## Remembering Iran’s Imprisoned Kurds on UN Human Rights Day

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The United Nations wants us to remember human rights 365 days a year, in fact. One group that needs attention: 29 Kurds on a hunger strike in Iran’s Orumiyeh prison.

Today, December 10, marks United Nations Human Rights Day, first proclaimed in 1950 “to bring to the attention ‘of the peoples of the world’ the Universal Declaration of Human Rights as the common standard of achievement for all peoples and all nations.”

Today also marks the 20th day of a hunger strike by 29 political prisoners in Iran’s Orumiyeh Central Prison, which mainly houses Kurdish political prisoners.  Fellow Kurdish prisoners of conscience in other cities across Iran have followed suit.

The prisoners of Ward 12 at Orumiyeh, in northwest Iran near the Turkish and Iraqi borders, “started their hunger strike protesting felons and criminals in their ward,” according to HRANA, a human rights activist web site. “The political prisoners on hunger strike have also demanded that another 27 prisoners who have been dispersed in other wards in the same prison be transferred to Ward 12.”

Some 50 inmates with drug addiction problems or violent pasts have been mixed in with the political prisoners, according to Kurdish-language news agencies. This unexpected appears to be the result of a recent order by the Iranian Intelligence Ministry, and there are strong indications that there is a plan by various security and intelligence apparatus to shut down sections of various prisons dedicated to prisoners of conscience.

Such a move, despite being an isolated one, has raised concerns in the rights community, as well as among the family of prisoners, but attracted little attention outside Iranian Kurdish media.

According to Mokhtar Houshmand, a former Kurdish political prisoner now living in exile in Germany, the decision to mix political with non-political inmates in prisons in Kurdish areas is partly meant to further subjugate the inmates to physical and psychological abuse at the hands of other dangerous inmates.

At the same time, according to Hooshmand, the Iranian regime “wants to strip the Kurdish political prisoners of their identity as actual political prisoners, and even trap them into drug addiction, forced confessions and remorse.”

In an op-ed for a Persian news site, Kurdish journalist Kaveh Ghoreishi confirmed the number of political prisoners at 29: with three of them with Turkish citizen, one from central Iran and the rest Kurdish.  Of the Kurdish political prisoners, Mansur Arvand and Jafar Afshari were each transferred to Mahabad prison and the labor ward of Orumiyeh prison respectively.

This year’s theme for Human Rights Day is “Human Rights 365” encompassing the idea that every day is human rights day.  Let’s all be inspired by this year’s slogan for Human Rights Day to pay tribute and remember each and every victim of human rights violation every day of the year, and honor our humanity and profession to have their voices heard regardless of their gender, race, colour, national or ethnic origin, language, religion, political or other opinions.