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Iranian rapper Toomaj Salehi sentenced to death for protesting

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Protesters in support of Toomaj Salehi in The Hague, the Netherlands.

Charles M. Vella/SOPA Images/LightRocket/Getty Images via CNN Newsource

(CNN) — Dissident rapper Toomaj Salehi has been given a death sentence for his involvement in the widespread protests that swept Iran in 2022, according to his lawyer.

“An order for the execution of Toomaj Salehi has been issued,” Salehi’s lawyer Amir Raesian tweeted Wednesday.

The rapper has been detained, held in solitary confinement and was allegedly tortured following his arrest.

In an unprecedented move, a court in Isfahan reversed the higher Supreme Court's decision on Salehi's case on Tuesday, upholding the original verdict of "corruption on earth" and issued the maximum punishment of death, according to Iranian pro-reform outlets Shargh and Entekhab.

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State media said Salehi's sentence is subject for reduction by a pardoning committee if he appeals again.

Salehi, 32, who has been critical of the Iranian regime and outspoken against the government in rap lyrics and on social media, was briefly released from prison last year before police violently rearrested him and sent him to prison in Isfahan, witnesses said at the time.

He was rearrested after appearing in a video where he revealed that he was tortured and placed in solitary confinement for 252 days following his arrest in October 2022, UN experts said in a statement published by the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR).

Another artist, Kurdish-Iranian rapper Saman Yasin, who was also arrested at the height of 2022's protests in Iran, was transferred to a psychiatric hospital two times in less than a year, according to pro-reform news outlet IranWire.

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A court in Tehran sentenced Yasin to five years in prison, according to group focused on Kurdish human rights, Hengaw.

Demonstrations swept the country after the death of 22-year-old Mahsa Amini, which occurred under suspicious circumstances while in police custody. A brutal crackdown on the protests by Iranian authorities targeted the weeks-long protests.

“We strongly condemn Toomaj Salehi’s death sentence and the five-year sentence for Kurdish-Iranian rapper Saman Yasin. We call for their immediate release,” the United States’ Office of the Special Envoy for Iran tweeted. “These are the latest examples of the regime’s brutal abuse of its own citizens, disregard for human rights, and fear of the democratic change the Iranian people seek.”

UN experts also demanded Salehi’s release and urged Iranian authorities to reverse the death sentence.


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“We are alarmed by the imposition of the death sentence and the alleged ill-treatment of Mr. Salehi which appears to be related solely to the exercise of his right to freedom of artistic expression and creativity,” the experts said.

Salehi’s political sponsor in Europe, German Member of Parliament Ye-One Rhie, called the death sentence against Salehi “absurd and inhumane.”

“It is still completely unclear how this verdict came about,” she tweeted Wednesday. “It is unbelievable how irresponsibly and arbitrarily the Iranian regime treats defendants. It is impossible to recognize the rule of law in the chaos of the courts in charge.”



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