



Iranians during a protests against the Islamic Republic in Berlin in October 2022

Outrage Over German City's Partnership With Iran's Esfahan

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German-Iranians blasted Freiburg's municipal government in Germany for voting last week to retain a twin city partnership with the Iranian city of Esfahan.

A majority of city council members from the left-wing parties, Greens and Social Democrats, rejected a motion from three small parties to end the controversial twin city partnership as protest to the Iranian regime's gross human rights violations.

Iranian born Kazem Moussavi, who has campaigned for over twenty years against the dual city partnership, told Iran International that "It doesn't matter to Mayor Martin Horn and his allies that independent civil society in Esfahan (Esfahan) is severely censored and brutally suppressed.

Kazem Moussavi during a protest against the Islamic Republic in Berlin

Dissidents and artists such as **rapper Toomaj Salehi** and **Heshmatollah Tabarzadi** were recently sentenced to long prison terms in Esfahan's notorious torture prison, which is on the US sanctions list. Several women have also been executed there in recent months."

The Freiburg Mayor has faced criticism from Amnesty International for going to great lengths to retain a city partnership with the clerical regime in Esfahan and for belittling grave human rights violations carried out by the regime.

According to the **German media outlet SWR**, Horn, who is not affiliated with a party, said he "wants to keep foot in the door" for the citizens of Iran by not shutting down the partnership. Horn refused to respond to numerous Iran International press queries.

Freiburg Mayor Martin Horn

Moussavi, who is the spokesman for the Green Party of Iran in Germany, also criticized Horn and the city council members who voted to retain the partnership, because they are ignoring that the morality police have been reactivated in Esfahan to ensure women wear the compulsory hijab.

The city council leader for the Free Voters, Johannes Gröger, issued a statement on behalf of his party and the JUPI (*Young, Urban, Polarizing and Inclusive*) and FL (*Make Freiburg worth living*) parties. Gröger said, "The

conditions in Iran, especially in our partner city Esfahan, are getting worse and worse. Human rights are trampled on. The rights of women are disregarded, and the number of executions is increasing." He added that "This is also supported by the incumbent mayor of our partner city and the local leadership elite."

Behrouz Asadi, the head of the Democratic Forum of Iranians in Mainz, issued a public letter to Martin Horn ahead of the vote, urging him to end the twin city partnership and "send a clear statement against torture and executions and for the release of all political prisoners, especially with respect to the previously mentioned musician Toomaj Salehi."

Asadi told Iran International that the city of Freiburg "must end its contact with the regime and support the citizens." He said his organization will send a letter to the parties in Freiburg who voted to retain the partnership. He said the "morality police must be abolished" and termed the clerical regime a "terror regime and a murderous regime."

Behrouz Asadi, the head of the Democratic Forum of Iranians in Mainz

Asadi's open letter was [published in Persian](#) and sent in German to Horn.

Freiburg, which is in the southwestern state of Baden-Württemberg, established its dual city partnership with Esfahan in 2020. Freiburg is the only city in Germany to have a municipal partnership with an Iranian regime-controlled city.

The German city of Weimar scrapped a partnership with Shiraz, in 2010, because regime officials on a trip to Germany refused to visit the Buchenwald concentration camp memorial.

The three parties opposed to the twin partnership in Freiburg said in their joint statement "The end of the twin city partnership should be a clear signal that Freiburg is committed to a world without oppression and human rights violations."

Ulrich von Kirchbach, who serves as the Social Democratic Party's cultural mayor in Freiburg, told SWR that "We don't want to terminate any partnership

because those who are now rebelling against the regime will feel completely abandoned.”

Simon Waldenspuhl, the leader of the JUPI political party, said the declaration issued by Freiburg in January is “too weak to express our contempt for such a brutal regime.” In January, Freiburg’s city government put the partnership on ice.

The FL city councilman, Wolf-Dieter Winkler, said “We increasingly must acknowledge that the persecution of people in Iran, including in our partner city Esfahan...even if declared dormant, no longer seems justifiable.

Horn is widely known as the German mayor who continues to do the heavy lifting for Iran’s regime via his strident activism to retain the dual city partnership. Critics argue Horn and the pro-Esfahan city council representatives have stained Freiburg’s reputation.

Sheina Vojoudi, who fled the Islamic Republic of Iran to Germany to escape persecution, told Iran International why a “German city prefers to turn a blind eye to all the human rights violations specifically in Esfahan.”

Sheina Vojoudi

Vojoudi, who has been campaigning to end the partnership, added “Toomaj Salehi is a living proof of human rights violations in Esfahan who’s sentenced to six years and three months in prison for his critical rap songs. I would love to remind Freiburg of the **Esfahan farmers who were shot by the regime forces** for protesting severe water shortages. Hopefully the city council and the decision makers followed it closely that many of those innocent farmers lost their eyes.”

According to Vojoudi, who is an associate fellow for the Gold Institute for International Strategy, “Each partnership with this regime is a stab in our people’s back and of course mocks all the lives sacrificed and are being sacrificed for justice and humanity. Not condemnation but action proves that Germany truly cares for the human rights violations in Iran.”

Moussavi took Horn and the city council members, who support the partnership, to task for their alleged hypocrisy, noting that Esfahan is a center

for Iran's construction of atomic weapons, drones and rockets. Horn and the pro-partnership city council members ostensibly claim to be against jingoism and nuclear weapons.

Moussavi also sharply criticized the commissioner tasked with fighting antisemitism in Baden-Württemberg, Michael Blume, for failing to urge Mayor Horn and the city council members to pull the plug on the twin city partnership. Moussavi said "An antisemitism commissioner must not tolerate Freiburg's relations with Esfahan, where Jews and other religious minorities are massively discriminated against and persecuted."

Blume has faced massive criticism for lashing out at Iranian dissidents on Twitter as "corrupt exiled nationalists," because they seek the toppling of the Islamic Republic and combat Iranian regime-sponsored Holocaust denial and antisemitism.

"Blume called people like me 'corrupt exiled nationalists' after I showed him leaked footage of Evin prison and told him that only criticism won't help us and as a defender of human rights she should do more," said Vojoudi.

She continued "But, in response, he insulted and discriminated against Iranians in exile. He called us corrupt but the rulers of their twin city [partnership], the officials of the Islamic Republic, are the most corrupt people on earth."

Blume has refused to comment on his attacks on Iranian dissidents. In October, a court in Hamburg, Germany said statements made by Blume can be termed "antisemitic" and Blume's critics can define him as "antisemitic." The Simon Wiesenthal Center's top Nazi hunter, Dr. Efraim Zuroff, urged Blume to resign.

Blume refused to answer Iran International media queries. The world-renowned human rights activist and former Soviet political prisoner, Natan Sharansky, told Iran International that Blume's twitter activity is "antisemitic" because he stoked an anti-Jewish conspiracy theory.

Iran Protests



Prominent Iranians Dismiss Upcoming Elections, Call For A Referendum