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IRAN

Authorities Turn a Blind Eye on
CHEMICAL ATTACKS
on Iranian Schoolgirls

Authorities Turn a Blind Eye on Chemical Attacks on Iranian Schoolgirls

After five months, the chemical attacks on Iranian schoolgirls continue to threaten the lives of young women and girls in schools across Iran. The clerical regime has not taken any meaningful measures to stop the attacks.

The chemical attacks on Iranian schoolgirls and students resumed after the Nowruz holidays, despite belated warnings from Ali Khamenei to arrest and punish the perpetrators of such heinous crimes.

The clerical regime claimed to have [arrested more than 100](#) individuals in early March. Still, they announced the names of only a few who appeared on TV making confessions that had been extracted from them under torture. The arrests failed to stop the chemical attacks on Iranian schoolgirls.

The attacks have occurred in over 700 schools in over 160 cities across Iran. Various Health Ministry, MPs, and regime officials have put the number of students affected between 5,000 to 13,000. The number has increased since the announcements in February and early March.

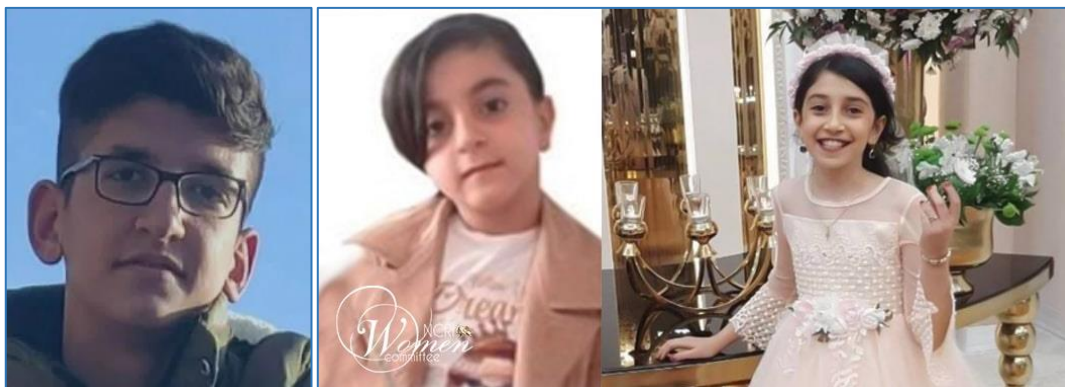
Tragically, at least five children have lost their lives so far.

Social media have reported the deaths of [Raha Hosseini](#), 9, in Isfahan in March and [Mahna Rahimi Mehr](#) in Saqqez, Kurdistan, in April due to the organized chemical attacks on girls' schools.

An 11-year-old student, [Fatemeh Razaee](#), reportedly died due to the poisoning in February. A first grader named Roham Shahveisi died after a chemical attack on their school.

Unconfirmed reports indicated the [deaths of two elementary schoolgirls](#) in Marand, E. Azerbaijan province (NW Iran), Fatemeh Mehdizadeh and Shabnam Jamshidi, on March 7.

[Karou Pashabadi](#), 16, from Kamyaran in Kermanshah Province, died on Friday, April 7, 2023, after being hospitalized for three weeks after inhaling poisonous gas.



From left, Karou Pashabadi, Mahna Rahimi, and Raha Hosseini

The Iranian regime's response to these attacks has been appalling. Instead of taking swift action to investigate and stop the attacks, the regime has engaged in a denial campaign, blaming the enemies and foreign intelligence services for the attacks.

The continued attacks on girls' high schools and the regime's inaction and cover-up attempts have left parents feeling helpless and concerned for their children's safety.

Sometimes, parents took turns guarding the school from outside and inside the yard to protect their children from intruders who wanted to attack them with poisonous gas.

Finally, after five months of keeping the public in the dark, the Ministry of Intelligence issued a declaration on April 28, denying using poisonous chemicals and claiming that the chemical attacks were mischief-making by students themselves!



Parents taking turns to guard a school in Zanjan

Intelligence Ministry denies poisonings in schools, blames enemy rumors

On April 28, the clerical [regime's Ministry of Intelligence](#) issued a statement containing the conclusions of its investigations into the chemical attacks on schools. The statement said: "Simultaneous with the project to fuel unrest in Autumn 2022, signs of the enemy's attempt to target students (especially girls) and shut down schools were observed."

The statement further concluded, "Toxic substances have not been distributed in any schools in the country; however, non-toxic agents that have caused panic have been accidentally or intentionally used in some reported environments."

"Undoubtedly, there was no network for distributing poisonous substances in the country, but various networks in cyberspace (from inside or outside the country) have been identified for producing and spreading rumors, creating school panic, attempting to close schools, protesting parents of students, deliberately accusing the Islamic Republic system and its followers, which a considerable number of them have been tracked and identified, and all of them will be pursued."

"The enemy's role in spreading rumors and creating panic is completely evident and undeniable."

The Ministry of Intelligence then vows to arrest and punish those who spread these rumors: "The system's definite intention is to deal seriously and without hesitation with those who spread rumors and create panic. The right to legally prosecute individuals, groups, media, and affiliated human media who have made baseless accusations against the system or innocent individuals and groups along with the enemies of the Iranian nation will be preserved."

Who were the ones arrested?

[Three young women](#), Setayesh Darugheh, 16, Erfaneh Honar, 19, and Setayesh Amiri, 17, have been arrested and pressured to confess that they were involved in the poisoning of schools in Larestan, Fars Province, by throwing sprays in them.



From left, Setayesh Amiri, and Setayesh Darugheh

Another young man, Alireza Bagheri, has also been arrested on the same charge. In another case, Milad Manzarian, an athlete and construction engineer, was arrested and brutally tortured to make false confessions. He had been previously arrested during the Iran protests and released on bail.



Milad Manzarian

On March 12, 2023, the semi-official [Arman-e Melli](#) newspaper reported the arrest of five individuals involved in the gas poisoning of students in seven schools in Lar, Fars province (S Iran).

Criticizing the lack of transparency in the report by the state television, Arman-e Melli added, “The interesting point in the report by the State Television and Radio Network is that the main culprit in this case and his daughter had procured toxic material and used it in seven schools in Lar. They had done so to send the footage to foreign media abroad and destroy people’s trust in the government. They broadcasted the film (of the father and daughter), talked with a couple of officials, and finally showed detainees’ legs wearing the blue prison pants.”



[Chemical attacks on Iranian schoolgirls – eyewitness reports](#)

We received a detailed report on the chemical attack on a girls’ conservatory in Tehran’s 15th district on April 18. The all-girls Abrar Conservatory has some 300 students.

The students said they were poisoned by a nauseating sweet smell, like a very sweet detergent. Some students vomited, and others had difficulty breathing. One student was kept in the hospital due to severe coughing. Some students were scared and wanted to leave the school, but the doors were closed, and they were not allowed to leave.

The authorities took tests but didn’t disclose the results. The school had a camera, but the officials claimed no video had been recorded. Ironically, none of the school’s staff were affected. (The state-run [salamatnews.com](#), April 19, 2023)

The all-girls Ansari School in Shahinshahr, Isfahan, was targeted on Tuesday, April 11, 2023. Eyewitnesses said the school's officials closed the doors and did not even let the students call their families.

Another video from Al-e Yasin High School in Shahinshahr shows families breaking the school's door to help their daughters. The school's authorities had closed the doors and did not let the students leave.



Tolou High School in the aftermath of the attack

Students at Tolou High School in Shahinshahr, also targeted on April 11, said, "We were gassed. They did not let us leave, and we had to stay in the schoolyard for one hour. We had severe symptoms like shortness of breath, red face, and dripping. The principal said those who had symptoms had problems from before. Finally, we opened the door on our own and called for an ambulance, which did not come for an hour. Instead, they sent agents from the governor's office."



Bottles collected from students and thrown out of school

On April 17, students from Mohammad Bagher School in Karaj said, "At the start of the day, they came and took away our mobile phones, water bottles, and any food to kill them afterward. Now they have gassed the students."

Eyewitness accounts reported by the Kurdish media indicated that in Mastoureh Ardal School in Sanandaj, from the early hours of school on April 24, all students' mobile phones were collected by the school management. The officials of this school kept the students in school until the end of the regular school hours and prevented them from entering or leaving.

In the case of Elahieh School in Kermanshah, attacked on May 2, police forces went to the high school after the chemical attack and threatened the students.

The students of one of the schools in Kermanshah, attacked on May 2, said they saw a drone dropping a smoking candle in the schoolyard.

Evidence of government involvement in the chemical attacks on Iranian Schoolgirls

1 – Government’s inaction and conflicting statements

One of the most striking pieces of evidence of the government’s involvement is its inaction on the serial poisoning of schoolgirls. The chemical attacks on Iranian schoolgirls began in Oom on November 30, 2022. However, the officials took no meaningful action to stop these attacks or provide an answer to the students’ concerned families.

The serial poisoning of schools continued in Oom, affecting hundreds of students and provoking parents’ protests on February 14, 2023. On the same day, the chemical attacks [spread to Tehran and Birjand](#).

It was only on February 20 that the regime’s General Public Prosecutor, Mohammad Jafar Montazeri, wrote to the Prosecutor of Oom about “the possibility of deliberate criminal actions.”

The state-run newspaper, Ettelaat, suggested on April 11 that “strong hands may be behind the conspiracy and damage, making it challenging to untie the knot of its secrets. Some officials have blamed mischievous students for the incidents. Still, the public is asking why these issues are not happening in boys’ schools where there is more playfulness and mischief.”

Ahmad Hossein Fallahi, a member of the parliamentary education commission, criticized the government’s [lack of action](#) to identify the perpetrators. “The news media and official news agencies claimed several people had been arrested for throwing sprays, etc., but in my opinion, the poisoning of students is beyond the mischief of a few students.” (The state-run khabaronline.ir, April 19, 2023)

The state-run Eghtesaad24.ir also wrote, “Five months have passed since the first news of [students being poisoned](#) in schools, and there is still no news of identifying the perpetrators. In such circumstances, the authorities call the poisoning of students’ “discomfort” and childish mischief.” (The state-run Eghtesaad24.ir, April 19, 2023)



Hengameh Mohammadi, an Iranian athlete and a gold medalist, was one of the victims of the chemical attack on schools on Sunday, April 9, 2023.

2- A pre-determined scenario to deflect blame and cover up the truth

Since the outset, the Iranian regime officials and media tried to downplay the significance of the poisonings, deflecting blame and avoiding responsibility. The belated statement by the Ministry of Intelligence also repeated the same talks after five months of so-called investigations.

Here is a chronology of official remarks or state-backed media reports:

On February 6, Siamak Mohebi, the vice president of Oom University of Medical Sciences, stated that the cause of the incidents was the students’ rapid respiration and stress and that their blood samples were normal.

On February 15, the Minister of Education, Youssef Nouri, claimed that the “discomfort” had been caused by rumors that scared people and students and that the students who had been hospitalized had chronic diseases. (Donya-e Eghtesad, February 15, 2023)

On February 18, a newsletter linked to the fanatic Fadaiyan-e Velayat group, affiliated with Ali Khamenei, declared that girls’ education is forbidden and threatened to spread the poisoning if girls’ schools weren’t shut down. The newsletter was published by the semi-official Tabnak.ir on February 25. The fact that a state media outlet published such threats raised serious questions about the regime’s involvement.

On March 1, Ahmad Vahidi, the Minister of Interior, said, “More than 90% of the poisonings were not due to external factors, but were due to stress and worries caused by the news.” (Tasnim.ir, March 1, 2023)

On March 14, Massoud Setayeshti, the spokesman for the Judiciary, told reporters, “It is better to use the term ‘discomfort’ instead of ‘poisoning.’ Poisoning must have specific symptoms. We have no reports or scientific findings indicating that there has been poisoning.”

Hamid Kazemi, the head of the Fact-finding Working Group on students’ poisoning, made an impertinent statement in the parliament about the chemical attacks, stating, “Some students are naughty and do mischievous things.” (The state-run Etemadonline.ir – April 7, 2023)

The Iranian Judiciary instructed officials to use “discomfort” instead of “poisoning” in their remarks and reports. (The state-run Mizan news agency, April 11, 2023)



Despite the clear evidence of poisoning, the regime’s [Health Minister](#), Bahram Ainollahi, has refused to acknowledge the problem. On April 15, he claimed, “We decided to call it ‘discomfort’ of the students because there was no solid evidence for the students’ poisoning.”

The state-run Fars News Agency downplayed the issue and shifted the blame to the students themselves.

In a report published on April 18, 2023, Fars claimed, “More than 90 percent of the cases were committed by students, and the mischief of the teenage period. The extensive media coverage has created competition among students in this regard. In a few cases, some teachers have committed violations, and the case of their violations is being processed. The cause for the discomfort of the students transferred to the medical centers is about 80% abuse and about 20% indoctrination. Of course, in some cases, they suffer from asthma, lung or heart problems, and the irritation of smelly substances or stress has led to their discomfort.”

Mullah Pour-Radi, the general director of the Department of Education of East Azerbaijan, said, “It seems that the matter had a suggestive and psychological aspect.” (The state-run Fararu.com, May 1, 2023)

Alizadeh, a parliamentary deputy, said, "One must deal with those who spread rumors and falsities regarding the discomfort of students so that others would take a lesson and future incidents are prevented." (The state-run Fars news agency, May 3, 2023)



3- Reporters, parents, and protesters arrested instead of culprits

Ali Pourtabatabaei, who first reported the poisoning of schoolgirls in Qom, was arrested and imprisoned on March 5. No one knows of his whereabouts. ([Reporters without Borders](#))

Parents of affected students [protested](#) several times but were [attacked](#) and dealt with tear gas.

Plainclothes agents violently arrested the parents who protested the gas poisoning of their daughters in Tehran and other cities.



Plainclothes agents pull the hair of one of the mothers outside the 13 Aban High School in Tehran

On April 20, a [woman was arrested](#) for "preparing videos and photos of the students' condition since their arrival at the hospital by attending various treatment departments." She was charged with spreading lies and propaganda against the regime and sent to prison. (The state-run Entekhab.ir, April 20, 2023)

Women's rights activist Sahar Khosravi in Sanandaj was arrested by IRGC intelligence during protests against the poisonings. At the same time, security forces abducted retired teacher

Bahaeddin Maleki in the same city. Amin Mahigir, 34, was arrested and detained after he protested the gas poisoning of students in Sarableh, Ilam.

In a further display of the regime's intolerance towards dissent, Tehran's prosecutor announced that they had filed cases against three managing directors of Ham Mihan, Rouydad24, and Sharq dailies for publishing the news of students' poisoning. Azar Mansouri, Sadeq Zibakalam, and Reza Kianian are accused of publishing fake news and unfounded claims that disrupted public opinion instead of publishing accurate and correct information.

Pershang Ranjbari, the director of Meraj High School for Girls in Saqqez, resigned to protest the chemical attacks on Iranian schoolgirls, the failure to identify the perpetrators, and the incriminating of the school staff.

The state-run Etemad Daily wrote on April 11 that several journalists and cyberspace activists were among more than 100 individuals arrested as poisoning culprits.



4 – The IRGC Intelligence has exclusive access to test results

Medical staff treating the poisoned students in Oom identified the type of poisoning caused by a microbial gas. However, the issue was silenced after two intelligence agencies intervened.

At Vali Asr Hospital in Oom, where some of the poisoned students were being treated, members of IRGC intelligence were present, as reported by a source to [RFE/RL \(Radio Farda\)](#). The source also claimed that the intelligence agency takes the results of the children's blood tests to their laboratory, and the staff is unaware of what is happening.

The media cited a specialist in one of Tehran's prestigious hospitals, saying, "Combined gases are being used for poisoning and are being used very intelligently, and access to these gases is not possible for ordinary people."

At a girls' high school in Zanjan (NW Iran), plainclothes agents and the State Security Force took many students to the hospital. Security forces did not allow the medical staff to register the students or take blood tests.

In the meantime, it has been reported that "Doctors and nurses are afraid to provide any information. They are worried about the consequences of this information. Some say they were told not to talk or give information; orders said to have come from higher authorities and the Ministry of Health. None of this ministry's officials will interview and explain what happened."

5 – Failure to use CCTV cameras to identify the culprits

The public and media have questioned why the State Security Force does not use their CCTV cameras to identify the culprits.

The semi-official Baharnews.ir highlighted the regime's inaction on February 27: "The security services that claim to be able to arrest a dust particle in the air and prevent sabotage activities before they are carried out have not found a single culprit of these terrorist acts so far.

In the [protest gathering](#) in Noorabad-Mamasani, in Fars Province, on March 7, a teacher said, "If a young man writes a slogan on the wall, they pursue him with drones and act with full force to identify him. Then they immediately arrest, torture, and [execute](#) him. In this case, however, despite the passage of three months since the poisoning of students started, government officials do not intend to answer people.

Some members of the mullahs' parliament expressed surprise that the State Security Force can use CCTV cameras to identify [improperly veiled women](#), but it cannot identify the perpetrators of this heinous crime. (The state-run ISNA news agency – April 10, 2023)

Ahmad Hossein Fallahi, a member of the parliamentary education commission, criticized the government's [lack of action](#) to identify the perpetrators. "After more than five months, it seems that the Interior Minister and military institutions focus on installing cameras and identifying women without the hijab, not the perpetrators of poisoning." (The state-run khabaronline.ir, April 19, 2023)

6 – Schools instructed to close the doors and confiscate the cell phones

Although there have not been any public announcements on a standard procedure the schools should follow in case of a chemical attack, eyewitness reports indicate that the schools' officials and staff have received special instructions.

Students of Mohammad Bagher School in Karaj were attacked on April 17. They said the school's staff and principal took their mobile phones, water bottles, and food before the school was chemically attacked with poison gas.

Students of [Mastoureh Ardalan](#) School in Sanandaj were attacked on April 24, 2023. They said that the school officials kept them in school until the end of the school day and prevented them from entering or leaving.

As noted earlier in the eyewitness section, the principal closed the doors in many schools and did not let the students out after the chemical attacks. Ironically, the school staff are not poisoned in most cases.



Call to Action

Iran is a tightly controlled country with numerous intelligence and security services that use the most advanced technology to identify criminals, even unveiled women. The ongoing chemical attacks on Iranian schoolgirls could not have been possible without the active involvement of the IRGC or the Ministry of Intelligence and other state agencies.

The clerical regime's attempts to blame foreign powers for the serial poisonings of girls in Iran are an effort to cover up their role in this heinous crime.

It's time for the Iranian regime to take responsibility for its actions and be held accountable for its crimes. Forty-four years of impunity of the clerical regime's leaders have encouraged them to commit more heinous acts, such as poisoning schoolgirls.

The world must take action to prevent Iran's clerical regime from using human casualties to maintain power, just as they did during the eight-year war, the 1988 massacre of political prisoners, and the Coronavirus pandemic.

The international community should hold the regime accountable and demand admission to the country for the UN international fact-finding mission to comprehensively investigate this heinous crime of poisoning innocent schoolgirls.

The Women's Committee of the National Council of Resistance of Iran calls on the international community to take immediate action to end this human tragedy. The committee urges the UN international fact-finding committee to conduct comprehensive and independent investigations.

The world must stand with the people of Iran, especially its women, and girls, and support their demands for justice, freedom, and democracy.