



Iranian artist Elham Modaresi being 'tortured' in prison and denied medical care, says sister

By [Nassim Khadem](#)

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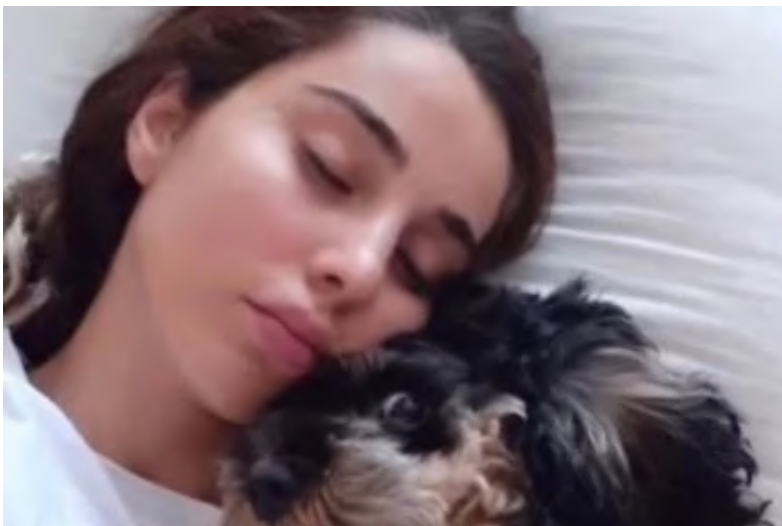
Elham Modaresi was arrested on November 2. *(Supplied.)*

In a prison West of Tehran, Iranian artist Elham Modaresi's will to survive is being gradually broken.

"Her life is in danger," says her sister, Mojgan Modaresi who lives in Sweden and is speaking out publicly for the first time since Elham was captured by Iranian intelligence agents on November 2.

The 32-year-old artist was taken from her home in Karaj, near Tehran, and transferred to Karaj's Kachoui Prison, accused of charges including "damaging facilities", "disturbing public order and comfort" and "propagating against the regime".

She suffers from a genetic liver disorder and requires urgent medical care, but her sister says that Elham is instead undergoing psychological torture.



Elham's family is worried she may die in prison. *(Supplied.)*

Mojgan says Iran's authorities have not provided the family with any evidence of wrongdoing and that Elham is being denied independent legal representation.

"Everyone is worried," Mojgan tells ABC News, speaking in Farsi.

"The family of other people who were at one stage imprisoned with my sister tell us she is under severe torture. She is in a bad state.

"They don't have a case against her but are trying to build one. And they do that by blindfolding her and psychologically torturing her.

"They say things like, 'You are prostitute, you are a slut. You are guilty of sinning – look what you've done to your family!'"



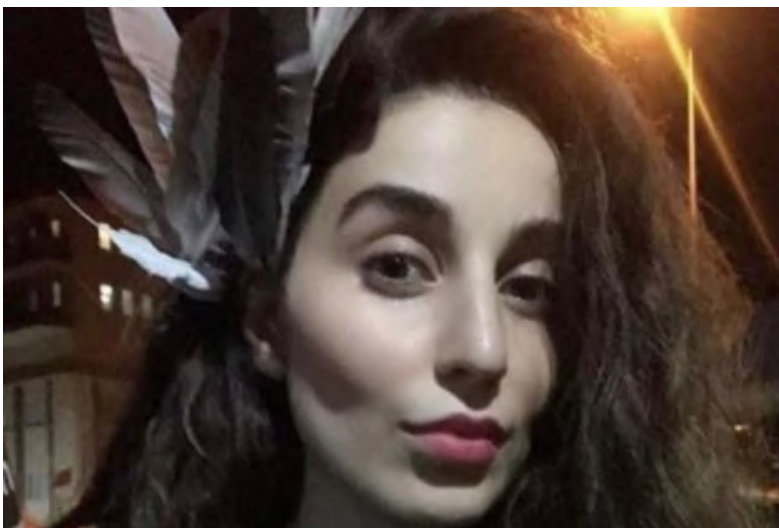
Elham's family say she's very social and kind. (Supplied.)

The family had kept quiet in the hope Elham would be released.

Until her arrest, Elham was living with her brother who recently underwent a liver transplant, and elderly mother who has heart problems and diabetes.

Mojgan says her brother stands outside the prison each day hoping for some news about his sister, but that the family have not been given any information by authorities since she was arrested.

Instead, they have had to talk to the families of other prisoners (some of whom have since been released) to find out what is happening inside the prison.



Elham's family say she is being psychologically tortured. (Supplied.)

'Executions used to instil fear'

About 500 civilians have been killed and more than 18,000 arrested since the anti-Iranian government protests began in September, according to estimates by the Human Rights Activist News Agency.

According to Amnesty International there are now about [26 people at risk of execution](#) in connection with the protests, some of whom are teenagers.

The current charges against Elham do not carry the death penalty, but her family fear that Iran's regime may come up with other charges that do.

Her case follows that of [Mohsen Shekari and Majidreza Rahnavard](#), who Amnesty says were "arbitrarily executed" following "grossly unfair sham trials".

The human rights organisation say Iran's government is using executions to "instil fear among the public and end protests".

Of the 26, at least 11 are sentenced to death and 15 are charged with capital offences and awaiting or undergoing trials.

Amnesty says, "there is a heightened risk that all (26) individuals listed ... may be swiftly executed without advance notice to their families".



Elham's family say Iranian authorities refuse to give her the medical attention she needs.

(Supplied.)

'They interrogate her for hours'

Mojgan says those that are not executed, are tortured and denied medical care.

She breaks down in tears when she speaks about her sister's situation, fearing that Elham is too sick to withstand the abuse she's facing inside prison.

"They blindfold her and interrogate her for hours to break her down," Mojgan says.

"They tell her things like, 'Your brother is in the cell next door to you, and we are interrogating him because of you.'"

She says they tell lies like that to scare her and forcibly extract confessions to crimes she did not commit.

"They know she is sick," Mojgan says.

"We have given them [the prison staff] medical documents about Elham's fragile state. They know it's very dangerous for her and that she could lose her life at any time."

She says Elham had asked her interrogators for photos or evidence that shows she did what they suggest. "But they tell her, 'You have no right to ask us for that. We are the ones who ask you the questions'."

She says the lies started the day of Elham's arrest. She says the prison staff would give reassurances to her mother and brother that Elham would be okay.



Elham with her nephew. (Supplied.)

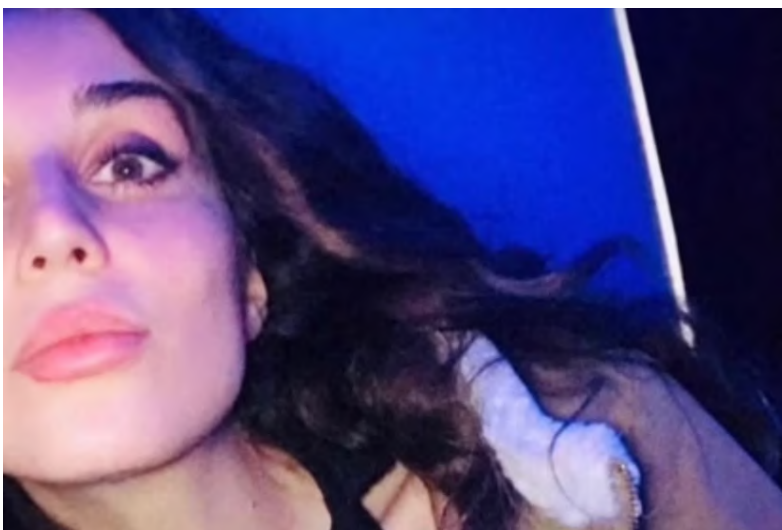
"They would say, 'There is no problem. Don't worry, she will be freed soon'. They'd say to my mum, 'We know you are sick, and we know your brother is still recovering from a transplant and we don't want to worry or upset you. Don't cry. Go home, in a few days she will be freed'."

But weeks later, the family is still waiting.

'We will keep you here until you die'

Mojgan says that because Elham is Kurdish, authorities are trying to pin her as a so-called leader of a group of protesters.

"They are pressuring her to admit that she was this group's leader and that if she accepts that she carried out such a role, they will free her," Mojgan says.



Elham's family worry her positive spirit is being broken under interrogation. (Supplied.)

"Elham refuses to admit to a lie to be freed. But they say that unless she admits to having played such a role, they won't allow her to go to hospital. They say, 'We will keep you here until you die, unless you stop objecting to what we say'."

Mojgan says Elham is the type of person who lifts others' spirits, but authorities are trying to break her spirit and her will.

"She has low blood pressure, and she has fallen unconscious many times. But they won't give her the treatment needs."

Elham used to work as a hairdresser but for the past year has been unable to work because of her illness. The talented artist would instead spend her days painting in her room.

"Art is her passion," Mojgan says.

Before her arrest, Elham spent much of her time in her room painting. *(Supplied.)*

"She is very social, and everyone loves her. They say she's an angel.

"Everything they are trying to pin on Elham is not true. It's not her. It's not her nature to do those things."

Mojgan says she is speaking out in the hope that the international community will put pressure on Iran's government to free her sister.

"Please free Elham," she says breaking down.

"She will die. She is sick. She needs urgent medical attention."

Art is Elham's passion. *(Supplied)*

"My mother is so worried. She is in a bad state. She is elderly and we lost my other sister a year ago because of health issues.

"For 45 days my brother stands outside the prison waiting for news. We are broken."