

# Palestinian activist's family seeks international justice

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Thu, 2021-08-26 18:31

JERUSALEM: The family of Palestinian activist Nizar Banat, who died in Palestinian custody in June, stepped up its quest for international justice on Thursday, turning to British police and the UN.

Banat – a leading critic of the Palestinian Authority and its 86-year old president Mahmud Abbas – died after security forces stormed his home in the flashpoint city of Hebron and dragged him away.

A post-mortem found he had been beaten on the head, chest, neck, legs and hands, with less than an hour elapsing between his arrest and his death. Banat's family has said it has no confidence in the PA's capacity to deliver justice, and called for an international probe.

A statement from the family's lawyers, the British firm Stoke White, said they have asked Britain's Metropolitan Police to open an investigation under the principle of universal jurisdiction.

For a small number of serious offenses, Britain's courts can hear cases even if the alleged crimes were committed abroad.

Stoke White also said it had asked multiple branches of the United Nations human rights system to open investigation, including the Working Group on Arbitrary Detentions and four special rapporteurs.

Ghasan Khalil Banat said his brother's "murder" was a "tragedy for our family, but also a tragedy for the Palestinian people."

"The so-called investigation that was carried out into his murder is an embarrassment and the PA should feel ashamed of it," he said in the statement.

The head of international law and Stoke White, Hakan Camuz, said:

"Responsibility for the murder of Nizar Banat very clearly lies with the senior leadership of the Palestinian Authority including President Mahmud Abbas and Prime Minister Mohammed Shtayyeh."

Shtayyeh and the PA have promised accountability over Banat's death.

Camuz accused the PA of a long-standing bid to silence dissent.

"They cannot be allowed to get away with this and this is why we are submitting these complaints and petitions to the British police and the UN," he said in the statement.

The UN and the European Union this week raised alarm over a spate of arrests of activists by Palestinian security forces since Banat's death, warning the PA appeared to be cracking down on basic freedoms across the West Bank, a territory occupied by Israel since 1967.



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New protest in Gaza as Palestinians demand an end to Israel's blockade  
Israel fires on protesting Palestinians in Gaza, 24 wounded

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## [\*\*Egypt distributes 1 million doses of locally produced COVID-19 vaccine\*\*](#)

Thu, 2021-08-26 16:40

CAIRO: The first batch of 1 million doses of the locally produced coronavirus disease (COVID-19) vaccine has been distributed among 657 vaccination centers throughout Egypt, according to Health Minister Hala Zayed.

The jabs have been produced following a cooperation agreement between Chinese company Sinovac and Egypt's Holding Company for Biological Products and Vaccines (Vacsera).

Vacsera manufactures and analyzes 15 million doses a month ahead of their distribution to vaccination centers nationwide.

Khaled Mujahid, assistant health minister, said the Vacsera-Sinovac vaccine obtained an emergency use license from the Egyptian Drug Authority on Aug. 23 following evaluation tests in accordance with the global standards and references followed by the World Health Organization to assess its safety, quality and effectiveness.

Mujahid said that an agreement was made to supply raw materials for the production of the vaccine in May. Vacsera medical teams and workers were trained by Chinese experts at a Sinovac facility, transferring vaccine manufacturing technology from China.

He added that the manufacture of the doses started on June 29, with three production cycles creating a total of 1 million doses.

Mujahid added that the vaccine was tested by the Vacsera control and quality laboratories, before being subjected to stability studies, noting that the samples were also analyzed in the laboratories of the Egyptian Drug Authority.



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[Egypt's Holding Company for Biological Products and Vaccines \(Vacsera\)](#)

[Hala Zayed](#)

Egypt vaccines ready for clinical trials Egypt expects to produce nearly 18 million doses of Sinovac coronavirus vaccine a month

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## [Lebanon raids discover hoarded fuel, medicine and baby formula](#)

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Wed, 2021-08-25 23:06

BEIRUT: Raids carried out by Lebanon security forces discovered millions of liters of subsidized fuel hidden in underground tanks to be sold later on the black market at new prices. Some of the tanks were merely covered by sand.

“Monopolized” medicine and baby formula were seized, too.

News of the hoarding has only added to the anger of Lebanese citizens, who have been suffering through exhausting fuel and medicine shortages for months. Long queues outside gas stations and empty shelves at pharmacies are common across the country.

The largest quantities of hidden subsidized fuel were found in Hawsh Al-Omara in Zahle, Bekaa, where more than 1.5 million liters of gasoline were seized.

Scenes of Caretaker Health Minister Hamad Hassan raiding depots in the south of Lebanon and the Shouf area that contained medicine missing from pharmacies have also left citizens fuming.

The depots contained medicine that could treat patients with coronavirus (COVID-19), blood pressure, and respiratory problems. Antibiotics and thousands of infant formulas – all subsidized at the official rate (\$1=1,500 LBP) – were also discovered.

“The raids are based on an electronic tracking system of ‘monopolized’ medicine,” Hassan said. “The system is very precise and accurate.”

The raid operation revealed a partnership between Hussein Fneish, brother of Hezbollah minister Mohammed Fneish, and Issam Ahmed Khalifa, of the NewPharm Company in Lebanon.

However, the timing of Hassan’s raids were criticized. Lebanon’s Central Bank has not opened credit lines for imports for three months as laws were put in place to prohibit free imports.

"These security campaigns and raids should have been carried out earlier," Issam Araji, head of the Health Parliamentary Committee, told Arab News.

"Medicine and fuel should have never been hoarded. Following these raids, Lebanon seemed like a floating city in a sea of gasoline and diesel. The dangerous part is that the fuel was being stored in residential neighborhoods."

Araji, who is also a cardiologist, said he had warned authorities about the hoarding of medicine for more than a year.

"But they insisted that people were storing the medicine in their houses," Araji said. "People cannot afford their daily bread, how would they be able to store all of the medicine? I think that the health minister has finally decided to take action because he received information about companies hiding and storing the medicine. These campaigns will all be in vain unless offenders are punished to deter others."

Although the country has started to unload ships of imported fuel and distribute it to gas stations, queues outside the filling stations did not get any shorter on Wednesday. Most drivers parked throughout the night and slept in their cars, hoping to fill up their vehicles in the morning.

Adnan Naccouzi, 69, suffered a stroke while waiting in a long queue for gas in the hot weather and without drinking water. He has been recovering inside the intensive care unit at a Beirut hospital for the past 24 hours.

Authorities have said fuel will be sold according to new prices, amid a gradual reduction of fuel subsidies.

As of Wednesday, a 20-liter canister of gasoline was sold for 133,000 Lebanese pounds (\$88) and the same canister of diesel for 99,000 pounds. The cost of transportation has automatically increased, where the fare rose to 20,000 pounds for each passenger; more than double the price of the previous day.

Despite the public calls to arrest monopolists and put them in prison, hoarding is classified by the Lebanese penal code as a misdemeanor and sanctioned either by a fine or up to six months in prison.

Meanwhile, Judge Ghada Aoun issued a search and investigation warrant against Lebanon's Central Bank Gov. Riad Salameh. This comes five days after setting a date for an investigation session – that he did not attend – over accusations of money laundering and money transfers abroad.

Lebanon's State Prosecutor Ghassan Oueidat in April dismissed Judge Aoun from the case. But she has insisted on proceeding with her investigations and broke into a money exchange company with the help of activists from the Free Patriotic Movement.

In other developments, the country's caretaker premier Hassan Diab will not appear before Judge Tarek Bitar, who is investigating last year's Beirut blast. Diab was supposed to be questioned as a defendant in the case on

Thursday, but has insisted that he should be questioned by the Supreme Council for the Trial of Presidents and Ministers.

Judge Fadi Sawan, the investigating judge who preceded Bitar, listened to Diab's testimony in his capacity as a witness more than a year ago. In that testimony, Diab acknowledged the presence of the ammonium nitrate that was illegally stored at the port and explained why he changed his mind about visiting the site just days before the explosion.



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## [Egypt steps up support for campaign against terror, crime groups in Sahel region](#)

Wed, 2021-08-25 21:39

CAIRO: Egypt wants to intensify bilateral and regional efforts to combat terrorist organizations and organized crime groups in the Sahel region in central Africa, with a focus on reconstruction and development in the post-armed conflict stage.

Egyptian Foreign Minister Sameh Shoukry made the announcement during a

meeting with his Sierra Leonean counterpart David Francis in Cairo on Tuesday, according to the Middle East News Agency.

The central Sahel region, which includes Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger, is facing one of the fastest growing displacement crises in the world – yet one of the most forgotten. More than 2.7 million people have been forced to flee their homes and at least 13.4 million are in dire need of humanitarian assistance, according to the UN High Commissioner for Refugees.

Ahmed Hafez, the spokesman for Egypt's Foreign Ministry, said the two ministers share a desire to enhance trade and improve political relations between the two countries.

Both ministers signed a bilateral agreement on cooperation in the field of political consultation. They also partnered on two memorandums of understanding to enhance cooperation in the fields of culture and youth. Their aim is to facilitate communication between officials from the two countries while promoting cultural dialogue.



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Chad to halve its troops fighting Sahel militants  
Macron announces Sahel troop drawdown, calls for new force  
UAE begins first flights to support counter-terrorism operations in the Sahel  
Macron: no immediate change to French

## [A trial in Sweden raises uncomfortable questions about Iranian regime's past](#)

Wed, 2021-08-25 20:44

STOCKHOLM: The Stockholm District Court's thick stone walls could not keep out the sounds of protest. Since the trial of Hamid Noury, 60, began on Aug. 10, Swedish Iranians have gathered daily outside the century-old court building to draw the world's attention to his alleged crimes.

During a court appearance last week, Noury complained that the protesters' chants and slogans were "insulting," forcing the judge to ask police to request the crowd outside to quieten down.

The trial is connected to the mass execution in July and August 1988 of political prisoners who were members or sympathizers of the armed leftwing group Mujahedin-e Khalq (MEK), also known as the People's Mujahedin Organization of Iran.

As an alleged assistant to one of the special-tribunal prosecutors, Noury is said to have been a key actor in the executions at Gohardasht prison, a facility on the northern outskirts of Karaj, about 20 km west of the capital Tehran.

The prosecution says that Noury facilitated death sentences, sent prisoners to execution and helped prosecutors gather prisoners' names. He has denied all of the charges while claiming that the sentences were justified because of a fatwa, or religious ruling, by Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, Iran's supreme leader at the time.

The fatwa, issued in 1988, targeted the MEK, which had been outlawed by the Islamic regime in 1981 and held responsible for a series of anti-regime attacks at the end of the 1980-88 Iran-Iraq War. The MEK had been operating since 1986 from Iraq, then ruled by Iran's archfoe Saddam Hussein.





Massoud Rajavi and his wife Maryam (R), leaders of the Iranian opposition movement the People's Mujahedeen (MEK), review militants celebrating their wedding 19 June 1985 at the headquarters of the National Council of Resistance of Iran (NCRI). (AFP/File Photo)

The families of the victims of the executions have waited three decades for justice. Now, after a complex Swedish police investigation into the suspected murders of political prisoners, they could soon find a measure of closure.

Survivors of the anti-MEK purge have testified that several inmates already had the hangman's noose around their necks when Noury led them down what was known among prisoners as a "death corridor," to await their hearing.

Noury is alleged to have read out the names of those who would face the specially appointed tribunal, which had likewise been nicknamed "the death commission." Few renounced their allegiance to the MEK, so few ended up avoiding the death penalty.

"It was a kangaroo court where the so-called trial took one to two minutes," Shahin Gobadi, a spokesman for the MEK-affiliated National Council of Resistance of Iran, told Arab News while participating in a protest last week outside the Stockholm District Court by exiled Iranians, former political prisoners and families of victims of the secret executions.

Gobadi added: "Noury served pastries to the judges on the 'death commission' and to the prison guards to celebrate a 'good day's work'."

In one witness statement, Noury was described as "particularly cold-blooded" compared with other officials involved in a veritable industrial production-

line killing system.



Kenneth Lewis (L) represents several of the plaintiffs, with the trial taking place at Stockholm District Court. (Photos by Ann Tornkvist)

Activists managed to lure Noury to Scandinavia with a bogus offer of a luxury cruise, before tipping off local police about his scheduled arrival. Since his arrest at Stockholm airport in November 2019, the case against him has expanded.

Kenneth Lewis, representing several of the plaintiffs, told the court that although 500 to 600 prisoners were known to have died at Gohardasht within the space of a few weeks, this was merely one of several prisons where executions were taking place.

A 2018 report by human rights monitor Amnesty International, "Blood-Soaked Secrets: Why Iran's 1988 prison massacres are ongoing crimes against humanity," places the death toll in regime jails at about 5,000.

In the wider crackdown, which was not reserved to the prisons, an estimated 30,000 Iranian dissidents are thought to have been killed. Lewis pointed out that this toll far exceeds other well-known atrocities, including Srebrenica in Bosnia.

"It is my belief, however, that the motive, not the numbers, define genocide," Lewis told the court in his opening statement. Indeed, Khomeini's son and right-hand man Ahmad Khomeini is alleged to have argued strongly in favor of the fatwa at issue, saying it was time to "exterminate" the MEK in retribution for its anti-regime activities.

"It is our view that these executions constitute genocide because the fatwa

was issued with the purpose of exterminating the (MEK) based on the (regime's) religious opinion," Lewis said.




SIS II		Dokumentets namn Detaljer om ansökningsakt i VIS	
<b>Information om en person</b>			
Födelsedag	19610429		
Efternamn	NOURY		
Tidigare efternamn			
Förnamn	HAMID		
Kön	MAN		
Vårdnadshavare			
Efternamn vid födseln			
Födelseort	TEHRAN		
Födelseland	IRAN		
Medborgarskap vid födseln	IRAN		
Bostadsort			
Nuvarande medborgarskap	IRAN		
Aktuell sysselsättning	KONTORSTJÄNSTEMAN		
Arbetsgivare/skola			
<b>Ansökan</b>			
Ansökningsnummer	ITAMAHD000000000000THE20190036336	Mottagande myndighet: Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation	
Status på ansökan	Visering utfärdad	Typ av myndighet	UTLANDSMYNDIGHET
Syfte	VISUM, TURISM	Land och ort	IRAN, Teheran
Destinations(er)	ITALIEN		
Planerad varaktighet	90		
Planerad ankomst	20210103		
Planerad avresa	20210102		
Gälden för första inresa	ITALIEN		
<b>Resehandling</b>			
Typ av pass	HEMLANDSPASS	Utfärdande myndighet	IRAN
Passnummer	L40578068	Datum för utfärdande	2017-02-12
Sista giltighetsdag	2022-02-13		
<b>Beslut</b>			
Ansvarig för ansökan	ITALIEN	Beslut	Utfärdad
Land och ort	IRAN, Teheran	Status	Visering utfärdad
Beslutande myndighet	Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Intern	Sticker nummer	ITAG40684070
Typ av myndighet	UTLANDSMYNDIGHET	Typ av visering	KORTTIDSVISERING (SHORT-STA
Datum för beslut	2019-09-29	Giltighetsd	2019-10-13 - 2020-10-12
Plats för beslut	IRAN	Planerad varaktighet	90
Reprresenterande land		Antal inresor	VISUM GILTIGT FÖR FLERA INRE

Image of Hamid Noury and his profile from the case with Swedish police. (Photo by Ann Tornkvist)

Ali Doustkam, who fled to Sweden in 1994 and has attended the protests in Stockholm, says that the trauma of the 1988 fatwa persists despite the passage of time. "The prisoners who were executed were discarded in mass graves. Their families have not been able to bury them to this day," Doustkam told Arab News.

According to him, suspected MEK members eliminated by the regime outside the prison system were also treated with the same disrespect in death. Branded enemies of God, they were denied the right to burial in communal cemeteries among the devout. "Parents were forced to bury their children in their backyard," Doustkam said.

In Gobadi's view, the Iranian "government of mass murderers" has not only avoided accountability for its actions, but has rewarded its functionaries for their "ruthless savagery," among them Iran's new president and former judiciary chief Ebrahim Raisi, who Amnesty accuses of being a member of the "death commission" behind the secret executions.

Raisi has denied involvement, but praised Khomeini's "order" to carry out the purge.

"It is our ultimate wish that a conviction here leads to Noury and members of the Iranian regime being tried for crimes against humanity at an international tribunal," Doustkam said.

Noury's defense team has contested the evidence against their client, highlighting perceived inconsistencies and unverifiable information in witness testimonies. They have also implied that groups on social media have created echo chambers where inaccuracies have percolated over many years, converting mere hearsay into supposed facts.



The trial is connected to the mass execution in July and August 1988 of political prisoners who were members or sympathizers of the armed leftwing group Mujahedin-e Khalq (MEK). (Photo by Ann Tornkvist)

The defense has also pointed out that none of the witnesses have identified Noury as a member of the actual “death commission” tribunal, meaning he had no formal decision-making or sentencing powers. They deny Noury even worked at the prison.

While such arguments carry weight in a court of law, the families of Noury's alleged victims are in no doubt about his moral guilt.

“He might have been a low-level operator,” Gobadi said. “But he was an integral part of the ruthless regime in Iran.”

Although only one individual is standing trial, the families of the victims of the secret executions understand the symbolic value of a successful prosecution and the possible knock-on effects.

“What is unusual about this trial is that it's most importantly an indictment of the entire Iranian regime, and that's a huge problem for them,” Lewis, the plaintiffs' lawyer, told Arab News.

While Kristina Lindhoff Carleson, the lead prosecutor in the case, has ruled that there is sufficient evidence to charge Noury with only 100 killings, the sight of even one suspect being led into a courtroom in handcuffs is unprecedented.



During a court appearance last week, Noury complained that the protesters' chants and slogans were "insulting," forcing the judge to ask police to request the crowd outside to quieten down. (Photo by Ann Tornkvist)

"This milestone trial in Sweden comes after decades of persistence by Iranian families and victims of the 1988 mass executions," Balkees Jarrah, associate international justice director at Human Rights Watch (HRW), said in a statement. "This case moves victims closer to justice for the crimes committed more than 30 years ago."

The trial is only possible in Sweden because the Nordic country recognizes universal jurisdiction over certain serious crimes such as mass murder, allowing for investigation and prosecution regardless of where the crimes were committed.

HRW has said that universal jurisdiction cases are important for ensuring that those who committed atrocities are held accountable. It says the process provides justice to victims who have nowhere else to turn, and that it deters future crimes by ensuring that countries do not become safe havens for rights abusers.

"Universal jurisdiction laws are a key tool against impunity for heinous crimes, especially when no other viable justice option exists," Jarrah said.

Members of the Swedish-Iranian community have told local media how proud they are to see authorities in their adopted home bring one of their tormentors to justice.

A verdict is expected in April 2022.



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Iranian accused of role in mass executions to face trial in Sweden  
Families of Iran massacre victims urge world leaders to protect graves  
Swedish trial offers hope of justice over Iran mass executions: HRW  
Families gather at Tehran cemetery in memory of 1988 massacre