

URGENT ACTION

TORTURED PROTESTERS SENTENCED TO DEATH

Young protesters Javad Rouhi, Mehdi Mohammadifard and Arshia Takdastan are at risk of execution in Iran following grossly unfair trials in connection with protests in Noshahr, Mazandaran province. The Revolutionary Court stated that they “incited riots” by dancing, clapping, chanting or throwing headscarves into bonfires. Authorities subjected them to beatings, floggings, electric shocks, suspension, death threats and sexual violence to extract “confessions”.

TAKE ACTION: WRITE AN APPEAL IN YOUR OWN WORDS OR USE THIS MODEL LETTER

Head of judiciary, Gholamhossein Mohseni Ejei

c/o Embassy of Iran to the European Union, Avenue Franklin Roosevelt No. 15, 1050 Bruxelles, Belgium

Dear Mr Gholamhossein Mohseni Ejei,

Tortured protesters Arshia Takdastan, 18, Mehdi Mohammadifard, 19, and Javad Rouhi, 31, are at risk of execution in connection with protests in Noshahr, Mazandaran province, on 21 September 2022. They were convicted of “enmity against God” and “corruption on earth” in December 2022, for which they received two death sentences. Javad Rouhi was also sentenced to death for “apostasy” based on his torture-tainted “confessions” that he burned a copy of the Quran. The Revolutionary Court in Sari, Mazandaran province, stated in its verdicts, which Amnesty International reviewed, that the young men “incited...widespread” arson or vandalism by dancing, clapping, chanting or burning headscarves. For Javad Rouhi and Arshia Takdastan, the prosecution authorities provided no evidence of their involvement in such acts while the court solely relied on their torture-tainted “confessions” of, respectively, forcibly entering and throwing items from inside a traffic police booth, and throwing stones and a glass bottle toward a police car and blocking a road. The court also cited Javad Rouhi’s “confessions” that he warned other protesters against entering the governor’s office and claimed that this proves his “leadership”. Javad Rouhi maintained in court that his participation in the protests was peaceful. For Mehdi Mohammadifard, the prosecution similarly cited forced his “confessions” of setting fire to state buildings and a video clip purportedly showing him throwing Molotov cocktails into the traffic police booth. His lawyer stated in court that the clip does not prove that he provoked or participated in widespread arson and that his “confessions” were obtained under coercion. Imposing death sentences for such offences flagrantly violates the right to life under international law, which prohibits the death penalty for acts not involving intentional killing.

Amnesty International learned that they were forcibly disappeared, tortured and otherwise ill-treated to “confess”, including through solitary confinement, suspension, floggings, electric shocks, rape and other forms of sexual violence, and death threats at gunpoint. As a result, Javad Rouhi suffered rotator cuff injuries, urinary incontinence, digestive complications and mobility and speech impairment while Arshia Takdastan sustained a broken toe and experienced memory loss. According to information gathered by the organization, Mehdi Mohammadifard sustained a broken nose and rectal bleeding as a result of rape. They were denied access to a lawyer during the investigation phase and access to a lawyer of their choosing at trial, consisting of a session lasting under an hour for each. Their appeal is before the Supreme Court.

I urge you to immediately quash the convictions and death sentences of Arshia Takdastan, Mehdi Mohammadifard and Javad Rouhi, and drop all charges related to their peaceful participation in protests. If charged with internationally recognizable crimes, retrial proceedings must meet international standards of fair trial, without resort to the death penalty and excluding coerced “confessions”. Their allegations of torture and other ill-treatment must be investigated independently and all those suspected of responsibility held accountable. I also urge you to grant them specialist healthcare for their torture-related injuries.

Yours sincerely,

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Revolutionary Guards agents arrested Javad Rouhi in a violent manner from the street in Noshahr, Mazandaran province, on 22 September 2022 after he was identified in a video that showed him dancing during protests in Noshahr a day earlier. For the next six weeks, the authorities concealed his fate and whereabouts from his family, which amounts to enforced disappearance, a crime under international law. In late October 2022, he was allowed to briefly call his family informing them that he was at an unidentified medical centre. The authorities disconnected the call after a few seconds. In the following weeks, his family continued to desperately search for him including by referring to the central prison in Noshahr. Eventually, in early November 2022, the authorities confirmed that he was held there and in mid-November 2022, they granted a family visit. For the next six weeks and until after the authorities informed him of his death sentence in late December 2022, he was denied contact with his family. It subsequently transpired that following his arrest, he had been held for more than 40 days in solitary confinement at a Revolutionary Guards detention centre known as Shahid Kazemi, which is located within Tir Kola prison in Sari. According to information obtained by Amnesty International, during this period, he was subjected to severe beatings and floggings, including on the soles of his feet and while being tied to a pole, electrically shocked with tasers, exposed to freezing temperatures, and sexually assaulted by having ice put on his testicles for 48 hours. Revolutionary Guards agents also repeatedly pointed a gun to his head and threatened to shoot him if he does not “confess” and “disclose” the name of the “grouplet” (a derogatory term used by the authorities in reference to outlawed opposition groups) with which he had “colluded”. Amnesty International learned that following his torture, Javad Rouhi developed urinary incontinence, digestive complications, mobility issues and speech impairment and was transferred on an emergency basis to a medical centre where he was hospitalized for 48 hours. He also sustained a re-rupture in his rotator cuff, which had been surgically repaired several years earlier. He continues to suffer from severe pain in his back and hips and numbness in his right leg, which have been left untreated and require specialist medical care. His trial took place behind closed doors before Branch 1 of the Revolutionary Court in Sari on 13 December and lasted for less than an hour. During the trial, he told the judge that he had been tortured to give false “confessions”. Despite this, the court relied on his forced “confessions” and refused to order an investigation. In apparent reprisal for speaking out about his treatment in court, immediately after his trial, he was transferred to a Revolutionary Guards detention centre in Sari, Mazandaran province, and held there in solitary confinement for around two weeks. In late December 2022, he was returned to the central prison in Noshahr, where he remains.

Revolutionary Guards agents arrested Arshia Takdastan in Noshahr on 24 September 2022 and transferred him the next day to Shahid Kazemi detention centre in Sari. According to information obtained by Amnesty International, there, he was held in solitary confinement for 28 days and repeatedly subjected to beatings and death threats, including through having a gun pointed at his head and being told that he would be shot dead if he did not “confess” in front of a video camera. The interrogators also threatened to detain and torture his father if he did not “cooperate”. The authorities concealed his fate and whereabouts from his family for 18 days, which amounts to enforced disappearance. In its verdict, which has been reviewed by Amnesty International, the Revolutionary Court cited as evidence of “enmity against God” a text message sent by Arshia Takdastan to Iran International, a media outlet outside Iran, wherein, according to the verdict, he expressed appreciation to the media outlet for “standing behind the people” and asked them to “keep encouraging the people so that the Islamic Republic is suppressed”.

Mehdi Mohammadifard went into hiding on 1 October 2022 after being summoned for interrogations by Revolutionary Guards. He was located and arrested in the early hours of the morning on 2 October 2022. According to information obtained by Amnesty International, his arrest was carried out in a violent manner involving severe beatings and pushing him to the ground, as a result of which he sustained a broken nose. The organization learned that following his arrest, he was held for a week in solitary confinement in a cell infested with mice and cockroaches, and during this period, he was subjected to torture and other ill-treatment to “confess” including through severe beatings and suspension upside down. He was also subjected to rape as defined in international criminal law, namely: non-consensual vaginal, anal or oral penetration of a sexual nature of the body of another person with any bodily part or object. The organization learned that as a result of rape, he suffered anal injuries and rectal bleeding and was transferred on an emergency basis to a hospital outside prison. He was returned to detention the next day and before he had recovered. Amnesty International was not able to ascertain the location of the detention facility where he was held during the investigation period. He is currently held in the central prison in Noshahr. He was not allowed any visits from his family until after he was sentenced to death in December 2022.

PREFERRED LANGUAGE TO ADDRESS TARGET: Persian, English

You can also write in your own language.

PLEASE TAKE ACTION AS SOON AS POSSIBLE UNTIL: 24 March 2023

Please check with the Amnesty office in your country if you wish to send appeals after the deadline.

NAME AND PREFERRED PRONOUN: Javad Rouhi (he/him), Mehdi Mohammadifard (he/him) and Arshia Takdastan (he/him)