

Majid Kazemi executed after 'torture', his Sydney cousin urges Australia to cut ties with Iran

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Majid Kazemi was executed in connection with the anti-government protests in Iran.

(Supplied)

Ten days before the Islamic Republic of Iran killed 30-year-old Majid Kazemi for his role in the anti-government protests that have swept the country for almost nine months, the family had held hope he would be released.

"We were almost 100 per cent sure that they would change the sentence — honestly, I don't know what happened," says his cousin Mohammad Hashemi, who lives in Sydney and had been [campaigning for Mr Kazemi's release](#).

Family of executed activist calls on Australian governme...



YOUTUBE: The family of an executed activist calls on the Australian government to cut ties with Iran.

Mr Kazemi, who had a business making copper kitchenware, and two other men — 36-year-old Saleh Mirhashemi, a karate champion and bodybuilder instructor, and 37-year-old Saeed Yaghoubi, an athlete who worked at a real estate firm — were arrested in November 2022 following their participation in anti-government protests in Isfahan city.

The three men — who took part in the Women, Life, Freedom protest movement triggered by the [death in custody of Mahsa \(Jina\) Amini](#) — were put on trial in December 2022 and in January sentenced to death on the charge of "moharebeh", or "war against God".



Saleh Mirhashemi, Majid Kazemi and Saeed Yaghoubi (left to right) were executed by the regime in Iran on May 19. (Supplied by Amnesty International.)

The authorities claimed they drew a gun during a demonstration in Isfahan and claimed that led to the deaths of two members of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps's Basij militia force, and a police officer.

Initially there was a lack of evidence, and authorities told the men's families on several occasions before their deaths that they would be pardoned and released.

"A few days before they approved the initial sentence in (Iran's) Supreme Court, I got a call from Majid's family that they were really happy — they said the lawyers informed that they just going to give them jail and the execution won't happen," Mr Hashemi tells ABC News.

On May 10, authorities announced the three men's convictions and sentences had been upheld by the Supreme Court.

Despite crowds of protesters gathering outside Dastgerd prison where the three men were held, and a campaign by Mr Hashemi calling on the Australian government to halt the executions, on May 19 the three men were hanged, away from the public view.



Mohammad Hashemi holds a vigil for Majid Kazemi in Sydney. (Supplied.)

Family under 'surveillance and harassment'

Even after Mr Kazemi's death, Iran's regime is still harassing the family and not allowing them to properly mourn his loss.

According to Mr Hashemi, his family in Iran wasn't allowed to have a funeral for Mr Kazemi and they are still under surveillance by Iranian authorities. He thinks his phone calls with his family in Iran are being monitored.

"In the 21st century they are even not allowing a family to mourn for the 30-year-old son that they just recently lost," he says.

"Since Majid was murdered by Iranian government, the police have been terrorising my family. The Iranian special forces stormed to her (Majid's mother's) house and beat up all the family members. They arrested Majid's two brothers, and sister, and smashed everything. They took all Majid's photos ... and Majid's brothers are still in prison."

Majid Kazemi would have turned 31 on June 8.



Majid Kazemi at an earlier birthday celebration. He would have turned 31 on June 8, 2023.

(Supplied.)

"He was born two days after me; I was born sixth of June, 1992. He was born eighth of June, 1992," Mr Hashemi says.

"And we were incredibly, incredibly close growing up together. I remember we were always playing together. We were playing soccer. We were just running ... in the street."

He says he visited his cousin last March and they went out in Naqsh-e Jahan Square, situated at the centre of Isfahan, and dancing at a family party later that night.

"He was trying his best to just make sure that I (was) enjoying (it)," Mr Hashemi says.

"He was really, really, really caring about everyone. I can't believe what happened to him."



Cousins Mohammad Hashemi (bottom left) and Majid Kazemi (bottom middle) have been close since childhood.

'No credible evidence'

Mr Hashemi says that Iran's government did not present credible evidence of a connection between the defendants and the bullets and guns allegedly used in the killings.

"There was no evidence — what was the gun that the people (Basij officers) were killed by? Or (did they have) any other evidence?" he says.

"They (Iran's regime) just needed three people to execute, so they can just show their power to their own forces ... to use the tactic to scare people so they can make sure that there won't be any other protests."

Mr Hashemi says his cousin was denied access to a lawyer of their choosing — as is the norm in Iran's Revolutionary Courts.



Majid Kazemi was subject to severe torture before being executed by Iran's regime.
(Supplied.)

Immediately after their execution, Iran's state media re-ran video posts of what were presented as the defendants' confessions.

Human rights groups say the incriminating statements, which authorities often air ahead of executions, were taken under torture or duress.

Before his death, in an audio message from inside Dastgerd Prison, Mr Kazemi said:

"I swear to God I am innocent. I didn't have any weapons on me. They [security forces] kept beating me and ordering me to say this weapon is mine ... I told them I would say whatever they wanted, just please leave my family alone. I did whatever they wanted because of the torture."

Mr Hashemi says his cousin was subject to such severe torture he cannot even bring himself to speak about some of it.

"They were using (electric) shockers to attack him, and they were threatening (his) family, saying, 'just help your family, don't be stupid, just accept and (make a) confession otherwise we will hang all your brothers as well'," Mr Hashemi tells ABC News.

Amnesty International says interrogators suspended Mr Kazemi upside down and showed him a video of them torturing his brother, who they also detained.

According to Amnesty, they also subjected Mr Kazemi to mock executions at least 15 times by standing him on a chair and putting a rope around his neck, only to pull him down at the last moment.

They threatened to kill his brothers if he did not accept his charges and "confess" to whatever they said.

"The shocking speed at which these men were ushered to their deaths illustrates the Iranian authorities' flagrant disregard for the rights to life and a fair trial," Diana Eltahawy, Amnesty International's deputy director for the Middle East and North Africa, said after the execution.

Mr Hashemi prefers not to detail the other horrific torture his cousin faced: "He mentioned some details, how physically they tortured him, which is really unbelievable. I'm not able to think about it, how hard it was for him."



Majid Kazemi and Mohammad Hashemi in Isfahan. (Supplied.)

Iran second to China in executions

So far this year, there have been more than 200 executions in Iran, some of which relate to the anti-government protests, and dozens more have been sentenced to death or convicted of capital offences.

That follows a spike in executions in Iran last year, according to Amnesty International's annual report on global executions.

Iran is known for executing more people each year than any other nation except China.

Executions in Iran soared from 314 in 2021 to 576 in 2022.

Amnesty says Iranian authorities have embarked on an "alarming execution spree of scores of people, intensifying their use the death penalty as a tool of repression in an attempt to instil fear into the population and crush ongoing acts of resistance".

The human rights organisation says at least another seven people in Iran are under sentence of death in connection with nationwide protests, while dozens of others are at risk of being sentenced to death.

The seven are Ebrahim Narouie, Kambiz Kharout, Manouchehr Mehman Navaz, Mansour Dahmardeh, Mohammad Ghobadlou, Mojahed (Abbas) Kourkour and Shoeib Mir Baluchzahi Rigi.

Amnesty says according to their sources, interrogators subjected Ebrahim Narouie, who was convicted of "corruption on earth" (efsad-e fel arz) in late 2022, to torture and other ill-treatment, including through sticking needles into his genitals, to compel him to make forced "confessions" in writing and in front of a video camera.

Another source also told Amnesty that the authorities repeatedly beat Mohammad Ghobadlou, whose conviction for "corruption on earth" and death sentence was upheld by the Supreme Court in December 2022, and withheld his bipolar medication. A forensic report confirms that while in custody, he sustained bruising and injuries.



Mohammad Ghobadlou, 22, has been sentenced to death in Iran. (Twitter)

And aside from targeting protesters, the regime in Iran is also known to target children. Amnesty says Hossein Shahbazi, aged 22 – who was also subject to "grossly unfair and his torture-tainted confessions" — could be executed this week in relation to a crime that took place when he was just 17 years old.

It says Iran's government often violates the absolute prohibition on the use of the death penalty against people who were children at the time of the offence for which they have been convicted.

'Australia not doing enough'

Following Mr Kazemi's execution, Foreign Minister Penny Wong tweeted: "Iran's execution of Majid Kazemi, Saeed Yaqoubi and Saleh Mirhashemi exemplifies the regime's brutality against its people. We condemn these reprehensible killings in the strongest possible terms. Our thoughts are with their families. Australia stands with the people of Iran."

Mr Hashemi says that is too little too late.

He had written an open letter to Ms Wong asking for her support and had conversations with her office.

"Honestly in the months leading to the Majid's death, I begged Australian government and Minister Wong to just pick up the phone and speak to the Iranian foreign minister and ask them about their release, or even having a fair trial instead of the sham trial that they ran ... but they refused," he says.

He says hours before Mr Kazemi was hanged, he called Minister Wong's office again.

"I said, 'okay, this is the last moment that only like ministerial level thing might be useful and might work'."

Mr Hashemi says Minister Wong's tweet after the execution "was really sad moment for me".

"She waited until the Majid was murdered before condemning the Iranian government," he says.

"She claims stand with people of Iran, but honestly, she could have taken much more effective (action) for my cousin."

The Attorney-General's department has said it does not have the ability to designate the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) as a terrorist entity under Australia's Criminal Code.

In March, Australia [issued new sanctions against Iran](#), targeting the morality police involved in the death of Mahsa Amini, as well as those supplying drones to Russia amid its invasion of Ukraine. The move comes after Australia sanctioned senior Iranian military and government officials [in February](#) and [in December](#).

Minister Wong was contacted for comment. A spokeswoman for the Department of Foreign Affairs Trade (DFAT) responded on Monday afternoon, saying, "the Australian Government is deeply disturbed by Iran's use of the death penalty" and that "Iran's execution of protesters exemplifies the regime's brutality against its people".

The spokeswoman said Minister Wong condemned Iran's use of the death penalty and called on Iran to immediately cease its execution of protesters.

She said Minister Wong delivered the same message directly to the Iranian Foreign Minister when they spoke in March.

Hours before Majid Kazemi was hanged, his cousin called Penny Wong's office pleading for her to help him. *(Supplied)*

And on three occasions in May, including the day of Mr Kazemi's execution, she said DFAT called Iran's Chargé d'affaires "to directly express the government's condemnation of Iran's execution of protesters and to demand an end to its use of the death penalty".

Mr Hashemi says if the Australian government really cares about human rights and wants to stop the executions it will stop negotiating with Iran's government and will [list Iran's Revolutionary Guard Corp as a terrorist organisation, as was called for by a recent Senate inquiry](#).

Last week Senator Claire Chandler received confirmation at Senate estimates that the Australian government wasn't progressing any amendments to allow a listing of the IRGC.

Currently foreign governments are engaging in prisoner swaps instead of taking such action against Iran's government.

On Friday, Iran freed Belgian aid worker Olivier Vandecasteele after almost 15 months in custody, in a prisoner exchange for Iranian diplomat, Assadollah Assadi.



Iran freed Belgian aid worker Olivier Vandecasteele after almost 15 months in custody, after a prisoner exchange. *(Supplied.)*

Assadi was jailed in Belgium over a 2018 plot to bomb an Iranian Opposition rally outside Paris. And Belgium, which has been negotiating for his release, has always insisted that Mr Vandecasteele was innocent of "espionage" and his trial was rigged.

"In many ways it seems that the worse the behaviour of the regime, the more leverage they are allowed to have, whether that's through nuclear negotiations, by using executions as a political tool, or by increasing links with other dangerous regimes," Senator Chandler says.

Mr Hashemi says if the Australian government is serious about stopping the Islamic Republic human rights abuses, it needs to do more.

"All the people around the world, they are sending their sympathy and they are not happy with all of these human rights violations — but you are the people in power; you could do something more powerful and useful," he says.