil Mountains from where there is a mass media section".<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> Austria: Federal Ministry of the Interior, The Kurds: History –Religion – Language - Politics, November 2015, <http://www.refworld.org/docid/568cf9924.html> [date accessed 4 May 2016]

<sup>41</sup> Jane's Sentinel Security Assessment, Iran; security, 4 April 2016, subscription source [date accessed 4 May 2016]

<sup>42</sup> Country report on Kurds in Iran, Professor Joffé, 30 September 2012, available on request.

<sup>43</sup> Danish Refugee Council and Danish Immigration Service Iranian Kurds On Conditions for Iranian Kurdish Parties in Iran and KRI, Activities in the Kurdish Area of Iran, Conditions in Border Area and Situation of Returnees from KRI to Iran 30 May to 9 June 2013, 30 September 2013 4.1. Party organisation of PJAK p.49 [http://www.nyidanmark.dk/NR/ronlyres/D82120CB-3D78-4992-AB57-4916C4722869/0/fact\\_finding\\_iranian\\_kurds\\_2013.pdf](http://www.nyidanmark.dk/NR/ronlyres/D82120CB-3D78-4992-AB57-4916C4722869/0/fact_finding_iranian_kurds_2013.pdf). [date accessed 4 May 2016]



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## 10.2 Recruitment to and membership of PJAK

### 10.2.1 The 2013 Danish Refugee Council and Danish Immigration Service fact-finding mission reported:

‘Asked about recruitment of new members, Shamal Bishir (PJAK) explained that PJAK strives to recruit young men and women and to get them to come to the mountains and become professional members. In order to become a professional member of PJAK, one must have reached the age of 18 and be in good health. The source stressed that both men and women can become professional members. The source added that PJAK welcomes members of other ethnicities than Kurds. New members receive theoretical training that includes the history of humanity, the history of Kurdistan, gender and the importance of women participation in the struggle, rhetoric, ecology and ecology awareness, military tactics and method. Besides theoretical training the member will practically go through military training too.’

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## 10.3 Membership cards

### 10.3.1 ‘...The same source also recorded that Shamal Bishir (PJAK) said that PJAK does not issue membership cards.

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## 10.4 Verification of membership

### 10.4.1 The 2013 Danish Refugee Council and Danish Immigration Service fact-finding mission reported:

‘...As regards the issuance of letters of recommendation, Shamal Bishir (PJAK) stated that PJAK issues such letters when a person affiliated with the party seeks asylum abroad. The source emphasized that the letter of recommendation will be sent directly from PJAK’s office in Sweden to the asylum authorities in the country in question or to the asylum seeker’s lawyer. Shamal Bishir (PJAK) emphasized that PJAK has a policy to stop youth immigrating to Europe and the party tries to channelize the youth’s ambition into struggle against the Iranian regime. It was added that there may be some persons affiliated with PJAK who go to Europe and ask for asylum but they do so on their own initiative. According to the source, there are PJAK people who have been sent to Europe by the party for organizational work but not many.’<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> Danish Refugee Council and Danish Immigration Service Iranian Kurds On Conditions for Iranian Kurdish Parties in Iran and KRI, Activities in the Kurdish Area of Iran, Conditions in Border Area and Situation of Returnees from KRI to Iran 30 May to 9 June 2013, 30 September 2013 p.53 [http://www.nyidanmark.dk/NR/rdonlyres/D82120CB-3D78-4992-AB57-4916C4722869/0/fact\\_finding\\_iranian\\_kurds\\_2013.pdf](http://www.nyidanmark.dk/NR/rdonlyres/D82120CB-3D78-4992-AB57-4916C4722869/0/fact_finding_iranian_kurds_2013.pdf). [date accessed 16 May 2016]

## 11. Treatment of Kurdish political activists and family members

11.1.1 The Danish Refugee Council and Danish Immigration Service's joint fact finding mission of September 2013 met with various sources who stated that:

"A Western diplomat and expert on Iran in Erbil explained that there is no tolerance on the Iranian regime's side for any kind of activities with connection to the Kurdish political parties and any affiliation with one of these parties would be reason for arrest. The main reason for this is that these parties' ultimate goal, despite their non-violent opposition, is a change in the regime of Iran which is much worse than support for the Green Movement which aims for reforms within the existing system".

'...The Western diplomat and expert on Iran in Erbil informed the delegation that the execution rate is high among Kurds in Iran. A large part of these executions are based on accusation of drug smuggling. Sometimes political activists are executed under the pretext of being drug smugglers.

'...Ammar Goli, a well-informed Kurdish journalist, stated that people work secretly for PJAK as they will be in grave danger if their activities are revealed to the authorities'.

'...Mustafa Moloudi (KDP-Iran) explained that some of the (KDPI) party members who had been conducting secret activities in Iran were caught by the regime. While some of them were executed and some were freed after a period of detention, others were exchanged. However, those who were freed lost their public jobs, for instance if they were working as teacher, and they were not allowed to work anymore in the public sector'.

'...Regarding punishment for being a member of Komala, Ebrahim Alizadeh (Komala, SKHKI) told the delegation that if a Komala cell member is arrested by the Iranian regime, he will be tortured, imprisoned for life or even executed. As regards the consequences for the cell member's family, Alizadeh explained that his family members may be arrested, but they will be freed on bail after a while'.

'...Ammar Goli, a well-informed Kurdish journalist, stated that at the moment, there are 200 cases involving persons arrested by the Iranian regime accused of being members or sympathizers of PJAK. In reality, many of these persons are not affiliated with PJAK, but are rather student activists, human rights activists, cultural activists etc. Since 2006, there have been 25 cases of persons sentenced to death accused of being connected to PJAK. Six out of these 25 persons have been executed. While three of them were PJAK members, the other three had no connection to PJAK". These were ...a teacher, a government employee and a Turkish citizen who was arrested in the border area between Iran and Turkey. The source emphasized that if PJAK members are sentenced to death, the party will make public statements about that.... the government knows that these people have no connection to PJAK but it uses the allegation of affiliation with PJAK as an excuse to eliminate people whom it considers a threat'.

'...According to Ziryan Roj Helaty (Tanupo Magazine), the Iranian regime is highly sensitive to the Kurdish population in Iran, and the regime always

reacts disproportionately towards activities conducted by Kurds. As a result, if the Iranian regime for instance catches a sympathizer carrying out an activity against the government, the consequences for him and his family will be serious’.

‘...Ziryar Roj Helaty also stated that anything related to KDPI, even talking about the Kurdish people and their rights could create a problem. Someone who talks directly about KDPI is, in the eyes of the regime, affiliated with KDPI, and a person speaking about Kurdish rights is seen as a general threat. ... Kurdish patriotism that has spread throughout the Middle East in recent years, may also reach Iran, and this is exactly what the regime in Iran fears’.

‘...According to UNHCR in Erbil, persons with a high political profile as well as human rights activists are targeted. ... Members of KDPI will get approximately two to ten years of prison if they are arrested by the Iranian authorities. Based on information from asylum seekers, KDPI members will be tortured during pre-trial detention in order to confess and disclose names of other KDPI members. The duration of the detention will typically be from one to six months depending on the level of the detainee’s engagement. The sentence which is imprisonment will depend on the level of the engagement of the person and the evidence that are presented against him’.

‘...Asked how the regime treats the family of someone who has been caught with a flyer, UNHCR Erbil answered that the family will be harassed until the wanted person shows up. The regime will sometimes detain a family member and interrogate him for a few hours and then release him; or the regime will hold one of the family members in detention. When asked in which cases family members will be harshly or mildly punished, UNHCR Erbil answered that there is no basis in the Iranian law to detain a family member to a person whom the authorities has failed to arrest. However, in practice once the authorities find out that a person who has actively been working against the government has escaped from them, they would interrogate the family members and sometimes detain them for a while and use torture to make them confess about the whereabouts of the wanted person. As regards pressure on the families of Kurdish political activists and Kurdish political party members, a Western diplomat and expert on Iran informed the delegation that the Iranian authorities put the families under pressure. This can be done by removing them from their positions in the public sector, frequently calling them in and asking them questions, calling the families to threaten them with imprisonment and with depriving them of access to higher education or employment in public positions, investigating their computers, etc.’<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> Danish Refugee Council and Danish Immigration Service Iranian Kurds On Conditions for Iranian Kurdish Parties in Iran and KRI, Activities in the Kurdish Area of Iran, Conditions in Border Area and Situation of Returnees from KRI to Iran 30 May to 9 June 2013, 30 September 2013, pages 15, 16, 17 and 21 [http://www.nyidanmark.dk/NR/rdonlyres/D82120CB-3D78-4992-AB57-4916C4722869/0/fact\\_finding\\_iranian\\_kurds\\_2013.pdf](http://www.nyidanmark.dk/NR/rdonlyres/D82120CB-3D78-4992-AB57-4916C4722869/0/fact_finding_iranian_kurds_2013.pdf). [date accessed 4 May 2016]

11.1.2 The Landinfo report of February 2013 regarding Conversion to Christianity, Issues concerning Kurds and Post-2009 Election Protestors as well as Legal Issues and Exit Procedures, reported that an international organization in Ankara said that “in the Kurdish areas, individuals who are suspected of connections to KDPI, Komala and Khabat may be called in by the security agencies. Individuals who organize cultural activities may also be called in for questioning. It was added that this is not a standard security control, but a way in which the authorities set pressure on such individuals by showing them that they are under surveillance”.

‘It was considered that the system targeted members of these groups, that is those who were documented members, and considered that in these cases, their family members, including women and children, may be pressured by the authorities as well. It was explained that the authorities, in order to target those individuals, may go directly to the family members of the active persons of those groups in search of these individuals as well as a means of putting pressure on them and their families.’

‘Asked about the situation in the Kurdish area, a Western embassy stated in the Landinfo report of February 2013 that; “it is difficult to obtain information on the ground. During the Khatami period, a dialogue started up between the central government and the Kurdish areas. However, nowadays, one hears more and more of ordinary persons being pursued by the authorities because of family members being members of PJAK, Komala or KDPI. It is considered that opposition is gradually increasing, but it is not possible to say anything about what kind of activity is going on“.’

The Landinfo report further noted that; ‘if an individual were caught with a leaflet, he would most likely be arrested and tortured as well as forced to confess to being a member of whatever group could have been behind such a publication. He or she would go through a five minute trial and the outcome such a trial could vary from many years imprisonment to a mild sentence. It is impossible to say’.

Asked about the consequences for family members of political activists, an international organization in Ankara informed that ‘If a person is deemed to be affiliated to a separatist party, he would be at risk. Family members could be regarded as oppositional as well. In the Kurdish regions, families are larger and links are closer. If a person is affiliated to the KDPI, one would expect to find other activists within the family. It is the general trend of the authorities to seek out family members in the event that an activist is a fugitive. Going after families also creates an example as well as fear.’<sup>46</sup>

11.1.3 According to the sources consulted in the Landinfo report of 2013;

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<sup>46</sup> Landinfo, Iran – On Conversion to Christianity, Issues concerning Kurds and Post-2009 Election Protestors as well as Legal Issues and Exit Procedures, Joint report from the Danish Immigration Service, the Norwegian LANDINFO and Danish Refugee Council’s fact-finding mission to Tehran, Iran, Ankara, Turkey and London, United Kingdom 9 November to 20 November 2012 and 8 January to 9 January 2013, February 2013, 3.1.1 Family members to activists p.43 <https://www.nyidanmark.dk/NR/rdonlyres/A8C2C897-1CA9-49D1-BA32-EC3E599D646D/0/Iranendeligudgave.pdf>. [date accessed 4 May 2016].

[...] many cases have been reported regarding imprisonment, torture, terrible prison conditions and executions in Iran of PJAK members and supporters. It was further added that an individual does not need to be a member of PJAK in order to be pursued and that others somehow affiliated could face risks. Families to PJAK members can also be at risk and face arrest and interrogations by the authorities. It was added by the sources that they obtain information on the situation in Iran through the internet and publicly accessible sources as well as through refugees.<sup>47</sup>

11.1.4 The Austrian report compiled by the Federal Ministry of the Interior on Kurds: History –Religion – Language – Politics dated November 2015 noted that: ‘The mere presumption of being a member of any of these parties can lead to long-term prison sentences. Many Kurds are among the victims of political persecution with frequent charges of terrorism – in particular the alleged support of PJAK – and often disproportionate degrees of punishment.’<sup>48</sup>

11.1.5 On 10 November 2015, International campaign for human rights in Iran reported on a Sunni Kurd who was facing execution. The report noted that: Shahram Ahmadi has been sentenced to death in Iran due to his activism as a Sunni Muslim and a Kurd. Members of ethnic or religious minorities in Iran who engage in criticism of the government are singled out by authorities for particularly harsh treatment, and there is a well-documented history of the Judiciary disproportionately meting out capital punishment to minority activists. “Making speeches, distributing books and pamphlets, or opposing the government are not capital offenses. Unfortunately Judge Moghisseh said that Shahram’s first two crimes are that he’s a Sunni and a Kurd. Therefore he was presumed guilty from the start,” a source told the International Campaign for Human Rights in Iran.<sup>49</sup>

11.1.6 The UN Human Rights Council, Supplementary information on the situation of human rights in the Islamic Republic of Iran dated 10 March 2016 reported that:

‘In October 2015, an appeals court reportedly confirmed the death sentence of Shahram Ahmadi, a Kurdish prisoner initially imprisoned for the charges of moharebeh, “acting against the national security” and “propaganda against the state.” Mr. Ahmadi rejects the accusations against him and has declared that he is a peaceful Sunni activist. Human rights groups have documented serious procedural flaws with Mr. Ahmadi’s trial held in Branch 28 of the Tehran Revolutionary Court and those of several dozen other Sunni Muslim

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<sup>47</sup> Landinfo, Iran – On Conversion to Christianity, Issues concerning Kurds and Post-2009 Election Protestors as well as Legal Issues and Exit Procedures, Joint report from the Danish Immigration Service, the Norwegian LANDINFO and Danish Refugee Council’s fact-finding mission to Tehran, Iran, Ankara, Turkey and London, United Kingdom 9 November to 20 November 2012 and 8 January to 9 January 2013, February 2013, 3.1 Kurdish political activities p.41

<https://www.nyidanmark.dk/NR/rdoonlyres/A8C2C897-1CA9-49D1-BA32-EC3E599D646D/0/Iranendeligudgave.pdf>. [date accessed 4 May 2016]

<sup>48</sup> Austria: Federal Ministry of the Interior, The Kurds: History –Religion – Language - Politics, November 2015, <http://www.refworld.org/docid/568cf9924.html> [date accessed 20 April 2016]

<sup>49</sup>, <https://www.iranhumanrights.org/2015/11/shahram-ahmadi-execution/> [date accessed 26 April 2016]

prisoners on death row. Mr. Ahmadi's brother, Bahram Ahmadi, was executed along with five other activists accused of engaging in terrorism in 2012.<sup>50</sup>

11.1.7 'On 4 March 2015, six Sunni Kurds, including Hamed Ahmadi, Kamal Malaee, Jahangir Dehghani, and Jamshed Dehghani, accused of engaging in terrorist activities were executed on charges of moharebeh and efsad fel-arz. The executions were carried out despite serious concerns about the fairness of their trials.'<sup>51</sup>

11.1.8 In March 2016 Freedom House reported that 'Kurdish activist Behrouz Alkhani was executed in August 2015 for alleged involvement in the 2010 killing of a prosecutor. Amnesty International called his trial "grossly unfair" and said he was put to death while his appeal was still before the Supreme Court.'<sup>52</sup>

11.1.9 Amnesty International's report on death sentences and executions for 2015 noted that: 'Behrouz Alkhani, a 30-year-old man from Iran's Kurdish minority, was executed on 26 August despite the fact that he was awaiting the outcome of a Supreme Court appeal. He had been sentenced to death by a Revolutionary Court for "effective collaboration with PJAK" (Party of Free Life of Kurdistan) and "enmity against God" (moharebeh). His "confessions", which he said were obtained through torture and other ill-treatment, were used against him.'<sup>53</sup>

11.1.10 According to the 2015 US State Department Human Rights report for Iran:

'According to online activists, Ghasem Ahmadi, a Kurdish journalist and editor of the previously banned Tehran University publication Rozhaf, started his two-year sentence in Mahabad Prison in January.'

'According to a Kurdish news organization, on January 6, authorities charged a Kurdish man, Sabir Moklid Moane, with "moharebeh," for his membership in the Democratic Kurdish Party after holding him without trial in Urumia Prison for two years in cells with violent criminals.'<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> UN Human Rights Council, Supplementary information on the situation of human rights in the Islamic Republic of Iran, 10 March 2016, <http://www.refworld.org/docid/56f17fd14.html> [date accessed 20 April 2016]

<sup>51</sup> UN Human Rights Council, Supplementary information on the situation of human rights in the Islamic Republic of Iran, 10 March 2016, <http://www.refworld.org/docid/56f17fd14.html> [date accessed 20 April 2016]

<sup>52</sup> Freedom House, Freedom in the world 2016; Iran, 7 March 2016, <https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/2016/iran> [date accessed 11 April 2016]

<sup>53</sup> Amnesty International, Death Sentences and Executions - 2015, 6 April 2016, <http://www.refworld.org/docid/5704b6ed4.html> [date accessed 20 April 2016]

<sup>54</sup> United States Department of State, 2015 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices - Iran, section 6, 13 April 2016, <http://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/hrrpt/humanrightsreport/index.htm?year=2015&dliid=252923> [date accessed 20 April 2016]

# Version Control and Contacts

## Contacts

If you have any questions about the guidance and your line manager or senior caseworker cannot help you or you think that the guidance has factual errors then email [the Country Policy and Information Team](#).

If you notice any formatting errors in this guidance (broken links, spelling mistakes and so on) or have any comments about the layout or navigability of the guidance then you can email [the Guidance, Rules and Forms Team](#).

## Clearance

Below is information on when this version of the guidance was cleared:

- version **2.0**
- valid from **20 July 2016**

## Changes from last version of this guidance

Updated country information.

Inclusion of further information on verification of membership of Kurdish political groups to aid decision makers.

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