Iran executes karate champion and volunteer children’s coach amid crackdown on protests

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<https://www.cnn.com/2023/01/07/middleeast/iran-protesters-executed-intl-hnk/index.html>

The executions on Saturday of two young men in [Iran](https://www.cnn.com/2022/12/24/asia/iran-protesters-protection-underground-network-intl-hnk-dst/index.html), one a karate champion, the other a volunteer children’s coach, in connection with nationwide protests have sparked outrage around the world.

The total number of people now known to have been executed in connection with the protests that have swept the country since the death of 22-year-old Kurdish Iranian woman Mahsa Amini in morality police custody on September 16 has reached four.

Mohammad Mehdi Karami and Seyed Mohammad Hosseini were [hanged](https://www.cnn.com/2022/12/23/middleeast/iran-footballer-amir-nasr-azadani-execution-intl/index.html) early Saturday morning, state-affiliated Fars News reported. The pair, who allegedly took part in anti-regime protests last year, were convicted of killing Seyed Ruhollah Ajamian, a member of the country’s Basij paramilitary force, in Karaj on November 3, according to the Iran’s judiciary news agency Mizan.

Mohammad Hossein Aghasi, a lawyer advocating for Karami, posted to Twitter Saturday saying that Karami was not given final rights to speak to his family before his execution. The lawyer added that Karami had begun a dry food hunger strike Wednesday as a form of protest against officials for not allowing Aghasi to represent him.

As many as 41 more protesters have received death sentences in recent months, according to statements from both Iranian officials and in Iranian media reviewed by CNN and 1500Tasvir, but the number could be much higher.

**UN and EU ‘urge’ Iran to ‘halt’ executions**

The UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) and the European Union (EU) have urged Iran to halt all executions following the hanging of the pair.

“We deplore the execution of two more protesters, #MohammadMehdiKarami & #MohammadHosseini, following unfair trials based on forced confessions,” the OHCHR said in a tweet on Saturday.

The OHCHR called it “shocking” that Iran has continued to execute protesters “despite international outcry.”

“We urge Iran to halt all executions,” the OHCHR added.

The EU said in a statement Saturday that it was “appalled” by the executions, calling it “yet another sign of the Iranian authorities’ violent repression of civilian demonstrations.”

“The European Union calls once again on the Iranian authorities to immediately end the strongly condemnable practice of imposing and carrying out death sentences against protesters,” the statement said.

“The EU also calls on the authorities to annul without delay the recent death penalty sentences that were already pronounced in the context of the ongoing protests and to provide due process to all detainees,” it added.

Norway-based non-profit organization Iran Human Rights (IHR) also condemned the killings and warned “of the execution of a large number of protesters in the coming days if this is not met with an appropriate response,” in a statement on Saturday.

“The executions are an extension of the killing of defenceless protesters in prison and have no legal basis,” Iran Human Rights director Mahmood Amiry-Moghaddam said in the statement.

Several major Hollywood stars including Cate Blanchett, Jason Momoa, Bryan Cranston and Olivia Wilde called for an end to executions in Iran in an online campaign launched Friday.

The campaign, which features more than 50 stars, was organized by Iranian American screenwriter and satirist Nicole Najafi, Iranian American director, writer and producer Ana Lily Amirpour, and Iranian American actress and writer Mozhan Marno.

In a video posted online, the featured celebrities hold up a white piece of paper with the caption “#StopExecutionsinIran” written across it.

The following message is conveyed through text on screen: “We stand with the people of Iran in their fight for freedom. Thousands of protesters have been arrested. Some have already been executed. Many more are in danger. But the world is watching.”

The video concludes by encouraging viewers to take their own photo with the sign and post it online.

**Tributes to the two executed men**

Karami, 21, was an Iranian-Kurdish karate champion who sported a tattoo of the Olympic rings on the inside of his arm. His cousin told CNN that Karami was a brave, intelligent boy and got into karate at age 11. He went on to join the Iranian youth national team and later won at the national championships.

Last month Karami’s parents posted a video to social media begging the state to spare his life. His father said, “My son is among the karate champions of Iran and has several national titles and was the fourth ranked member on Iran’s national team … I beg of you to please lift the execution order.”

Karami was convicted on December 5, less than a week after his trial began in Tehran over the alleged killing of the paramilitary. Amnesty described the trial as bearing “no resemblance to a meaningful judicial proceeding.” His family allege he was tortured in prison and refused access to a lawyer.

Amnesty International published a quote from Karami’s father that read: “I go to the court and prison every morning and then walk aimlessly in the streets. This morning I went to prison, but the assistant prosecutor stationed in prison was not there. They told me that I must stop going there if my case related to the protests. They do not give you any response.

“Every night I am terrified that they would give me the news of my child’s execution,” his father said. “I have lost hope… they have sentenced my child to death and might carry out his execution any minute.”

Seyyed Mohammad Hosseini, 20, was remembered for volunteering with children by a German parliamentarian who advocated his case.

“The story of #SeyedMohammadHosseini is so sad. He lost both his parents. He visited their graves every Thursday. He coaches kids for free,” Ye-One Rhie wrote on Twitter.

Hosseini was arrested on his way to visit his parents’ graves, according to Ye-One Rhie. His brother was also taken and has not been heard from, the parliamentarian said.

According to Amnesty, Hosseini was convicted in the same hearing as Karami and two other men who were also sentenced to death, Hamid Ghare-Hasalou and Hossein Mohammadi.

Amnesty says the convictions relied on forced confessions.

“Before the group trial had started, state media aired the defendants’ forced “confessions” and described them as “murderers”, in breach of their rights to presumption of innocence and freedom from torture and other cruel, inhumane and degrading treatment,” Amnesty wrote.

**Journalist arrested**

Meanwhile, the politics editor of independent Iranian newspaper Etemad Online, Mehdi Beyk, was detained on Thursday, according to a tweet from the publication. The arrest came amid a crackdown by Iranian authorities following the protests sparked by the death of 22-year-old Mahsa Amini last year after she was apprehended by the state’s morality police for allegedly not wearing her hijab properly. The protests have since coalesced around a range of grievances with the authoritarian regime.

Beyk was detained by officials from Iran’s Ministry of Information, his wife, Zahra Beyk, said on Friday.

He was arrested after he “interviewed the families of several of those arrested in the ongoing demonstrations,” according to pro-reform activist outlet IranWire.

The journalist’s “mobile phone, laptop, and belongings were confiscated,” his wife tweeted. It is unclear so far why Beyk was arrested.

Iranian officials have previously arrested some individuals for their criticism of the government’s response to the demonstrations.

One of Iran’s best-known actresses, [Taraneh Alidoosti,](https://www.cnn.com/2022/12/17/world/iran-actress-taraneh-alidoosti-arrest-protest-execution-intl-hnk/index.html%22%20%5Ct%20%22_blank) was released on bail Wednesday, state-aligned ISNA said, after she was [arrested](https://www.cnn.com/2023/01/04/middleeast/taraneh-alidoosti-released-bail-intl/index.html) following her criticism of a protester’s execution.

Known as a feminist activist, Alidoosti last month published a picture of herself on Instagram without the Islamic hijab and holding a sign reading “Women, Life, Freedom” to show support for the protest movement.

Alidoosti was not formally charged but was initially arrested for “lack of evidence for her claims” in relation to her protest against the hanging of Mohsen Shekari last month in the first known execution linked to the protests.