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The Westerners Held In Iran

By Stuart WILLIAMS May 26, 2023

Over a dozen Western passport-holders are detained in Iran, even after the release on Friday of Belgian aid worker Olivier Vandecasteele in an exchange deal between Belgium and Iran brokered by Oman.

Rights groups say they are innocent of any crime, and that they are being held as part of a deliberate policy of hostage-taking by Iran to extract concessions from foreign governments.

Tehran insists all the foreigners held have been subject to proper judicial process. Activists fear there may be more cases yet to be confirmed.

- Iranian-American businessman Siamak Namazi has been in prison since his arrest in October 2015 and is the longest held detainee. His father Mohammad Baquer Namazi, a former UNICEF official, was arrested in February 2016 when he went to Iran to try to free his son.

They were both sentenced to 10 years on spying charges in October 2016. Baquer, under house arrest since 2018, had his sentence commuted in 2020, and was finally granted permission to leave the country for medical treatment in October.

- Morad Tahbaz, an Iranian-American who also holds British nationality, was arrested alongside other environmentalists in January 2018 and sentenced to 10 years in jail for "conspiring with America".

- Iranian-American venture capitalist Emad Sharqi was sentenced to 10 years in prison on spying charges, Iranian media reported in 2021, saying he was captured trying to flee the country.

- British-Iranian labour rights activist Mehran Raof was arrested in October 2020 and is being held in solitary confinement, Amnesty International said.

- German-Iranian Nahid Taghavi, in her late 60s, was sentenced to 10 years and eight months in jail in August 2021 after being arrested at her Tehran apartment in October

2020 and held in solitary confinement.

- Jamshid Sharmahd, an Iranian-German, was captured by Iran in August 2020, while travelling through the UAE, according to his family, and charged with terrorism over a deadly 2008 bombing. His family have rubbished the accusations.

He was sentenced to death in February, a verdict that has been upheld by the supreme court and his family fears he could be executed any day.

- French teachers' union official Cecile Kohler and her partner Jacques Paris were detained in May 2022 while sightseeing in Iran. They are accused of spying.

- Banking consultant Louis Arnaud was arrested in September 2022 while visiting Iran. Described as "a great traveller", he is jailed in Evin prison in "extremely harsh" detention conditions, according to his parents.

- Another French citizen is confirmed by Paris to be held but their identity has never been revealed.

- Iran earlier this month released tour operator Bernard Phelan, who also has Irish citizenship and was detained in October as well as tourist Benjamin Briere who had been arrested in Iran in May 2020.

- French-Iranian academic Fariba Adelkhah was released earlier this year but is still unable to leave the country.

- Iranian-Austrian Massud Mossaheb was detained in January 2019 and jailed for 10 years on charges of spying for Israel and Germany. He was released in November 2022 on medical furlough as he suffers from cancer but not authorised to leave Iran.

- Iranian-Austrian businessman Kamran Ghaderi was arrested in January 2016 and sentenced for working with hostile states to 10 years in jail, after a trial Amnesty called "grossly unfair".

- A third Austrian, who has not been named, was earlier this year sentenced to seven-and-a-half years in jail in Iran for spying, according to Vienna.

- Iranian academic Ahmadreza Djalali, a resident of Sweden, was arrested during a visit to Iran in April 2016 and sentenced to death in 2017 on charges of spying for Israel's Mossad.

He was granted Swedish citizenship while in jail. His hanging was postponed but his family says he remains on death row.

- Habib Chaab, an Iranian-Swedish dissident, disappeared during a visit to Turkey in October 2020, turning up in Iran accused of being a leading figure in an Arab separatist group and of perpetrating bomb attacks. He was sentenced to death and executed on May 6.

- Spanish citizen and football fan Santiago Sanchez Cogedor has been in detention in Iran since October. He was arrested while trying to walk to Qatar for the football World Cup.

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