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# Iranian Athletes Killed, Tortured, Sentenced to Death for Supporting Protests (Updated)

(https://iranhumanrights.org/2023/01/iranian-athletes-killed-tortured-sentenced-to-death-for-supporting-protests-1/)



**Editor's Note: This article is regularly updated with new information.**

January 4, 2023 – The Islamic Republic’s persecution of athletes for peacefully supporting anti-state protests that have been ongoing throughout the country since September 2022 should be publicly condemned by sports federations and the international community, said the Center for Human Rights in Iran (CHRI).

Women and male athletes have been shot and killed, sentenced to death by kangaroo courts, disappeared and tortured after being arbitrarily detained for supporting the protests that arose after 22-year-old Jina Mahsa Amini was killed while in state custody after her detainment for an alleged improper hijab.

“Islamic Republic authorities are targeting athletes as part of a systematic campaign of repression aimed at crushing dissent, especially among those with large fan bases or large social media followings,” said CHRI Executive Director Hadi Ghaemi.

“The goal is to silence any criticism of the state through violence and imprisonment and by using kangaroo courts to instill terror in the hearts of those who are peacefully calling for change,” he added.

“International sports federations, fellow athletes, the UN, and world leaders should forcefully condemn the Islamic Republic’s extreme violence against the Iranian people through every means possible,” said Ghaemi.

## Athletes Killed or Subjected to Severe Persecution to Silence Dissent

CHRI spoke to sources with detailed knowledge of a number of these cases, which are listed below. All of these sources requested anonymity to protect themselves from reprisals by the government for speaking out about the cases, which implicate state forces in severe rights violations.

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**Marjan Jangjou**, a rock climber, has been missing since Islamic Republic agents arrested (<https://iranwire.com/en/politics/111547-irans-incoherent-scenario-for-alleged-shiraz-bombing-plot/>) her in her home in early November 2022 for her alleged participation in street protests.

Jangjou owns a gym in the city of Shiraz, Fars province. As she no longer has living parents, her relatives (<https://iranwire.com/fa/features/110973>) filed a missing-person report, but so far they have not received any answers.

"Some of Marjan's friends have been looking for her in places she frequented as well as in cemeteries in Shiraz to check unmarked graves hoping to find traces of her," a source close to Jangjou told CHRI.



**Ali Mozaffari** (<https://fa.iranfreedom.org/%D8%B4%D9%87%DB%8C%D8%AF-%D8%B9%D9%84%DB%8C-%D9%85%D8%B8%D9%81%D8%B1%DB%8C%D8%9B-%D9%88%D8%B1%D8%B2%D8%B4%DA%A9%D8%A7%D8%B1%DB%8C-%DA%A9%D9%87-%D8%AF%D8%B1-%D9%85%D8%B3%D8%A7%D8%A8%D9%82%D9%87-%D9%81/>), who plays for the local first division Saipa volleyball team, and who had received an invitation to the national team's training camp, was shot and killed by security forces when he joined protests in Qoochan, Razavi Khorasan Province.



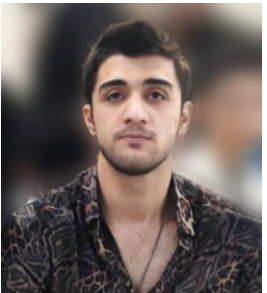
**Mohammad Ghaemi Far** (<https://www.iranintl.com/202211079705>), the goalkeeper for an under-21 soccer club in Dezful, Khuzestan province, was cornered in a dead-end alley on October 22, 2022 during a street protest and shot in the back of the head.

"There were more than 40 pellet marks on his head and neck," one of Ghaemi Far's relatives told CHRI. "They blocked the alley to prevent anyone from getting close to him. When they took him to the hospital, it was too late to save him. He fought death for a few days but didn't live."



**Ehsan Ghasemifar** (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0-5NErcP63o>) a national bodybuilding champion, was laid to rest on December 5, 2022 in Kangavar, Kermanshah province.

The 22-year-old athlete was killed during protests in Karaj, Alborz province, but local authorities forced the family (<https://www.radiofarda.com/a/32161827.html>) to say he suffered a cardiac arrest, CHRI has learned from an informed source.



**Mohammad Mehdi Karami** (<https://iranhumanrights.org/2023/01/two-more-men-executed-in-iran-in-connection-with-protests-others-at-imminent-risk/>), 22, a former national karate champion, was executed on January 7, 2022.

After being accused of killing a member of the Basij paramilitary during a protest in Karaj, Karami was denied a lawyer of choice or any time to prepare a proper defense; he was sentenced to death in less than a month.

In court testimonies (<https://www.mashregnews.ir/news/1441695/>), he consistently denied any involvement in the killing, yet a revolutionary court (<https://iranprimer.usip.org/resource/islamic-judiciary/>), which follows the orders of the security establishment and which conducts show trials using forced "confessions" in the place of evidence, condemned him to death on the charge of "waging war."

Karami had started a hunger strike (<https://www.etemadonline.com/بخش-سیاسی-9/589874-محمد مهدی-کریمی-فرجام-خواهی-وکیل-تعیینی>) on January 4, 2022, three days before he was hanged, to demand access to counsel.



**Amir Reza Nasr-Azadani** (<https://www.rouyad24.ir/fa/news/325873/>), 27, a soccer player in Iran's premier league, was sentenced to death in December 2022 by the Islamic Revolutionary Court, along with two co-defendants, Saleh Mirhashemi and Saeid Yaghoubi.

Update: On January 10, Nasr-Azadani was sentenced (<https://ir.voanews.com/a/6910173.html>) to 26 years in prison (16 years mandatory) on the charge of "assisting in waging war" in connection with street protests. He was accused of killing two Basij paramilitary members and a police officer during protests in Isfahan and was denied due process, including counsel of his choice, during his brief trial. Co-defendants Saleh Mirhashemi, Saeid Yaghoubi and Majid Kazemi were sentenced to death (<https://aftabnews.ir/fa/news/818014/>).

While detained, the men were forced to make forced "confessions" and on November 20, 2022, the Islamic Republic's Mehr News Agency published a video of them, yet even then, Nasr-Azadani denied being at the scene of the crime.

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**Saleh Mirhashemi Baltaghi** is a 36-year-old karate champion and bodybuilding instructor from Isfahan who was arrested during nationwide protests in November 2022.

Along with co-defendants Majid Kazemi and Yaghub Kordsofla, he was sentenced on the charge of “waging war against God” for his alleged role in the deaths of three Basij militia members during protests in the central Iranian city of Isfahan, the judiciary’s Mizan Online website reported on January 9.

Mirhashemi was denied counsel of his choice or time to prepare a proper defense. He reportedly told his mother during a phone call from prison, “I asked the mullah where the gun was, I did not even have a firecracker with me.”



**Sahand Nour-Mohammadzadeh**, 26, who won third place in a national bodybuilding championship, was sentenced to death on the charge of “waging war” for alleged acts (<https://shahraranews.ir/fa/news/142660/>) of arson and destruction of public property after being arrested on October 4, 2022. In March 2023, his lawyer announced that Nour-Mohammadzadeh had been sentenced to 5 years in prison and banishment to Kerman province for 10 years, a ruling he would appeal.

In an audio file (<https://twitter.com/beyk7777/status/1606957415861452801>) released after his detention, Nour-Mohammadzadeh said that he was told he was going to be executed the moment he was arrested, and that the only evidence presented in his trial was a video showing him moving the guardrail in a street during a protest.



**Parham Parvari**, a 26-year-old national swimming champion and swim instructor of Kurdish descent, was also charged (<https://twitter.com/rojhalat2022/status/1591819253715701760?>) with “waging war” in early November 2022, which can carry the death penalty, after being arrested (<https://iranhumanrights.org/2022/12/irans-courts-using-death-penalty-charges-to-crush-protests/>) by security agents while sitting in his car in Tehran amid street protests.



**Eshragh Najafabadi** (<https://iranwire.com/fa/features/110973-%D8%AC%D9%85%D9%87%D9%88%D8%B1%DB%8C-%D8%A7%D8%B3%D9%84%D8%A7%D9%85%DB%8C-%D8%A7%D8%B2-%D8%AC%D8%A7%D9%86-%D8%B3%D9%86%DA%AF%D9%86%D9%88%D8%B1%D8%AF%D9%87%D8%A7-%D9%88-%D8%B5%D8%AE%D8%B1%D9%87%D9%86%D9%88%D8%B1%D8%AF%D9%87%D8%A7%DB%8C-%D8%B4%DB%8C%D8%B1%D8%A7%D8%B2%DB%8C-%DA%86%D9%87-%D9%85%DB%8C%D8%AE%D9%88%D8%A7%D9%87%D8%AF>), a former member of Iran’s national cycling and mountain climbing teams, was arrested along with several friends—Hesam Mousavi (rock climbing coach), Amir Arslan Mahdavi (rock climber and snowboarding coach), Mohammad Khiveh (mountaineer), Dena Sheibani (snowboard coach) and Hamed Qashqaei (mountaineer)—in Shiraz, Fars province on November 9, 2022.

The six were tortured, according to a source with knowledge of their cases who spoke to BBC Persian, and forced (<https://iranwire.com/fa/news-1/111298>) to make “confessions” in front of a camera about an alleged bomb plot. The forced “confessions” were then aired on state media.

“The only thing they can charge Hamed with is that he chalked the word ‘Freedom’ on mountain tops,” a friend of Najafabadi told CHRI after explaining that Najafabadi had not committed a single crime.

“Every time the family contacted [Najafabadi’s friend] Dena in prison, she was in a really bad mental state and crying,” a source with knowledge about Sheibani’s case told CHRI.

“It seems that she is being used to ensure the co-defendants receive heavy sentences,” added the source. “Her family has been completely isolated; they aren’t even allowed to speak to her [state-appointed] lawyer.”

Dena Sheibani and Mohammad Khiveh have since been released on bail.

Many high-profile sports figures have also been summoned and temporarily detained. They include soccer stars **Voria Ghaffouri**, **Parviz Boroumand**, **Kaveh Rezaei**, and **Hossein Mahini**, as well as world Greco-Roman wrestling champion **Alireza Nejati**.

Boroumand, a former member of Iran’s national soccer team, has been charged with (<https://iranwire.com/fa/news-1/109910>) “leading the riots” and “damaging public property.” After being released on bail in late November, he checked into a hospital to be treated for injuries suffered during his violent arrest.

**Soroosh Rafiei**, captain of the top-tier Persepolis soccer club and Aref Gholami, who plays defense for the Esteghlal team, were slapped with disciplinary measures by their teams after publicly criticizing (<https://iranwire.com/fa/news-1/109969-%D8%B9%D8%A7%D8%B1%D9%81-%D8%BA%D9%84%D8%A7%D9%85%DB%8C-%D8%A8%D9%87-%D8%B3%D8%B1%D9%88%D8%B4-%D8%B1%D9%81%DB%8C%D8%B9%DB%8C-%D9%85%D9%85%D9%86%D9%88%D9%86-%DA%A9%D9%87-%D8%A8%DB%8C%D8%AA%D9%81%D8%A7%D9%88%D8%AA-%D9%86%DB%8C%D8%B3%D8%AA%DB%8C/>) the state’s suppression of the protests.

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**Ali Daei**, a veteran soccer star who has been outspoken in supporting the protests, has seen Islamic Republic authorities shut down his restaurant and jewelry shop in retaliation and prevent his family from leaving the country.

On December 26, Islamic Republic authorities forced a passenger plane heading to Dubai to return (<https://www.iranintl.com/202212266156>) to Tehran so that they could force Daei's wife and daughter off the plane.

The Islamic Republic of Iran has a documented history of imposing travel bans on dissidents and their families to pressure them into silence. In this case, the family had not even been informed of the ban, according to Daei.

"I thank God that their plane wasn't shot down by enemy missiles," Daei told (<https://www.radiofarda.com/a/ali-daei-reaction-airplane/32195212.html>) state media in a reference to the shooting down of Ukrainian flight PS752 by IRGC missiles in January 2020, which killed 176 people.

In a bold act of defiance, Daei, a football legend in Iran, had also previously refused to attend the FIFA World Cup in Qatar where Iran was competing, in solidarity with the protesters.

"Instead of repression, violence and arresting the Iranian people, solve their problems," he wrote in an Instagram post in September.



**Kowsar (Mahbanou) Khoshnoudi-Kia**, 27, a silver-medal-winning national archery champion of Kurdish descent from Kermanshah province, lost sight in her left eye after being shot by Islamic Republic forces in December 2022, according to the Kurdistan Human Rights Network.

In a message she sent one of her friends that was later posted on social media (<https://www.instagram.com/p/Cnw6qE1qYhF/>), Khoshnoudi-Kia described the shooting (translated into English below by the Center for Human Rights in Iran):

"My father and I were on Tagh Bostan Boulevard. It was 4 p.m. Unfortunately, we were fired at by men wearing special units' uniforms. My father and I were injured. He was struck with two [pellets] in his left arm and I was struck with three [pellets] in my right arm and one in my left eye. One of the [pellets] broke off a piece of my bracelet and it, too, penetrated my left eye. Because of the pellet and the bracelet shrapnel that went into my left eye, from now on I will be seeing the world only from my right eye."

Read this article in Persian (<https://persian.iranhumanrights.org/1401/10/iran-protest-athletes-death-penalty/>)

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