**SHOTS FIRED AS IRAN ARRESTS OVER 30 GAY MEN IN VIOLENT RAID**

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he Islamic Republic of Iran arrested more than 30 men who are believed to be gay at a private party last week in the Esfahan province.

The prominent Canadian NGO Iranian Railroad for Queer Refugees (IRQR) first reported on the violent crackdown, saying the men were between the ages of 16 and 30. "IRQR received several reports in last few days and were able to confirm that police attacked guests and physically beat them. Police detained them all at the Basij (Revolutionary Guard Militia) Station and then transferred them to Esfahan’s Dastgerd Prison. A few people managed to escape and we received reports that there were several heterosexual individuals among those arrested," the human rights NGO wrote in its website on Thursday.

Firing their weapons, the Iranian authorities, who raided the party, seized the men in the district of Bahadoran in the Esfahan region.

IRQR added, "After a few days, all the families were informed by Basij that their sons were arrested for sodomy. A special prosecutor has been assigned to their cases and they were charged with sodomy, drinking alcohol, and using psychedelic drugs. It was reported that prisoners will be sent to Esfahan’s Medical Jurisprudence department for anal examination in order to provide evidence of homosexual acts to the court."

The Basij is a para-military force used to repress dissidents and played a key role in dismantling the Green movement protests in 2009 against a reportedly fraudulent presidential election. Iran's Islamic legal system prescribes the death penalty for gays.

Volker Beck, a leading human rights activist and gay MP from the German Green Party, told The Jerusalem Post on Thursday, "Not only the Iranian regime's [desire for Israel's annihilation], but also its persecution and policy of annihilation against homosexuals makes the Iranian regime an enemy of human rights. Such a country cannot be a partner of our community of values."

The IRQR wrote "This unfortunate event has created chaos among the LGBT community in Esfahan, since prisoners were forced to write down full names of all their LGBT friends and acquaintances. IRQR is deeply concerned about this situation since Iran has a well-documented history of persecuting homosexuals."

Stefan Schaden, a LGBT rights activist and spokesman for the European 'STOP THE BOMB‘ campaign, wrote to the Post by email, “It is outrageous that the European Union is cozying up to the Iranian regime for trade and ignores the deadly homophobia, the overall disastrous human rights situation, the latest execution and arrest waves, and the regime’s promotion of antisemitism and support for terrorism. Iran’s Islamist regime with [Hassan] Rouhani as President is anything but ‘moderate."'

Schaden said, "While the Islamic State throws gays from rooftops, the Islamic Republic hangs them. Iran’s regime forces homosexuals to flee the country, and the EU turns a blind eye - the EU is, however, required in their dealings with third countries to comply with binding guidelines laid down in the Union's 'LGBTI Toolkit' to combat state violence against LGBTI persons. The EU must clearly step up its efforts in this regard and consider more human rights sanctions against the Iranian regime.“ LGBTI refers to persons who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, or intersex.

US Secretary of State Rex Tillerson slammed Iran's regime on Wednesday for its human rights violations. Iran’s clerical regime executed a gay adolescent in July, 2016. Iran’s UN diplomatic missions in New York and Geneva did not immediately respond to Post press queries.