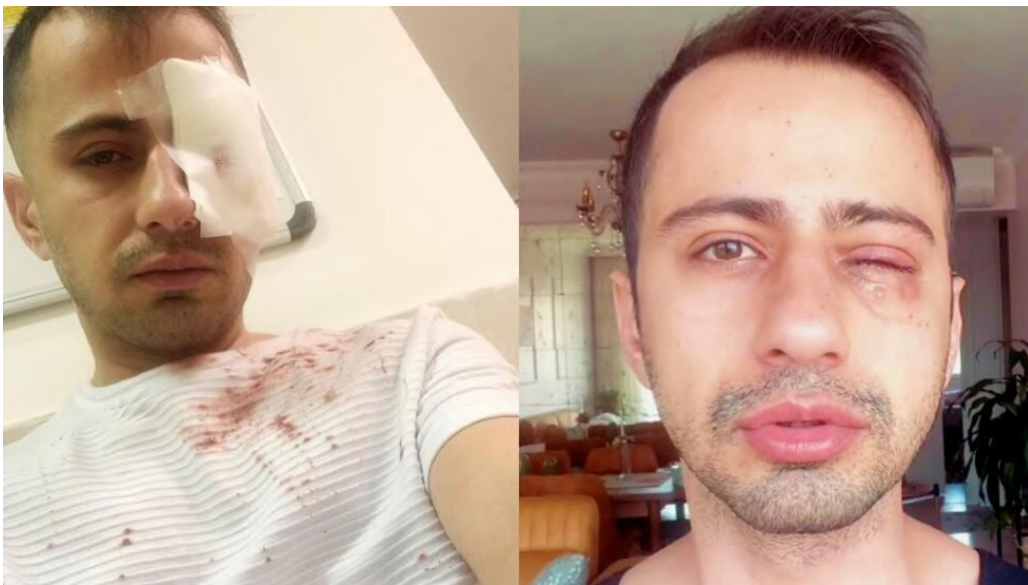


Repression in Iran: 'Whoever targeted my eye knew exactly who I was'

Saman, a 31-year-old export consultant, fled from a Tehran hospital when Iranian security officers came to arrest him in October. His left eye was seriously wounded when he was shot at point-blank range with a rubber bullet during protests that erupted after the death of Mahsa Amini. Saman now lives in Germany, where he is still being treated for his injuries.

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5 min



Saman was shot by a rubber bullet during a demonstration in Tehran on October 1, 2022. © samaniist / Instagram

By: Bahar MAKOOI

The officer recognised my face in Tehran's Valiasr Square. I had noticed him over the past three days of demonstrations. On October 1, our eyes met and everything went black. He had shot me [with a rubber bullet] from three metres away. The man who shot me in the eye knew who I was.

A few days after they killed [Mahsa Amini](#), I saw demonstrators on Instagram going after the law enforcement officers that were mistreating them. They were resisting. That same evening I joined them in the square in Tehran. My friends and I gathered in groups of seven or eight, sometimes on motorbikes, to demonstrate together. But I was alone on October 1 when I was shot in the face.

I spent two days in Farabi Hospital in Tehran. Part of my eye had exploded when I was hit and I had to undergo an emergency operation. I was still confined to bed when a nurse warned me the next day that two officers were talking about me in the lobby. They had come to arrest me.

I hid in one of the consultation rooms, close to a corridor, and as soon as I could I left through the courtyard. A hospital security guard saw me, but he turned around. I don't know if he was too old to run after me or if he let me get away, in which case I thank him for it.

'Others have gone to the scaffold for less'

I stayed hidden for 12 days, then I flew out of Iran to Turkey with my eye still bandaged. I was so scared that I was going to be stopped at the airport, because I couldn't pass unnoticed with the bandage. I was relieved when the plane took off.

I was right to be afraid, because I recently received a summons by email from the justice ministry saying that I had to appear before a judge. I don't know exactly what reasons were given, but I know that my file is pretty thick because I've protested a lot, and I've been speaking my mind for a long time. They could have sentenced me to death. Others have gone to the scaffold for less.

[Read more](#) **Death of Mahsa Amini: 'The silent crowd came to life and began shouting'**

I soon began to speak out about what had happened to me. I shared a video of my face on Instagram. I received a lot of messages from other demonstrators who had suffered the same thing. At that time, very few people dared to talk about it publicly. Pictures of young people who had been hit in the eyes by projectiles like I was later started to make the rounds on social media. And there are still others who have come forward recently.

'I'm doing it for the next generation'

I knew that the authorities had me in their sights. I had already received threatening text messages from the ministry of intelligence warning me not to commit the same offences again, especially because I had shared a GIF making fun of [Iran's Supreme Leader] Ali Khamenei in private chats. I have never censored myself, either on Instagram or on Facebook.

I don't believe in their religion; I want to be free to choose. For me, sharing and communicating with other people is vital so that people know what horrors the Islamic Republic is subjecting us to. I have been demonstrating since 2009 (when protests erupted after the disputed re-election of president Mahmoud Ahmadinejad) and I protested again in 2017 (against the economic hardships and the regime) and in 2019 (against both rising prices and the hardline regime). I'm not even doing it for myself. For me it's too late, I'm 31 years old. I'm doing it for the next generation, so that they can live freely and enjoy this country's potential, so that no more young people have to leave Iran.

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I was working as a consultant in exports and strategy management for a number of companies in Tehran. I made a pretty good living. I spent weekends with friends by the Caspian Sea or winters on Kish Island (in the Persian Gulf). I loved Iran – I was one of the few members of my family who was still living there. It's a wonderful country that the government has turned into a polluted prison.

'My left eye will never see again'

Today I live at a refugee centre in Germany; I'm just a migrant. I arrived here at the end of July. I sent visa requests to a few different European countries and Germany was the first to get back to me. I had to get out of Turkey as quickly as possible because I didn't feel safe there. Iran's intelligence services have a long reach. Nobody was supposed to know where I was living, but I received photographs of my building warning me that I had been tracked down.

I left my whole life behind in Iran. I left with a single T-shirt. I'm going to have to start again from scratch and get used to my new face. But here, I can get care. I consulted a specialist, but unfortunately he told me that my left eye will never see again. When I was shot, my zygomatic bone (cheekbone) was also broken. I'm going to have tests done to see if I need an operation.

Despite everything, I'm not one to complain. I left the country easily enough and here I can start to have a normal life without fearing for my safety. After I left, some of my close friends were arrested. A few of them were physically tortured. And they were interrogated about my case. One of them just arrived in Germany as well. He didn't get a visa, so he came by land, undocumented. On the way, he was stuck without food or water for five days in a forest in Poland. I can't wait to see him again. We have a lot to talk about.

This article has been translated from [the original in French](#).



Mahsa Amini's death, one year on_© Studio graphique FMM